

#ShiftThePower

HISTORY MADE IN SIERRA LEONE

*as Sierra Leoneans Raised Over
\$100,000 to Combat Rape*



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INTRODUCTION

“Purposeful embarked on a transparent communication process to inform the public about every single cent donated... This helped in building the confidence of contributors and encouraged more donations.”

In 2020, within six weeks, Sierra Leoneans raised an unprecedented \$100,000 to set up the [Survivors Solidarity Fund \(SSF\)](#), a funding pool for Sierra Leone by Sierra Leoneans to combat the root causes of rape in the country.

Over the years, rape has become a significantly persistent practice in Sierra Leone. In 2018, [8,505](#) rape cases were recorded by the Sierra Leone Police, and over 2,579 of those reported cases involved minors. In 2020, Rainbo Initiative [reported](#) that [3,339](#) rape survivors used their free medical and psychosocial services - 2,335 of whom were children below the age of 15yrs. Even with these high figures, a huge number of cases are unreported. These include the [story](#) of a 5-year-old girl who was raped by her 28-year-old uncle, and is now suffering from a spinal cord injury caused by the rape. These stories spurred rape survivors, leaders, activists and women groups across the

country to protest the increase in incidents of rape and abuse against girls.

The protests raised awareness about the gravity of the issue and called for survivors to break the silence caused by stigma and shame. However, those who report sexual violence often do so at great personal cost. They often risk social exclusion from their families and communities and are persecuted and subjected to further violence when they report incidents of sexual violence. Mounting pressure across all corners of our communities led to a national [declaration](#) of a State of Emergency over sexual and gender-based violence in early 2019. However, by 2020, we still faced the realities of widespread sexual violence against girls and women in the country.

Purposeful seized the opportunity to mobilise resources when Sierra Leoneans were protesting against the rape of two 5-year-old children. Perpetrators in both cases were allegedly close relatives. One child died, the other is still suffering from a spinal cord injury caused by the rape. This was the moment, and through it, a movement committed to ending rape and all forms of violence against women and girls was born. This powerful movement of survivors, activists, women leaders, etc., are the drivers of the Fund.

Purposeful saw that protests alone could not solve the problem; tangible changes needed to be made, and this was the reason for the establishment of a Survivors Solidarity Fund (SSF) for women and girls. We launched the Fund on 25 June 2020. Purposeful provides administrative support for the operation of the Fund and is a resource mobilisation platform by and for Sierra



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The Survivors Solidarity Fund was set up to finance our collective vision for a new world where Sierra Leonean women and girls are safe. The fund intends to help brave women and girls to build social assets and solidarity, have access to free medical care and support in seeking justice. To kickstart the fundraising, Purposeful reached out to renowned Sierra Leoneans in Sierra Leone and in the Diaspora and invited them to serve as survivor Champions.

Purposeful constituted a team of Co-Chairs and Champions who led in resource mobilisation efforts.

Purposeful, the Fund Co-Chairs, Champions and all contributors to the fund made a commitment to no longer wait for foreign support to resource a future where Sierra Leonean women and girls live in freedom, safety and dignity. In partnership with allies in Sierra Leone and around the world, Purposeful scaled up its collective efforts to raise funds and support organisations providing lifesaving and life-sustaining services to survivors of rape. **The goal was also to invest in programmes geared towards ending the culture of rape in Sierra Leone.**

The Fund's Approach to Fundraising: Co-Chairs and Champions played a critical role by using their platforms and skills to raise awareness about the SSF and raise resources.

Isha Sesay – British Sierra Leonean Journalist and former anchor and correspondent of CNN; **Idris Elba** - the British Sierra Leonean actor, DJ and musician; and Asmaa James - a famous Sierra Leonean Journalist, station manager of Radio Democracy and Pioneer of the Black Tuesday

Movement, became the honorary Co-chairs of the Survivors Solidarity Fund.

Purposeful also appointed five fundraising champions, including a survivor leader – Josephine Kamara (Advocacy Manager at Purposeful), a legal practitioner – Fatmata Sorie (President of LAWYERS - an association of female lawyers in Sierra Leone), a doctor – Binta Mansaray, a private business owner – Martin Michael (CEO of Mercury International), and feminist activists – Haja Abdallah (President of 50/50) and Dr. Isha Fofanah Ibrahim.

The role of our Co-Chairs and Champions was to mobilise donations. For example, Asmaa James used her media platform to amplify the essence of the fund by sharing stories of survivors and families seeking redress and calling on more Sierra Leoneans to donate to support their cause. **Isha Sesay and Idriss Elba brought [global attention](#) to the rape pandemic in Sierra Leone and the SSF.** The other local champions mobilised support by posting on their social media accounts about the Fund and sharing what motivates them to serve as survivors' champions.

Amazingly, **Martin Michael - head of Mercury International set a fundraising record.** He raised Le198,500,000 leones (USD19,228) within a week - this includes his personal donation and those of his staff, family members and friends. The Mercury staff collectively donated Le16,000,000 (USD1,600) from their own personal funds to add to the Le 100, 000, 000 (USD10,000) that the company donated.

Another champion, **Josephine Kamara, Senior Advocacy Manager at Purposeful** joined other survivors to share her childhood experience of sexual penetration and called for more support towards the Survivors Solidarity Fund as this presents a concrete solution to fund lifesaving and life-sustaining services for survivors.

Below are some concrete actions implemented to mobilise resources needed for the Fund:

- i. Purposeful kicked off the donation drive with a [press release](#) that was published in local newspapers and featured on TV and radio news.
- ii. Purposeful sent out flyers seeking donations through various social media platforms. It was a more cost-effective solution and also a very effective way to reach the public. The flyers contain information on how to donate.
- iii. Contributions to the Survivors Solidarity Fund

were also raised offline through direct contacts to potential contributors e.g., SSF champions raised money directly from friends and relatives.

- iv. We sent out letters for sponsorship to banks and private-owned companies.
- v. Young people started their own fundraising drive. For example, Femme Collective, a group of young feminists called for donation from school and university students and provided an equivalent matching fund for every leone donated -, if a student donated Le50,000, they added another Le50,000 to make the donation Le100,000. A total of USD 1,530 was raised and donated to the Survivors Solidarity Fund through this effort.
- vi. Donations came through mobile money, cheques, bank transfers, and PayPal.
- vii. We gave an e-badge to certify and celebrate contributors. It reads "I Just Donated, the Time is Now - Spread the Word". We encouraged contributors to post this badge on their social media accounts and share on WhatsApp groups to encourage other people to donate.
- viii. We amplified the visibility of the Fund through radio and TV shows like the Good Morning Salone show on Radio Democracy and AYV TV. The target was to harness resources from local contributors who might be uncomfortable or unable to donate on a card-based online platform.
- ix. Our champions and partners also used their networks to spread the message.

These complementary efforts enabled Purposeful to raise an unprecedented SLL1,046,592,200 leones (equivalent to USD \$109,020.02) from Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad. Sierra Leoneans were inspired to donate through social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp (we realised that we could reach more locals through WhatsApp groups).

Resources raised were funds received through bank transfers, mobile money, PayPal, and cash donations as outlined below:

Mobile Money - Le 7,391,000 (USD 769.9)

Bank Transfers and Cheques - Le 484, 311,200 (USD 50,449.08)

PayPal - Le 557,940,000 (USD 58,118.75)

Others e.g., physical cash - Le 28,500,000 (USD 2,968.75)

Despite the unprecedented milestone realised, it was challenging to reach more people online because our online audience in Sierra Leone has limited access to the internet. Radio continues to be the most effective platform for reaching a wide audience – with a greater level of access than either television or the internet. However, airtime is also expensive.

Being accountable to supporters and survivors

Whilst the donations were coming in, Purposeful embarked on a transparent communication process to inform the public about every single cent donated. Purposeful shared information about partner organisations that were going to benefit from the first disbursement of funds. This helped in building the confidence of contributors and encouraged more donations.



Photo by Jon Tyson- unsplash

On Tuesday, 1 June 2021, Purposeful hosted a special [television show](#) to provide updates on the Funds' management and expand reflections on the Survivors Solidarity Fund so that Sierra Leoneans home and abroad are informed about the interventions of the organisations that received the funds in the first disbursement phase.

Above all, the whole process was guided by the lived experiences and opinions of survivor leaders. This survivors-led approach informed the process of the fundraising drive, and the influence of our Champions, Co-Chairs; and stories from ordinary Sierra Leoneans (including students, business owners, survivors, etc.), who also, attracted more donations.

The impact of the Fund

Since its launch, the Survivors Solidarity Fund has attracted a total of SLL1,046,592,200 leones (equivalent to USD \$109,020.02). On 4 August 2020, this was disbursed to four organisations - Rainbo Initiative, Aberdeen Women's Center, LAWYERS and SMART Women's Initiative. These organisations are renowned for their provision of essential services to survivors of rape and sexual violence in Sierra Leone. Below are how the organisations capitalised on the resources provided through the Fund to support survivors, after almost a year since the first disbursement was made:

i. **LAWYERS used the money to provide a safe space for prosecutors** to meet with witnesses and survivors, and to make it easier for them to come to court during hearings;

ii. **SMART Women's Initiative is offering sign language training to service providers working on combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**, to make it easier to understand the needs of survivors who are speech or hearing impaired;

iii. **Rainbo Initiative introduced the distribution of dignity kits at Rainbo sexual assault centers in Freetown, Kono, Kenema, Makeni and Bo**. Each dignity kit contains transportation refund, sanitary pad, towel, clothing, lappa, soft toys, underwear and toiletries, and the package complements Rainbo's ongoing work on provisioning free medical and psychosocial services;

iv. **Aberdeen Women's Center has started setting up a child-friendly space** to attend to the medical and psychosocial needs of child survivors.

Reflecting on the milestone realised by the organisation through this process, the Advocacy Manager, Josephine Kamara notes that, "What we have done is a targeted manual fundraising drive, which can be replicated in a space where contributors are not typical online donors. Deciding to raise money online through social media platforms that are commonly used in Sierra Leone and offline through mobile money, bank transfers or cheques, gave us the opportunity to target contributors who do not have access to or cannot deal with the complexity of global online crowdfunding sites".



Photo by Annie Spratti- unsplash

Lessons Learned

These are some of the lessons Purposeful learned throughout the process:

1. **Be ready for the right moment:** Purposeful had the technical knowledge, relationships and credibility to act at this moment. We were ready to channel the moment.
2. **Translate outrage into an opportunity for your cause:** Sierra Leoneans wanted justice for rape victims and survivors and aimed their outrage at the courts and government. We amplified that to a bigger conversation around survivors and their needs.
3. **The power of working with credible partners:** Purposeful could have raised money for ourselves and our work, but that is unlikely to have had this kind of impact - bringing together a unified but diverse set of actors, around the same issue, showed the public that this is not business as usual.
4. **Fundraising can be an opportunity to strengthen programme and delivery:** We developed a response map that made clear what each partner's role and how to coordinate on responding to the needs of survivors
5. **Fundraising champions are critical:** Individuals and organisations using their own social media and other platforms lent credibility to the process and expanded the reach of our fundraising ask, ultimately resulting in more donors.
6. **Invest in media and branding:** We created a specific brand for the Fund, this generated brand recognition for the Fund among supporters, and therefore credibility. Partners were also able to build on this brand and use it. We also developed different communications assets that targeted a diverse set of audiences.
7. **Important to make campaigns about a cause beyond an individual:** Making the Fund about all survivors allowed us greater flexibility and scope for advocacy. Focusing more broadly on survivor, is also important for building the broader movement on this issue, giving the campaign longevity. We can continue to use the brand, communication assets and platform to raise funds for other partners, or related causes/moments.

8. **Set up multiple channels for donations:** From the global, to the local, in order to maximise donations, we had to remove as many barriers as possible to the actual act of donating. We accepted contributions via PayPal, mobile money, bank transfers, cheques and cash.
9. **Be transparent with your audience:** People want to give but are also suspicious about where their money goes. Purposeful's coverage overhead and hosting public handover of the monies with frequent updates to the public enhances the reputation of the initiative and makes it more likely for people to come forward and give in the future.
10. **Diversify funding sources:** Efforts made by Purposeful successfully localised crowdfunding, while simultaneously leveraging on Champions from the diaspora to tap into a more global audience, hence, expanding our pool of potential supporters. This same method can be used in any context to help raise resources locally during an emergency.

Next Steps for the Survivors Solidarity Fund

As we reflect on the lessons we have learned through the SSF to date, our work to realise the ambition of the Fund continues. In the coming months, more survivor-led frontline organisations will be resourced to carry out critical support for survivors, while Purposeful, Co-Chairs, Champions and partners continue to mobilise resources, raise awareness about the existence of the Fund and hold ourselves accountable to both supporters and survivors.

Our journey can be followed on the dedicated [SSF website](#) and on Purposeful's [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) accounts.

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The Survivors Solidarity Fund partners comprised of women's groups, private companies, survivor leaders' groups and feminist organisations, including the 50/50 Women's Group, Easy Solar, Mercury International, Salone Adolescent Girls Network, Girls Plus, Femme Collective and the Friends of Sierra Leone Adolescent Girls Network.

Document your Local Philanthropy Practice: What's your Story?

The West Africa Civil Society Institute (WACSI) is inviting individuals, organisations, associations and groups from across Africa to submit stories or cases of existing community or local philanthropy models or practices they are engaged in.

The overall goal of this call is to identify, document and disseminate information on existing innovative, indigenous practices and or models of philanthropy or giving in Africa. It further seeks to explore, where possible, how these philanthropic approaches, practices and models interact with other existing practices within the African philanthropy ecosystem.

For more information, click here: <https://bit.ly/3CfuMeZ>

For enquiries, write to research@wacsi.org

NB: Submissions made will be done for the sole purpose of documenting indigenous praxis on local philanthropy and are therefore not subject to attracting any financial benefits.

Submissions are accepted all year round and will be reviewed and published on WACSI's website in close collaboration with authors.



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