



CARE on *Capitol Hill*

SHE LEADS THE WORLD

Meet Mabinty

Shaping Future Leaders with Purpose and Passion

The Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone Primary School in Mafaray is a big, bright campus with two brick school buildings, a large front yard with its own well, a line of neatly kept latrines, and a big soccer field. There are large trees here and there providing shade from the sun. The second classroom building is new. At least three more classrooms were needed, so the community raised the \$1,200 to build them out of their farming shares.

There are seven teachers at the school. Four are on the government payroll, and three are volunteers. One of those volunteers is Mabinty Thullah, a 35-year-old mother of three in a bright, cheerful yellow dress amidst a sea of schoolchildren in their green uniforms. Mabinty volunteers because her businesses are successful enough that she can afford to, both in terms of time and money. She is a farmer, and trades in fuel, groundnuts, and rice.

She has gained skills over time, but points specifically to CARE when talking about her success.

“I was not doing anything much, but when CARE came here with the project, they first trained us on business entrepreneurship on how to do business which really taught me a lot.”

“After that, they introduced the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) scheme. At first when I joined the VSLA my husband never wanted me to be part of it, but when I started bringing returns home after the first cycle, he became interested, and this is how I started contributing and supporting the home. This was how I convinced him to join the VSLA and now when we do share out, he brings home [earnings], I also bring mine and we put together to run the family affairs.”



What is a VSLA?

VSLAs are a 30-plus-year initiative of CARE. Originating in west Africa, and referred to as “the box” in communities in Sierra Leone, they are groups of 20-25 women who collectively save money. This money is loaned to group members for business development or in a crisis, like paying for unforeseen health fees. Loans are paid back with modest interest. At the end of a one-year cycle, that accumulated interest is shared among the group members. And groups reform and keep up the cycle of saving and investing funds into their business ventures.

“I decided to become a volunteer here in this school so that I don’t lose the knowledge I have gained.”

“Since there were only male teachers in the school, as a female, I thought it fit that women also can do what men can do so I spoke to the head teacher, he accepted me, and this is how I became a volunteer teacher. I became the first woman teacher in this school, but I also spoke to another woman who later joined me as a volunteer because we need to push ourselves and capacitate ourselves.

“For me one of the opportunities in being a leader is that I also have the opportunity to talk to other women, share information with them and encourage them to step up for leadership and development.”

“It is almost like the principle of 50-50 were you see a man, you also see a woman. This is what I believe, and this is what I have been talking about to my fellow women.”

She doesn’t just talk. She sings in the classroom as part of the lessons she teaches. It keeps the students’ attention and gets them directly involved. This is especially important in here, where keeping children in school is not always top of mind for their parents. Farming families, for example, will pull their kids from school to harvest their crops. This makes it hard for them to complete their lesson plans and effects their readiness for exams.

“I really want to get more education so that I can compete with the men... If I have opportunity, I will live abroad and study overseas, come back, and support my family, community, and the country as a whole.”



“I am now bold, and I am proud to stand in public and talk.”

This International Women’s Day, CARE is celebrating women leaders like Mabinty, who have worked hard to overcome adversity and step into leadership positions in their communities with empathy and determination.

At the same time, we are urging members of Congress to pass funding for global programs that would improve women’s livelihoods, allowing them to reach financial independence, attain leadership roles, and pursue their full potential.

When asked why it is important to be present for her community, Mabinty’s answer is simple. “I should care about people because we are all humans, we are all the same.”

