

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH THROUGH PREVENTION, SUPPORT, AND CARE

FoRUT's mental health project has been instrumental in changing the narratives about mental health issues across our operational communities in Port Loko, Moyamba, and Western Area



Urban and Western Area Rural districts. FoRUT's mental health project aims to build community resilience in mental health by

supporting prevention and referral services for persons at risk of mental health conditions and persons with mental health conditions/Lived Experience. It capacitate civil society organisations (CSOs) and community based organizations (CBOs) and schools to promote mental health and selfcare. It also support Health Facilities to have the capacity to prevent severe mental health conditions

FoRUT utilises human rights-based approach and community led initiatives to build community resilience in mental health by supporting prevention and referral services for persons at risk of, and persons with mental health conditions. Targeting 6 communities since 2024, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Welfare's Directorate of Mental Health and Psychosocial Services, we have provided intensive training for community volunteers across our operational districts on mental health including tools to provide psychosocial support and referrals services for persons at risk of, and persons with mental health conditions.

Prior to FoRUT's intervention, persons exhibiting signs and symptoms of mental illness were stigmatized and ostracized, as people associate such signs and symptoms to superstitious beliefs including curse or witchcraft. In Limp-ka-Kuru community, Bake Lokoh Chiefdom Port Loko district, Fatmata Kamara, a farmer and petty trader, 23 years old had experienced stigma and discrimination because of exhibiting signs of mental illness. Since introducing community based mental health care in the community, the trained volunteers successfully provided care and referral services for her to access treatment at the Port Loko Government Hospital and the Psychiatric Teaching Hospital in Freetown. She later recovered and reunited

with her family and reintegrated into the community. Fatmata's experience positively influenced the attitudes and perceptions of the community regarding seeking psychosocial support and medical therapy to address mental health conditions. She is actively participating in community development initiatives free from stigma and discrimination. The community now regards mental health care as an integral part of overall health.





FoRUT recognized the influential role of religious leaders in shaping community values. In Bauya community Moyamba District and Limba Coner community Port

Loko District, local imams and pastors were trained in mental health awareness. They have now started incorporating mental health messages into their sermons. They emphasize the importance of understanding, compassion, and seeking help for mental health challenges.

FoRUT's community-based mental health volunteers have played a pivotal role in changing attitudes in Port Loko, Moyamba and Western Area rural and Urban. These volunteers, who have received comprehensive training, have led numerous awareness campaigns, home visits, and support group sessions. They visit homes to provide information about mental health conditions and educate community members about recognizing signs of mental illness.

In Tombo community, at the Western Area Rural District, trained volunteers organized a public



awareness event where they shared information about mental health and wellbeing and provided information about where to seek help.

In Bauya community Moyamba District, a traditional healer shared his experience of working alongside mental health professionals. After learning about mental illnesses, he was able to refer persons exhibiting signs of mental health conditions for specialist care and treatment at health facilities. This partnership has created a collaborative approach where traditional healing practices are respected, and individuals receive the proper care they need, whether it be through spiritual or medical means.

FoRUT's mental health project has made a profound impact in Port Loko, Moyamba and Western Area Rural and Urban District. Through education, awareness campaigns, and collaboration with religious leaders, traditional healers, and health facilities, FoRUT has helped change the way mental



health is understood and treated. The community has become more open, empathetic, and proactive in addressing mental health challenges, breaking down the stigma and providing support to individuals in need. The success of this project highlights the importance of community involvement, education, and collaboration in promoting mental health and well-being.