

# Sierra Leone Leadership Training Breaks Barriers

After the civil war in Sierra Leone was over, Mary Musa returned from exile to Koidu Town in Kono District. She had nowhere to sleep because her house had been burned. She also received devastating news – her husband had been killed during the war.

Returning to her town under great hardship and becoming a leader in the community had unique challenges. Now serving as Chairperson for the Koidu Town Council, Musa is a rarity – a woman in a position of power in the male-dominated mining region of Kono. Says Musa, "It wasn't easy to become the Chairperson. This position had never been handled by a woman in this district so there were complaints that I should be replaced by a man. Thank God that people stood strong to maintain me."

Musa needed training in her new role as chairperson. She wanted to help the community cope with the losses resulting from the war and support them as they rebuild. USAID-sponsored Nation Building training provided Musa and other leaders in the community with knowledge about leadership, public service, accountability, acceptance, and teamwork.



Photo: Laura Lartigue

Community leader Mary Musa,  
Chairperson of Koidu Town Council.

As the former head teacher of a local school, upon her return to Koidu, she used the classrooms to shelter herself and her five children, along with ten other children whose parents were killed during the war. She was able to mobilize her fellow teachers to make bricks to put up a small housing unit so that the children could move out of the classrooms.

"After the training," says Musa, "I found out that staying discouraged about my situation wouldn't help – I needed to do something practical about it. We were able to engage our school children, along with our relatives, in helping us. They molded each brick for fifty cents. The lesson that dealt with looking into the needs of other people in the community helped me a great deal."

***"We were taught that although we must take care of our personal needs, as a leader one should always be concerned about the needs of the people we lead and not be completely self-centered."***  
– Mary Musa

When asked why she decided to take the training, Mary Musa said, "Because I am a leader. When we came back after the war, we had so many problems. We leaders are also under much stress. Undergoing this training has helped me tremendously in carrying out my activities."

Although she has a rough road ahead as people in Koidu learn to transition back into a peaceful society, the USAID training has allowed her to use her abilities and her patience in solving difficult situations around her for both herself and for other members of the community. "I have now discovered that through my own potential, I can do much to assist my children, myself, and my community."