In a place like rural Sierra Leone, connections between people and places are invaluable. Villagers in Ngolahun depend on a worn bridge that connects them to nearby communities and provides access to their farms.

This bridge and others like it are made by villagers with local materials—sticks and homemade rope. They cannot last through the rainy season and require annual maintenance, but sometimes they break sooner than expected. This spring, a child following his mother to their farm in Ngolahun fell from the rundown bridge and was injured.

The following day, villagers gathered at a community meeting to discuss how the community should share in the work for their selected OVP project – total latrine coverage for every household. A community member brought up the more immediate issue of the failing bridge and the injured child, who fortunately healed. His mother said, “Let us come together and show OVP that we can respond to our own challenges.”

It quickly became clear that the whole community wanted to use the skills they had developed while partnering with OVP to solve their problems together as a committed team. A plan was made to repair the bridge the next day.

Typically, the Ngolahun community divides responsibilities into three sections when things like bridges fail. One section starts the work, then the next section picks it up, and the final section completes the job. Each section provides just enough labor to get the work done.

Because OVP’s model emphasizes collaboration, this time the villagers decided to share the work as a unified community so they could fix the bridge quickly and keep their children safe. Such a swift and cohesive response had never been seen before. In the past such an undertaking would have taken weeks, but this time the bridge was fixed in just one day.

After an immediate answer was found, Community Projects Supervisor Sheku worked with the community to brainstorm long term solutions. A plan was made for each household to contribute a small amount of money each year to purchase new materials for a bridge that is stronger and more sustainable.

By coming together and sharing responsibility equally, the Ngolahun community gained a new understanding of their ability to act as agents of change. As they constructed a plan to strengthen their bridge, the people of Ngolahun also strengthened their confidence in themselves and their connections to one another.
Steps in the Right Direction

A message of gratitude from OVP’s Executive Director Jill LaLonde

One of the most exciting things for me about joining the OneVillage Partners team in May was that OVP is truly doing development differently. International development is a complex business, and an industry where the best intentions can have a negative impact; but when you start by asking communities what they need, and when you prioritize building leadership capacity and social cohesion, that is one huge step toward inclusive, sustainable impact.

OneVillage Partners is privileged to work alongside communities as they take huge steps toward prosperity; this issue features two of these stories. As you read these highlights, remember that your contributions have enabled OVP to change lives and create dignity in incredible ways.

The most exciting thing is, we’ve only just begun! Not only do we aspire to expand our reach from 13,700 people to double this by 2018, but we also have a solid foundation and model from which to build upon. On top of this, we have a genuinely exciting story to share as an organization, one that started as you – our supporters – banding together to help communities rebuild following civil war, and one that has since innovated and grown based on community-identified needs. We implement forward thinking best practices in international development to improve the quality of life for thousands of people. We are beyond grateful for your generous support; thank you for your ongoing partnership and commitment to our work.

Top: Executive Director Jill LaLonde representing OVP at Rotary Club of Edina.
Middle: NOW participants in Mamboma sing and dance together before their meeting begins.
Bottom: Community members of Ngolahun show off their completed bridge to OVP staff.

A Bridge to Leadership and Unity, continued from front page

Sheku says, “If it were not for the presence of OVP in that community that day, probing to know and getting the people to realize what they ought to do, the result would have likely been... [okay, let’s get the child healed and move on]. The bridge would not have been fixed.”

By facilitating this sort of community action, OVP is truly creating change from within.

*This story was originally featured as a OneVillage Perspective on OVP’s blog. Visit www.OneVillagePartners.org to read more inspiring stories.
Ninty-eight Women Graduate from NOW
OVP’s new women’s empowerment program sees much success

This past August, OVP successfully finished their first round of a new financial literacy and empowerment program.

In rural Sierra Leone, women often do not have the opportunity to gain an education and over 70% of women in the villages where we work are illiterate. Most women do not have the ability to contribute to decision-making in their households or communities, but evidence tells us that when women have more decision-making power, there are better outcomes for the family: more children enroll in school and money is spent more productively.

Based on this knowledge, OVP developed and piloted the Nurturing Opportunities for Women (NOW) Program in 2016 by developing a picture based curriculum with a local artist. Over eight months, illiterate women learned the tools to budget, save and manage their household finances and foster communication skills.

Ninety-eight women from three villages participated by using their natural abilities to set, plan, and achieve financial and life goals. Just six months into the program, 89% of women like Zainab Sessay (pictured right) met their first financial goal, which was most frequently for children’s education expenses.

When OVP asked Zainab Sessay what she enjoyed most by participating in the NOW program, she smiled and said, “What is most interesting is being able to pay for my children to go to school without a loan. And I have money leftover in case of an emergency.” Even though the program has concluded, Zainab and her fellow NOW participants in Mamboma continue to meet twice a month so they can continue to review the lessons in their NOW workbooks and discuss what they are doing and learning.

All 98 women who participated in the first round of the NOW program have graduated. Many of the women across the three communities continue to set and achieve additional goals for themselves and their families. We are so excited for the next 98 women in three new villages to begin achieving their goals in January.

Ways to Help OVP

DONATE - We will be expanding to new villages in 2017 and cannot do it without you. Your gift will allow more communities like Mamboma to create inclusive, sustainable impact and women like Zainab to achieve their goals.

VOLUNTEER - Be a part of our important work by volunteering in the OVP office or on a planning committee.

ADVOCATE - Share our mission by hosting a house party, connecting with us online, or inviting us to speak at your next civic or church meeting.

TRAVEL TO SIERRA LEONE - See the communities and meet the villagers in person by traveling with OVP in June or November 2017.
Celebrating as OneVillage

OneVillage Partners celebrates with communities at their handover ceremonies

After working with OVP to plan, budget, and construct their selected project, each community hosts a handover ceremony. Though they are unique in their presentation, handover ceremonies celebrate each community’s successful partnership with OVP and their ongoing ownership of the completed project. See some of the highlights below!