

## Data Use Case Study: Transforming data into useful information for transparency advocacy in Liberia

Joseph Cheayan is a programme associate at the Institute for Research and Democratic Development (IREDD) in Liberia. He monitors budgets on service delivery across sectors, builds the capacity of community-based organisations to monitor budgets, and strengthens the role and capacity of legislators who are representing citizens. He is an active stakeholder on the [Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative](#), which seeks to improve accountability within the mining industry especially for community rights under the mining law.

*This profile is part of a series looking at how data is being accessed and used in different contexts produced by Development Initiatives with financial support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.*



### Joseph's demand for data and information

*“Our budget analysis work enabled us to find out that money provided by the European Union for the health sector wasn't being disbursed by the Ministry of Finance”.*

Joseph's work schedule involves gathering information and analysing data on government revenue inflows, budgets and spends through the use of Liberia's Freedom of Information Act. Joseph uses other methods to collect information, such as cultivating personal relationships with the Office of the Chief Clerk in parliament or direct requests from line ministries' information units. Joseph also engages with the private sector to gather information on concessions and revenue flows of mining companies operating in Liberia

## Examples of Joseph's data use

- **Translating complex data into useable information.** Budget tracking is a major component of Joseph's work. He translates technical budget language into Pidgin English, the common medium of communication in rural Liberia, and reworks content so it is more accessible. Joseph engages 50 people in each community and trains them on how to use the simplified materials.
- **Using information to increase engagement with parliamentarians.** Having information is not enough; members of the community demand to know how their representatives in parliament contribute. To address this demand, Joseph's organisation introduced a scorecard for parliamentarians that records their attendance at business of the house and later sharing of the results with the public. Parliamentary members are now aware of this scrutiny and attending sessions is taken very seriously. Parliamentarians now respond to community invitations to discuss national budgets and other government policies. The scorecard is bringing the community and senators closer and is helping communities to influence national policies. In one of such community interactions, questions were raised about the status of a European Union-funded infant mortality project. Joseph and his colleagues tracked it to the Ministry of Finance, where the money was diverted to a different project.
- **Using information to hold mining companies accountable to communities.** Joseph trains communities to understand the provisions outlining community rights in mining law and the procedures of the Liberian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. He procures copies of mining laws and reduces the technical jargons into simple and Pidgin English to be accessible to members of the communities.

## Challenges to John having better information

*"The ministry regularly displays projected spend on a notice board outside of their building [in Monrovia], but not everybody knows about this".*

One of major issues that Joseph finds is the **lack of intermediaries** to translate data into the information communities need. Communication from the Ministry of Finance does not target the rural community; the information is made public in the capital city of Monrovia but then it is not spread across the rest of the country. Very little attention is paid to the needs of rural people and non-technical professionals, such as teachers.

Joseph faces the challenges of **incomplete and outdated data**. This makes it difficult for him to provide reliable information to the rural communities who depend on his analysis to improve accountability within the mining industry.

This case study is available online at: <http://devinit.org/#!/post/transforming-data-into-useful-information-the-story-of-a-liberian-transparency-advocate>. A longer-form version of this case is available from DI's Access to Information programme.

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