

Foundation for Community Initiatives

Final Narrative Report for The Rufford Small Grants Foundation RSG ref: 11.09.09



“Women Voices in Development”

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Acronyms

NRM – Natural Resource Management

FCI-Foundation for Community Initiatives

CFDC-Community Forestry Development Committee

CFF-County Forest Forum

NFRL-New Forestry Reform Law

CRL- Community Rights Law

RSG- The Rufford Small Grants Foundation

CBO-Community Based Organization

NGO- Non- Governmental Organization

FDA- Forestry Development Authority

SAMFU- Save My Future Foundation

SDI- Sustainable Development Institute

PRS- Poverty Reduction Strategy

WCGs- Women Conservation Groups

DELTA- Development Education and Leadership Team in Actions

PRA- Participatory Rapidly Appraisal

Acknowledgement

The Board of Directors, Management Team and staff of FCI wish to express their thanks and appreciation to Rufford Small Grants Foundation (RSG), for its continuous supports for projects in Rivercess and Grand Bassa Counties. Without this support, FCI would not have achieved her goal of empowering women to actively engage in natural resource management in the counties and the country at large.

Executive summary

The marginalization and exclusion of rural residents especially women in the decision making and management processes in the forest sector in Liberia deprived them of their share of benefits from the revenues generated from these resources over the past decades which created the need for on-going reforms in the natural resources management especially the forestry sector.

The Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) is using the reform period to work with women in natural resource rich counties to ensure that they actively participate in the decision making process of natural resources for increased benefits. Since 2008 FCI has worked with women in Rivercess and Grand Bassa Counties identifying the problems they faced and creating solution for these problems along with them. Activities implemented since 2008 includes, leadership training, restructuring women groups and putting leadership in place, clustering women groups into Women Conservation Groups (WCGs), assist them to develop action plans and following up on them to ensure that the actions are implemented as well as providing on the spot coaching to fill additional gaps.

This report is a combination of two projects implemented with support from RSG since 2008. It outlines activities, outcomes, constraints as well as conclusion and recommendations for the period under review.

INTRODUCTION

Liberia is endowed with huge forest covers that stretched as far as the upper guinea forest region of Africa. The Liberian populations' dependence on the forest resource is impossible to overestimate. In 2003, Liberia emerged from fourteen years of civil conflict and a presidential election was held in November 2005 that brought President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to power. In 2006, the Liberian legislature passed the National Forestry Reform Law (NFRL) that led to reform laws in the forest sector in Liberia.

Community participation has been considered key to the successful implementation of the reforms in the forest sector. Various platforms have been created to allow communities to speak out and make their voices heard. Women who make up most of the population and the major users of forest resources needed to take advantage of the opportunity and get involved in the management of these resources for their sustainable use. This created the need for which the activities outlined in this report were implemented.

Main Objective of the project

The overall objective of the two projects was to increase the knowledge and enhance the skills of women to actively participate in natural resources management in their communities and counties in Liberia.

Specific objectives 2008-2010

- To provide a forum for women to discuss and analyse their role in natural resource management and identify opportunities for promoting them;
- To create a conscious grassroots movement for conservation and development with women position to play active role in leadership;
- To outline strategies for capacity building for women in targeted areas to meet the myriad of challenges facing their development and well being
- Hosting of three (3) training workshops in Leadership, Mobilization and Participatory techniques in three additional Districts in Rivercess and Grand Bassa counties;
- Facilitate the transformation of the trained women groups into Women Conservation Groups (WCG);
- Provide continual backstopping support to trained women through follow up meetings to fill gaps to ensure efficiency, etc.

Activities implemented during 2008-2010

Creating forums for women to discuss and analyse their role in natural resource management.

To engage women in Grand Bassa and Rivercess who have been marginalized over the years in natural resources management in Liberia, the need to work with them to identify and analyse the problem affecting them was a priority. This was useful as a baseline activity to inform FCI in designing activities that could address the problem identified. Initially several community meetings were held in communities in various districts in Grand Bassa and Rivercess Counties to create the forum for women to discuss their roles and participation in natural resource governance and management in their communities. During these meetings, participants discussed gaps and identified opportunities for promoting their role in forest governance and self- organization. Some of the gaps identified included the following:

- Lack of knowledge and skills needed to participate in the activities;
- High rate of illiteracy;
- Limited interest in development activities
- Marginalization and exclusion of women by their male counterparts;
- Corrupt practices by local authorities;
- Lack of understanding on the importance of the environment;
- Ignorance of their rights and responsibilities to their communities;

- Social threat (exercised by male counterparts thus creating lasting psychological panic in women; and
- Considered as secondary participants which is equal to non priority groups
- (receivers only); etc.

At the end of the various meetings, women then identified and recommended possible ways to enhance their participation in the natural resources and development issues as follows:

- Trainings are provided for women from Rivercess and Grand Bassa in leadership development, networking, group organization and community mobilization to strengthen their participation and organize them for collective actions.
- Support through micro loan opportunities for women to get engage in petty business to improve the livelihood of their families and make contributions to community activities and initiatives.
- Restructure existing women groups and strengthen the leadership skills of their leaders to provide adequate guidance to the members in carrying out their activities.

Training

To respond to the training needs recommended by women during the community meetings FCI organized 2 training workshops for three days each (one training in each of the two counties including Rivercess and Grand Bassa counties. 45 rural women were trained in 2008 with topic selected and designed to meet their expectations. Topics covered during the training included Groups dynamics/conflict resolution, Communication and listening techniques, Community mobilization, Participation and decision-making, Natural resource management issues, PRA/DELTA Techniques and Leadership styles.

In 2010 FCI also conducted three training workshops lasting 3 days each in three districts (Morweh and Zaflahn in River Cess and Compound #4 in Grand Bassa County. 75 women benefitted from the three training workshops. The trainings were a replication of the trainings hosted in the first two districts. The trainings were provided in response to requests from women in the districts to benefit from the trainings so that they are able to perform at the same level. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) women benefitted from the five trainings. At the end of these trainings, integrated action plans were developed that set the basis for the beginning of women engagement in activities in the forest sector.

At the end of the training an integrated action plan for networking amongst women groups in Rivercess and Bassa was developed. This plan outlines activities to be carried out by women to strengthen their work in both counties with anticipated results.

Activity	Location	Responsible person(s)	Result
Election of leaders	Rivercess and Grand Bassa Counties	Small working group	Proper and elected leadership in place
Mobilization and registration of women	Same as above	Small working group	Rooster of membership for each group
Developing of by-laws and constitution	Same as above	Small working group	Legal guidelines in place for operation for each group

Follow up Meetings

Constant follow visits were made in the communities to ensure that planned actions are implemented and to provide additional supports needed after the training. During these visits it was observed that women have restructured their groups and developed guidelines to govern them as a result of the action planned during the training. Holding regular meetings have become a part of them as compared to the past. In some cases women were seen conducting meetings and documenting the proceedings of the meetings. Women are now attending community meetings with high level recognition.

FCI used the follow up meetings with both direct and indirect beneficiaries of the projects to identify future capacity needs for women in the two counties to ensure that they fully participate effectively at their levels and their activities are sustainable to provide easy exit of FCI after three years of engagements. It was also used to identify gaps and challenges faced by these women and provide on the spot coaching and evaluation. In 2009 FCI requested additional funding from RSG to continue engagement with the women from the two counties. The proposal requesting additional funding for project activities for women in Grand Bassa and Rivercess counties was approved which activities are also reported here.

Formation of Women Conservation Groups (WCGs)

The Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) in 2010, worked with nine (9) women groups for the purpose of establishing Women Conservation Groups (WCG). These groups were clustered into three conservation groups to work in three districts in Rivercess and Grand Bassa Counties. The groups have developed an action plan for implementation in the first quarter Of 2011. The action plan developed by WCGs is as follows:

Activity	Location	Time frame	Remarks
General awareness meeting	Zaflahn, Morweh and Compound #4	Jan 7-15,2011	To encourage other women to join the group
Election of officers and finalization of	Zaflahn, Morweh and Compound #4	Jan 25-March 5,2011	To put in place a proper leadership

constitution			
In-house training workshop on conservation issues	Zaflahn, Morweh and Compound #4	March 22-26, 2011	To increase the knowledge of the women on conservation

Achievements/ Outcome

FCI with support from RSG implemented two rounds of projects activities in Rivercess and Grand Bassa Counties. During the period under review the project has had the following impacts in the two counties.

- Women are currently holding regular meetings among themselves to discuss issues affecting them and are now invited to participate in local and county level discussions about natural resources and development issues;
- 120 women have benefited from trainings and are using the skills to lead their groups and engage stakeholders for equal share of benefits accrued from natural resources;
- Three Women Conservation Groups (WCGs) have been organized (two groups in Rivercess and one in Grand Bassa. The groups have developed actions that they are working to implement in the first quarter of 2011;
- Increased number of women participating in forest governance issues in the community;
- Women groups in the two counties have been restructured with leadership put in place which has increased efficiency in their works; and
- Women have been appointed/elected to take up key positions on community forest management bodies such as CFDCs and CFF in the two counties;

Constraints

During the period of implementation of the two projects, we were faced with bad road condition especially in 2010 when the rains were heavy. Most of the road became inaccessible by vehicles. This led to increase in the transportation fares coupled with the fluctuation in the exchange rate that reduced in USD in which the project funds were expanded.

Conclusion

All sector groups in the communities are important to the management and sustainable use of natural resources in their communities. Women make up more than half of the population and are the most users of forest products for various reasons ranging from feeding to herbal treatment of the population. Therefore they cannot be excluded and marginalized from processes that are geared towards protecting forest resources and accessing benefits. Our work with women in the two counties over this period has helped them to understand the importance of participating and the benefits natural resource management and governance will bring to them as community and the country at large. We are convinced that constant and regular engagement with these women will strengthened and promote their collective actions to actively and adequately engage in natural resource management and governance.

Recommendations

As stated in the individual projects reports and based on the needs identified and for an effective exit from the two Counties, FCI recommends a continuation of the project in the two counties for the following reasons:

1. The WCGs have just been organized and there is still a need to work with them for a period of one year so that they have broader knowledge on conservation activities and fill in additional gaps by making follow up visits in the two counties;
2. Women groups' already restructured need to be connected to other women working groups in other forested counties as well as the NGO Coalition for Liberia¹ for the purpose of networking and collaboration. This will ensure proper placement of a networking strategy
3. Organized women groups need to be legalized to give them the legality to engage stakeholders as legal entities under the Association Laws of Liberia. This will provide them the opportunity to mobilize funding for future activities from local donors and organizations and engage the FDA for their share of benefits from forest revenues.

¹ The NGO Coalition is a consortium of Local NGOs and CBOs advocating on cross-cutting issues related to natural resources.