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FOREST INCOMES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY (FIFES)

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The Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability (FIFES) activity is implemented by ACDI/VOCA. FIFES combats deforestation and biodiversity loss while developing forest-based enterprises that provide sustainable economic opportunities and forest communities. The activity contributes to USAID/Liberia's overall sustainable economic growth program to promote equitable and sustainable market-led economic opportunities while improving natural resources management.

FIFES promotes biodiversity conservation in eleven community forests (CF) in Grand Bassa and Nimba counties. FIFES supports local and national stakeholders to achieve two main objectives:

- 1) Create well-developed rural, forest-based enterprises, which provide sustainable economic opportunities for farmers and forest-dependent communities while combating deforestation and biodiversity loss, and
- 2) Enhance the capacity of the Government of Liberia institutions and rural communities to sustainably manage and benefit from CF and buffer zone natural resources.

Current Activities

- **Livelihoods Improvement:** Creating new opportunities for livelihoods improvement is key to reducing reliance on forest resources. FIFES works in forest communities to

increase agricultural productivity, promote agricultural processing, create enterprise groups, and support Women Owning Resources Together (WORTH) savings and loan associations.

- **Private Sector Engagement:** Connecting forest communities with formal enterprises is critical to increasing incomes in forest communities. FIFES has helped community members and enterprise groups develop business relationships with companies that buy honey, charcoal, cocoa, and other agricultural products. FIFES is also forging connections between CFs and ecotourism companies interested in bringing tourists to CFs.
- **Resource Inventory:** Accurate inventories of forest resources is key to managing and conserving those resources. FIFES helps CFs create maps, clear boundary lines, implement biomonitoring systems, and conduct surveys and inventories.
- **Improved Forest Management:** FIFES has supported development of written management plans for each CF. These CF management plans summarize results from inventories and clearly describe long-term plans for ensuring sustainable management. FIFES provides training on forest management and surveillance techniques to help ensure appropriate implementation of management plans.
- **Public Awareness:** Raising awareness of the value of forests and wildlife is key to conservation. FIFES utilizes “town criers”, locally produced dramas, radio shows and jingles, and direct training to help populations in forest landscapes better understand the value of forest resources.
- **COVID-19 Response:** The Government of Liberia’s COVID-19 mitigation measures resulted in substantial negative impacts on rural economic and food security. FIFES responded by carrying out a rapid food security assessment, providing hand tools and inputs to food insecure farmers, supporting marketing of soap and facemasks by WORTH groups, and increasing awareness of measures to limit COVID-19 infection.

Accomplishments to Date

- More than 54,000 hectares in 11 Community Forests in Nimba and Grand Bassa Counties are under improved natural resources management practices
- Established 149 WORTH groups with 4,400 members. Each member saved an average of \$60 per six-month savings cycle, resulting in \$1,848,000 in savings available for loans to members.
- To date, 1,137 agroforestry and forestry enterprise groups have been established with a focus on developing a culture of sustainable business, savings, and independence. Incremental sales for these enterprise groups in fiscal year 2020 were \$177,033.
- FIFES adapted the Rapid Assessments and Long-term Ecological Discovery (RAPELD) community inventory method for its 11 target CFs. CF members utilized this system to conduct inventories, identify and demarcate boundary lines, create zoning plans,

implement biomonitoring systems, and write CF management plans.

- More than 280 km of CF boundary lines were cleared and demarcated.
- Recruited and trained 149 Community Forest Guards to conduct patrols of community forests, protect flora and fauna, and ensure sustainable use of the forest resources. These guards have identified poachers, loggers, and miners in CFs and reported them to the appropriate authorities.
- Deployed 25 Liberia Forestry Training Institute (FTI) interns to CFs to assist in community engagement, boundary demarcation, forest inventories, and livelihoods development.
- 9,396 forest community members received COVID-19 hygiene training and supplies, and 3,284 farmers received urgently needed training, tools, and inputs to reduce the spread and impact of COVID-19.

Planned Outcomes

- Build a network of thriving sustainable forest-based enterprises and local governance groups made up of men and women capable of managing forests for biodiversity protection and economic benefits.
- Increase the capacity of the Government of Liberia to better regulate and manage commercial, community, and conservation activities in Liberia's forests.