

Promotion and Upgrade of Ecotourism Products of Western Area Peninsula Forest Reserve in Sierra Leone

Project No: SLE/SGP/OP5/CORE/BD/13/03/008

Grantee: Responsible Community Tourism

Organization (RECTOUR)

Location: River No 2 Community, Western Area

Peninsula Forest Reserve

SGP Contribution: 29,000 USD

Cash Co-Financing: 12,311.63 USD

In-Kind Co-Financing: 2,969.55 USD

Project Duration: 12 months

Number of people served: 20,179

Focal area: Biodiversity

Background

There are 11 beach communities and 2 forest edge communities around the Western Peninsula National Park in Sierra Leone. These communities attract a large number of weekend travellers and international tourists. The National Park has been an important historical site of the slave trade, the Guma Valley Dam, the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary and a biodiversity hotspot.

Tourism around the coastal beaches is the main source of income and livelihoods for the communities as tourists buy fish, oysters, shrimp, and fabrics from the communities.

Due to high number of tourists during weekends and holidays, the amount of waste generated on a regular basis is huge. Specifically, as often times, waste ends up in the local marine and wetland ecosystems causing pollution and

environmental degradation. Furthermore, local communities with little knowledge on sustainable waste management techniques were conducting open burning of waste, generating air pollution and CO2 emissions as well as affecting the local tourists. To improve the waste management techniques of the local population, create alternative livelihoods through ecotourism and protect the natural resources of the area, in March 2013, the GEF Small Grants Programme supported a project implemented by the Responsible Community Tourism Organization (RECTOUR).

Project Objectives and Key Activities

To improve the waste management techniques of the local population, create alternative livelihoods through ecotourism and protect the natural resources of the area, in March 2013, the GEF Small Grants Programme supported a project implemented by the Responsible Community Tourism Organization (RECTOUR), to promote and support phase out of POPs and chemicals of global concern at community level. The project reinforced the institutional capacities of the communities involved in the ecologic management of POPs and ODs.



The project enhanced the capacities of 28 persons from 13 communities by providing training on waste recycling and solid waste management. As a result, 13 communities established waste management committees and employed youth with different skills to organize and manage the ecotourism services. The project also organized awareness raising campaigns on waste management using messages such as "STOP burning the waste, use composting; Don't throw away the plastics, cans and pints, put them in the nearest

dust bins”; Live a healthy live, save life don’t litter the beach”. The communities were provided with waste bins and a mini truck for waste collection to the dump site and waste collection points were established at strategic locations within the community.

To improve the livelihoods of the local population, an ecotourism office was created to showcase products of the sea and to conduct tours of the Western Area Forest biodiversity.

Environmental Impact

Due to the establishment of waste management committees in the local communities the area has experienced a significant reduction on the open burning of waste. The project has also reduced, avoided or prevented 240 tons of waste from entering water bodies. Youth groups have also organized themselves to collect the waste left by tourists on the local beaches and bungalows and carry it to the closest waste collection points:- an effective system of waste collection and dumping has contributed to ensuring a clean environment.

Waste related injuries, caused by glass bottles and cans left on the beaches, have been reduced. Effective waste disposal and management has also contributed to a decrease in the number of malaria incidents. According to the communities, 3 in 10 people experienced malaria before the project but only 1 in 20 now experience malaria. This has contributed to improved health and security of both the inhabitants and tourists.

Socio-Economic Impact

The improvement in waste management and the acquisition of skills to produce alternative incomes such as the sale of fish, oysters, shrimps and fabrics have contributed to increase in household income by two-folds from \$50 to \$100 for 1,500 households. For instance, at River No 2 alone, the community reported a monthly revenue of \$5,000 as compared to \$1500 before the project. The project has created jobs for more than 300 youths who earn at least \$60 a month from waste collection activities and 28 youth representatives received training and are actively responsible for marketing strategy for Ecotourism products. From the proceeds more bungalows have been built to accommodate tourists and increase the revenue base. There is an emergence of strong collaboration among communities in the Peninsula area, mostly because of the project work. The revenue from the ecotourism activities has contributed to children’s school fees and 150 children are now going to school an increase of 60 more than previous number.

Policy Impact

The waste management committees have positively influenced local bylaws by engaging the village elders in constructive dialogue on waste managements and every community has effective waste management bylaw policy. Bylaws and penalties (fines of \$ 100) are instituted for failure to properly collect and dump waste. Generally, no one burns waste at home. In addition, waste recycling initiative have been adopted where plastics and rubbers are collected separately from bottles. The sale of bottles for recycling generates income while the plastic is disposed of in designated points agreed by stakeholders including the government.

Youth Engagement and Participation

The project was initiated by a small group of youths at the River No 2 community. After initial discussions with SGP office, they were requested to organized into a functional local CBO called RECTOUR (Responsible Community Tourism Organization) which has almost 90% of its members being categorised as youth. The identification of the problem of wastes in the peninsula area was done through baseline assessment process, and on the basis of the outcome of the assessments, planning and implementation were all solely led by the youths.



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Gender Mainstreaming

During the baseline assessment process, focus group discussions were held with the women's group who trade in ecotourism products. The women are mostly in the supply chain as sellers of the ecotourism product and are also engaged in waste recycling. This project has provided them with a regular income and some form of independence which has contributed to self-confidence.

Replication and up scaling

The formation of a waste management committee has been a successful model that other communities are learning from. Already, Tombo a community in Western Area Rural District upon receiving invitation and attending meeting at the Bureh Community to witness the presentation of waste bins, and upon hearing the establishment and achievement of the waste management committee, has emulated the approach and this is yielding the desired results such as making bylaws and identifying a dumping site.

Lessons learned

This project has shown that communities have solutions to their problems. They only require proper organizational skills, development and improved capacity to handle these problems. The formation of waste management committees and their relentless efforts to restore clean environment has served as a sustainability strategy to promote community support and ownership of the initiative as a real example. There is better coordination and willingness to work when they do so themselves which is guided by self-realization on the needs to address common problems. They monitor the project themselves and it is much easier to monitor when they are involved. They have controlled release of smoke into the air due to burning of waste.