



# Increase the use of the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure among CSOs and Grassroots Organizations

## Liberia

The *Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security (VGGT)* set out **internationally-accepted principles and standards** for responsible practices, providing a framework for governments, the private sector and civil society to use when developing policies and programmes for improving food security. FAO has been working in more than 58 countries, providing technical assistance for awareness raising, multi-stakeholder platforms, training and capacity development, and support to the assessment, formulation and implementation of national policies and laws.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are **key partners** in this effort. It has been recognized time and again that ensuring the same level of information and capability among

stakeholders leads to more meaningful participation in dialogue processes.

In this project (2015-2018), FAO has worked in 21 countries (see map below) through partnerships with national CSOs in carrying out awareness-raising and capacity development workshops to:

- Enhance civil society's **knowledge and understanding of the VGGT**;
- Increase **network and advocacy skills** to defend their tenure rights and **strengthen partnerships** for wider application of the VGGT at all levels;
- Build capacities for **effective participation in policy processes** related to tenure reform processes and national VGGT multi-stakeholder platforms.

The main product of this project has been the **capacity development manual** for CSOs, *Putting the Voluntary Guidelines on Tenure into Practice: A Learning Guide for Civil Society* in partnership with FIAN International, which draws upon the *People's Manual on the Guidelines on Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests*, developed by the International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty



(IPC). In 2017, an adaptation of this Guide was developed to integrate the *Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication*, the roll-out of which is currently in a pilot phase.

Local civil society partners played a key role in the successful implementation of the project. With their knowledge of the local context, the Learning Guide could be adapted to link the VGGT to on-going processes within the country.

As part of FAO's global VGGT implementation programme, this project identified specific opportunities for potential or ongoing processes of tenure reform, and/or specific CSO networks or multi-stakeholder processes where FAO input would be most effective.

### LEARNING GUIDE

The Learning Guide uses **participatory and experiential learning, based on participants' active interaction and their direct experience on tenure.** The methodology follows a modular learning process of five main elements to gradually build the user's knowledge and capacities. This **modularity** allows for the guide to be adapted to the audience's needs, including knowledge level, CSO objectives, and specificities of the country tenure context.



#### ACTIVITIES AT COUNTRY LEVEL

**AFRICA:** Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, Tanzania. **ASIA & PACIFIC:** Indonesia, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines. **EUROPE & CENTRAL ASIA:** Kyrgyzstan. **LATIN AMERICA & CARIBBEAN:** Colombia, Guatemala.



# Liberia

Liberia is a country that has long suffered conflicts related to rights over land and natural resources. The country's 14-year civil war, which started in part due to these conflicts, has severely impacted the lives and livelihoods of its people. Today, more than a decade into the post-conflict reconstruction period, Liberians are working to rebuild their economy and implement institutional reforms that would promote equitable access to land and resources, secure tenure, investment, and development. While some work has been done in this regard, the country has faced numerous challenges in recent years, including the Ebola epidemic in 2014, which have slowed progress.

Liberia currently uses two conflicting tenure systems, i.e. a statutory system based on individual fee simple titles used by the urban elite, and customary systems based on community ownership used by rural indigenous communities. There has been conflict over communal lands as the government has granted some land concessions to industries such as logging, mining and large-scale agriculture.<sup>1</sup> For these reasons, it has been necessary to review the current national tenure governance framework.

In April 2016, the government established the Liberia Land Authority, a national institution dedicated specifically to land issues and the future implementation of the Land Rights Act once passed by the government. The VGGT therefore represents an important tool to inform and guide the necessary renewal of the Liberian tenure governance legal framework.

Liberia, started the implementation process of the VGGT with two multi-stakeholder workshops in June 2014 and October 2015. Led by the government, in particular the Ministry of Agriculture, these workshops were primarily targeting Government Ministries and Agencies, CSOs and the private sector. The civil society participation was organized through the national CSO council of Liberia, specifically the Land Rights Working Group made up of 18 CSOs.<sup>2</sup>

FAO worked together with civil society to implement this project in Liberia in order to capitalize on these ongoing efforts for VGGT implementation and reinforce the capacities of CSOs and grassroots organizations to participate meaningfully in these multi-stakeholder dialogues, working groups and forums relevant to the implementation of the VGGT at country level.

<sup>1</sup> USAID Liberia Country Profile: <http://www.usaidltp.com/liberia>.

<sup>2</sup> As of the time of publication of this leaflet, members of the Land Rights Working Group include: Rights and Rice Foundation (RRF); Sustainable Development Institute (SDI); Foundation for Community Initiative (FCI); Save my Future Foundation (SAMFU); Search for Common Ground (SFCG); Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY); Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL); Association of Liberia Community Radio (ALICOR); Natural Resource Women Platform (NRWP); Alliance for Rural Democracy (ARD); National Charcoal Union of Liberia (NACUL); Green Advocates (GA); Rural Human Rights Activist Program (RHRAP); PARLEY; Farmers Union Network (FUN) of Liberia; Voice of the Voiceless (VOV); Liberia Reform Movement (LRM); Sustainable Organization Initiative in Liberia (SOIL).

## Partnering with civil society

To support the implementation of the VGGT in Liberia, FAO worked with the CSO Land Rights Working Group in order to reach a wide range of CSO actors at national and county levels and strengthen their understanding of the VGGT to more effectively engage in the institutional framework and ongoing national dialogue on new tenure policies.

FAO consulted with the CSO Land Rights Working Group and, with their recommendation, partnered with **Voice of the Voiceless (VoV)**. VoV has been very active in raising awareness among women and girls on their legal and human rights and how to fight discrimination on particular issues. VoV adopts a very communicative and community-level approach in their engagement work, focusing on dialogues, peer reviews and town hall meetings as well as conducting workshops and radio programmes. With their experience in this field, FAO was able to capitalize on their expertise in organizing the awareness-raising activities within Liberia.

© *Voice of the Voiceless (VoV)* is an NGO created in 2003, focusing mainly on the rights of women and girls, as well as governance, democracy and peace-building issues. Promoting a human-rights-based approach, they work to raise awareness on national and international legal instruments to empower women and girls.

## Activities in the country

The project was able to organize one Training of Trainers in Monrovia, which successfully trained 20 CSO participants. Subsequently, three regional awareness-raising workshops were held for both civil society and local government representatives in Bomi, Grand Gedeh and Bong counties, training an additional 29 participants in Bomi, and 50 participants in both Grand Gedeh and Bong counties.

In order to support the awareness-raising workshops, three regional radio talks were held to further the outreach of these workshops to more people at regional and local levels.

The activities implemented in Liberia were strongly connected with those similarly implemented in Sierra Leone, working to not only increase the use of the VGGT in their respective countries, but to increase the exchange of knowledge and dialogue between the two countries, as they face similar issues of tenure governance. In fact, some representatives of VoV and as well as the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) participated in the ToTs organized in Sierra Leone as part of this exchange.

## Links with other VGGT initiatives

The activities of the project have been closely linked to other VGGT initiatives (both directly and indirectly connected) taking place in the country.

In particular, a German-funded project has been supporting VGGT implementation at country level in parallel in Mongolia, Liberia and Sierra Leone since 2014. The project has supported the establishment of a national multistakeholder platform, including setting up a VGGT Steering Committee and Secretariat, and four national multistakeholder workshops seeing the participation of 260 representatives of government, CSOs, private sector and academia.

Through the above mentioned project, the FAO country office has also worked with Sustainable Organization Initiative in Liberia (SOIL), in close coordination with the VGGT Secretariat and the Liberia Land Authority (LLA), in the organization of four regional awareness-raising workshops (Gbarpolu, Grand Gape Mount, Grand Bassa and Rivercess counties) and a national radio sensitization campaign on the

## ACTIVITIES

◎ 1 ToT in Monrovia.

◎ 3 Regional workshops:

- Bomi County;
- Grand Gedeh County;
- Bong County.

◎ 3 Regional radio talks.



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implementation of the VGGT and in support of the passage of the Land Rights Act. The objective of these activities was for stakeholders to become better prepared to engage in and contribute to these processes.

## Main areas of impact

The capacity development given through this project positively impacted a number of areas within civil society's



work on tenure issues in Liberia. In particular, the project saw positive results in building stronger CSO networks, raising awareness among grassroots levels, and strengthening those actors to engage in national policy processes.

## Strengthening CSO networks

The ToT workshop helped to create a link with the USAID-Land Governance Support Activity (LGSA) in particular in support of the ongoing discussions for the passage of the Land Rights Act. They thereby became aware of the CSO Land Rights Working Group and the basis for an increased collaboration between donors was established. The support of USAID in this matter has helped to highlight the slow progress in the passage of the Land Rights Act and has aided CSOs in putting pressure on the government to show that there is the political will to move forward with the legislation.

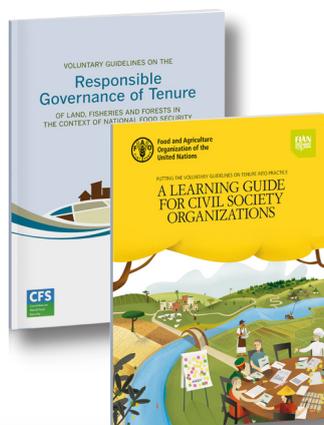
The close links the activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone allowed for stronger CSO networks across borders. The inclusion of Sierra Leone CSOs in the ToTs held in Monrovia (and vice versa in Sierra Leone) allowed not only for a greater exchange of experiences, but also for synergies to be capitalized on as well as national and regional CSO networks to be strengthened.

## Links to national policies

The activities of this project contributed to strengthening the capacities of CSOs to engage in the national multistakeholder process with the support of the abovementioned German project. The participation in the multistakeholder platform, as well as the many informational campaigns undertaken (e.g. radio campaigns), in particular in relation to the passage of the draft Land Rights Act, demonstrates the importance of disseminating information and increasing awareness and capacities of local actors in order to effectively engage in the national processes.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ **Strong collaboration** with CSO and the Land Rights Working Group.
- ✓ **Wide network** and exchange of experiences both in-country and across borders.
- ✓ Support for **renewing the legal framework**, passing the draft Land Rights Act and raising awareness about its contents.



For more information on this project and FAO's work on the VGGT see:

<http://www.fao.org/in-action/increase-use-of-vggt-in-civil-society/en>  
<http://www.fao.org/elearning/#/elc/en/course/CSOMOB>

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