

STANDING WITH OUR COMMUNITIES

A summary report of the P3CL COVID 19 prevention intervention



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1. Introduction

In March, Liberia recorded the first few cases of COVID 19. By April 10, as the number of cases started to increase, the government imposed a State of Emergency – closing schools, places of worship and non-essential businesses, instructed non-essential civil servants to take paid leave, closed the airports, restricted travels between the various counties as well as limiting public gatherings to no more than 10 persons in a room or confined space.

Reflecting on their experiences of 2014, when the spread of the Ebola Virus Disease peaked, the partners met to discuss how best to support the project communities during the pandemic. The partners feared that given the weak state of the country's health system, a robust focus on prevention was needed. At the end of the meeting they agreed that such intervention would demonstrate solidarity in the face of the pandemic. Additionally, there was a strong feeling among the partners that such support would further reinforce trust between themselves and the communities; a critical *social capital* they need as they work together on the sensitive issue of land.

The partners therefore requested permission from the Tenure Facility to procure and deliver hygiene kits along with official public health information materials to the 24 project communities. They agreed that not only would such effort contribute to preventing the spread of the virus to the communities they work in, but it would support the government's effort to prevent the spread of the virus across the country. Following approval from the Tenure Facility, the partners procured and supplied hygiene kits to all 24 communities and their sub-units.

This report describes the activities carried out as part of the intervention, and shares updates from the communities since the intervention.

2. Summary of activities

The intervention had two components: awareness raising and delivery of prevention supplies, but both were carried out in an integrated manner. This approach was designed to ensure that people were adequately informed about how the corona virus spreads and the ways in which it could be prevented, and at the same time provide the communities the materials or resources they needed to prevent the spread of the virus.

The population of the 24 communities, estimated to be more than 100.000, benefitted directly and indirectly from the intervention, especially the awareness raising component. For example, radio programs highlighting facts and figures related to the pandemic, the erection of signboards in strategic locations in some communities, and the posting of posters in key population centers within the project communities as well as neighboring communities made it possible to reach a large segment of the population within and outside of these communities. The hygiene supplies distributed benefitted primarily the project communities and their immediate neighbors.

The three partners procured and delivered materials to the communities they are working with to implement the Customary Land formalization activities. The supplies included 2,298 buckets fitted with faucet to set up hand-washing stations across the communities, and disinfectants including 80 cartons of liquid Chlorine, 553 cartons of powdered soap and assorted quantities of Dettol and Hand Sanitizer.

Below is a summary of each partner's activities. The partners' individual reports contain more specific details on locations and communities.

2.1. Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI)

FCI delivered hygiene kits that included 640 buckets fitted with faucets, 40 cartons of chlorine, 25 cartons of hand sanitizers and 83 cartons of powder soap to 8 communities in Grand Bassa and Sinoe Counties. The distribution covered the communities benefitting from the P3CL project. The team also delivered illustrated awareness messages from the Ministry of Health focusing on the signs and symptoms of COVID -19 as well as preventive measures on COVID – 19.

All the community leaders and stakeholders receiving supplies on behalf of their communities expressed gratitude to the team and the organization. While the team avoided bringing in large numbers of the Community Members, cross section of community stakeholders were always present during the presentations. The FCI team worked alongside the CLDMC leaderships to carry on the exercise in the 8 project communities.

2.2. Sustainable Development Institute (SDI)

SDI distribution and awareness raising on the COVID 19 pandemic covered River Cess, River Gee, and Maryland targeting 8 communities supported through the P3CL project and selected neighboring communities. SDI response had three components including awareness raising efforts through educational materials and radio programs, in person meetings with the project community leaderships - with social distancing rules and other safeguards applied, and distribution of hygiene kits including buckets, chlorine, powder soap, Clorox, Dettol to towns and villages within all eight communities. The team also distributed materials in 15 neighboring towns and villages.

In total SDI distributed 567 buckets, along with 70 cartons of powder soap, 35 cartons of Dettol, 40 cartons of Chlorine and cleaning materials to 57 towns and villages. The team also placed buckets at important community centers at central locations in each towns, including churches, youth centers, Palava Huts, Chiefs' offices. To increase local knowledge of the virus, SDI distributed educational materials including 1000 posters and 20 banners with government approved awareness messages on the virus and preventive measures.¹ In addition to the government produced materials, SDI printed and distributed 2000 flyers, 3 large banners, 500 stickers and conducted 3 radio program in the 3 project counties to get the messages spread to a wider public.

The team used community leader forums to educate the communities about COVID 19 preventions. To show community ownership, the team worked closely with community mobilizers, animators, CLDMCs, town criers, and selected local community leaders during the awareness and outreach efforts.

The team used the intervention to update itself on the status and challenges of the eight communities, assessing efforts and ongoing challenges, especially around boundary harmonization.

2.3. Parley Liberia

Fourteen clans in the three counties benefited from Parley's distribution. These clans included the 8 Parley supported communities and others neighboring communities including Tahamba, Wulukoha, Wanwoma, and Hassala clans in Lofa and Kpatawee and Kporyoquelleh clans in Bong County. These adjacent clans are involved in boundary harmonization activities with the P3CL supported communities and the hygiene kit distribution presented the opportunity to build

¹ These materials were received from the Ministry of health and the National Public Health Institute of Liberia

solidarity among communities involved in the formalization process, while mitigating the spread of the virus.

The materials distributed included 1091 hand-washing buckets with faucets, and 400 cartons of powdered soap (approximately 60, 30 gram sachets per beneficiary). 109 hygiene kits were reserved for distribution at up-coming boundary harmonization meetings.

In Lofa County the two P3CL supported communities were allocated 200 sets, while the four adjacent communities were allocated also 200 sets. In Bong County the two P3CL supported Communities were allocated 200 sets, while the two adjacent communities were allocated 100 sets. The four P3CL supported communities in Nimba County were allocated 400 sets. Approximately, 60 sachets of (30 gram each) powdered soap were distributed with each bucket with adjustments for larger clans/communities.

The Parley Team worked with the Community Land Development and Management Committees (CLDMCs) to ensure the materials reached all community sub-units. Given that the number of sub-units per clan is not uniform, Parley prepared a distribution plan that considered the number of towns/villages and population size. This approach mitigated the problem of disadvantaging clans with more subunits, and more populated towns and villages.

3. After Action Update

The government has ended the State of Emergency imposed at the onset of the outbreak in Liberia, but advises the population to remain vigilant given that the virus remains present here. Following the relaxation, partners are now accelerating activities while ensuring compliance with basic hygiene and government regulations. For example, participants at community meetings are required to wear partial face-covering (mouths and nose) and, to wash and sanitize their hands regularly.

Although the number of infected persons continue to increase, no case has been reported in any of the 24 communities where the partners are working; this is in spite of the fact that some of counties or regions where the communities are located have recorded cases. This is particularly welcoming considering that all of them are remote, mostly inaccessible by road at this time of the year, and are without health facility with capacity to deal with an outbreak.

4. Conclusions

Below are three key conclusions related to the pandemic, the intervention, and the P3CL Project itself, the partners would like to highlight:

- 1) In spite of the adjustments to the budget, to accommodate the procurement of the COVID 19 prevention kits, a budget overrun is not foreseen. All the partners have made adjustments to accommodate the COVID 19 response expenses within their approved budgets and yet remained under the 10% reallocation threshold.
- 2) Given the changes to the national context, some minor adjustments have been made to the work plans. For example, instead of three national learning and experience sharing events, the partners now plan to convene a 3-day national conference that would involve two full days of learning and experience sharing and a third day that would focus on launching a donor appeal.
- 3) Liberia has been successful at containing the virus, however lingering concerns about a potential surge requires continued vigilance throughout the remainder of the year. As such, activities that

would otherwise be carried out in a mass community assembly are now broken up into multiple community meetings to ensure social distancing and other protocols are fully observed. This approach prolongs the time it takes to implement these type of activities, and necessitates a request for a no-cost extension to conclude the project by March 31, 2021.