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Legal Protection for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Margibi County, Liberia
Program Update for 3rd Quarter and Annual Report for Period September 10,
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SUMMARY

This report details the achievements and challenges of the project titled *Legal Protection for Survivors of Gender-Based Violence in Margibi County, Liberia*. This project was implemented by the American Refugee Committee – Liberia over the period from September 10 to July 10, 2008, with generous funding from OFDA. This report describes the activities and achievements during the entire project period and highlights those conducted during the third and final quarter. The program goal was to improve the protection services of IDPs, vulnerable individuals, and at-risk persons to gender-based violence (GBV) in Margibi County.

To achieve this objective, the following activities were implemented:

- Identification of seventeen (17) target communities
- Recruitment of eighty (80) community peers
- 25,440 community members sensitized
- Fifty-five (55) GBV survivors provided with legal assistance
- One (1) rape case successfully prosecuted and seven (7) domestic violence cases successfully mediated
- Eight (8) Legal Protection Officers trained

- Thirty-seven (37) Interagency Service Providers trained
- Eighty (80) community peers trained

ARC worked in partnership with the West African NGO, Foundation for International Dignity (FIND). Throughout the project, ARC provided formal as well as on-the-job training and mentoring to FIND to build their capacity to provide legal assistance in Liberia.

This project had 25,620 direct beneficiaries, including community members sensitized, survivors assisted, and responders trained. There were 248,961 indirect beneficiaries, including 27,994 IDPs,¹ who benefited from increased awareness of GBV and relevant law.

ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Objective 1: To enable communities to prevent and respond to GBV through community sensitization and awareness-raising, the provision of free and confidential legal aid support to survivors, and capacity-building of protection actors.

Activity 1.1 17 communities trained / sensitized on GBV

➤ Community Identification

During the first phase of the project, the ARC/FIND team identified seventeen (17) communities within four (4) districts in Margibi County to target with awareness raising and education activities. All of the 17 communities were targeted because they had been identified as having particularly high rates of GBV during previous ARC projects funded both by OFDA and other donors. The target communities were spread between the four districts:

- Kakata District: five (5) communities
- Gibi District: two (2) communities
- Mamba-Kaba District: five (5) communities
- Firestone District: five (5) communities

During the community identification phase, eighty (80) community members were recruited and trained to serve as peer educators. Each Peer was selected with input from the communities which began during the community entry process when peers demonstrated an interest in ARC/FIND's GBV work. After identification, they were trained on legal issues related to women's rights and GBV to enable them to identify and report cases, as well as provide immediate support to survivors of GBV such as rape and

¹ IDPs include all of the returnee refugees, returnee IDPs, and current IDPs in Margibi County. All of the inhabitants of Margibi County are indirect beneficiaries of the ARC/FIND project.

domestic violence. As much as possible, equal numbers of women and men were recruited in order to ensure gender balance.

➤ Community Sensitization and Awareness Raising



ARC uses images and Liberian English to communicate behavior-change messages.

After peers were identified and trained, they conducted seventy-two (72) sensitization and awareness-raising campaigns with guidance and support from ARC. These campaigns involved various techniques including small group discussions, school sensitizations, and mass sensitizations. ARC/FIND reached 25,440 individuals, including 13,000 women and 12,440 men, through sensitizations and awareness-raising activities. ARC's experience working in Liberian communities over the past several years enabled it to design the most effective forum for each component of education and awareness messages.

Mass sensitizations were used to spread information quickly to a wide audience, though care was taken to reach vulnerable members of the community. The primary purpose of the thirty-five (35) mass sensitizations was to educate the selected communities about ARC/FIND's role in their communities in the context of the OFDA project. ARC held mass sensitizations in each of the seventeen (17) communities, and focused on reaching groups within the communities including IDPs, returnees, the indigent, and other vulnerable people.

After mass sensitizations, ARC used small group discussions with groups of women and men segregated by age and gender to disseminate more detailed information and discuss personal or sensitive issues. ARC/FIND conducted twelve (12) small group discussions during the course of the project. The discussions used a participatory and interactive style to explore and challenge the participants' knowledge of and beliefs on GBV and related legal issues. The ARC/FIND team presented each topic before giving beneficiaries the opportunity to ask questions, discuss answers, and share experiences and beliefs. The specific topics discussed during these sensitizations included inheritance and domestic relation laws, GBV and the Liberian law, the new rape laws, due process, the mediation process, general human rights, and the role of the legal aid team.

School sensitizations for large groups of students were used to help participants understand specific issues of GBV and relevant law as they relate to youth. The discussions covered the same topics as the general mass sensitizations, but focused on the specific implications of GBV and SEA for young women and men. Twenty-five (25) school sensitizations were conducted with students, teachers, and school administrators.

Activity 1.2 IDP returnees, at-risk individuals and GBV survivors have access to legal aid services for GBV in Margibi County

➤ Cases Identified

During the project implementation period, the team identified fifty-five (55) GBV cases including gang rape, statutory rape, incest, family abandonment, child abuse, and persistent non-payment of child support. Cases were referred to ARC/FIND for legal aid either through ARC peers or from other GBV programs managed by national or international NGOs. Table 1 displays the types of cases identified by district in Margibi during the ten months of project implementation.

Table 1: Type of GBV Case by District, Sep. 2007 to Jun. 2008

<i>District</i>	<i>Rape</i>	<i>Domestic Violence</i>	<i>Total</i>
Mamba-Kaba	10	1	11
Gibi	8	2	10
Firestone	13	2	15
Kakata	16	3	19
Total	47	8	55



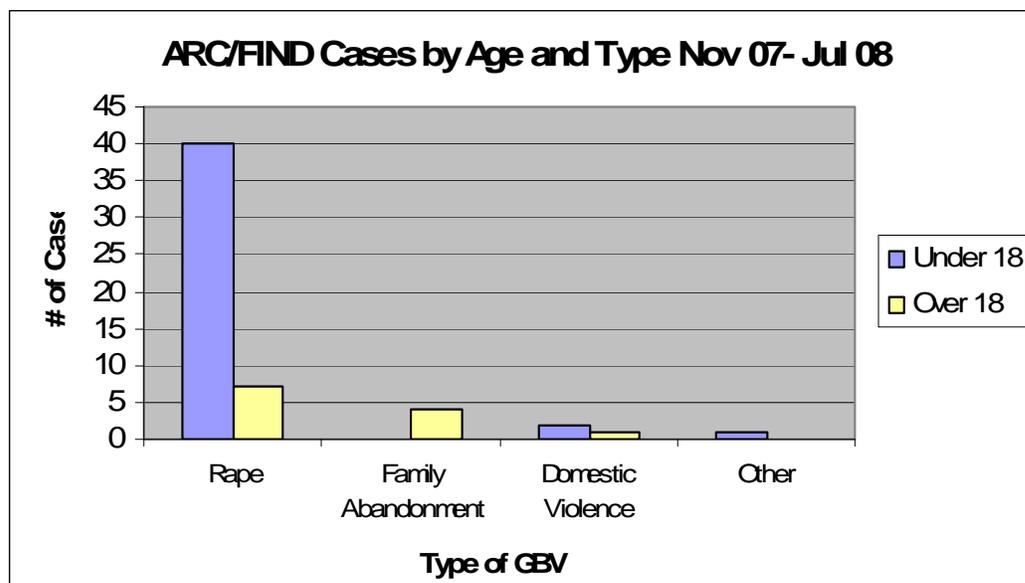
“My husband was giving me a hard time. He was beating me. It was physical abuse. But he said he didn’t want the relationship to end. I went to see ARC’s legal aid team to see if they could help. They enabled me to take the case to court, free of charge, and my husband and I finally parted. Six months on, I’m doing fine. I was unable to claim back most of my belongings, but I’m smiling again – that’s what matters”.

After identification and intake, ARC/FIND’s legal aid social workers immediately follow up to determine the most appropriate legal assistance for each survivor based on the type of case and her wishes. In criminal cases, social workers ensure that the legal rights of survivors are respected and pressure the courts to conduct the preliminary hearings necessary to transfer the case up to the highest court that has jurisdiction over each type of case. Non-criminal cases are either mediated or taken to a court of lesser authority based on the survivor’s decision.

While the GBV cases identified and assisted by ARC/FIND are diverse, there is a heavy caseload of very young rape survivors. Overall, 85% of the cases that ARC/FIND identify and assist are rape. Of these cases, 89% of the survivors of rape are under the age of 18. 47% of the survivors of rape are

under the age of 12. The youngest rape survivor is four years old. Chart 1 shows the type of GBV by the survivor’s age.

Chart 1: Type of GBV by Age of Survivor in Margibi, Nov. 07 – Jul. 08



➤ Follow-up and Monitoring

The team made a total of forty-one (41) follow-up and monitoring visits during the ten months of the project implementation. The primary purpose of these visits, which took the legal aid team to police stations, courts, and communities, was to keep the social workers up-to-date on the progress of the cases and pressure legal and protection actors to prioritize GBV cases. They also served as an opportunity to monitor the capacity of the Liberian system to appropriately manage GBV cases. Whenever a capacity gap was identified, ARC/FIND’s social workers provided on-the-spot trainings to build the capacity of law enforcement officers or legal actors.

➤ Access to Legal Aid Services for GBV Survivors in Margibi County

ARC/FIND provided legal representation, mediation services, and legal advice to fifty-five (55) survivors of GBV during the ten months of project implementation in Margibi. Forty-eight (48) of these cases were sent to the formal legal system while seven (7) were successfully mediated. Table 2 displays the status of each of the cases managed.

Table 2: Status of GBV Cases Identified by ARC/FIND in Margibi County, Nov. 2007 to Jul. 2008

District	Mediation			Formal Legal System			Total
	Mediated	Pending	Dropped	Prosecuted	Pending	Dropped	
Mamba-Kaba	0	0	0	0	9	2	11
Gibi	2	0	0	0	3	5	10
Firestone	2	0	0	0	13	0	15

Kakata	3	0	0	1	4	11	19
Total	7	0	0	1	29	18	55

Twenty-nine (29) of the fifty cases referred to the formal legal system are still awaiting trial in court as of October 2008. Due to the huge backlog of all types of criminal cases pending in the Liberian legal system and extremely low capacity of the courts to hear cases, only two or three of GBV cases are put on the docket for prosecution during each three-month term of court.

Eighteen (18) cases were dropped for the following reasons:

- In nine (9) cases, the alleged perpetrators escaped from jail. Under Liberian law, the perpetrator is required as evidence to prosecute a crime; thus, cases in which the perpetrator is missing cannot be prosecuted.
- Two (2) survivors who are under the age of 18 were relocated at their parents' requests. Their parents accused the guardians of not providing adequate protection for their children and relocated their children to other homes.
- One (1) case involving an alleged juvenile perpetrator could not be prosecuted because there are no adequate juvenile detention centers.
- One (1) case was transferred to another agency by the survivor's parent. The mother wanted ARC/FIND to represent the survivor, but the father preferred another NGO. In the end, ARC/FIND, the other NGO, and both parents decided to allow the other NGO to handle the case.
- One (1) case of domestic violence was withdrawn from court and resolved by family members after the perpetrator appealed to the survivor to drop the case in order to save their relationship.
- Four (4) cases of rape were withdrawn from the courts at the request of the parents.

Most of the pending cases are simply waiting to be put on the docket (waiting to be scheduled) in the courts in Margibi. However, two (2) cases were mismanaged by the court authority of the Unification/RIA Magisterial Court. The two (2) alleged perpetrators involved in these cases have been released by the court authority and have not been rearrested despite all the efforts of the ARC/FIND team. Under Liberian law, these cases can only be tried if the alleged perpetrators are available for trial. ARC/FIND continues to work with

A Win for the Women of Liberia

In March 2008, the ARC/FIND legal aid team prosecuted a 52-year-old man for the rape of a 12-year-old girl. A sign of the deterrent power of successful prosecutions, the number of GBV cases received by the police in Kakata fell dramatically during the two months following the verdict from a rate of eight cases per month to only two.

According to Margibi State Prosecutor Oberly, the 2005 rape law has not been effective because it is rarely enforced. In his words, "the only way to deter rapists is to have many (perpetrators) face the law and be found guilty." At least in this case, a survivor found access to justice and other rapes may be deterred.

partners in the legal system and police to have these alleged perpetrators rearrested so that the cases can be transferred to the appropriate court for trial.

One (1) case was successfully prosecuted, and the perpetrator is now fulfilling a sentence of life imprisonment. This is the only case successfully prosecuted in Margibi since ARC began doing GBV work in the county. This case had an important psychological effect on community members, who expressed their relief that at least one survivor could access justice through the formal legal system in Margibi.

Activity 1.3 Legal Protection Officers, Interagency Response Actors, and Community Peers receive capacity building / training

➤ Capacity Building / Training

ARC/FIND began capacity building with their staff by training eight (8) Legal Protection Officers of the ARC/FIND legal aid team, including four (4) FIND staff and four (4) ARC staff. This week-long training was provided at the beginning of the project and covered GBV, psychosocial support, and relevant Liberian law. ARC's staff worked side-by-side with FIND staff during the entirety of the project to transfer knowledge, monitor performance, and continually mentor their growth as Legal Protection Officers. A refresher training was provided for all eight (8) Legal Protection Officers in the third quarter.

During the project period the ARC/FIND team monitored twelve (12) courts, two (2) major police stations, and three (3) police depots in Margibi County. During the monitoring process, social workers identified the capacity needs of the various institutions and provided on-the-spot trainings to build the capacity of legal and protection actors.

In total, 37 interagency service providers were trained through two-hour sessions on the following topics:

- Handling cases with confidentiality
- The importance of speedy trials
- Changing Liberian laws



This poster advertises legal aid at every FIND office.

During these trainings, ARC/FIND staff noted the level of knowledge of legal and judicial actors, particularly judges, in order to revise and target trainings to their needs.

ARC/FIND were unable to meet their target of 100 legal and judicial actors trained because the Liberian government put a moratorium on all judiciary trainings during the second quarter of the OFDA project until a single module is developed for all organizations involved in the training of judicial actors. Though this country-wide training module was not completed before the end of the OFDA project, ARC/FIND continued to provide two-hour, on-the-spot trainings to fill in the capacity gaps that were identified.



Liberia National Police Chief Inspector Gerald Holder and ARC/FIND Legal Protection Officers meet at the police station to discuss cases.

ARC/FIND also built the capacity of communities to respond effectively to cases of GBV and refer survivors to appropriate response provider. Peers were also empowered to engage in one-on-one discussion with individuals in their communities and serve as community mobilizers during ARC/FIND mass sensitizations. ARC/FIND trained all of the 80 peers in Margibi in one three-day training session. This session focused on GBV law and

how to conduct small awareness sessions with community members.

CONSTRAINTS AND SOLUTIONS

During the implementation of the project, ARC/FIND faced several constraints. Despite such challenges, ARC adapted its strategy in order to achieve objectives as fully as possible.

The most serious constraint on ARC/FIND's ability to complete this project was the moratorium placed by the Ministry of Justice on all trainings for judicial actors. The Ministry decided to forbid any organization from training judicial actors until all could agree on a standardized training manual. To adapt to this constraint, ARC/FIND provided on-the-spot, informal trainings to build the capacity of judicial and protection actors instead of the formal 3-day training that had initially been developed. ARC/FIND also partnered with the Ministry of Justice and other stakeholders to develop a standardized manual for training judicial actors. Nevertheless, implementation was hindered by the moratorium. Protection actors were not very responsive to the opportunity to be trained on response to GBV cases, and the lack of a centralized training prevented legal and protection actors from sharing experiences. ARC/FIND recommends that in the future, protection actors must be formally trained to be enabled to fulfill their role in the management of GBV cases.

Most of the sensitizations held in Firestone District took place at night, which prevented ARC/FIND social workers from adequately monitoring the work of the community peers. To address this constraint, sensitizations will be scheduled during evening hours to allow social workers to speak to participants that are only available at night , thus, enabling effective monitor to occur during the evening sessions.

The last constraint on implementation was the limited number of reported cases until the social workers could conduct widespread sensitizations to raise awareness of ARC's services. A large number of sensitizations were required to encourage community members to report cases of GBV. As a result, more cases were reported to the legal aid team for legal intervention by police and court authorities during the second and third quarters of the project implementations. Nevertheless, ARC/FIND exceeded the target number of GBV cases assisted with legal aid. Emphasis should be placed on awareness, as it helps address fears within communities that stop them from reporting and also helps judiciary actors to understand the various roles of ARC/FIND, the community, and the judiciary.

Objective 1: To enable communities prevent and respond to GBV through community sensitization and awareness-raising, the provision of free and confidential legal aid support to survivors, and capacity building of protection actors.

Sub-Sector: Gender-Based Violence and/or Women's Centers

Expected Outcomes	Indicators	Quarterly Progress	Cumulative Progress	Comments
1.1 17 communities trained/sensitized on GBV	# and type of GBV services made available to targeted population	3 services provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal awareness • Legal aid services • Capacity building 	3 services provided: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal awareness • Legal aid services • Capacity building 	Services provided throughout the project period
	# of women trained/sensitized on GBV issues (Target: 12,000)	8,608 women trained/sensitized	13,000 women trained/sensitized	Target exceeded by 8%
	# of men trained/sensitized on GBV issues (Target: 12,000)	8,937 men trained/sensitized	12,440 men trained/sensitized	Target exceeded by 4%

Sub-Sector: Coordination, Personnel and/or Advocacy

Expected Outcomes	Indicators	Quarterly Progress	Cumulative Progress	Comments
2.1 IDP returnees, at-risk individuals and GBV survivors have access to legal aid services for GBV in Margibi County	# of Legal Protection Officers provided (Target: 6)	6 pro bono attorneys provided	6 pro bono attorneys provided	Pro bono attorneys available throughout the project period
	# of GBV survivors that receive support through ARC/ FIND Partnership (Expected: at least 50 survivors)	20 GBV survivors receive legal aid support	55 GBV survivors received legal aid support	Target exceeded by 10%

Cross-Cutting Theme: Capacity-Building/Training

Expected Outcomes	Indicators	Quarterly Progress	Cumulative Progress	Comments
3.1 Legal Protection Officers, Interagency Response Actors, and Community Peers receive capacity building/training	# of Legal Protection Officers (ARC/FIND social workers) that receive training (i.e. Case Management, Project Cycle Management, etc.; Target: 6)	8 Legal Protection Officers attended a refresher training 4 FIND 4 ARC	8 Legal Protection Officers trained 4 FIND 4 ARC All 8 attended a refresher training in May 2008	Target exceeded by 33%
	# Interagency Response Providers (i.e. LNP, judiciary members, local chiefs, etc.) that receive training on the legal/judicial system, GBV, and establish appropriate prevention, response and referral systems to protect survivors of GBV (Target: 100)	25 legal protection actors trained	37 legal protection actors trained	Target not met because Government of Liberia put moratorium on all trainings for judicial actors until a standard module could be produced and adopted by all trainers. To adapt to this moratorium, ARC provided informal, on-the-spot training instead of the formal 3-day sessions that we had initially planned. ARC also began working with the Ministry of Justice to create an official training module for judicial actors.
	# community peers that receive training on GBV, the legal/judicial system, and establish appropriate prevention, response and referral systems to protect survivors of GBV (Target: 80)	80 peers provided with refresher training	80 peers trained in January 2008 80 peers attended refresher trainings in second and third quarters	Initial 3-day training as well as two refresher trainings provided to all community peers