



# SUSTAINABILITY

FY19 FOURTH QUARTER & ANNUAL REPORT: OCTOBER 1, 2018 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2019



# FOREST INCOMES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

October 1, 2018 – September 30, 2019

CONTRACT NUMBER: AID-669-A-16-00002

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Authorized Forest Community
CF	Community Forest
CEPA	Communications, Education, And Public Awareness
CFG	Community Forest Guard
CFGMS	Community Forest Governance and Management Structures
CFOCs	Community Forest Organizing Committees
CFMA	Community Forest Management Agreement
CFMB	Community Forest Management Body
CFMP	Community Forest Management Plan
CFWG	Community Forest Working Group
CIFOR	Center for International Forestry Research
CLA	Communication, Learning and Adaptation
CRL	Community Rights Law
CPI	Community Performance Index
DQR	Data Quality Review
EG	Enterprise Group
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency (Liberia)
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
FIFES	Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability
FGRM	Conflict Mitigation and Feedback Grievance Redress Mechanism
FTI	Forestry Training Institute
FY	Fiscal Year
GIS	Geographic Information System
GoL	Government of Liberia
GPS	Global Positioning Specialist
HH	Household
HHS	Household Size
IMS	Improved Management Standards
IR	Intermediate Result
ITT	Indicator-Tracking Table
ISP	Institutional Strengthening Plan
ITOCA	Integrated Technical and Organizational Capacity Assessment
KTC	Kparblee Timber Cooperation
LOA	Life of Activity
LSA	Liberia Strategic Analysis
LGSA	Land Governance Support Activity
LRCFP	Land Right and Community Forestry Program
LFSP	Liberia Forest Sector Project
LEAP	Learning, Evaluation, and Analysis Platform
MAST	Mobile Application to Secure Tenure
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSME	Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprise

MTE	Mid-term Evaluation
NRM	Natural Resource Management
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PROSPER	People, Rules and Organizations Supporting the Protection of Ecosystem Resources
Q	Quarter
RAPELD	Rapid Assessments (RAP) combined with long term ecological research (PELD; in Portuguese)
QPR	Quarterly Portfolio Review
SEARCH	Special Emergency Assistance to Restore Children’s Hope
TOC	Theory of Change
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USFS	US Forestry Service
VPA-SU	Voluntary Partnership Agreement – Support Unit
WORTH	Women Owning Resources Together

## ACTIVITY INTRODUCTION

The Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability (FIFES) activity is a five-year USAID initiative implemented by ACDI/VOCA with assistance from Pact and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). FIFES is designed to combat deforestation and loss of biodiversity while developing key rural forest-based enterprises that provide sustainable economic opportunities for farmers and forest-dependent communities. The FIFES Activity contributes to USAID/Liberia's overall sustainable economic growth program to promote equitable and sustainable market-led economic opportunities in Liberia while improving natural resources management.

The purpose of the FIFES activity is the conservation of biodiversity in 11 community forests (CFs) in Grand Bassa and Nimba counties. To achieve this, FIFES staff work with local, regional, and national stakeholders to achieve two main objectives: (1) creation of well-developed rural forest-based enterprises, which provide sustainable economic opportunities for farmers and forest-dependent communities while combatting deforestation and biodiversity loss, and (2) enhanced capacity of government of Liberia (GoL) institutions and rural communities to sustainably manage and benefit from CF and buffer zone natural resources. These objectives are reflected in the following three FIFES activity components:

1. Sustainable forest-based enterprises developed and strengthened
2. Community forest management improved
3. Cross-cutting themes: gender, youth, and public outreach

### FIFES Theory of Change

The FIFES Theory of Change (TOC) states: ***If*** key rural forest-based enterprises provide sustainably increased economic opportunities for farmers and forest-based communities, ***and*** the technical and management capacity of GoL institutions and communities responsible for the management of CFs are enhanced, ***then*** deforestation and biodiversity loss will decrease.

## IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

### SUMMARY OF ANNUAL RESULTS

**Table 1. USAID Standard Indicators and ACDI/VOCA Custom Indicators, FY19 Q4 and Annual**

USAID Standard Indicator	Q4 Actual	Annual Actual	Annual Target	Comments
<b>Goal: Develop key rural forest-based enterprises that provide sustainable economic opportunities for farmers and forest-dependent communities while combatting deforestation and loss of biodiversity</b>				
Number of direct beneficiaries reached as result of FIFES facilitation or support	931	1,072	3,614	These are individuals who benefited from Women Own Resources Together (WORT) cocoa nursery, beekeeping, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data collection trainings throughout the entire year. Female = 293 Male = 779
Number of indirect beneficiaries reached as a result of FIFES facilitation	4,869	5,690	9,035	Calculated by household size (HHS) minus the household

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USAID Standard Indicator	Q4 Actual	Annual Actual	Annual Target	Comments
				(HHHs) reached by the project
Number of households reached as a result of FIFES facilitation or support	911	1,051	822	These are new and continuing households. New = 55 Continuing = 996
EG.3-1 Number of individuals who have received USG-supported training	931	1,072	850	Annual actual 1,072 (female 293, male = 779)
EG.10.2-4 Number of people trained in sustainable natural resources management and/or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance	134	242	425	These are first-time NRM trainees (72 female, 170 male)
<b>Result 1: Sustainable forest-based enterprises developed and strengthened</b>				
EG.10.2-3 Number of people with increased economic benefits derived from sustainable NRM and conservation activities as a result of USG assistance—Feed the Future/Outcome (Standard)	-	4,653	2,090	Results are taken from the annual survey data collected Q4.
Number of forest-based enterprises/businesses operating more profitably (at or above cost) due to FIFES project assistance	208	208	10	Results are taken from the annual survey data collected Q4.
EG.3.2-19 Value of smallholder incremental sales generated with USG assistance	-	\$25,686	\$1,630	Results are taken from the annual survey data collected Q4. (Ex-rate 1USD = 194 LD)
<b>IR 1.1: Sustainable agroforest-based business enterprises established</b>				
Number of new forest-based enterprises formed to support program-assisted value chains	38	40	14	Two enterprise groups (EGs) formed in Q2 and thirty-eight formed in Q4.
EG.3.2-3 Number of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including farmers, receiving business development services from USG-assisted sources	904	1,045	N/A	These are continuing farmer groups Female = 55, Male = 990
<b>IR 1.2: Improved enabling environment for agroforest-based business enterprises</b>				
EG.10.2-5 Number of laws, policies, or regulations that address biodiversity conservation and/or other environmental themes officially	0	3	20	Annual actual captures all approved/adopted bylaws and constitutions of enterprise groups for FY19; no new policies

USAID Standard Indicator	Q4 Actual	Annual Actual	Annual Target	Comments
proposed, adopted or implemented as a result of USG assistance				were worked on in Q4.
<b>IR 1.3: Improved capacity of sustainable agroforest-based business enterprises</b>				
Score, in percent, of combined key areas of organizational capacity amongst FIFES assisted forest-based enterprises	-	-	-	The activity data for this indicator runs through the life of the project and will be reported FY20.
<b>IR 1.4: Increased public-private partnership in biodiversity conservation and management</b>				
EG.3.2-5 Number of new public-private partnerships formed	0	1	0	
Value of new private-sector resources contributed to USG-supported public-private partnerships (PPPs)	0	\$ 103.09	\$20,000	Kparblee CFMB contributed \$103.09 towards PPP with A Liberia General Trading Inc.
<b>Result 2: Community forest management improved</b>				
EG.10.2-2 Number of hectares of biologically significant areas under improved natural resource management as a result of USG assistance	0	54,346	54,346	The 11 CFs have completed nine-step process and achieved legal status as official CFs, CFs were formed and are functioning as CF management units, human and institutional capacity is developed, and on-the-ground improved management improvements demonstrated. These hectares are already under improved management and will continue without any additional hectares being added as this is the total number of hectares for the 11 CFs FIFES supports.
EG.10.2-1 Number of hectares of biologically significant areas showing improved biophysical conditions as a result of USG assistance	-	-	-	This is an indicator that reports on the physical condition of community forests and buffer zones. CFMBs began collecting data in Q4 and will report on condition during FY20.
Score, in percent, of combined key areas of organizational capacity amongst FIFES-assisted community	0	61.1%	25%	This is the average across all CFMBs

USAID Standard Indicator	Q4 Actual	Annual Actual	Annual Target	Comments
forest management bodies/Community forest management body (CFMBs)				
	<b>IR 2.1: Enhanced knowledge and skills on sustainable biodiversity and landscape management</b>			
EG.3-1 Number of individuals who have received USG-supported training				To demonstrate the integrative nature of FIFES' Result 1 and Result 2 activities this is a re-mention of this indicator; also reported under Goal (see above)
	<b>IR 2.2: Inventory of forest resources (timber, NTFP, &amp; animals) conducted and biomonitoring in place</b>			
EG.10.2-2 Number of hectares of biologically significant areas under improved natural resource management as a result of USG assistance				As presented in the approved MELP this indicator is repeated already presented under Result (see above).
Number of plant and animal key species monitored as a result of FIFES assistance	-	-	-	After completion of the forest inventories (on a rolling basis approximately one per month with final inventory planned for August 2020) FIFES will help CFMBs set up their biomonitoring systems. The CFMBs will then start monitoring and reporting key species identified during inventories. This indicator will report zero until the CFMBs begin monitoring the key species.
	<b>IR 2.3: Strengthened environmental practices in the CFs, buffer zone, and larger landscape</b>			
EG.3.2-17: Number of farmers and others who have applied improved technologies or management practices with USG assistance	0	1,050	0	(Female = 660, male = 390) Results are taken from the annual survey data covering the period from Oct 2018 to Aug 2019.
	<b>Cross-cutting gender and youth</b>			
Number of women beneficiaries receiving savings and credit technical assistance as a result of USG support	553	582	0	These are WORTH group members from Authorized Forest Communities surrounding C...
Proportion of females who report increased self-efficacy after USG-	0	79.64%	35%	Results are taken from the annual survey data covering

USAID Standard Indicator	Q4 Actual	Annual Actual	Annual Target	Comments
supported training/ programming				period from Oct 2018 to Aug 2019.

## Q4 AND ANNUAL PROGRESS NARRATIVE

*Goal: Develop key rural forest-based enterprises that provide sustainable economic opportunities for farmers and forest-dependent communities while combating deforestation and the loss of biodiversity.*

In FY19, FIFES reinforced the CFMB Hub and network model implementation to address the recommendations that resulted from the data quality review (DQR) and mid-term evaluation (MTE) conducted in FY18. During FY19 the CFMB network, consisting of three CFMB Hubs (Blei in Northern Nimba, Gbear-Gblor in Southern Nimba, and Barconnie in Grand Bassa), continued to evolve in its function as a platform allowing the CFMBs to take on more responsibilities for CF management efforts including awareness-raising, CF biomonitoring, data collection, analysis and reporting, boundary line clearing, forest inventory, technical assistance and mentoring for EGs and WORTH groups, as well the promotion of female participation and leadership in CF governance and management decisions. FIFES supported this evolution in responsibilities by providing technical assistance and training-of-trainers methodology training to the Technical Assistance Focus Persons selected by the 11 CFMB. These individuals are responsible for the provision of technical assistance and market information to their respective authorized forest community (AFCs), and the promotion/facilitation of commercial linkages and round tables to foster commercial negotiations and transactions for EGs linked to the CFMB Hub and network.

It is worth noting that not every activity was implemented as planned. For example, it took almost the whole of FY19 to resolve the inter-community forest boundary line conflict among three CFs (Kparblee, Boe-Quilla, and Sehzuplay) in Southern Nimba. Secondly, it took more time than anticipated for the FDA to develop and release the new guidelines for CFMP development and revision, stalling FIFES efforts to revise existing CFMPs. Despite these hindrances, the FIFES team made significant progress during FY19. The following progress narrative provides details for each indicator during FY19.

### Number of direct beneficiaries reached as a result of FIFES facilitation or support

During Q4, FIFES CFMB support teams worked with 931 new direct beneficiaries (580 female, 351 male) and 141 continuing direct beneficiaries (78 female, 63 male) bringing the total number of direct beneficiaries to 1,072 for FY19. The 1,072 direct beneficiaries, between the ages 15 to 80, are disaggregated as follows:

- Under 30 years of age = 304 (54 female, 250 male)
- 31 to 50 years of age = 679 (219 female, 460 male)
- Over 50 years of age = 89 (20 female, 69 male)

The FIFES team reached these beneficiaries through value chain support (training on cocoa farm rehabilitation, the FaaB concept and fundamental practices, and improved beekeeping techniques) and capacity development efforts (training on CF governance, and CFMB M&E data collection, analysis and management). Aggregation of the data shows that 1,072 individuals benefitted directly from FIFES and CFMB Hub interventions during FY19, achieving 31% of annual target (3,614 direct beneficiaries for FY19). The low achievement percentage is attributed to the transition, occurring the latter half of FY19, from a FIFES centric support network to the CFMB Hub-centric support system for CFs, which occurred as the main component of FIFES' efforts to promote ownership and sustainable Activity results.

During FY20, to achieve 100% of the life of activity (LOA) target, FIFES will encourage and assist the CFMBs to

increasingly implement specific support activities (normally undertaken by FIFES) directly. This means, for example, that the CFMB Technical Assistance Focus Person who benefited from FIFES provided Trainer-of-Trainer methodology training in FY19, will roll out the trainings to EGs and WORTH groups linked to the CFMB Hub and network in FY20. This will significantly the impact staff to beneficiaries' ratio and allow the FIFES team to reach a greater number of direct beneficiaries ultimately leading to the achievement of the EOP.

### **Number of indirect beneficiaries reached as a result of FIFES facilitation**

FIFES CFMB support team efforts during Q4 benefited 4,869 new indirect beneficiaries (3,040 female, 1,829 male), bringing the total number of indirect beneficiaries to 5,690 for FY19. Of the indirect beneficiaries reached this year, 3,260 were female (57% percent), and 2,430 were male (43% percent). The greater percentage of females as compared to males for indirect beneficiaries is attributed to more females on average remaining in each household; males tend to move away from their parent's homes to larger cities in search of better economic opportunities. The calculation reflects the total household size minus the total sum of households reached by the FIFES team.

### **Number of households reached as a result of FIFES facilitation or support**

During Q4, the FIFES CFMB support teams reached 911 households through support to cocoa and honey enterprises (trainings on cocoa farm rehabilitation techniques, the FaaB concept and establishing strong market linkages), and various CFMB, EC, CA and CFG capacity-building efforts (trainings on M&E data collection, etc.) The FIFES activity reached 243 households in FY16, 2,544 in FY17, 1,136 in FY18, and 1,051 households (New = 55, Continuing = 996) in FY19. Therefore, FIFES has reached more than 100% of the LOA target of 842 households reached as a result of FIFES facilitation. With assistance from FIFES, the CFMBs, working through their respective CFMB Hubs and the CFMB Network, will continue to provide support to these households in FY20.

### **EG.3-1 Number of individuals who have received USG-supported training**

During Q4, the FIFES team in collaboration with CFMBs and FDA staff, provided training to 931 beneficiaries (260 female, 671 male) on various subjects (e.g. cocoa farm management techniques, FaaB concept, the importance of market linkages, biomonitoring and law enforcement to reduce deforestation and biodiversity loss, solar dryer construction, usage and management, computer literacy, and data collection, analysis, storage and reporting). Additionally, the CFMBs raised awareness about Liberia's endangered animals and what can be done to promote biodiversity conservation.

During FY19, as a result of FIFES training, farmers rehabilitated and maintained a total 313 acres of cocoa farms (Grand Bassa 25, Nimba 288) and harvested more cocoa beans than previous years in the project. Speaking after a training on improved cocoa production techniques, cocoa farm rehabilitation, improved harvesting techniques, and postharvest handling, Madam Comfort Yeeaplah, a female beneficiary of the Gaye-Kwadou EG, was elated saying, *"the training helped us to know what it means to harvest cocoa on time, remove diseased pods, and the meaning of 75% ripeness of cocoa. So, we are happy that this will make us productive on our current site instead of increasing farm size into the forest."*



**Madame Yeeaplah with fellow Gaye-Kwadou EG members**

#### **EG.10.2-4 Number of people trained in sustainable natural resources management and/or biodiversity conservation as a result of USG assistance**

During Q4, the FIFES team, in collaboration with the CFMBs, trained 134 beneficiaries in NRM, bringing the total number of people trained in sustainable natural resources management and biodiversity conservation to 242 (72 female, 170 male) in FY19. Training topics included but were not limited to: forest inventory methods, biomonitoring techniques, resource use law enforcement, and forest enterprise development. These numbers indicate a 57 % achievement rate for FY19. This occurred because the indicator was newly established in FY2018, and FIFES only actually begin vigorous natural resource trainings in FY 2019 in association with the four community forest inventories done during FY19. To make up for this discrepancy, FIFES will increase NRM trainings accompanying the push to undertake forest inventory and CFMP review/revise activities in FY20.

#### **IMPLEMENTATION STATUS (RESULT 1, RESULT 2, AND CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES)**

The FIFES team's accomplishments detailed below illustrate how FIFES CFMB support teams developed and strengthened sustainable forest enterprises to produce incentives to promote improved natural resource management and biodiversity conservation in the CFs, buffer zones, and greater landscapes during FY19.

##### *Result (R) 1: Sustainable Forest-Based Enterprises Developed and Strengthened*

#### **EG.10.2-3 Number of people with increased economic benefits derived from sustainable NRM and conservation activities as a result of USG assistance**

During Q4, the FIFES M&E team completed an annual outcome indicators survey to collect data on this indicator. Economic benefit in this indicator is defined as an increase in cash earnings or consumption due to sustainable natural resource management (NRM) and conservation activities. In FY19, 4,653 beneficiaries (female 2,810, male 1,843) showed increased economic benefits which is 13.6 percent greater than the 4,097 individuals who showed increased economic benefit in FY18. The 4,653 beneficiaries are comprised of individuals from one or more of the various groups supported by FIFES (e.g., WORTH groups, CFMBs, CAs, CFGs, and EGs) that earned more cash or consumed more goods in FY19 due to sustainable NRM or conservation activities supported by FIFES.

#### **Number of forest-based enterprises/businesses operating more profitably (at or above cost) due to FIFES project assistance**

During Q4, the FIFES M&E team collected data to measure the number of forest-based enterprises/businesses that are working in FIFES supported value chains (cocoa, plantain, groundnut, cowpea, honey, pepper, palm oil) operating more profitably due to FIFES interventions. For FY19, 208 enterprises or businesses, reported increased profits of at least three percent (annual income minus annual operating expenses) compared to the previous reporting year. Of the 208 enterprises operating more profitably, 193 were in Nimba county, and 15 were in Grand Bassa county. This number represents more than 100% of the LOA target of 57 enterprises operating more profitably due to FIFES assistance.

### **EG.3.2-19 Value of smallholder incremental sales generated with USG assistance**

During Q4, the FIFES M&E team conducted an annual survey to measure the value of this indicator, and survey results showed smallholder incremental sales of \$25,686 for seven value chains (oil palm, groundnut, honey, cocoa, pepper, plantain, cowpea/beans in FY19. The disaggregation is as follows: (incremental sales of oil palm = \$368.65), (incremental sales of groundnut = \$847.71), (incremental sales for honey = \$2,195.55), (incremental sales of cocoa = \$18,146.56), (incremental sales of pepper = \$3,962.63), (incremental sales of plantain = \$131.90) (incremental sales of cowpea/beans = \$33). The cocoa value chain experienced the largest incremental sales because of increased smallholder interest, while cowpea/beans recorded the least sales because cowpea/beans were mostly produced for household consumption and not for sale. This figure represents a 2.8-fold increase compared to the LOA target of \$9,186.

*Intermediate Result (IR) 1.1: Sustainable agroforestry-based business enterprises established*

#### **Number of new forest-based enterprises formed to support program-assisted value chains**

During Q4, the CFMB support teams assisted CFMBs to form 38 EGs bringing the total number of CFMB formed EGs to 40 in FY19 with a total membership of 1,340 people (520 females, 820 male). Before the formation of new CFMB-formed EGs, the CFMB support team provided mentoring to the CFMBs on the selection criteria for forming new forest-based enterprises. Once new EGs were selected and formed, the CFMBs provided training and support that allowed the EGs to create a solid foundation for collective marketing and information sharing amongst themselves, ultimately empowering the EGs with greater negotiation power with buyers and input suppliers. FIFES-facilitated peer-to-peer learning events on improved production techniques and enterprise profitability generated considerable interest among EGs. The events also resulted in an increase in requests for training in improved cocoa nursery establishment and management.

Additionally, the CFMB support team continued to monitor CFMB implementation of MoUs signed between the CFMBs and existing EGs. The MoUs create a platform for mutual collaboration and support for technical assistance and increase opportunities for collective value-addition efforts. They also improve CF management and biodiversity conservation by formally linking the EGs to the CF and the overarching management plan that strives for biodiversity conservation.

**EG.3.2-3 Number of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including farmers, receiving business development services from USG-assisted sources**

During Q4, 904 individuals (24 female, 880 male) received business development services, which included technical assistance and training for farm management improvement and assistance with commercial negotiation skills. This resulted in a total of 1,045 farmers (55 female, 990 male) that received BDS support from FIFES in FY19. During FY19, FIFES also provided capacity building BDS for business plan development. As a result, the Barconnie CFMB Hub developed a charcoal business plan and a funding proposal for sustainable production of charcoal, using an improved retort kilns technology instead of the traditional earthen kiln techniques and the establishment and maintenance of fast-growing renewable tree lots for biomass production.



*Barconnie Community Forest Business Plan Development Training Participants*

*IR 1.2: Improved enabling environment of agroforest-based business enterprises*

**EG.10.2-5 Number of laws, policies, or regulations that address biodiversity conservation and/or other environmental themes officially proposed, adopted or implemented as a result of USG assistance**

In Q4, there were no new laws, policies, or regulations officially proposed, adopted or implemented as a result of USG support under the FIFES Activity. However, during FY19, the CFMB support team did facilitate the signing of three MOUs between the Kparblee, Boe-Quilla, Sehzuplay, and Gbear-Gblor CFMBs and their respective EGs. The signed MOUs establish a professional relationship between the CFMBs and the EGs to improve community forest management by promoting agroforestry enterprise best production practices outside the CF, adhering to biodiversity conservation tenets and discouraging conversion of forested areas for agricultural purposes. The MOUs outlined the commitment of the EGs to support their respective CFMB Annual Action Plan which covers the management of the CF, and the CFMBs' commitment to provide technical assistance in the form of training on improved production techniques, Farming as a Business (FaaB), and the collection and dissemination of market information to the EGs. The MOUs also stipulate that all technical assistance packages will be channeled through the CFMB after the EGs request technical assistance. Additionally, the MOUs set forth that the CFMBs and EGs will work together to explore opportunities for value addition to forest-based and agroforestry products at the site and/or community level.



*CFMB Chief Officer Nathaniel Kermon and EG Chair Cathrine Morris signing the CFMB technical extension services MOU as EG members look on.*

*IR 1.3: Improved capacity of sustainable agroforest-based business enterprises*

**Score, in percent, of combined key areas of organizational capacity amongst FIFES-assisted forest-based enterprises**

Data for this indicator is to be analyzed across the life of the Activity, and thus will be reported in FY20. However, as part of FIFES capacity-building support to CFMBs, the FIFES team provided refresher trainings to

WORTH group management committees on their roles and responsibilities in the day to day operation of their groups (as outlined in their respective by-laws and constitutions). The refresher courses provided training on understanding village savings/loan principles, interest rate calculations, repayment requirements, as well as improve fiscal data collection and reporting.

Additionally, during FY19, the FIFES team conducted a three-day computer literacy training for 42 CFMB and EC members (4 female, 38 male) from ten CFs (Barconnie, Sehvi, Zor, Blei, Gba, Gblor, Gbear-Gblor, Sehzieplay, Boe-Quilla, and Kparblee) in Grand Bassa and Nimba counties. One CF (Matro) did not participate in the training due to the unavailability of the CFMB members because of an unforeseen cultural event. The training, which targeted CF governance and management structures, including CFMB chief officers, EC chairpersons, CFMB support teams, and EC secretaries, was a result of CFMB self-determined capacity gaps identified during the institutional strengthening plan (ISP) assessment conducted in September 2018. The training provided CFMB and EC members with their first exposure to computers, word, and data management software, and virtual communication via email and Skype software. Upon completion of the training, each CFMB received one computer (the FIFES team distributed 10 in total). Further, each CFMB Hub received a printer (the FIFES team distributed three). The CFMB members expressed their gratitude for the training and equipment and were excited about beginning to collect, manage, and report on EG, Women Owning Resources Together (WORTH) group, community forest usage, and biodiversity data. During the coming year, FIFES will check on how the computers and are being used, and work with the CFMBs to expand their computing and reporting skills.



*Nimba CFMBs receiving computer literacy training*

*IR 1.4: Increased public-private partnership in biodiversity conservation and management*

**EG.3.2-5 Number of new public-private partnerships formed**

No PPPs were established in Q4. During FY19, FIFES provided third-party negotiation training to the Gba CFMB, which improved their ability to negotiate commercial agreements from a position of strength. The CFMB used the skills they learned from this training to enter into a one-year, third party agreement with Askon Liberia General Trading, Inc. The agreement, signed on February 6, 2019, allows Askon to harvest all species of marketable timber located on 450 acres within the Gba CF, as formally agreed in the Gba-CFMB third party agreement with ArcelorMittal Liberia (AML). This parcel of land, approved by the FDA, acting as the legal representative of the GoL, is set-aside for AML to use as their Tailings Management Facility (TMF). According to the third-party agreement with Askon, in return for using the land, the Gba CFMB will receive compensation for the sum of all logs harvested at a rate of US\$35.00 per cubic meter. To ensure that communities receive fair benefit from the management of their CF resources, FIFES provided the CFMB with capacity-building training to properly manage third-party agreements and provided an onsite FDA agent embedded with the CFMB to provide technical oversight of the operation and CF management activities.

Following the signing of the third-party agreement, Askon started harvesting and gathering all marketable species, but later halted the operations during the peak of the rainy season (July-September) due to challenges with moving equipment from one point to another. They plan to resume harvesting in early November 2019 once the rainy season ends. In FY20, FIFES will continue providing CFMBs with capacity-building training to negotiate and manage third-party agreements to ensure that communities receive fair benefit from the

management of their CF resources, and FIFES staff will follow-up with CFMBs to ensure revenue generated from CF resources are properly shared with communities.

### Value of new private sector resources contributed to USG-supported PPPs

The initial total monetary value of the third-party agreement signed between the Gba CFMB and Askon Liberia General Trading, Inc. was not captured due to Askon Liberia General Trading, Inc.'s unwillingness to disclose whatever value they have contributed to this partnership. Therefore, the FIFES team knows only the value contributed by the Gba CFMB which is = \$103.09. Askon Liberia General Trading, Inc will pay to Gba CFMB a calculated cost of US\$35.00 per cubic meter for all logs harvested and assembled. Askon will pay the calculated amount to Gba CFMB within 21 working days after the calculation. The Gba CFMB will report private, and public sector resources contributed to this partnership biannual to members of the GBA community forest Executive Committee (EC) and Community Assembly (CA).

### R 2: COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT IMPROVED

#### EG.10.2-2 Number of hectares of biologically significant areas under improved natural resource management as a result of USG assistance

During FY19, the CFMB support team assisted eight CFs in cleaning a total of 215.15 kilometers of boundary lines. The CFMBs contributed 200 volunteers (25 per CF). Although the FIFES team had hoped to finish cleaning boundary lines for all 11 CFs, the initiative had to be stopped for CFs (Gbear-Gblor, Kparblee, Sehzuplay, and Boe-Quilla) in southern Nimba due to contested boundary lines. Fortunately, in Q4, with continued assistance from FIFES (numerous meetings with AFCs and facilitation of 4 conflict mitigation roundtables), the yearlong inter-community forest boundary line dispute in southern Nimba was resolved. The boundary line cleaning, a critical prerequisite for measuring biologically significant areas that show improved natural resource management, also helps each CF to recognize their responsibility to demarcate their forest and enforce internal sustainable resource use targets for improved forest management. The following table provides an update on the remaining number of kilometers of the CF borderline that needs to be cleaned beginning in Q1 of FY20.

**Table 5. Boundary Line Cleaning Status, September 2019**

Name of CF	County	Boundary Line (km)	# of km Cleaned	Remaining km to be Cleaned	Status
Sehyi	Nimba	25.9	25.9	0	Completely cleaned
Gblor	Nimba	37.2	37.2	0	Completely cleaned
Gba	Nimba	35.5	35.5	0	Completely cleaned
Blei	Nimba	13.7	13.7	0	Completely cleaned
Zor	Nimba	19	19	0	Completely cleaned
Gbear-Gblor & Sehzuplay (PSS)	Nimba	17.8 (shared boundary)	0	17.8	To be completed in Q1 and Q2, FY20
Boe-Quilla & Sehzuplay (PSS)	Nimba	6 (shared boundary)	0	6	To be completed in Q1 and Q2, FY20
Sehzuplay & Kparblee (PSS)	Nimba	4 (shared boundary)	0	4	To be completed in Q1 and Q2, FY20
Gbear-Gblor & Kparblee (PSS)	Nimba	12 (shared boundary)	6	6	To be completed in Q1 and Q2, FY20
Boe-Quilla & Kparblee	Nimba	32 (shared boundary)	0	32	To be completed in Q1 and Q2, FY20

Matro	Grand Bassa	58	58	0	Completely cleaned
Barconnie (PSS)	Grand Bassa	25.85	25.85	0	Completely cleaned
<b>Total</b>		<b>286.95</b>	<b>221.15</b>	<b>65.8</b>	

All the work that CFG, CFMB, EC and CA members from the 11 CFs have done during the past year, and the progress that they have made described elsewhere in this document, contribute to improved natural resource management of the CFs.

#### **EG.10.2-1 Number of hectares of biologically significant areas showing improved biophysical conditions as a result of USG assistance**

During FY19, the FIFES team, in collaboration with FDA, assisted four CFMBs (i.e., Sehyi, Blei, Barconnie, and Gbear-Gblor) in conducting their respective community forest inventory. The forest inventory team, comprised of 19 persons (six CFGs, seven FTI Forest Support Assistants, three FDA personnel and three FIFES staff), collected and analyzed data and drafted forest inventory reports for each of the CFs. The next step, during Q1 FY20, will be to present these reports to CFMB, EC, and CA members for validation. The inventory report will then provide needed information to inform CFMB decision making on CF zoning and CFMP development or revision and will allow them to report on this indicator. At the end of the inventory work, the team turned over all inventory equipment to the CFMB Hubs so that individual CFMBs can borrow this equipment for future forest inventory and biomonitoring activities. The exercise formed part of the USAID-FIFES adapted Rapid Assessments and Long-term Ecological Discovery (RAPELD) community inventory methodology.



*FDA Seconded Staff Assisting with Forest Inventory in Barconnie CF.*

#### **Score, in percent, of combined key areas of organizational capacity among FIFES-assisted community forest management bodies**

During FY19, the FIFES team conducted the Integrated Technical Organizational Capacity Assessment (ITOCA) in 11 CFs in Nimba and Grand Bassa Counties. The exercise brought together 316 beneficiaries (female = 125 and male = 191) from the CF governance and management structures and examined progress towards and sustainability of activities implemented by community forest governing structures. Results from this analysis varied, as expected, with CFMBs, ECs, and CA members from the 11 FIFES-supported CFs showing increases and decreases in each of the various capacity areas that were evaluated. However, in general (considering all capacity areas), each CFMB either increased or maintained their overall capacity scores, resulting in a 61.1% capacity rating for FIFES supported CFMBs. This shows that CF stakeholders are beginning to understand what it means to function in these competency areas effectively. As the ITOCA is based on participants' perceptions, members of the CF have increased their level of understanding and are now, with the assistance that FIFES has provided, able to determine their strengths and weaknesses across the competency areas. They are also able to use this knowledge to define where they need continued capacity development support. Because of this ITOCA/CPI work, each CFMB developed an ISP. The FIFES team will use the ISPs to guide technical assistance interventions moving forward. During Q4, FIFES already responded to CFMB defined capacity development needs by providing business administration and

financial management training. The following tables represent where each of the CFMBs stands with required administrative documents and their CFMPs.

**Table 7. Updated summary of CFMB documentation, September 2019**

Community Forest	CFMA	Bylaws/ Constitution	Business Registration & Articles of Incorporation	Certificate of Accreditation	List of Staff	Annual Financial Report	Bank Account
Martro /Kartro	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	No
Barconnie/Harmonville	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	Yes	Yes	No	No
Gblor	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	No
Gbear-Gblor	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	Yes
Kparblee	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	Yes
Boe-Quilla	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	No
Sehzuplay	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	No
Sehyi	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	No	Yes	No	No
Gba	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Blei	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Zor	Yes	Yes	Yes (2019 re- registration pending)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

**Table 8. Summary of CFMP development modules status, September 2019**

Community Forest Module	Matro	Barconnie	Gblor	Gbear-Gblor	Kparlee	Boe-Quilla	Sehzuplay	Sehyi	Gba	Blei	Zor
<b>Module 1:</b> Community forestry planning facilitation	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
<b>Module 2:</b> Community forestry awareness raising	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
<b>Module 3:</b> Community profile	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
<b>Module 4:</b> Boundary demarcation/re-cleaning	C	C	IP	C	IP	IP	IP	C	IP	C	C
<b>Module 5:</b> Identifying threats to biodiversity	C	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	C	C	C
<b>Module 6:</b> Land use planning (zoning)	C	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	C	C	C
<b>Module 7:</b> Forest inventory and resource assessment	C	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	TD	C	C	C	C
<b>Module 8:</b> Community forest management plan	C	TD	RR	TD	RR	TD	RR	TD	RR	RR	RR

C: completed; IP: in progress; TD: to do; RR: review and revision

*IR2.1: Enhanced knowledge and skills on sustainable biodiversity and landscape management*

**EG.3-1 Number of individuals who have received USG-supported training**

(Reported under Result 2: Community Forest Management Improved).

*IR 2.2: Inventory on forest resources (timber, NTFP, and animals) conducted and biomonitoring in place*

**EG.10.2-2 Number of hectares of biologically significant areas under improved natural resource management as a result of USG assistance**

(Reported under Result 2: Community Forest Management Improved).

**Number of plant and animal key species monitored as a result of FIFES assistance**

The FIFES team, working alongside CFMB, EC, and CA members, as well as CFGs and volunteers from AFCs, conducted several forest inventories during FY19 (i.e., Blei, Sehyi, Barconnie, and Gbear-Gblor CFs). During these inventories, Cf members collected and analyzed key plant and animal species data as part of FIFES' forest monitoring training for the CFGs. This data will be presented to the CFMBs early in Q1 FY20 to be used as baseline data for their efforts to set up their biomonitoring systems. The report will provide information on the number of key plant and animal species to



*Recent Forest Technical Institute Graduates and Blei Community Forest Guards collecting inventory data.*

monitor in each of their respective CFs. As a result of the initial training, conducted during the forest inventories, the CFGs have already started collecting data on fauna and flora in community forests via regular CFG patrols, but will not start reporting on this data until the baseline data is formally presented to the CFMB. During the forest inventory exercise, team members saw evidence of the presence of forest buffalo, chimpanzee and various duiker species (tracks and scat found while establishing the forest transect).

### *IR 2.3: Strengthened environmental practices in the CFs, buffer zones, and larger landscape*

#### **EG.3.2-17: Number of farmers and others who have applied improved technologies or management practices with USG assistance**

During Q4, the FIFES M&E team conducted an annual survey that measured the number of farmers who have applied improved technologies. Analysis of survey data showed that 1,050 farmers (660 female and 390 male) applied improved technology and best management practices on their farms and demonstration sites. This represents a 98% percent uptake (1,050/1,072) of improved technology promoted by FIFES CFMB support teams during FY19. This high adoption rate is attributed to increased market demand (e.g., cocoa) and improved farm gate prices that were achieved through FIFES trainings on business negotiation skills and support for commercial roundtables.

CFMB support teams achieved this result by assisting AFC members in establishing improved technology and best management practices at demonstration sites. Enterprise Groups then used the sites to expose members and non-members to information that would enable them to make better farm management and natural resource use decisions. Groups demonstrated techniques at these sites, including solar dryer construction and management, proper seedling transport and transplanting, correct plant spacing, on-time planting, scheduled weeding and irrigation, and timely harvesting.

### *Cross-cutting: GENDER*

#### **Number of women beneficiaries receiving savings and credit technical assistance as a result of USG support**

These women are WORTH groups members from authorized forest communities around FIFES supported CFs. Analysis of the annual survey data covering the period from October 2018 to August 2019 shows that women who participate in the WORTH program are more likely to start an environmentally friendly second income business for themselves as compared to those women from the same communities that did not engage in the WORTH saving and credit program.

During Q4, CFMB support teams (led by PACT staff) verified that 143 WORTH groups with 2,983 active members (female 2,400, male 583) were successfully managing village-based savings and loan groups. Among the 2,400 women members of the WORTH groups who are active, a total of 553 women received savings and credit technical assistance from other WORTH groups in FY19. The credit technical assistance included trainings, mentoring, and material support intended to improve financial skills and business acumen within the larger population of women, and it attracted new women members expanding the membership to the existing WORTH groups. This secondary self-generated training shows that WORTH groups continue to be an attractive activity for FIFES beneficiaries, particularly women, and can be seen through the fact that the target set for FY19 for this indicator was surpassed. The 2,983 members of the WORTH groups are also members of FIFES-supported enterprises, enabling them to generate money from environmentally friendly businesses that they fund using the WORTH model.

### **Proportion of females who report increased self-efficacy after USG-supported training/ programming.**

During Q4, the FIFES M&E team conducted an annual survey; a component of that survey measured the proportion of females who reported increased self-efficacy after interacting with CFMB support team staff through trainings and mentoring events. The team surveyed a total of 200 women from a sample size of 322 women receiving support from FIFES. This sample size represents 11 percent of the total number of women (2,927) with whom FIFES has worked since the beginning of the Activity, and the survey showed that 79.64% reported increased self-efficacy. Each woman was asked to respond yes or no to several questions designed to measure self-efficacy. A positive response to any of the seven self-efficacy questions was recorded as a woman that reports increased self-efficacy because of USG supported training and programming. Data shows that women who received support from FIFES (through trainings and mentorship) generally perceive that their self-efficacy increased because of the support. More than 80 percent of women surveyed responded positively to five of the seven self-efficacy categories. The two

1. Do you feel comfortable leading a group?
2. Do you understand what it means to be a leader?
3. Do you think you can handle and solve problems?
4. Do you think you can facilitate a team meeting?
5. Do you feel that you can communicate effectively in writing?
6. Do you feel you can effectively communicate verbally?
7. Do you think you can speak in public forums?

*Questions Asked to Women in the Annual Survey  
Assess Self-efficacy*

categories that received less than 80 percent positive response track well with observations from the field. In a patriarchal society such as this one, there are multiple barriers (e.g. access to education, traditional norms that limit a women's role in society, etc.) to female self-confidence, participation in decision making meetings and speaking in public. Although it is encouraging to see 77 percent of women surveyed responded that they could effectively communicate verbally after FIFES training because of increased access to information which empowered them to make decisions about their enterprises, the fact that only 29 percent of women who were surveyed responded positively to being able to communicate effectively in writing highlights the existing literacy barrier; conventional text-based training techniques are not as effective with this group. In FY20, the team will conduct a rapid gender assessment to better understand the barriers to women's leadership, and support CFMBs to focus on increasing the ability of women to speak in public as well as use of pictures/diagrams during trainings.

### **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

To accelerate and extend public awareness/outreach efforts, during Q4, the FIFES team finalized biodiversity and forest management communications messages that were generated in collaboration with CFMB, EC, and CA members. The FDA and CFWG validated the messages and engaged an artist to develop simplified pictures that communicate the messages. During Q1 of FY 20, these pictures will be field-tested to both men and women and adjusted as needed to be sure they effectively communicate the desired messages. Once the pictures are finalized, the FIFES team will use them to produce a "box of images" (i.e., a collection of pictures) that will be given to each of the CFMBs to be used by their respective technical assistance outreach person to conduct awareness-raising activities in the CFs. During FY19, the FIFES team provided extension/outreach technique training to the CFMBs (e.g., communications and awareness-raising related to biodiversity and agroforestry activities, refresher training on writing and grammar, small group animation techniques, photography, etc.) so they are well prepared with the necessary training skills. To promote this initiative, the FIFES team encouraged CFMBs to develop outreach plans

for FY20. These plans were used as a basis for establishing an agreement between FIFES and the CFMBs for support of their efforts to conduct their awareness raising, technical assistance to EGs, CF biomonitoring, and oversight of Women Owning Resources Together (WORTH) activities.

## **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

During FY19, FIFES team members had several discussions with Liberia 4-H regarding the possibility of establishing 4-H supported biodiversity clubs at each of the CFMB Hubs. Unfortunately, due to 4-H funding issues and a change in their in-country management, there was no conclusion reached. Going forward, the FIFES team will re-engage with 4-H management to collaborate in the implementation of a 4-H supported biodiversity club at each of the CFMB Hubs. Further, the FIFES team continued implementation of the Lugar Foundation supported youth initiatives. The FIFES team selected forty youth, 20 each from the Tappita (2 female, 18 male) and Sanniquellie (5 female, 15 male) Hubs, to be “young cocoa business ambassadors” and provided them with training on improved cocoa production, agricultural value-chains, business plan development, and extension techniques. These youth are in the process of creating their cocoa cooperative, which will serve, in the coming year, as a base for their on-going youth business incubator outreach efforts. In FY2020, the FIFES team will receive training on how to engage and partner with youth.

## **COMMUNICATION, LEARNING, AND ADAPTATION**

During the quarter, FIFES’ Communications and Knowledge Management Director participated in a three-day collaborative event organized by the West Africa Biodiversity and Climate Change (WA BiCC), a USAID regionally funded program. This activity aimed to improve Collaboration, Learning, and Adaptation (CLA) by allowing various implementers of USAID activities to share ideas and best practices and lessons learned to foster communication initiatives and visibility. FIFES shared successes, lessons, and best practices on community Stakeholders Engagement (SE), collaborative design of community forest governance and utilization messages, livelihood and sustainable agroforestry practices and biodiversity conservation initiatives, and finally, impactful awareness-raising strategies. The FIFES team shared strategies they employed to allow CFMBs to become more assertive in daily CF management. Additionally, FIFES convened a meeting for CFMBs, WORTH groups and EGs of Blei and Gba to strengthen acquaintances and provide awareness on the MOU which links the CFMBs to the WORTH groups and the EGs to provide technical assistance, oversight, mentoring, monitoring, and supervision.

Within the same period, FIFES’ Finance Manager and Finance Assistant participated in a USAID organized Implementing Partners’ (IPs) training aiming to strengthen capacity on compliance, understanding Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for branding and conducting financial reviews. Since the learning event, the FIFES finance department staff are aware of the new USAID rules on financial reviews and have begun to implement the SOPs.

FIFES also strengthened CFMBs through facilitation of a meeting with FDA staff and counterparts from Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone to foster collaboration and achieve trans-boundary coordination around the Zor and Gba CFs. An initial multi-stakeholder trans-boundary meeting was held in Ivory Coast to increase awareness of governance practices and share lesson learned from each of the respective countries and to strengthen trans-boundary collaboration on Biodiversity Conservation, Environmental management, and Governance (TBEG) issues for the Mano River basin and the Mount Nimba Massif. Additionally, the USFS further strengthened this initiative

by facilitating a second meeting in Yekepa town in Nimba county between AML, FDA staff and the ENNR co-management Committee, including Blei – Joint Community Forest Management Body (JCFMB) to understand the biodiversity conservation and livelihood impacts of AML’s mining operations on CF management.

During Q4, FIFES and USFS implemented an assessment of ecotourism potential for the Blei CF and the ENNR. This initiative worked with the Blei CFMBs to begin development of an Ecotourism Business Plan. The assessment was further advanced when FIFES’ DCOP, in collaboration with FDA ENNR Chief Park Warden, organized training for Blei, Gba and Sehvi CFMBs to establish a biomonitoring system in the three CFs. The learning event covered topics such as biomonitoring protocol design, data collection, and using the GPS application. This training model has been rolled out across the three Hubs. FIFES also collaborated with the Foundation for Community Initiative (FCI) to train CFMBs on commercial contract negotiations, roles, and responsibilities of CFMB, EC, and CA members as stated in the CRL 2009, and the role of the FDA in CF management.

To improve coordination, learning, and adaptation at the national level, FIFES’ DCOP and the Communications and Knowledge Director have continued to participate in the CFWG meetings. At these meetings FIFES’ DCOP shares FIFES’ progress, successes, challenges, lessons learned in the implementation of activities. They also continue to promote the CFMB Hub model as the most viable way to improve CF’s management while exploring opportunities to link the Hub model to NUCFMB for sustainability.

## SUSTAINABILITY

In Q4, FIFES ramped up several initiatives to help sustain the gains made in previous quarters and FY19. The following are a few of the primary initiatives FIFES collaboratively worked with the II CFMBs to ensure.

**Amplifying the CFMB Hub Model:** During FY19, the FIFES team implemented the CFMB Hub model which focused on building CFMB capacity, resource mobilization and utilization to improve management, and coordination. The team also monitored, reported on activities, and explored solutions to challenges in CF management. With this recognition, Hub and non-Hub communities have continued to gravitate to the opportunities the CFMB Hub model provides as a one-stop platform for communities to “internally” assess the capacity of CFMB thematic technical focal points to provide solutions to the challenges they will face in the future. The model also expands financial opportunities for EGs and WORTH groups through the CFMBs to access markets. The most successful impact observed so far is the fact that the NUCFMB and other USAID activities have formally recognized (through CFMB Hub Network inclusion in their 2020 workplans) the worth of the CFMB Hub network platform. To amplify the success of the CFMB Hubs, FIFES is documenting lessons on the role of the Hubs in promoting CF governance, enterprise group successes, implementing biodiversity systems, and improving 3<sup>rd</sup> party negotiation; success stories are regularly shared with local and national stakeholders in Weekly Update Bullet Points.

**Linking CFMB Hubs to Liberia’s REDD+ Emissions Reduction (ER) program through the NUCFMB:** During FY19 FIFES articulated to the FDA the need for CFMA communities under FIFES to qualify for REDD+ funding as “low-hanging-fruits” with the ability to demonstrate results quickly given the urgency of the ER program. With all the CFs members of the NUCFMB and recognized by the FDA, the sustainably, governance, financial management, reporting, and oversight functions could easily be monitored by the NUCFMB to allow communities in the Hub network to access funds from the REDD+ ER program under the Result Based Payments scheme.

**Pursuing PPP – development of Business Plans:** Throughout FY19, FIFES worked with the CFMB Hubs to develop business plans that are tailored to the needs and strengths of CFs. FIFES trained CFMBs to master business

pitching skills to sell their business ideas to financial institutions and potential investors. With potential funding, CFMBs can forge partnerships with 3<sup>rd</sup> parties to produce and market specific goods and produce profit to sustain their operations. In Q4, FIFES and the Buchanan CFMB Hub engaged a United States-based Private Investor Blue Mango interested in producing sustainable charcoal briquettes from coconut chaffs. FIFES is providing technical assistance to the CFMB to ensure this business venture is consummated.

**Expanding the Permit System:** FIFES and the CFMB Hubs have agreed that the only viable strategy for sustainability is the ability to mobilize domestic resources to create internal revenue. During Q4, FIFES worked with CFMBs to reestablish forest permitting systems to effectively manage resources and respond to NTFP market demand. The permit systems are expected to generate revenue for the operation of CFMB Hubs and sustain their programs.

## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

**Impact of Timing and Amount of Funding:** During FY19, the biggest challenge the FIFES team faced was the continual pressure to maximize implementation to achieve desired results under a very uncertain financial environment. Without formal notification of the timing and amount of the subsequent USAID obligation, ACDI/VOCA was forced to make changes to implementation plans to try and maximize sustainability while beginning close out procedures. This resulted in limited funds being spent only on USAID and ACDI/VOCA agreed upon priority interventions, decreasing the FIFES team's ability to achieve planned Q3 FY19 activities. Once there was a clear indication of the funding amount and when it would be available, in the latter half of the fiscal year activities returned to the normal implementation schedule greatly facilitating the achievement of activities and follow-on planning efforts. Nonetheless, this negatively impacted FIFES ability to achieve annual targets.

**Legislator Interference in CF Governance Functions:** Elected county and district legislators routinely disrupt CF daily management and coordination by intimidating CFMBs and manipulating CAs into making management decisions in the legislators' interests as opposed to the general well-being of the AFCs. On two occasions in Year 4, Legislators disbanded CFMBs on bogus corruption allegations – and without following due process as enshrined in the CRL 2009. In some cases, they proceeded to single handedly appoint new CFMBs without the consent of the CAs. This has bred conflicts between CF leadership and the AFCs resulting in loss of CFMB capacity, coordination, and setbacks in FIFES' activity implementation time. The CRL 2009 provides that the CA has the sole right to remove CFMB, EC, or other CA members for specific acts that contravene financial transparency. It does not provide any authority to the legislators to suspend CAs, CFMBs, and ECs. Legislators have only non-voting status as members of the CA. To remedy this, FIFES is working with the CFWG to host a legislative dialogue on the roles and responsibilities of legislators in CF management.

**Inadequate Forests Inventory, Data Analysis, and Presentation Capacity:** FIFES continue to work with CFMBs to undertake forest inventories across the CFs. However, the inadequate capacity of CFMBs is a persistent challenge to data collection, analysis, and presentation of results. FIFES is currently working with USFS and the FDA to ensure CFMB capacity is built to an appreciable level to effectively participate in the data collection, analysis and report development processes as part of the overall goal of building CFMB capacity to manage CFs appropriately.

**Identifying Financial Resources for CFMB Business Plans:** As FIFES works with CFMBs to develop business plans for the sustainability of the CFMB Hubs, it is increasingly difficult to find financial lending institutions in the private sector to invest in local community enterprises. This is primarily due to the current economic recession and the associated high risk with investing in community-based organizations with no previous history of implementing programs with financial return responsibilities. FIFES is working to identify resource needs to

enhance the CFMB Hubs' profile to qualify for financial investments. This includes outsource accounting responsibilities to an independent firm to provide support to the CFMB enterprise as part of conditionality for investments.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Reflecting on FY19 implementation, FIFES documented the following lessons learned to enhance its partnership with communities and improve overall service delivery moving forward.

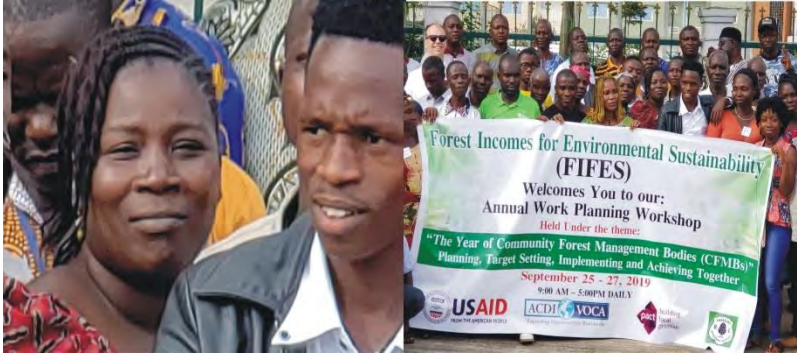
**CFMB Participation in Planning and Implementation is Essential for Sustainability of Results:** In FY19, FIFES encouraged the CFMBs to take more responsibility for their development and strategically decreased FIFES' level of implementation support. The objective is to build CFMB capacity to handle CF management, administrative, and technical functions consistent with the CRL and its regulation 2017. To this end, the FIFES team worked with the CFMBs to develop a set of agreements (with financial resources attached) tailored to each Hub and covering specific themes – from awareness creation, biodiversity monitoring, M&E support, WORTH group mentorship and technical assistance extension support for EGs. To ease the logistical challenges, and after appropriate asset management and maintenance training, FIFES donated motorbikes to the CFMBs to facilitate coordination and support. Under the agreements, the CFMBs are required to provide reports on key beneficiary support activities to the CFMB Hub coordinators who, in turn, translate these deliverables to Monrovia office for tracking — in essence, creating an incentive for the CFMBs to begin taking on increased levels of responsibility.

**CFMBs are an Excellent Coordination Tool Between Producers and Buyers:** During FY19, a major lesson learned was the importance of empowering the CFMBs to facilitate engagements between buyers and local producers. At one such platform in the Zor CF, agroforestry product buyers and financial lenders laid out their expectations and standards for purchased commodities to the local producers who in turn negotiated the standards (through the CFMB). This ultimately allowed the two parties to establish a purchase quota, size and condition quality requirements and predefined price. The producers pledged to meet the demand with quality products, and the purchasers pledged to buy the quota amount at the established price. A statement of agreement between the buyers and producers was established. FIFES plan to extend this approach to other Hubs in the coming year.

**Liaising with Local Authorities is Critical to Resolution of Local Conflicts Between CFs:** FIFES worked with a local commissioner and the Nimba Security Council in the Tappita area to resolve the long-standing boundary dispute between Boe-Quilla, Sehzupley, and Kparblee CFs which had slowed implementation of critical activities during FY19. For over one year, the communities were at an impasse on official CF boundary lines, and despite numerous FIFES and CFMB efforts to resolve the conflict, nothing was achieved. FIFES ultimately reworked its resolution strategy, focusing on bringing the local commissioner to pursue a path of peace. To date, all the CFs have signed a conflict resolution agreement harmonizing the boundaries and allowing FIFES and the CFMBs to work toward boundary recleaning, forest inventories, and support for enterprise and WORTH groups

## ANNEX 1: FOURTH QUARTER SUCCESS STORY

### Female Beneficiary Elated for CF Opportunities



Despite living in a society where men typically hold leadership positions, Irene Vokar Wilson, a mother of two children, serves as the chief officer of Boe-Quilla Community Forest Management Body (CFMB). She is not only the CFMB chief officer, but also the vice president of operations and finance officer for the

National Union of Community Forest Management Bodies (NUCFMB).

Recently, Irene was in Monrovia with members of the 11 authorized community forests that the Forest Incomes for Environmental Sustainability (FIFES) Activity supports.

“I feel great and believe it’s good that a woman as myself can have the opportunity to serve as chief officer.” Irene said.

Protecting biodiversity is important to Irene, as she believes the forest is the future. Before becoming chief officer, Irene was a businesswoman and later worked for Catholic Relief Services. For her, community forest activities are a whole new approach to sustainably managing resources, and she is thankful for the FIFES approach (regular and refresher community forestry and enterprise development training events) that targets local stakeholders.

“I believe it is hard for a woman to serve in this position, being a chief officer, but I am grateful for trainings from FIFES.” Irene said. She pointed to a need for more knowledge and skill-building among communities and others. “Although we are being trained at the local level, there’s still need for capacity building at the national level, whereby we can interact with national actors,” she said.

Irene emphasized the need for more participation among women because empowering women also empowers whole communities. She called on other forest-dependents, like herself, to ensure that women are put into leadership positions within community forest management bodies.

Irene’s community forest of Boe-Quilla recently, with her leadership and participation from local authorities, resolved an ongoing boundary dispute that lasted for more than a year with its neighboring communities of Sehzuplay and Kparblee. Now, they are back on track and implementing a series of activities for sustainable forest management.

Irene is a testament to what women can achieve if given the chance, based on the multiple positions she holds in the forest sector. Despite the challenges she faces, she hopes more women will get involved in protecting forestlands and improving local livelihoods.