

Brief History

Bacconnie Community was established since the eighteenth century and it was adjacent to the multi million dollars LAMCO Joint Venture Mining Company that stayed around for more than twenty years but was totally neglected over the more than 20 years of the company's existence. The Community is now playing host to Arcelor Mittal Iron-ore Mining Company yet there is still no improvement in the life of this community. Inhabitants of this community live on less than one dollar a day. The community is made of 14 villages with a population around 3,000 persons. The Community is predominately a low scale fishing community; therefore, most household income depends on the Atlantic Ocean. During certain periods of the year especially the rainy season, fishing expedition is very difficult if not impossible due to the roughness of the tidal waves which reduces household income and has severe impact on the life of the inhabitants of the community.

GRASS held a series of community driven development consultations in the community and during the consultations the factors contributing to the issues of poverty in the community were discussed with in-depth analysis on their negative impacts on the community. During the discussions on alternative livelihood activities to supplement the core activity of fishing, the community selected goat farming as economic empowerment project.

After the consultations, GRASS wrote a proposal on an economic empowerment project (goat farming) to the American Ambassador Self-Help Fund for GRASS and the Community to partner on the project which will be of benefit to both groups. The project was approved for the purchase of 45 goats and starting medication with funding from USADF through the Ambassador Self-Help fund. GRASS delivered the goats to the community and worked with the community in the selection of the date, time, venue and the invitees for the official launch of the project.



OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE GOAT FARMING PROJECT FUNDED BY USADF THROUGH THE AMBASSADOR SELF-HELP FUND

On April 18, 2014, GRASS and the Community of Bacconnie officially launched the Economic Empowerment Project (Goat Farming Project funded by USADF through the American Ambassador Self-Help Fund) in Bacconnie, near Buchanan City, Grand Bassa County. The Program brought together the fourteen villages that make up Bacconnie Community. A special delegation from the American Embassy headed by the Political Officer and Chief Supervisor of the Ambassador Self-Help Fund, Kareina L. Brazenor attended the program and made a special statement.

The program commenced at 3:00PM with an opening prayer said by one of the community dwellers. The Town Chief, Honorable Aphanso Gee officially welcomed the invitees and assured all attending the program to feel free as Bacconnie is a peace loving community, therefore, visitors to this community are all protected.



The National Program Coordinator (NPC) of GRASS gave the overview of the program. Amongst other things, he mentioned that the program got on its way about a year back and it started with the holding of a community driven development consultations. The consultation culminated in the crafting of a proposal which was submitted to the American Ambassador Self-Help Fund and was subsequently approved with funding disbursed to GRASS for the purchase of 45 goats. Now that the goats were

already in the community, GRASS and the community thought it wise to have a turning over program of the goats to the community. He also reminded the community that Bacconie is part of the communities affected by Arcelor Mittal activities, as such; the American Jewish World Service is funding an advocacy project on the usage of the County Social Development Funds to benefit such communities. Therefore, the goat farming which is an economic empowerment project will improve the community's economic strength to take up some of their advocacy issues without the direct involvement of GRASS. For instance, if the community wanted to meet with some duty bearers/stakeholders on an advocacy issue affecting them (for example about the full utilization of the dedicated clinic which is still lying idle in the community); they could sell one of their goats to facilitate the process. In conclusion, the National Program Coordinator thanked the People and Government of America for their continuous assistance to the people of Liberia especially the Bacconie Community.



The project was then officially launched by the Coordinator of the Grand Bassa County Civil Society Council, Mr. Peter G. Johnson. He admonished the community to pay serious attention to the goats, particularly the women. He went on by asking, which one of them would ignore his or her child if crying to cry indefinitely. He intimated that he knew that no mother or father would do that. He said that he or she will first stop the child from crying and will also investigate why the child was crying; and if it were for hunger; he or she will immediately find food for the child. He also went on to say that the project should be taken seriously by the women because men are always busy doing other things. In conclusion, he thanked GRASS for its continuous engagement with marginalized and underprivileged communities and praised the people of America and their government for their support to community initiatives and asked other embassies to follow suit.



For his part, the youth leader of Bacconie, Samuel G. Wilson, said, “The battle field for poverty is the community; as such more attention needs to be paid to address the issue of poverty in the community.” He asked the visitors to take a view of his community. He asked them what they see around the community that was adjacent to a multimillion dollar company, LAMCO Joint Venture Company that stayed for more than twenty years and its operations hugely affected the community. He further said that LAMCO is no more around but they have Arcelor Mittal replacing LAMCO and for the past five or more years, they have yet to see their Corporate Social Responsibility being translated from theory to practice. He continued by saying that they have reasons to be nervous because what happened to them during LAMCO days is creeping on them with high velocity, if they do not start to engage Arcelor Mittal the community would definitely remain the battle field for poverty. He also mentioned that leaders (Superintendent, Representatives and Senators) within the county pay less attention to these community initiatives that have the propensity to improve their wellbeing but would rather elect to visit such marginalized community during the political season to bring bags of rice etc. that will not help the community. He continued by saying that something needs to be done to help change the situation in their community. He pledged the youth support to the project and encouraged GRASS to continue with such efforts as it has the propensity to reduce poverty in their community. He also thanked the people and the Government of the United States for their support.

The women leader and an elder also pledged their support to the project and called all stakeholders participating in the project to feed and protect the goats so that the community benefits from the project. The Women leader particularly mentioned that the women will not leave the men alone; “we are under obligation to join hands with all stakeholders to participate in the overall development of their community.” They promised to bring to book anyone found in the act of stealing any of the goats and also called ngo/ international organization to help in building shelter for the goats if the community is to reap maximum. She concluded by saying, “shelter for the goats is a challenge and needs urgent attention.”

The Coordinator of the American Ambassador Self- Fund, Mr. Daniel Boval, Jr. Introduced his boss Karelna L. Brazenor the Political Officer and Chief Supervisor of the American Ambassador Self- Fund and started up by saying that he has a good working relationship with his boss and this has led to what we are witnessing to today. He said that she has been very supportive in wanting to see all communities benefit from this grant. In his concluding statement, he thanked GRASS for its tireless efforts in wanting to see community get out of poverty. In her special remarks, Kareina compared the goats with a child, who will cry when there is a need and urge the caretakers not to ignore it because by doing so may cause a serious problem for the goats. She expressed thanks and appreciation to the community and GRASS for the execution of the project. She concluded that the people and Government of the United States would continue to support such effort that is intended to bring relief to local communities.

The America Embassy Team Visit to Jackson Kwenah's Town



Pineapple farm project

The team from the American Ambassador Self- Fund was escorted to Jackson Kwenah Town where there is an ongoing pineapple project funded by American Ambassador Self-Help Fund and implemented by BOWASIDE more than three years ago. Community had expressed on numerous occasions to enlarge the farm, therefore, GRASS had agreed to work with the communities participating in project. The beginning of the collaborative effort was for GRASS to foot the transportation cost to bring their first harvest to the market. Now GRASS is working with them for the enlargement of the farm and to construct a labor based road to reach the project site. New clearing is ongoing for the enlargement exercise. GRASS is also

encouraging community members who are participating in the project to start doing their individual pineapple projects so that it will feed into the bigger project.

The team travelled under heavy down pours of rain on that Saturday morning. The team arrived at Luewein in Wee Statutory District, Grand Bassa County and disembarked from the vehicle while it was still raining. Luewein is the place where the vehicle stops for anyone travelling to Jackson Kwenah Town to take the bush path leading to the town. It took between 1:30 to 2:00 to trek to the town. The rain would have obstructed the visit but for the determination and dedication of both teams especially the embassy team the trip was made.

Escorts from the town met the team on the way and as we travelled on foot they sang songs of welcome and appreciation. They also appreciated Kareina, a different national, for walking under such a condition to come and see their project. One of the lady said that God was doing a new thing in their community and she trusted that the issue of a motor road would soon be behind them. They kept singing until the team arrived in the town. In two hours, the team arrived in Jackson with women of the town spreading their wrappers (lappa) for their sister, daughter, aunty, as a way of appreciating her as in photo below.



The Team arrival to Jackson's Town

One of the things learned on the trip besides passion which took the Embassy staff to this remote village on foot and in the rain was how much can be accomplished with a good working relationship in a team. That has challenged GRASS to do more in the communities in which they work.

A brief program was arranged with the Town Chief making the welcome statement, after a word of prayer was said for safe arrival of the guests. The overview of the project was made by the National Program Coordinator of Grassroots Agency for Social Services, K.M. Togba. The project started with commitment demonstrated by the community of Jackson Kwenah, Dolo and the other towns.

The project coordinator of the pineapple farm, Mr. Edward Kwenah thanked the teams especially the team from the embassy for braving the storm to travel under the heavy down pours of rain just to reach their project. He said, "This day will not be forgotten". He was disappointed in the behavior of the local government for not addressing their plight. He said, "If a community can undertake such development

that has the propensity to reduce poverty in their communities and also to compliment government's efforts in addressing some of the priorities outlined in the County Development Agenda, why can't they play their role"? He called on his fellow countrymen to start advocating for their rights because the issue of road concerns everybody.

The elder thanked the team while the women were overly happy. They performed a traditional rite as a way of expressing their happiness and deepest gratitude to the team from the embassy. They also gowned the Political Officer and Chief Supervisor of the American Ambassador Self- Fund, and said that she was one of them (a citizen and daughter of Jackson Kwennah Town). The elder also appealed for attention to be paid to the issue of a motor road to avoid premature death of citizens who died from curable illnesses due to the distance they had to cover on foot.



Gowning ceremony of the political official at the American Embassy, Liberia

History will be incomplete, if we did not mention anything about the sponsor of the project, Julia Childs her daughter, Bleu Childs both Americans and Louise Fahnbulleh a Liberian working with USAID, braved the storm about three years ago and visited project site. The community can still remember the effort made by little Bleu who saw it fit by using money giving to her as her birthday present by her mom to use it for the purchase of additional tools for the project. Your hand mark cannot be forgotten. Those participating in the project cannot forget your contribution. You are such great people, the communities is still grateful to you people for the sacrifice made for the sake of humanity.

Mr. Boval introduced his boss and praised GRASS for its continuous engagement with the community. In her special remarks, the Political Officer and Chief Supervisor of the American Ambassador Self- Fund took a little girl on her lap and said that since they had declared her "daughter of this land", her acceptance is demonstrated by having the child on her lap. She said she considered the child as her sister and all the children are her brothers and sisters. She expressed her gratitude for the unity among the people which she mentioned is the driving force for the continuation and the sustainability of the

project. She thanked the communities for the true love they had shown her, particularly the women; say she would not forget them as her people.

PLEAD FROM THE COMMUNITIES

The two major challenges confronting the people of Bacconnie where the goat farming is ongoing and Jackson Kwenah's where the pineapple project is ongoing. The issue of shelter for the goats cannot be overemphasized while the lack of road in the Jackson Town Community is a serious constraint in conveying their produce to the market. They are calling on all well intention people of this our one world to come to their aid.