PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER ACTIVITIES OF THE
MLME-NVE INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAM IN LIBERIA
BEST PRACTICE: CHALLENGES AND ENTRY POINTS

In July 2011, ENERGIA was approached by MLME-NVE for support in gender mainstreaming within the Program “Institutional Capacity Building and Strengthening of the Energy and Water Resources Sectors in Liberia” funded by the Norwegian Government for 5 years (2010-2015) in partnership with Norwegian Water Resource Directory (NVE) and the Liberian Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy (MLME). ENERGIA’s support to MLME-NVE was based on Norad’s frame-agreement with ENERGIA.

ENERGIA’s support to the gender activities of the Program in Liberia consists of: (i) gender mainstreaming across all the Cooperation Areas of the Program, (ii) women’s empowerment particularly as relates to local communities and (iii) collection of sex disaggregated data on energy use and needs. The support has involved three visits to Liberia by ENERGIA Consultants (2 in November 2011; 1 plus support staff February 2012; 2 in May 2012) plus Skype calls and email exchange.

The following points summarize the main challenges encountered, entry points identified and possible next steps:

Gender mainstreaming in the energy sector:
- Country in a post-conflict situation undergoing reconstruction. Much of the country’s previous development was destroyed during the war, and recovery stifled by the lack of basic social services and infrastructure: most electrical distribution, piped water, except for Monrovia; road and railways; communications; and public buildings destroyed.
- Liberia’s poverty rate among the highest in sub-Saharan Africa. The poor primarily living in rural areas (86%), and engaged in subsistence farming as their main source of livelihood, with little or no cash income.
- Less than 1% of the population has access to electricity. For lighting, people are forced to use kerosene lamps and candles, and fires from lighting fuels are a major issue leading to children getting burnt and homes being destroyed. The most recent census (2008 data, published in 2009) shows that 70% of the urban population use charcoal for cooking. In Monrovia it is even 85% of the population; the uptake of charcoal in rural areas is fairly high with 5% of the rural households using it. Traditionally, women in Liberia cook bear the brunt of fuel food collection and cooking over an open fire using the three-stone method.
- The recent unfortunate history of Liberia has resulted in an under-educated workforce which can mean that finding quality staff to implement programmes is challenging. The number of women in the energy sector and their capacities is even more limited. There is a need to urgently upgrade knowledge and skills all round not only in gender mainstreaming. Nevertheless there is an enthusiasm for learning and self-improvement amongst everyone we came in contact with.
- The uncertain political situation including changes in the political leadership within the MLME has also proved problematic in obtaining support from key quarters. Within the administration there is support for gender mainstreaming which has been most helpful in contributing to achieving a number of the results listed below. There is interest from the Ministry of Gender and Development in supporting the mainstreaming activities. There are also other good energy sector partners who are interested in gender mainstreaming (World Bank, Winrock International).

Entry point – gender mainstreaming: The appointment of a staff member responsible for the Gender Program at the Norwegian Embassy in Accra will help to maintain the momentum started in building the capacity for gender mainstreaming in the energy sector. Carrying out a gender audit within the energy sector could be a next step to mainstream gender at the policy level. This has been a strategy used by ENERGIA in other countries. An output of the Audit could be a Gender Action Plan which would provide support to the Gender Focal Point within MLME to facilitate an enabling framework for the planning implementing and monitoring gender activities. The Gender Action Plan should be developed through a workshop that will facilitate input and commitments from key stakeholders. Continue support to scholarships for female staff of the MLME-NVE Program would help build capacity within the Ministry. A contribution to building capacity within the energy sector as whole is through financial support to female students to study Sciences and Engineering as well as
continuing the schools outreach programme. Dissemination of the results of the gender mainstreaming in the energy sector in Liberia, possibly with the support of MoGD, would help build awareness of the benefits of gender mainstreaming in the energy sector.

**Entry point – women’s empowerment:**
At this stage, Liberia faces a critical need to expand energy access for its population, both in terms of electricity for productive use and social infrastructure and on cooking fuels. In this situation where the basic energy and is missing for majority of the population, ‘gender and energy’ efforts needs to first focus on expanding access, and to do it in a gender sensitive manner. In this regard, a number of reliable and efficient women groups have been identified with whom the NVE- MLME could carry out new activities. Further capacity building and financial support is required for these women groups to become women energy entrepreneurs. Innovative models that could be tested are “bare-foot college model” to train women village solar technicians and establishing revolving fund program to provide the women groups with seed capital to start up energy businesses.

Despite the reliance of the vast majority of the population on biomass resources to meet their basic energy needs, charcoal is not a priority of the Government which tends to focus on large scale infrastructure projects. Charcoal producers mostly work individually and are often migrants from other parts of Liberia who came to the counties surrounding Monrovia in search of employment after the civil war. The National Charcoal Union has registered approximately 700 charcoal production members in the Firestone area, most of whom are women – this is very unusual since it is a trade usually dominated by men. The Union is very supportive of their women members. The charcoal producers live under very difficult conditions and do not have access to potable water, health facilities, schools, or income generating activities other than charcoal. Women are probably subject to sexual harassment (although this is difficult to document). Food production is also problematic. An entry point could be a comprehensive gender analysis, including the collection of sex disaggregated data, of the charcoal industry in order to get a full understanding of the extent of gender issues in this subsector. The gender analysis could then be the start of a gender mainstreaming process in which the communities and the charcoal organizations could participate.

**Sex disaggregated data on energy use and needs:** The basis of good planning is good data. Currently there is a lack of sex disaggregated data on energy use, needs and priorities for the country as a whole. The lack of base line data presents problems for the Program monitoring and evaluation, as well as for developing/informing relevant interventions and policies that are gender equitable to improve livelihoods of both women and men in the country. In consultation with the Statistical Office of the Government of Liberia (LISGIS), ENERGIA has designed a questionnaire to collect the energy and gender sex disaggregated data. However, progress with implementation has been slow. There are two issues: (i) a methodological issue about sample size which needs to be resolved between LISGIS and the Norwegian Statistical Service; (ii) ownership of the data – MLME has to make clear that it wants the data and that it will use it.

**Entry point:** LISGIS is a competent professional organisation and they are capable of providing quality data for gender sensitive energy planning. Carrying out a gender audit within the energy sector as proposed above would demonstrate the lack of sex-disaggregated data and the role that it can play in energy planning. This could be follow up with support to LISGIS o the implementation of gender sensitive energy survey.

**Results achieved** (NB results in italics are from components of the programme that ENERGIA was not directly involved with)

**Gender mainstreaming in the energy sector:**
- Need and gap assessment workshop with personnel from MLME, DOE, LEC, LHS, RREA, Winrock, EU and the World Bank (Nov 2011)
- TOTs in gender mainstreaming: 27 persons trained (MLME, DOE, LEC, LHS, RREA, MoED, LISGIS, MoGD) (May 2012)
- 2 gender and energy manuals with a focus on Liberia
- 3 replica workshops: 75 persons trained (July 2012)
- Scholarships to female staff of the MLME-NVE Program (March & Oct 2012)
- Promotion of Science Education to female students: (i) school visits to 60 senior high schools (April 2012); (ii) 3 days of career orientation with female role models (May 2012); (iii) science display to arouse the interest of students, especially females, in Science and Engineering (Nov 2012); (iv) scholarships to
female students to study Science & Engineering (Oct 2012); (v) visit of Norwegian Science teachers to Liberia and need assessment workshop on quality of Science Education in high schools in Liberia (Nov 2012).

Women Empowerment:
- Need and gaps assessment workshop with grassroots organizations (Nov 2012)
- TOTs training workshop on gender, energy and women empowerment (Feb 2012): 20 grassroots women and men and 7 from DOE & RREA
- 6 replica TOTs workshops organized and facilitated by grassroots people (March 2012): 149 grassroots women & men were trained
- 12 grants to support the grassroots women led initiative related to energy and income generation (July-Dec 2012)
- Annual forum for networking and exchanging experience among grassroots women organizations (Nov 2012). Grassroots organizations that participate since 2011 are from 5 counties: Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Margibi and Montserrado.

Sex disaggregated data on energy use and needs
- Questionnaire to collect base line data on household and community energy use suitable for energy planning.