

LIBERIA: *Community and Detainee Reconciliation Program*



Mediation meeting with town elders.

After 14 years of civil war, Liberia continues to face many challenges in establishing a peaceful society. To help mitigate potential conflicts, the East-West Management Institute (EWMI), in partnership with Prison Fellowships Liberia (PFL), has launched the Community and Detainee Reconciliation in Liberian Localities (C-DRILL) Program. This community outreach and mediation program, funded by USAID, strives to educate community leaders and the public on the benefits of mediation to mitigate conflicts, provides mediation services to community members, and uses mediation to address the overuse of extended pre-trial detention in the country. The goal of the two-year project is to prepare Liberians to address the root causes of conflict in the community before a dispute becomes violent or before an individual is arrested and placed in extended pre-trial detention.

Together, EWMI and PFL have trained a core group of 24 mediators, eleven of whom are women, to initiate public outreach discussions with leaders and citizens in four targeted counties (Montserrado, Margibi, Bong, and Grand Bassa). The mediators were taught to address the root causes of conflict, including land and economic disputes, and to educate citizens and leaders on how to resolve quarrels relating to these topics before violence erupts. In its first year, EWMI and PFL organized four community outreach events at which leaders such as mayors, judges, police, correctional officers, and elders met to discuss root causes of violence. During the events, the C-DRILL team conducted role play exercises demonstrating the use of mediation, and disseminated a comic book, which, in a simple and accessible fashion, recounts three different stories relating to disputes and how to peacefully resolve them. PFL mediators also spoke at a series of public outreach events at schools and marketplaces, educating an estimated 37,000 about the benefits of mediation and the peaceful resolution of disputes. As a result of these outreach efforts, several community members approached the C-DRILL team requesting assistance in resolving disputes. During the first year of the project, PFL mediators resolved

Community Mediation Success Story:

PFL mediated a case in Margibi County between Rachel and Helen, at the request of the church the two women attend. Initially the dispute appeared to have to do with the younger woman (Rachel) disrespecting the elder (Helen); as the mediation went on, it turned out that the dispute really concerned the replacement of money taken from a revolving fund the two women are part of. Helen blamed Rachel for bringing in the member who absconded with the money; Rachel felt that Helen was turning the community and Helen's family (which includes Rachel's boyfriend) against her. After prolonged discussion, the family and Rachel agreed to share the cost of replacing the missing money.

Working in partnership with grass roots groups, local governments and international organizations to build just, prosperous and democratic societies.

almost 250 matters through mediations, thereby avoiding violence or deprivation of an individual's liberty in the targeted areas.

An innovative aspect of the project incorporates PFL's on-going work to facilitate the release of pre-trial detainees who have been held in detention for periods beyond the legal limit from prisons in the four localities where C-DRILL operates. The group of 24 mediators traveled to these prisons to work with officials to identify those detainees who should be released, facilitated reconciliation with their accusers and advocated for their freedom with local authorities. Since the start of the project in January 2010, PFL mediators have aided over 2,000 pre-trial detainees.

Prison Mediation Success Story:

In mid-December, PFL monitors in Bong County visited Phil, a 22-year-old who was arrested in July 2010 and charged with theft of property. Phil was in jail without trial for four and one half months. PFL mediators learned that he had been arrested after he returned the property that was alleged to be stolen; the complainant demanded reimbursement for expenses she incurred in looking for him, and it was his failure to pay the reimbursement that led to his arrest. The complainant never pursued her complaint, and in an interview stated that she no longer had a problem with Phil. After notifying the County Attorney of the situation, the PFL mediator asked that Phil be put on a list of persons who would be released before the end of the year. Phil was released on December 29.



A guardhouse at a recent prison visit.



PFL mediator leads a discussion on mob justice at a community outreach event

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