

Country Report 6: Guinea

GRTI Activities in Guinea

In the third phase of GRTI, a pilot project to improve river transport in the mangrove area of Guinea was funded. The project was entitled *Gender and Transport Intervention: Mangrove River Transport Aid Project*. The implementing organization was an NGO called Gender and Promotion of the Rural Areas (GPMR). The pilot project was designed to acquire a boat and two mangrove transport trucks with combined GRTI and RTTP funding for the benefit of a gender-mixed group of farmers (GMERM) who became the owners / operators of the boat.

The justification for the project was that transport in the mangrove area of Guinea is very difficult, expensive and hazardous. Providing a boat which is operated and managed by the local population itself was seen as a source of economic and social empowerment for the people in general and the women in particular.

Implementation Strategy of the Pilot Project

Local Construction of the Boat: The boat was made from local materials with the skills of local artisans. This is a good strategy to ensure sustainability and replicability as well as cost reduction. One of the problems encountered, however, was that the wood to be used for the boat could not easily be extracted from the locality. In order to gain access to the cutting area well-known for the quality of the wood used for beams, traditional ceremonies involving an offering of kola nuts to the local elders was necessary. A process of negotiation was carried out. The problem was overcome by respecting the local socio-cultural practices and working with the people, rather in confrontation with them.

The boat was constructed during the rainy season which itself posed some difficulties. During the rainy season, an average of 5000 millimetres may be recorded with more than 100 mm on a single occasion. This slowed the work considerably and posed unfavourable working conditions for the artisans.

Modification of the Original Plan: One of the problems encountered with the original plan was that the boat would use a sail to power the boat. This was found to be impractical and a higher level of technology, with the use of an outboard motor, had to be adopted. This denotes the fact that many factors must be taken into account before decisions are made on cost or other individual factors alone. The difficulties of sailing a boat of that size (14m long and 2 m. wide) makes this plan unsuitable for sail-assisted travel if the intentions are to use the boat continuously and ensure it makes a profit. The project made adjustments and a small motor was purchased at a cost of 1 800 000 fg or US\$ 947. The amount was provided by the NGO in the form of a loan with a ten month repayment period.

Another adjustment had to be made in the anticipated coverage of the boat. Since the outboard motor that was purchased was rather small in relation to the size of the vessel, it has not been possible to cover all the routes that were first considered as the boat cannot get to some of the islands. The vessel can only make the journey between the towns of Dubreka, Mengbe, Sonfoma, Kporo and Samatara.

Challenges to Ensure Local Participation

Creating awareness was an important component of the project to ensure that people in the surrounding localities were fully informed of the operation of the boat and the benefits to be derived. It was therefore necessary to travel around the islands to ensure all of the island populations were sensitized. It was later discovered that this had been successfully accomplished when even populations outside the area of operation were taking advantage of the opportunity. This was evidenced by the case of women from Koba and Boffa, both of which were outside of the areas covered by the boat, who preferred to send their merchandise to Dubreka by road and then use the boat for onward transport. This is because the boat could carry more load at a lower cost than if road transport alone was used.

One of the challenges with project implementation resulted from the high level of illiteracy among the group members. This necessitated training not only for selected members of the group, but sensitization of the members in general who lacked managerial skills as well. Capacity building in terms of training for operating the boat and managing the operation of the boat was carried out with both male and female members of the group. The result was that a local resident operates the boat and group members manage the operations of the boat.

Efforts were made to fully integrate women into the activities of the pilot project. The project staff attempted to train women in operating the boat, but only one woman showed any interest. She made two trips around the mangroves with the chief captain and managed well. Her constraint, however, was that she cannot remain in the mangrove swamps for extended periods of two weeks as she has to carry out her domestic responsibilities at home.

Impact of the Project

Not only members of the group but the local population in general have benefited greatly from the pilot project. Much of their transport burden – particularly in terms of transporting loads – has been relieved and at a lower cost than previous transport services. Members of the group enjoy free transport. Non members pay between 200 and 500 fg per trip. As a result of the project, women in the locality including not only the members of GMERM, but also other women beneficiaries of the area are demonstrating better management skills, have increased their income and are more exposed to information on markets and opportunities in other areas.

Operation of the boat has resulted in a consistently increasing income for the group. In January, February and March, the income earned by the boat was 125 000 fg, 220 000 fg and 350 000 fg respectively. The income is allocated in the following manner:

- ✚ 50% towards the payment of the loan for the outboard motor,
- ✚ 25% to the group's fund,
- ✚ 10% for repairs and maintenance, and
- ✚ 15% for the captain's salary and that of the two apprentices who are not members of the group.

The group has begun to make repayments on the loan for the outboard motor. The first repayment was in February with the sum of 150 000 fg or US\$79.

In the short period that the boat has been in operation, it would appear to have had an initial positive impact upon the local population of islanders – both members and non-members - for whom transport is a serious concern. It is likely that the positive impact of this pilot project may be an incentive to other groups to similarly take on such entrepreneurial activities.

