

# Project Affected Communities Strengthened Relationship with Mano Oil Palm Plantation after Years of Neglect



Demmah Town, a project-affected community (PAC) in Zepah Clan, Senjeh District, Bomi County once ignored and not recognized by Mano Oil Palm Plantation, is now forging a stronger, more cooperative relationship with the oil palm company.

The town is one of the heavily affected communities, but was never recognized by then Sime Darby Plantation Liberia and now Mano Oil Palm Plantation until a very sustained advocacy and support from the Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment (RICCE), the Sustainable Development Institute (SDI) through the funding support from the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) forest for a just future programme.

Demmah, Gayah Hill, and Beysao communities in the operational areas of the plantation suffered environmental pollution, offensive swarms of flies, and the denial of basic social services such as access to clean drinking water, healthcare, and transportation for schoolchildren. Despite these setbacks, the company failed to acknowledge them as project-affected communities (PACs).

Previously, children from these communities were stopped from using the company's school bus, while residents had to struggle without safe drinking water and no access to the company's health facility. This segregation raised bitterness and deepened uncertainty between the communities and the company.

However, a turning point came through the intervention of RICCE and SDI with support from the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA). RICCE researched the gender differential impact of agribusiness in 2022, which highlighted the untold suffering of women in these communities. RICCE and SDI also raised awareness about community rights, advocating that the communities be compensated as the affected community in line with the provisions in the concession agreement. RICCE and SDI flagged the issue during their appearance on Forest Hour in 2023, a popular radio talk show designed to lift forest-related matters, and through the Civil Society Oil Palm Working Group (CSOPWG) meetings, which are attended by the National Bureau of Concession (NBC). The NBC is a government agency with a statutory responsibility to monitor and ensure compliance by concessionaires.

As a result of these efforts through the GLA project, Mano Oil Palm Plantation, which took over the concession from the Sime Darby company, has officially recognized the previously excluded communities as PACs according to Madam Hawa J. Gbelley, Chairlady of the Project Affected Community and Co-Chair of the Community Land Development Management Committee

(CLDMC) of Demmah town. Madam Gbelley narrated on Friday, August 23, 2024, in Tubmanburg, Bomi County, during an interview that the improved relationship is marked by regular engagements and community participation in decision-making processes.

Filled with visible excitement, Madam Gbelley said she is very happy to see herself serving as the chairperson of the PAC and Co-Chair of the CLDMC because they, as women, went through a lot, from leading protests to attending several meetings to ensure that her community and other communities are fully recognized by the company as PACs.

“In 2022, we had a mass protest on the farm for 21 days, and I was brutalized by the company’s security and other national security officers. I was wounded badly and warned by other people to stay away, but I told them that I would let them see my community recognized by the company and our benefits given for our land. RICCE, SDI, and others educated us that women have rights to land, too, like men. The training helped us a lot as women. We can now sit with men and discuss issues of our communities and our land with no fear or pressure,” she recounted.

The Demmah Town PAC Chairperson further said, “Mano Oil Palm Plantation is not doing 100%, but we are grateful to them for recognizing us as PAC. Many thanks to RICCE and SDI for their interventions. We used to experience flies, pollution, and the chemicals that affected our farms and crops, but now the company has stopped, and they have renovated our hand pumps to provide safe drinking water for the community.”

She also added, “We are grateful; our children can now ride the school bus. The buses can come and all the students can ride them, whether company workers’ children or non-workers’ children.”

“We are grateful to these organizations, and we need more training. Let them come and train us more to advocate for our rights. Now that the company and the government have done the mapping of our land, we want to push for our benefits as affected communities to be given to us. We need SDI and RICCE to help us in this direction.’

As the gender technical partner to Liberia partners of the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) forest for a just future programme, RICCE Program Manager, Madam Renee N. Gibson, filled with joy following the disclosure, said, “This is the result of consistent rights-based advocacy, and planned partnership. It shows what’s possible when communities, especially women, are empowered and companies are held accountable.”

## **WERWONA and women led CBOs Applause RICCE for Empowering Women and Advocates through Gender Justice and Human Rights Training**



Participants from women-led Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Western Region Women Network Association (WERWONA), Community Land Development and Management Committees (CLDMC), Project Affected Communities (PACs), have applauded the Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment (RICCE) following an intensive daylong training session focused on human rights advocacy for gender equality and climate justice.

The training, held at the Bomi Women Center in Tubmanburg, Bomi County on Friday August 22, 2025 is part of RICCE's ongoing grassroots empowerment initiative, aimed to deepen participants' understanding of gender, intersectionality, gender transformation, gender justice, and the critical links between natural resource governance and women's rights.

According to the participants, the training was not only educational but also transformative, and it helped them to reframe their views on gender justice and resource access within their communities. "Before this, I never saw how gender equality is related to how we access land and other resources," said a participant. RICCE has opened our eyes."

Leaders from WERWONA emphasized the importance of integrating intersectionality into community advocacy, noting that women's experiences with land rights, shift, and resource abuse often differ.

Madam Lydia Ballah, Coordinator of WERWONA said "This training is about our rights as women especially in land rights, concessions and others. We women need to know those things in concession agreements and other issues in our communities. The training helps us to know our benefits and rights as women in our communities and how to advocate."

A representative from one of the women-led CBOs noted, "We now understand the power of advocacy rooted in human rights and how to demand accountability through gender approaches."

RICCE Program Manager, Madam Renee N. Gibson during the training used real-life situations, participatory learning tools, and community case studies to engage participants in active discussions and practical exercises. By the end of the session, participants had committed to continue their engagements in advancing gender equity and natural resource justice.

The training concluded with a strong call to sustain momentum and expand outreach to include more grassroots actors, particularly women and marginalized groups often excluded from land governance and decision-making processes.

Madam Gibson expressed gratitude for the passionate participation, stating, “This is what transformative community empowerment looks like when local voices lead the charge for gender justice and equitable resource management.”

She said “The issues affecting women should be discussed by women. She encouraged the women to be fully involved in discussions in their communities; stand up and take the needed actions for rights to be respected and your views considered.”

As the session ended, the participants agreed to keep informing their communities aimed at driving change across the western region.

The training was funded by the Green Livelihoods Alliance (GLA) forest for a just programme through the Green Forest Coalition (GFC). RICCE is the gender technical partner of the Liberia partners of the GLA.