

LAND COMMISSION
MARGIBI COUNTY TRIBAL CERTIFICATES INVENTORY PROCESSING PROJECT
FINAL REPORT
COVERING THE PERIOD MARCH 6TH THROUGH JUNE 29TH 2013

BACKGROUND

The Margibi County Tribal Certificate Inventory Processing Project is an offspring of previous pilots partially conducted in parts of the county as well as Maryland and Lofa Counties in 2012. The project is self-stratified into intermediate and long-term objectives defined as follows:

First, in term of intermediate objectives, the project seeks to provide insight as regard the total land mass covered by tribal certificates in the country. Information gathered will then be recorded in a national inventory database referred to as 'Open Title' for easy access at the Center for National Documents, Records and Archives - CNDRA. As regard the project's long term objectives, it is believed that once data from the field are formally consolidated and synchronized, Land Commission will critically analyze the resultant output and accordingly advise government on its on-going effort aimed at formulating land use and administration policies and law for the country.

The Tribal Certificates Inventory Program (or project) is expected to go nationwide over a three-year's period. In Margibi County, the project covered all three statutory/electoral districts namely, Kakata District, Gibi District and Mamba Kaba District, respectively. This report provides a comprehensive insight of the project at all levels-ranging from lessons learned in the field over the lifespan of the project to TC management's perspectives of various interventions and the ramifications they may have for subsequent tribal certificate projects.

THE PROJECT: AN INSIDE LOOK

Land Commission, through its Tribal Certificate Processing Unit, launched a county-wide Tribal Certificates Inventory processing project in Margibi County on March 6, 2013. The project officially ended with Mamba Kaba District on June 29, 2013. It was funded with grant from USAID/MCC under the Land Policy and

Institutional Support (LPIS) program assistance to Liberia. Field Management was provided by the Land Administration Oversight Division of Land Commission through its Tribal Certificate Unit while TETRA-TECH ARD, a USAID sponsored Consulting Firm, exclusively managed the funds and provided some level of technical assistance.

The Tribal Certificate Project, as defined, principally consists of the following field activities: Outreach-Public Awareness and Sensitization (which cuts across all phases of the project), Scanning of tribal certificates, Vetting of the scanned certificates and the Delineation or Demarcation of parcels of land covered by the tribal certificates that are deemed legitimate, otherwise referred to as 'certified TCS' through a vetting process. The data entry component which marks the final phase of the project is basically office-based.

OUTREACH-PUBLIC AWARENESS AND SENSITIZATION

Consistent with the project's Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), a number of consultative town hall meetings were held in each of the districts prior to the commencement of actual inventory processing activities. These meetings brought together a consortium of county and local leaders. Following a formal presentation of the project's implementation methodology and procedures. Suggestions from elders and certificate owners as well as county and local leadership were made and noted and appropriate adjustments effected where applicable; especially, as it relates to scheduling.

In addition, clearly crafted messages in simple Liberian English and local dialects were broadcast on the airwaves of local community radios. Individuals, fluent in the local dialects were also contracted to serve as Town Criers and to distribute Flyers, Posters and other material. Other means of information-sharing widely used throughout the project included the distribution of visual images such as T-shirts. Jingles and drama recorded by Cultural Ambassador Julie Endee's Crusaders for Peace Musical Group during the 2012 piloting period were re-aired on community radios and also played on portable tape recorders in the communities. Team members travelled on foot to many towns and villages not accessible to vehicles (motorbikes and cars), carrying out public education and

awareness activities. Team members also travelled to market places talking with marketers and distributing flyers.

Outreach Activities in action



Outreach activities in Worhn, Gibi District the elderly man seeing in
this picture, serving as Town Crier, is said to be 95 yrs. Old
Above is LC Information Officer, Arthur Tucker



Gibi outreach activities with LPIS Outreach
activities in Charlesville, Mamba Kaba with Project Mgr addressing
Specialist Bernard Wariety the crowd



Outreach activities in Silver Compound,
activities in Barclay Farm market, Mamba Kaba
Mamba Kaba



Outreach



Mamba Kaba. Above is Sonpon Freeman
partial view of Charlesville, Mamba Kaba audience.



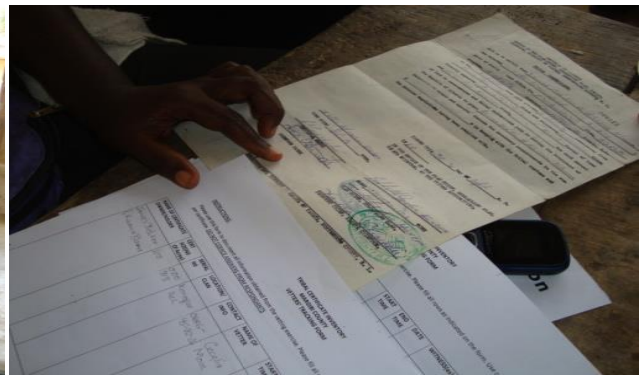
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SCANNING /RECORDING

Scanning /Recording is a process through which TC owners/holders bring forth their tribal certificates to be officially scanned and recorded into the TC inventory database. During this time, Tribal certificates were collected from owners/holders and scanned without immediate decision as to their authenticity. The question of authenticity/validity is subsequently determined by the Vetting Team when

deployed. A serial number is assigned to each certificate for identification purposes. The certificate is then photocopied and a picture is taken of the holder/owner with the certificate suspended below his/her chain. A T-shirt is given to the owner/holder of the certificate as a reward and the original copy of the TC is then returned to the bearer of the certificate.

Below are some Scanning and Recording Activities in Pictures.



Scanning in Gibi with Erastus Poden & others
Inspecting TC documents at the scanning exercise



Scanning Supervisor Charles Grove
Supervisor Grove on scanning procedures
And Scanner Sarwee of LC

PM alerting



In Worhn, Gibi District: Ivan Ford & Andrew Triscott of LPIS with some local leaders
Waiting in line for scanning in Worhn, Gibi Dist.



Scanning continuing in Worhn, Gibi District
the lady seen above is being photographed with her TC

Certificate suspended below her chain

VETTING

Vetting is the process through which the validity or authenticity of ownership of a given tribal certificate is established based on guidelines and procedures set and agreed upon by both the government and tribal people throughout the country. In determining the validity of TCs, the following criteria are considered:

- a) Date and age of the certificate: Was the certificate acquired during the on-going moratorium on the sale of public land?
- b) Does the physical appearance of the certificate commensurate with its age?

- c) Does any portion of the certificate appear to be altered? and
- d) At point of sale, was the tribal certificate signed by the appropriate people such as Tribal Elder(s), Town Chief, Clan Chief, Sectional Clerk, Paramount Chief and or District Commissioner?

The answers to the above questions will determine as to whether a given certificate meets the criteria for vetting. Certificates that do not meet these criteria are considered 'questionable' and subsequently referred to the Margibi County Branch of the Land Coordination Center (LCC), based in Kakata, for resolution.

The next stage is to establish ownership. Vetting team moved from one town or village to another, having meetings and talking to those residing in these areas to ascertain some facts about the ownership of the parcel of land covered by the certificate... Where there is no contention regarding the certificate, it is then categorized as 'Certified TC' and sent to the Demarcation Team. In areas where contentions existed, the Vetting Team tried to create some understanding and harmony among the contending parties. If that doesn't work, the case is referred to LCC for resolution and the certificate is classified as 'In Conflict'. Generally, unresolved 'Questionable and Conflict TCs' were not eligible for demarcation.

Vetting exercises conducted in Kakata and Gibi Districts adhered to these guidelines and principles. In both districts, the time allotted for the exercise was extended to enable owners to come forward with their certificates. Quite often than not, the vetting team has to walk miles to get to the town or village where the land is located.

Clips from the Vetting exercise:



Vetting in Richard Town, Wiah Clan, Kakata Dist
Chairman Wisner with UNHABIT Country Director Liz

LC Vice

Moorsmith

observing the vetting exercise in Richard Town



Dr. Mark with Vetter Jallah in Richard Town
Carter in Waymahquelleh

Liz and Dr.

DEMARCATATION

The demarcation phase of the project has to do with the use of GPS equipment to establish Points and Coordinates of parcels of land indicated on tribal certificates. As indicated earlier, it is believed that GPS results can be used to obtain deed. However, GPS Technicians who trained our team argued that the equipment can only take coordinates of land parcels for aerial view or mapping purposes (which then enable one to point to the location of his/her land) not necessarily its actual size and boundaries). To obtain deed, they contend, will require a physical survey.

The Demarcation component of the project took more time than all of the other components combined due to a number of reasons: Apprehension on the part of TC holders regarding the entire process, resulting in an apparent reluctance on the part of TC owners to clear the paths leading to their land as scheduled, to enable GPS users to navigate their way; far distances to land sites coupled with active farming and Poro/Sande activities during the time, among others. In some areas, land boundaries became contentious and where agreement could not be reached, the case was again referred to the Land Coordination Center (LCC) and the team will leave the area without conducting Demarcation after walking several hours back and forth, accomplishing nothing for that day.

In Gibi District, due to the distances involved in reaching land sites, the team had to move inland where it remained for 14 days to have the project completed. During that time, they had no access to vehicular movement or communication network. Demarcation was not conducted in Mamba Kaba District for reasons explained later in this report.

Pictorial view of the Demarcation Exercise:



TC holders in joyous mood after demarcation of their land
listening to Demarcation Team debriefs from MLM&E Team

PM



Demarcation Team in motion. At the rear are Dr. Mark Demarcation Team Leader Wiah & his Asst. Roland Flomo

DATA ENTRY

The Data Entry component of the project is a process through which information collected from the field is entered into a big data bank called 'Open Title'. Open Title is new international land system software. This exercise marks the final phase of the inventory processing project and it is now in a work-in-process stage at the Land Commission.

CHALLENGES

The Margibi County project had its own challenges as well as lessons: From the outset, the project was destined to experience problems especially with the demarcation component. The amount of time allotted for both the demarcation and the vetting phase of the project for which budgetary appropriations made appeared grossly underestimated. The planning process of the project heavily relied on experience of the 2012 pilot, though that pilot was limited in scope. As a result, it failed to take into account the interplay of several factors that could adversely affect the success of the project such as the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of the people for whom the project was intended: For example, the mindset of our people regarding this new phenomenon - inventorying tribal certificates, is a new national initiative and thus viewed by tribal people as a scheme designed by government to levy heavy tax burden on them or to take away their land. Then there is the issue of their economic

activities (most are either involved in active subsistence farming or are employees of rubber and other agricultural companies as a source of financial survival). This is compounded by other aspects of traditional/ cultural practices such as Poro and Sande activities which are peaked during the time of the year the project was being implemented.

Below and above these constraints, tribal certificate holders and community leaders were of the opinion that a direct communication from the Executive Mansion concerning the project, since it has to do with land, would have sufficed in quenching their anxiety about the exercise. This argument, in addition to other considerations mentioned above, could very well explain some of the snail-walk attitude adopted by certificate owners during the project.

Worst still, it would appear that TC holders themselves have no sense of how much actually is the physical land acreage they are claiming on their certificates. They commonly referred to soap tree as a boundary which in some cases, didn't even exist. The average landscape demarcated as per a given tribal certificate, ranges between 500 to 1,500, although a sizable amount of the certificates covered areas as huge as 5,000 – 10,000 acres which for all practical reasons, seem inconceivable. The GPS equipment used in the field cannot simultaneously convert readings into actual survey results while in the field. As a result, we could not tell certificate owners the actual size of their parcels of land relative to the quantity indicated on the certificate. Thus, we may have left the field with the implied impression that indeed the land acreage reported on the tribal certificates are exactly what is being captured by the GPS readings, knowing very well that actual survey could produce contradictory results.

LC/TC MANAGEMENT AND TETRA-TECH WORKING RELATIONSHIP

Since we were opportune to join the Land Commission family almost a year ago, we have come to realize that the institution is an awesome place to work. It is a place where everyone, irrespective of status, counts and is counted. In the midst of stringent budgetary constraints, a condition not innate to the Commission but one experienced throughout MACs – Ministries, Agencies and Commissions across the country, the administration of the Commission makes it a bounding duty to

accommodate all by improvising where feasible. More importantly, the administration encourages opinions of all, from bottom up. This is because it believes that a 'whole is a sum of its individual parts, to the extent that what affects one, affects all'. This modus operandi is ideal to modern management and administration practices because it recognizes that organizational productivity can only be enhanced through people - when employees' thoughts are regarded as part of a whole.

Conversely, during the Margibi County project, we witnessed a strange organizational philosophy, completely alien to the culture practiced at Land Commission. The following is a précis:

When Land Commission contracted a crew of Demarcation Technicians to be trained in the use of GPS equipment in order to carry out the demarcation component of the project, TETRA –TECH ARD Management summarily dismissed the group as unqualified to carry out such a task, never mind how much training they received. It turned out it was wrong as the team performed exceptionally well, amid all odds and obstacles. TETRA-TECH ARD Management finally acknowledged how efficient the team has been especially in the last few weeks of the project given the excruciating circumstances and conditions they had to endure.

But this attitude continued throughout the lifespan of the project: Dr. Mark, TETRA-TECH Boss, continuously denigrated the performance and suggestions of TC team members; sometimes, with red-cheek rage. He is constantly suspicious of everyone on the team although he never established any clear rational basis for his suspicion. He never once said thank you to a team member or as a group. He often made remarks such as; they just sit on their butts doing nothing. He never once motivated the team nor did he paid regular visits to project site to assess progress, except once. The one time he went there, he was extremely condescending of team members, derailing whatever left of their motivational spirit. A photograph of that incident is not deserving of display in this report. I approached him about his behavior and how it could affect team morale. He apologized. He always spoke in an angry mood and at one time, belittled the

Project Manager in the presence of LPIS staff at his Sinkor Office. He again apologized the next day in a telephone call but it would seem the attitude is systemic because each time he gets an opportunity, he repeats it.

PROJECT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Then comes the issue of money: it ran out before the project could conclude. The situation became so terrible that by then, DSA was in arrears rather than pre-paid as a normal practice. Some DSAs are still outstanding to legitimate beneficiaries as TETRA-TECH continues to offer excuses regarding the legitimacy of the arrears, though services were performed simply because, according to him, there is no money left.

Rental vehicles were paid exorbitant fees and the entire bidding process was marred by conflict of interest. All of the vehicles used in the field were tied to employees of LIPS, using names of some bogus companies. An astounding \$85,000.00 or approximately 40% of the total budget was spent on vehicles. While rental fees for vehicles that operate close to Monrovia (about 45 miles outside of the capital) range between US \$75- \$85/day, especially when contracted over an extended period (in our case, four months), ours were going for US\$150.00/day.

In some cases, the principles of due diligence were completely compromised as drivers of some of the vehicles were without valid driver's licenses and insurance documents could not be found anywhere in the rented vehicles, although our law requires that insurance documents should be in the vehicle at all time when plying the streets and highways of the country. TC Management complained of this to Dr. Mark and at one time threatened to ground the non-compliant vehicles in the field. Dr. Mark claimed the insurance documents were in the field but they never turned out in the field throughout the project in spite of Project Management insistence.

There were constant breakdowns and it is not clear whether owners of vehicles were denied payment for those days the vehicles were out of commission, given that the Project Manager always notified LPIS Logistician whenever such incident

occurred. Owners of some of the vehicles for the most part, were paying their drivers only \$5 US Dollars a day in contravention of government's \$35 US Dollars a day DSA policy for drivers during field trips. As a result, the drivers were completely disgruntled throughout the project which posed a serious risk to team members riding in the vehicles operated by them. While complaining to the Project Manager, they disclosed the names of the owners of the vehicles, their employers. It turned out that those were names of people working at LPIS/TETRA-TECH ARD. The Project Manager again alerted Dr. Mark of this problem but he hastened to point out that it is not his responsibility.

A partial review of LPIS' mid-term financial report raised more questions than answers as some line item expenditures were inflated and in some cases, double counted. Some activities that never took place in the field were reported on the financial statement. These, by our assessment, amount to some \$42,000.00 and may eventually require some level of clarifications.

The Mamba Kaba phase of the project was short lived: Although Mamba Kaba is the largest of the three districts in the county, only four days were allotted for public awareness and sensitization, compared to 14 days spent in Kakata District and 10 days spent in Gibi District on the same activity. LPIS Outreach Specialist was relieved of his post earlier and Land Commission Information Officer was re-assigned to other projects of comparable magnitude. The number of Outreach staff was reduced considerably to a non-media specialist team of two. Notably, while Scanning lasted an average of two weeks in the smaller districts, Mamba Kaba, the largest district, was allotted only 6 days and by the fourth day, it was cut off because there was only one certificate received in that time. While it is true the district sits on quite a large portion of deeded land, there are sizable amount of land that is still covered by tribal certificates in the region. This is evident by the numerous calls received from District and Township Commissioners after the project was ordered closed informing us that certificates were now coming in. But it was all over.

This is the inside-look of the Margibi County Tribal Certificates Processing Project. The project is now over but we can learn from its associated good and bad side with the aim of making future projects even better.

CONCLUSION

We thank the Land Commission Administration, through the Office of the Vice Chairman which has oversight responsibilities on land administration for the opportunity given us to participate in this exercise. By all honest admission, the project helped to broaden our understanding of the issues and people surrounding tribal land in the country. We believe that knowledge acquired here will be useful in subsequent projects and other land related issues.

THE WAY FORWARD/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Land Commission is equipped with the intellectual capital required to conduct a tribal certificate inventory in the country. Those who manned the Commission including those of the Tribal Certificate Unit are part and parcel of the Liberian culture, realizing that an understanding of said culture is fundamental in dealing with any land issues in the country. While the Commission has and must at all time, welcome overseas technical assistance, it is important to note that such technical assistance should not subordinate the views of Liberians especially those in the field. In consideration thereof, we recommend that subsequent tribal certificate projects take these concerns into account;
2. That the vetting of vehicles for subsequent projects, if at all necessary, be completely out-sourced to minimize incidents that have the potential to compromise the integrity of the vetting process; and that Land Commission should form an integral part of the financial management of the project or at least, be briefed regularly on the financial status of the project, not at the point when funding runs out;

3. That subsequent planning of tribal certificate projects takes keen note of time allotted /duration of the various phases of the project especially that which relate to the Vetting and Demarcation components; and
4. That future projects be preceded by some form of communication from the Executive Mansion to help soften the grounds for project smooth implementation.

TRIBAL CERTIFICATES PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS

1. T. Sampson Quioh – Manager
2. Flomo Kokolo - National Coordinator

SCANNING TEAM

1. Charles Grove – Team Leader
2. Cyrus B. Sarwee
3. Amos Tweh

VETTING TEAM

1. Veronica Nimene (Mrs) – Team Leader
2. Myer Simpson
3. Taryonah Delboe
4. Lusu Jallah
5. Cecelia Moi
6. Erastus Poden
7. Tarnue Zeze

DEMARCATIION TEAM

1. Augustine Wiah – Team Leader
2. Roland Flomo
3. Stephen Sonah
4. Thatcher Tweh

DATA ENTRY TEAM

1. Buddy Taku-Taku Page – Team Leader
2. Garbee Morris
3. C. Armah Gray
4. Summerhill Karzon