

HMG: Literacy and Human Rights



Members of the HMG community in Cyanika, Rwanda, participate in literacy and numeracy training.

In Rwanda, there exists Historically Marginalized Groups (HMG) of people. Traditionally, these people lived a nomadic life in the forests throughout the Great Lakes Region of Africa. However, as the forested landscape dwindled, so did the livelihood of this group of people. As a result, the HMGs have entered into the culture of the majority of Rwandans, a culture dependent on farming and livestock, with land being one of the key necessities to wealth and status. Unfortunately, due to their previous nomadic forest lifestyle, the HMGs have no land and are often living in situations of dire poverty.

The Enterprise, Environment, and Equity in the Virunga Landscape of the Great Lakes Region (EEEGL) project has worked comprehensively for the last three years with the HMGs living near Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. The main focus of this work has been to improve equity for the HMGs; this has been done through training the HMGs in the areas of literacy and human rights and in potato production and propagation. While these activities have been the focus, they have resulted in the laying down of roots in a community that accept and respects them.

Approach

In October 2010, a literacy and human rights program for the HMGs began. As part of this program, HMGs were provided literacy classes 2-3 times per week. The classes were held in the Gahunga and Cyanika sectors. In addition to learning how to read, write and count, participants were taught the importance of basic human rights such as: marriage, health insurance, education for children, and land rights. It was also realized that sufficient food was an issue for the participants and participants were often unable to attend class because they were searching for food. Therefore, a component of the program was added; participants were provided food to eat and were taught Irish potato production.

Impact on Poverty

Sixty-four (64) Historically Marginalized People obtained basic literacy through training courses; 40 people in Cyanika sector and 24 people in Gahunga sector. These students were trained in literacy as well as human rights. The literacy skills assist in conducting business transactions. The human rights knowledge gained has significantly impacted the HMGs. The students realized the importance of sanitation and implement improved sanitation for themselves and in their houses. This has enabled the HMGs to become more integrated into the community, where they were previously shunned for their poor sanitation. Eight couples are now officially married. This is important especially in regards to land rights and inheritance. Students now go to health centres when they are ill and when they are giving birth; this is particularly important as maternal and infant mortality rates among HMG is very high. 8 of the students' children now attend primary school.

As part of the EEEGL project, 60 HMGs (one group of 40 and one group of 20 in the Cyanika sector) also learnt Irish

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Impact, cont.

potato production. Harvesting was undertaken on a total of 2 hectares (ha); this land, along with 6 other ha for a total of 8 ha, was received from the local government. A significant impact on poverty reduction for the HMGs is the return of these 8 ha to the HMGs. This land was initially owned by HMGs but the local government controlled the land. The community paid rent to the government to use the land; the rent paid was used for supporting HMGs. However, after a claim by HMG and advocacy by EEEGL, the land was returned to the HMGs in February 2011. After one month of having the land returned, the HMG started planting Irish potatoes.

From the first harvest from the Cyanika group of 40 farmers, one part of the harvest was sold and one part was kept for self consumption. Six tonnes of Irish potatoes were harvested; two tonnes were sold as potatoes or seed potatoes and four tonnes were kept for self-use. The money from the sold portion was used to buy basics such as farming equipment (e.g. hoes and seeds) and personal care items (e.g. clothes and plates). The potatoes consumed provide HMGs with a free source of food. Some of the self-use potatoes were saved to be used as seed potatoes for the next harvest. The group of 20 potato farmers group harvested potatoes but did not sell their produce; they kept it for self consumption and for seed potatoes for the next harvest.

In addition, the larger potato group opened an account at the local Savings and Credit Co-operative (SACCO). Combined, the group of 40 farmers have saved RWF 46,000 (US\$ 77). When the savings is great enough, the HMGs will use the money to collectively buy more land for farming.

Impact on vulnerable and historically marginalized groups

The literacy and Irish potato production activities were focused on HMGs so all participants were from one of the most vulnerable groups in Rwanda. In addition, in the literacy program, 38, or 59%, of participants were female. In the Irish potato production, 38, or 63%, of the farmers were women. Out of the 8 participant children who now attend primary school, five, or 63% of them are girls.

Impact on capacity building

Through the literacy and food production activities, HMGs gained a significant amount of skills.

These students learned basic reading, writing and math skills so that they are able conduct basic business transactions. This ability is important because, prior to having basic literacy knowledge, HMGs would sell goods at the market and often lose money due to lack of knowledge of how to conduct basic calculations.

The participants learned how to successfully plant, tend and harvest Irish potatoes. This will enable them to harvest independently in the future. As the farmers have saved some of the potatoes for seeds for the next harvest, the process is still continuing.

Finally, the participants received informal savings training. This encouraged 40 of the participants to open a joint account at the SACCO and to appreciate the importance of saving.

Beneficiary Profiles



Peruth Mukanoheri, Nyagisenyi, Rwanda

Peruth is 24 years old and mother of two. Peruth is a member of the potato farming association, but has also participated in the literacy and numeracy training.

Pierre Karadoga, Nyagishe, Rwanda

Pierre is 49 years old and father of five children. He received training in land rights and assistance with Irish potato production, both going hand-in-hand with food security for his family.



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Lessons Learned

Integration into society can be challenging so a significant amount of capacity building will be necessary

HMGs are able to work like other Rwandese but due to a long period of discrimination they have not yet feel comfortable and/or confident that they are able to work. This leads to a long period of training being necessary in order to build the confidence of the HMGs.

There exist significant culture/ customs/ background barriers

Most development activities (e.g. agriculture, commerce, handcraft making) are not in HMGs culture. This leads to both the society and some HMGs having skewed perceptions of HMG involvement in these activities. Some HMGs and society members discourage the HMGs participating in new activities, saying they are not capable of conducting the activity. Therefore, sensitization of both the HMGs and the local community is necessary.

One actor/ sector of intervention is not enough to contribute to the HMGs development

HMGs face a lot of challenges in development and if a project intervenes in one or two activities (e.g. literacy) this does not alleviate all problems and at the end, there remain many other problems that were not addressed. Some of these other problems (e.g. shelter, health) are sometimes even more difficult for HMGs to resolve and may prevent a livelihood improvement. A holistic view must be taken when planning interventions.

Looking Ahead

Close follow up by potential stakeholders of existing HMG activities is necessary. It has been seen that if there is no follow up, the HMGs will very quickly give up and return to their previous state.

Education of young HMGs is a key issue which must be addressed. It is not uncommon for young HMGs to be left alone to fend for themselves for food and shelter and for HMG children, who are still with their parents, to be tasked with survival activities. Therefore, education becomes a secondary priority. It is important that HMG children realize the importance of education and are supported in attending school. The support needed is both for material goods (e.g. school fees, uniforms, school supplies) and emotional and educational support.

Future HMG related activities should be integrated development projects which address a number of issues. This holistic approach will enable true livelihood improvements and will be more sustainable.



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Case Study: Integration of HMG in Other Interventions

In addition to the focused efforts by the EEEGL Project with the HMGs in Rwanda, the EEEGL Project has taken measures through all interventions in both Rwanda and Uganda to incorporate the HMG community and ensure equitable benefits within communities.

Members of HMG community were involved in the participatory process to review and revise the resource use guidelines for multiple use zones in Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks in Uganda. The revision of these guidelines have incorporated the specific requests from the HMG community, including the legal and regulated harvesting of traditional food crops, like wild yams, within the national park. Other resource user groups legally keep beehives within the multiple use zones. Members of the HMG community are registered along with their non-HMG neighbors within these **resource user groups**. Inclusion and recruitment of HMGs into the assessment, revised guidelines, and user groups has aided in mainstreaming them into an activity that they used to do illegally, causing conflict within the communities, HMGs harvesting honey from hives that did not belong to them within the parks, for example.

Members of the HMG community have also been encouraged to participate, and have received training in **enterprise activities like mushroom and honey production**. In Rwanda, the HMG community have begun their own mushroom growing cooperative. In Uganda, HMGs have received artisan training to fabricate smokers and modern beehives as well as received access to subsidized hives, smokers, and protective gear.

In addition, when an assessment of the first round of Gorilla Levy disbursement-a revenue-sharing scheme for communities living near Bwindi Impenetrable and Mgahinga Gorilla National Parks in Uganda- revealed that HMGs were not benefiting, revisions were made to the guidelines by the Gorilla Levy committee that all future disbursements will have 15% of funds earmarked for projects to benefit the HMGs of the area.

Members of the resource user group in Rutunga, near Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, including members from the HMG community.



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