

## **Introduction**

Sharing research results with communities facilitates important community access to data they made possible through study participation. With this knowledge, communities can harness findings to realize local development goals and protect their interests. Research that is committed to community participation can also mitigate the problematic potential of research to be ‘extractive’ from the standpoint of the study population, as appropriate data dissemination can reduce the gap between researchers and communities by building trust and including communities in research benefits (McDavitt, et al. 2016).

Such activities also have the potential to augment the research project by strengthening the rigor, relevance, and reach of such research (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013). Interaction between the community and researchers presents an opportunity for community members to interact with findings to produce programming adjustments and increase confidence in unanticipated results.

To this end, USAID is currently supporting efforts to disseminate rigorous evaluation findings back to local project stakeholders, including survey respondents, project beneficiaries, community leaders, and local government officials. These dissemination efforts aim to provide project stakeholders with a summary of key development outcomes and trends in their area and to raise awareness of project activities and achievements. Since the audience to which the information is directed oftentimes determines the appropriate method of dissemination, evaluation findings may be presented in a number of ways, such as preparing an illustrated story board or fact sheet and sharing it with survey respondents during a next round of interviews or through community meetings or notice boards.

This paper focuses on one such effort in in three rural counties in Liberia (Lofa, Maryland, and River Gee), and the location of these areas is shown on Figure 1. It presents a case study of sharing research results with local communities during rigorous quasi-experimental evaluation of a community land protection model in Liberia, Namati’s Community Land Protection Program. The evaluation is funded by USAID, IDRC, and Namati and seeks to measure program impacts using panel survey data collected in 2014 (baseline) and 2017 (midline) in 57 communities. Midline analysis was completed in fall 2017. A Liberian data dissemination partner is sharing midline evaluation results with the community, and pairs of skilled facilitators were trained to give findings presentations in each of the 57 study communities. Presentation of the data to communities is taking place over three weeks in February through early March 2018.

This data dissemination activity is designed to communicate important study findings about their customary communal lands and land governance that communities can integrate into ongoing efforts to secure property rights for community lands. In addition to introducing this data dissemination case study,



# Land Governance in an Interconnected World

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY  
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 19-23, 2018



## SHARING EVALAUTION FINDINGS WITH COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

**KATE MARPLE-CANTRELL**

The Cloudburst Group, USA

[kate.marple-cantrell@cloudburstgroup.com](mailto:kate.marple-cantrell@cloudburstgroup.com)

**Paper prepared for presentation at the  
“2018 WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY”  
The World Bank - Washington DC, March 19-23, 2018**

*Copyright 2018 by author(s). All rights reserved. Readers may make verbatim copies of this document for non-commercial purposes by any means, provided that this copyright notice appears on all such copies.*



# Land Governance in an Interconnected World

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY  
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 19-23, 2018



## **Abstract**

Sharing research results with communities facilitates important community access to data they made possible has the potential to strengthen the rigor, relevance, and reach of such research. USAID is currently supporting efforts to disseminate rigorous evaluation findings back to local project stakeholders, such as survey respondents, project beneficiaries, community leaders, and local government officials. These information dissemination efforts provide stakeholders with a summary of development outcomes and trends in their area and raise awareness of project achievements. This paper presents a case study of one such community based participatory research activity that involves sharing data with respondents participating in a rigorous quasi-experimental evaluation of a community land protection program in Liberia, exploring methodological considerations for ongoing research – such as minimizing the potential for bias and threats to the validity of evaluation findings – as well as design challenges that arise translating technical findings for an audience with limited formal education.

**Key Words:** Customary land tenure, Data dissemination, Community based participatory research

this paper will explore methodological considerations for results dissemination in the context of ongoing research, such as minimizing the potential for bias and threats to the validity of evaluation findings, as well as delving into design challenges that arise when translating technical findings for an audience with limited formal education, as is the case in the case study areas.

Communities that provide data to rigorous land sector evaluations may find some analyses informative and helpful in their own development efforts, such as strengthening their communal land tenure. This new methodology by USAID represents an innovative approach for returning data to communities, and this data dissemination activity is a ‘pilot’ that will inform future USAID data dissemination activities. The overarching goal of this activity is for communities to have opportunity to learn about themselves, rather than focusing on our learning as researchers about communities.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 1 provides background and context. Section 2 presents the theoretical framing for community based participatory research and action research. Section 3 describes the methods used in this case study. Section 4 describes our experience undertaking this pilot activity. Section 5 discusses these observations and lessons learned for future data dissemination activities. Section 6 summarizes and concludes the paper.

### **Background**

Ananya Roy writes in *Encountering Poverty* (2016), “Just as romanticism was at odds with utilitarianism in the past, today the call to think of history and anthropology is usually met with the impatience of those many poverty actors who are focused on impact and impact evaluation” (139). She charges that focusing on measurable impacts of development programs frames poverty as a technical problem and implies that its ‘solution’ can be equally technical and divorced from context. The ‘impatience’ to gather what data is necessary to demonstrate impact may spur practitioners to discount the historical and cultural knowledge that the subjects of this research can bring to this research and to overlook the right of the research subject to these outputs, lest the work become an extractive endeavor.

Michal Goldman (2001) has also suggested that while these and other types of ‘scientific assessments’ conducted by development organizations are framed as tools to improve programming and mitigate harmful project impacts, they also conscript state institutions and resource dependent communities into “new disciplinary mechanisms of globalized environmentalism” (194). Given the historical imbalances of power and potentially divergent interests of the funder and communities participating in the land tenure research evaluation, transparency and opportunities for community participation in the research process are critical for pursuing equitable and beneficial research.

## **Theory**

The cycles of reflection, data collection, and action characteristic of participatory research are designed to account for “the extent to which knowledge can represent the interests of the powerful and serve to reinforce their positions in society” (Baum, et al. 2006). Community-based participatory research and action research are methodologies rooted in the ethical tenet that as core stakeholders in the research process, communities deserve meaningful access to the materials that research produces. The adult education work of Pablo Freire (1972) is foundational to these methodologies. Through these techniques, the researchers who adapt them hope to transform the production of scientific knowledge “from a top-down, expert-driven process into one of co-learning and co-production” (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013, 9).

Substantial scholarship on participatory research has occurred in the field of public health. There the application of these methodologies further research that requires building community trust to produce better outcomes, a task with facets applicable to work in community natural resource conservation. This body of literature attests that with the input of communities, better programs and research is possible. Meaningfully involving communities in research design and the interpretation of findings increases the cultural appropriateness of the intervention and evaluation research, fosters greater local interpretation of the relevance of findings, and allows iterative improvement of programming and implementation of findings to address community needs (McDavitt, et al. 2016). In other words, when researchers can form these types of embedded community partnerships, the result can be research that is more rigorous, more relevant (asking the right questions), and with a greater reach of findings to inform policy and future inquiry (Balazs and Morello-Frosch 2013).

Research encompassing varying degrees of community participation falls under these broad categories. Unidirectional strategies for communicating with participants (press releases, websites, policy briefs, etc.) are generally believed to provide less opportunity for meaningful participation in research by community stakeholders than open and active solicitation of community engagement by researchers throughout evaluation phases. Furthermore, flexibility and adaptability of data dissemination strategies, allocating time for debriefing and implementing input from community members, and continuity of communication with communities are key strategies for engaging community members as research partners (McDavitt, et al. 2016).

Prior applications of community-based participatory research and action research in land tenure work – and especially land tenure evaluations – is limited. Within the sphere of natural resource management and conservation, advocates express interest in using participatory research techniques to promote inclusive and sustainable resource management strategies, such as forestry management (Wilmsen 2005).

## **Methodology**

This paper presents a qualitative case study describing a pilot findings-sharing exercise in Liberia that is informed by the principles of community based participatory research. As such, the key methods employed in collecting information for this case study are literature review, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with members of the evaluation's study communities. The author played a central role in the design and implementation of this pilot activity, including training the field team. Then, the author accompanied the field team to a subset of study towns and observed the exercise. Concurrent with the data presentation exercise, the evaluation team secured funding for videotaped interviews to be conducted with volunteers from each community to better understand participants' reactions to the findings presented, intended use – individually and by the community – of the evaluation data that was presented to them (if any), and feedback about the experience of living in a community that is participating in a longitudinal land study. The author also observed these interviews.

## **Getting Data Back to the Communities Pilot Activity**

Before presenting the evaluation findings to study communities in Liberia, the midline findings presentation was developed in close consultation with intervention implementers over several months. Together, the evaluation team, an evaluation funder and funder of the results sharing pilot (USAID), the program designer (Namati), and the program implementer in Liberia (the Sustainable Development Institute of Liberia) collaborated in an iterative process to craft appropriate strategies to communicate basic statistics and changes over time with the members of the study communities in rural Liberia.

Key considerations during the development of the plan for sharing this evaluation data with community stakeholders were that every town should receive a presentation to maximize the reach of the data sharing presentation, as most community members are unlikely to travel to another town to participate in the data sharing presentation. The research team also ultimately opted not to present findings to treatment communities on program impacts so that at endline all treatment and control communities will have received the same information during data sharing.

The final presentation was designed to comprise a guided discussion of key findings or data points in an engaging, participatory, and audience-appropriate way. The interactive presentations are made at a meeting of all available community members in participating towns (treatment and control). The data presentation exercise is designed to last two- to three hours and contains 12 key data points from 5 main research themes: land governance, tenure security, negotiations with investors, rights of women and members of minority groups, and natural resource conservation.

Discussion of each theme includes: (1) a brief introduction about conditions on this topic, (2) overview of changes in the community, and (3) open dialogue and reflection period. The statistics contained within the

presentation are customized to each individual community. During the open discussion of each data point, highly skilled facilitators translate the statistics and guide the conversation. Community members have an opportunity to interrogate research findings in several important ways, providing comments, responses, and potentially the chance for validation of surprising research findings.

The presentation also includes interactive presentation materials to supplement discussions. The key supplemental material is an interactive visual aid poster produced in collaboration with a local cartoonist visualizes key data points throughout the presentation. By presenting concepts and statistics with limited text, the interactive visual aid facilitates data comprehension by an audience with limited literacy. It is also laminated and contains white space that can be drawn on by facilitators using a whiteboard marker, complementing interactive activities within the presentation, such as a 'guessing game' where participants state what they expect the finding to be. Facilitators use these presentation materials to guide a discussion of key findings in an engaging, participatory, and audience-appropriate way.

A partnership with iLab Liberia, a local NGO that specializes in freedom of information advocacy, allowed the presentations to be conducted by their network of facilitators native to each study county to ensure that meetings were conducted in a locally appropriate manner by facilitators knowledgeable about the area and who are able to translate the data points into local language dialects to ensure that all attendees can follow the presentation material and participate in the language most comfortable to them.

Facilitator training began on January 31, 2018, and continued through February 7, 2018, including a pilot day, in Bong county, Liberia. The iLab Field Manager and Director of Programs led the training, with guidance from an evaluation team member. Twenty facilitators and mobilizers (16 men and 4 women) were trained on best practices for field work, qualitative facilitation techniques, and the data presentation exercise script. The exercise script was practiced in both American English and Liberian English. Training contained lectures, role plays, and group exercises and provided three days for facilitators to practice the presentation in small groups, share their questions and advice, and practice taking notes about key themes and dynamics during the exercise (Figure 2). Feedback from this training allowed the evaluation team to improve the script and further adapt it to the local context before the commencement of the field activity.

A pilot was conducted in Bong county on February 6, 2018, to give all team members direct experience using the survey instruments. The pilot field activity took place in three communities where the midline data collection instruments were piloted in 2016, so facilitators could practice delivering real survey results back to community members. Observations from this pilot also led to several minor improvements

in the script and a full day of debriefing with facilitators to improve the clarity and dynamism of their presentations.

In total, the field team consisted of one field manager, ten mobilizers, and ten facilitators. The team was divided into ten smaller teams of two: mobilizers (five teams) and facilitators (five teams). The teams traveled separately, and the field manager completed at least one site visit to observe a data presentation exercise in its entirety. After observing each data presentation exercise the field manager led facilitators in a detailed debriefing conversation to review community feedback and challenging topics.

Teams of mobilizers traveled ahead of the facilitators to conduct community entry activities and liaise with local officials such as the Town Chief and Town Crier so that each town knew ahead of time what day the meeting would take place and could communicate this information with members of the community. This component of the field plan is essential for maximizing daytime meeting attendance during the farming season, which the time of year when fieldwork must be conducted because the roads are passable and the communities are accessible because it is the dry season. To further publicize the events, announcements were also made on local radio stations about the meetings taking place.

Each team of facilitators was responsible for conducting between nine and fourteen exercises total, or approximately one exercise each day, usually in the mornings, for two weeks. The teams shared two roles during the exercises: that of lead facilitator presenting the information and that of the note taker, who assisted with preparation and presentation of the visual aid materials and with noting key themes and feedback as they arose in the discussion. All facilitators were fluent in American English, Liberian English, and at least one local dialect, and the majority had at least some post-secondary education.

Ideally, each team of facilitators would have consisted of one female facilitator, to increase the likelihood of women feeling comfortable to talk in the meetings, but only one of the five teams of facilitators contained a female facilitator. However, there was good participation by at least some women in the exercises, so we do not believe that the challenges with respect to gender balance in the teams contributed meaningfully to women feeling uncomfortable during the meetings.

The data presentation field activity took place between February 2018 and March 2018 (Figures 3 and 4). Tracking team progress was done through a cloud-based mobile data collection effort. Information was entered directly into Android phones using a mobile data collection platform, SurveyCTO, and downloaded and formatted into Excel spreadsheets. Recording relevant feedback for the evaluation team was done via a detailed paper questionnaire that was completed by facilitators immediately after the conclusion of the exercise. There facilitators recorded key themes, social dynamics, difficult topics, and feedback about the program, the evaluation, and about specific findings. With informed consent, a subset

of data presentation exercises were also video recorded in their entirety, and analysis of these recordings presents a future opportunity for further understanding how community members received the evaluation data and plan to use it in the future. As these recordings are currently still undergoing transcription, this paper focuses on the facilitators' written reports about the exercise as the source of information about community engagement with the material and feedback.

## **Discussion**

The overarching goal for effectively communicating this evaluation data back to the communities is for communities to have the opportunity to learn about *themselves*, rather than focusing on our learning as researchers about the communities. In other words, the learning exercise is designed to be more akin to a dialogue, where the facilitator offers information and solicits feedback, instead of a focus group discussion, where the facilitator asks questions and respondents provide information in response.

One notable challenge of bringing this type of information to the study communities in rural Liberia is that it is uncommon for residents of these towns to have any formal education. In fact, about a third of household survey respondents at midline (29%) had no formal education. Among women, the proportion of survey respondents without formal education rises to 53%. Only 14% of household survey respondents overall have graduated from high school, and only 2% of female respondents have completed high school. Since all interested members of the community are encouraged to attend the data presentation exercise, finding a way to communicate information that is not didactic and that is clear to illiterate or innumerate community members is a key consideration.

Another consideration informing the choice of data to present and the manner of presentation was the desire to comply with the Institutional Review Board<sup>1</sup> requirements for protecting confidentiality of respondents. In line with the requirements for human subjects' protection, approval for the midline data collection protocols was received from the Clark University Institutional Review Board (IRB) in December 2016 and from the University College London IRB in January 2017. Verbal informed consent was received from each participant after reading a statement about the purpose of the research, the content of the survey, any risks or benefits, and the time commitment. Participants were assured their participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any point and their answers would be kept confidential. They were also informed that their responses would be shared through public posting and publication in a way that protected their identities. Participants who agreed to participate in the research gave their consent orally, and consent was recorded in the electronic survey device. Facilitators were

---

<sup>1</sup> University College London in the UK and Clark University in the US

carefully trained not to ask survey respondents to identify themselves nor to frame the presentation of data points in a way that would stir speculation about who has provided the information.

In addition to the careful training about confidentiality provided to facilitators, the evaluation team ultimately also decided that the short length of time that facilitators would spend with each community precluded the presentation of particularly sensitive material, as the evaluation team has a strong ethical responsibility to avoid fomenting conflict within communities, particularly if it involved speculation about the identity of respondents to the contents of their survey responses. For this reason, the evaluation team chose to avoid presentation of findings about perceived negative characteristics of leaders, such as unethical behavior (taking bribes) or lack of capacity (they are lazy or drunk).

Furthermore, the evaluation team felt that the study's governance data on leader perception and community power dynamics was sufficiently sensitive that it should be presented aggregated geographically to the district level, rather than at the town level, even though all other data was presented at the town level. This decision was made in the hopes of ensuring that any survey respondents present did not feel uncomfortable during the presentation and discussion of findings about governance.

The key methodological consideration from the standpoint of the evaluation team with respect to the need to be mindful of the requirements of the evaluation research during this activity is the desire to conduct a subsequent endline round of data collection in two to three years in all the study communities. For this reason, the decision was made to standardize the content of the presentation in a way that did not include discussion of the program effect. Accordingly, at endline both treatment and control communities will have received the same data presentation 'treatment'. While this nuance will marginally affect the external validity of the endline findings, it will not affect the internal validity of the study, or its ability to detect changes attributable to the program.

Several challenges encountered during this pilot inform the lessons learned from this activity. One key challenge encountered in undertaking this activity in rural areas of Liberia is the difficulty in recruiting local field staff who are highly trained in qualitative facilitation techniques. Field staff from the study areas often have prior experience in development projects and data collection, but they lack deep experience with qualitative research and trainings. Conversely, it is extremely difficult to recruit highly trained qualitative researchers from each of the three study counties, and as such, available qualitative researchers will often lack knowledge of the local dialects spoken by many members of the communities. The evaluation team chose to prioritize local knowledge when recruiting facilitators for this pilot, but this decision led to the necessity of extending training by one day to provide additional guidance to facilitators about presentation strategies. In the absence of other constraints, it would likely be best to

deploy a smaller field team (around four facilitators) to increase the likelihood of recruitment of field staff who possess all the desired skills and experience.

Another challenge that emerged is the difficulty of separating programming from participatory research. Due to budget and timing constraints, it was not possible for the data sharing presentations to incorporate training on the topics covered in the presentations. In other words, rather than telling community members what we considered to be the ‘right’ answer to a question, the presentations only communicated what people had said in response to the question. This separation between the research evaluation and implementation produced a large volume of feedback from communities requesting additional training and awareness raising activities in treatment areas and the expansion of programming to their area in control areas. Given this experience, it may be a better model in the future to build baseline or midline data sharing into program activities in programs that have a community education component.

The facilitators’ notes indicate little actionable feedback on the program or the evaluation, but they do show generally positive feelings about the program and the evaluation. Communities report that they embraced program, and it brought clearer understanding of community land protection. Some general facilitator observations on the program include:

“Everyone appreciates CLPP. It provides more education on how well they can live in harmony together as a community.”

“[The] program is very good, and we would like to continue to it, as it broadens our minds about our forest and natural resources.”

“This program, the CLPP, has really given them knowledge about their land.”

“The CLPP helped the community to know that their community forestland is helpful to the community people.”

“[The community] praised the CLPP as an educational opportunity, saying, ‘We learned our rights, learned to use our community land wisely, and learned to make peace during boundary harmonization.’”

“Because of the CLPP they will organize the community to do more protection of the land and natural resources.”

One Chief Elder in a treatment community in Maryland explained zealously, “The CLPP is a weapon that helps us win our war against suppression and ignorance”.

Community members in treatment towns also described the progress they were making along the program components when asked for program feedback. One popular program activity that was described frequently at midline data collection and again in these meetings was work that designated community representatives undertook to harmonize community land boundaries and communicate those boundaries to everyone in the community by holding town hall meeting and conducting site visits to boundaries. One facilitator reported, “Participants [in a treatment community] said that almost every adult member knows all their community boundary points now rather than before.” Another facilitator noted that community members indicated, “CLPP helps us resolve [the boundary] issues peacefully now”. In the past, they fought among themselves because of a boundary dispute.

Similarly, communities described how they felt that the empowerment and awareness raising components of the program. One facilitator noted that the community members explained, “Before the people [from the program] came here the investors did whatever they wanted to do without them [the community members] benefitting, but now with the help of this program they have realized the steps to take care of the forest for their future children”. Another facilitator wrote, “The CLPP helped them [the community] to know whenever an investor comes they have the right to talk to them.”

However, feedback on the program and evaluation findings indicates that there is still more governance work to do. Despite the local governance improvements found during the evaluation, one treatment community in Lofa still said that the leaders would take the largest share of benefits from investors because they are “not honest”. Elders also continue to play important role in decisions about use and access of community land, as at times they are identified as having the most power over these decisions, above any other actor (Town Chief, Paramount Chief, whole community, etc.).

In another community, the Land Management Committee set up through program encouragement has “not been effective”, and they are still trying to decide how it can “be made effective and decide all the land issues for the people”. Similarly, not all new rules about land use have been immediately effective. One community reported, “The wood is still not properly managed in the community, as the rule put in place for sawing is not working.” Facilitators believe that the challenge of creating viable alternative livelihood activities is to blame for this slow progress, “The community depends on the forest for their survival so it will be very difficult to follow rules about it. If they should follow these rules, there should be an alternative, like skills and empowerment training, to enable them to survive.”

As suggested by the evaluation findings an observed during data sharing by facilitators, one of the most ‘sticky’ land governance issues that persists in some places is community resistance to greater land rights for women and other vulnerable groups. They report remaining disagreement about whether women have

rights to land at all, especially in Maryland. If women do have land rights, they are not always equal to those of men. In some areas they can inherit town property but not farmland “even though the female child helps in the farming process by investing time and other resources”. One facilitator wrote of a community in Maryland, “The female participants were very frantic that they have no rights to inherit land from their fathers. An elderly woman demanded that I write and tell those who sent us that the denial of their right to inherit land from our parents hurts our women.”

Women’s rights to land also include the right to participate in discussions about land. Especially in Lofa, in some towns women have right to speak in general meetings and others are more traditional, and women are still encouraged not to speak in a mixed gathering. Communities – and the experience of the field team during this activity, when women in many communities participated in this discussion – suggested there might be movement on the governance front with respect to women's rights before communities accept inheritance of land for women. Despite slower progress than hoped at midline on supporting more inclusive land rules and land governance, women did especially appreciate the CLPP because of the belief that “it helps bring them more rights”.

However, the lack of land rights of members of minority groups and ‘non-citizen’ residents of towns appear to be the most intractable view. No community indicated that these groups have equal rights to community land, but in some cases they were allowed to attend the data presentation exercises. They participated in very few community meetings. The reason for the lack of participation could be community norms in some cases, but in other cases it was a language barrier, such as not understanding the dialect spoken by the majority of the community, or in the case of migrant workers from francophone Africa, not understanding English. Some communities have rule prohibiting strangers from planting trees.

One community suggested that buy-in for greater rights for women and other vulnerable groups could be improved through awareness raising campaigns in the local dialect, “Promotes and jangles should be interpreted into the Grebo dialect educating and promoting women’s and strangers rights to access and take good care of the community land and natural resources”. They also requested “USAID support and sponsor a group of fluent cultural dialect oriented people to... let the country men give more credence to women and youth to be involved in decisions regarding the community land and natural resources”.

Facilitators recorded generally positive feelings about the research evaluation and the data available to the community because of it. Several communities noted that this was the first time that data was being brought back to them. They were interested to learn what were the findings of the household research survey. Some general facilitator observations on the evaluation and the data include:

It has given them “relevant ideas” and “clearer view” about “how their community land is”.

Research has been “eye opening”. “[They] believe all the surveys conducted have been very important, and they need to help NGOs to push the government to solve all of the boundary issues, so as to help the communities.”

Evaluation has been “unique and sensitive to the needs of the communities, and it has created a huge opportunity for communities”.

“[They] were glad [to receive the evaluation] and expect another in the future.”

“[They see the research evaluation as a means to get a better understanding of how they use and protect their forestland and resources.”

“The evaluation gives the community clearer understanding of where they stand and where they are going.”

The evaluation has “indirectly educated them about the dos and don’ts on their land and tenure security”.

The community was ‘impressed’ that we shared the data results with them.

“We appreciate the research evaluation. We want it to be repeated for lesson learning.”

“The materials were well understood because of the pictures.”

Community members did also report surprise upon learning what were the average responses to survey questions in their town. Facilitators recorded that these surprises community members took this information as a sign that “some community member have yet to understand issues”, such as who would receive the largest share of benefits from an investor. Another facilitator wrote, “They were surprised to see/hear the answers they gave three years ago, and they added the program should continue”, and a third described, “They [the community members] were surprised to see their answers of 2014 and 2017 but amazed by them.”

Another common reaction the data presentation exercise was interest in hearing “what other people in other parts of Liberia said about the condition of their land”, as opportunities for learning about other parts of the country can be limited in remote towns. One facilitator wrote that the bringing data back to the communities “exercise has been of great importance in that it has provided wider knowledge about their land and also help the community members to know about other communities”.

Facilitators also reported encountering common issues that arise during survey data collection, such as initial lack of trust or reticence to respond to questions on some topics (who owns your community's land). In this instance they did not indicate that these topics made participants to uncomfortable to proceed, and the situation was resolved through patient follow up questions and examples by the facilitator. Facilitators also reported some suspicion about why the research team keeps returning for this data in control communities who have less of the whole picture about why this data is being collected and may need reassurance that the research team is not collecting this data because of an interest in acquiring or expropriating their community land. Finally, facilitators noted frustration in control communities about the lack of benefits they have received from the evaluation. This is an important issue in research ethics. In this case, the program and evaluation were designed with the intention that control communities would be part of a lagged treatment group, where they would receive the program after the conclusion of the evaluation, but resource constraints have significantly delayed implementation.

Despite the uncertain future of program implementation, there is widespread hope that findings of this evaluation and its data will spur the passage of the Land Rights Act in Liberia inform the implementation of the associated land reform. As such, communities revealed to facilitators that they would like to make sure that the national government also has access to and uses this data “for further action... to adequately enact into law the Land Rights Act and to help reduce the illegal entrance of people, investors or companies onto the community [land]”. One community requested for central government officials be present at future data sharing exercises to “know how desperately the people would put forward their concerns”.

In terms of next steps, many communities plan to continue along the program steps without outside support. The most common way they plan to do this is to continue working to improve existing land use rules, reinstate old rules, or increase rule enforcement. There is high interest in creating new rules and action plans to improve community land management in treatment communities, and the evaluation findings also evidenced this. Control communities also have an interest in these next steps, and we may see some movement there after this field activity. Additionally, some communities in Maryland are interested in making rules about mining gold and diamonds, but there is not always agreement about if or how this activity should be limited. In one treatment community the youth said, “We are hungry of cash, but the old people stop us from tapping into the resources. We believe it [mining] is the only way our lives can change.” Communities also demonstrated interest in pursuing or continuing other governance improvements. One would like to organize a “community task force to watch over their forestland”. Similarly, another control community would like to organize a ‘forestland governing council’ and yet another would like to re-establish their community land management team.

The other major program activities that communities would like to see through to completion is community land boundary harmonization and demarcation, including surveying. One treatment community plans to continue boundary harmonization meetings with other communities, and another treatment community in Lofa plans to do further work felling trees along their community land boundary so it is clearer. Some communities request help from the Liberian government with surveying their land (as found at midline) and others plan to go forward with this themselves. One facilitator wrote, “They want to survey their land... They will task each citizen to pay for the surveying fees of the town in order to legitimize their ownership”.

To broaden the reach of the program and ensure implementation success where it does already exist, there is also widespread desire for a CLPP follow-on and/or expansion. Several control communities would like to request CLPP-like boundary demarcation and surveying support from the government. One control community plans to “petition central government or humanitarian agencies/organizations to bring land boundary programs to their area”. Treatment communities would also like more support, such as, “A series of awareness programs in their community and its environs to help traditional people understand and remain consistent... that they should be the ones reaching concession agreements [with investors].” One community requested that researchers, USAID, and/or humanitarian organizations “initiate programs in relation to increasing the strength of the CLPP awareness across the county and country”.

Unsurprisingly, there is widespread desire in the communities for the passage of the Land Rights Act (LRA) and that USAID and researchers should work with the government to bring into law the Land Rights Act. In the current environment of legal ambiguity, communities display much frustration with the persistent ambiguity about who owns a community’s land. Many communities stated that while they own their land in principal, the government will control it until the LRA passes. Some communities plan to work with the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) until the LRA has passed. One facilitator wrote, the community will “put in place pre-forestland governance policy at the level of their community while they await the [passage of] the LRA... At least the FDA act has guarded them and helped inform them on forest governance [during the delay in passage of the LRA].” Another facilitator wrote that a community requested “that USAID support the roll-out of the FDA. Why await for the LRA to be enacted into law to pre-govern the forestland and livelihoods and [establish] a good governance system of the forest area, which will prevent people from cutting more wood than they need from the forest and seriously harming the forest?” The FDA also holding trainings in some parts of the study area, “teaching them how to maintain their forest and how to do rotational farming”.

**Conclusion**

This pilot model of community based participatory results sharing contains several benefits of interest to researchers and funders. The activity provides a meaningful contribution to control communities who also donate time to research effort and receive few other benefits. The model also has wide relevance to those who wish to share program evaluation findings in rural areas where audiences may have limited literacy, though the activity can be customized in many ways to suit needs of a variety of stakeholders. This type of activity is also adaptable to the particular study timing and context, and while the case presented in this paper pertains to midline evaluation findings, a similar activity could also occur after baseline data analysis to communicate descriptive findings from baseline. Overall, due to its flexibility, this type of community engagement with findings is a better method for customizing and communicating results to local stakeholders than traditional strategies such as translating long or technical evaluation reports. While this is the first activity of its kind following a land tenure evaluation, the response to it is encouraging, and future activities – such as a planned data sharing activity in Zambia with some deviations from what was implemented in Liberia – will inform best practices for building such activities into future evaluations.

## References

- Balazs, Carolina L., and Rachel Morello-Frosch. "The Three Rs: How Community-Based Participatory Research Strengthens the Rigor, Relevance, and Reach of Science." *Environmental Justice* 6, no. 1 (February 2013): 9–16. doi:10.1089/env.2012.0017.
- Baum, Fran, Colin MacDougall, and Danielle Smith. "Participatory Action Research." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 60, no. 10 (2006): 854–857.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder, 1972.
- Goldman, Michael. "The Birth of a Discipline: Producing Authoritative Green Knowledge, World Bank-Style." *Ethnography* 2, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 191–217. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14661380122230894>.
- McDavitt, Bryce, Laura M. Bogart, Matt G. Mutchler, Glenn J. Wagner, Harold D. Green, Sean Jamar Lawrence, Kieta D. Mutepfa, and Kelsey A. Nogg. "Dissemination as Dialogue: Building Trust and Sharing Research Findings Through Community Engagement." *Preventing Chronic Disease* 13 (March 17, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.5888/pcd13.150473>.
- Roy, Ananya, Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales, Kweku Opoku-Agyemang, and Clare Talwalker. *Encountering Poverty: Thinking and Acting in an Unequal World*. Univ of California Press, 2016.
- Wilmsen, Carl. "Perils on the Road to Participatory Research in Community Forestry." In *Urban and Community Forestry: Working Together to Facilitate Change*, edited by Zhu H. Ning and Kamran K. Abdollahi, 49–56. Southern University, 2005.

**Figures**

Figure 1: Community Land Protection Program Evaluation Study Area, Liberia

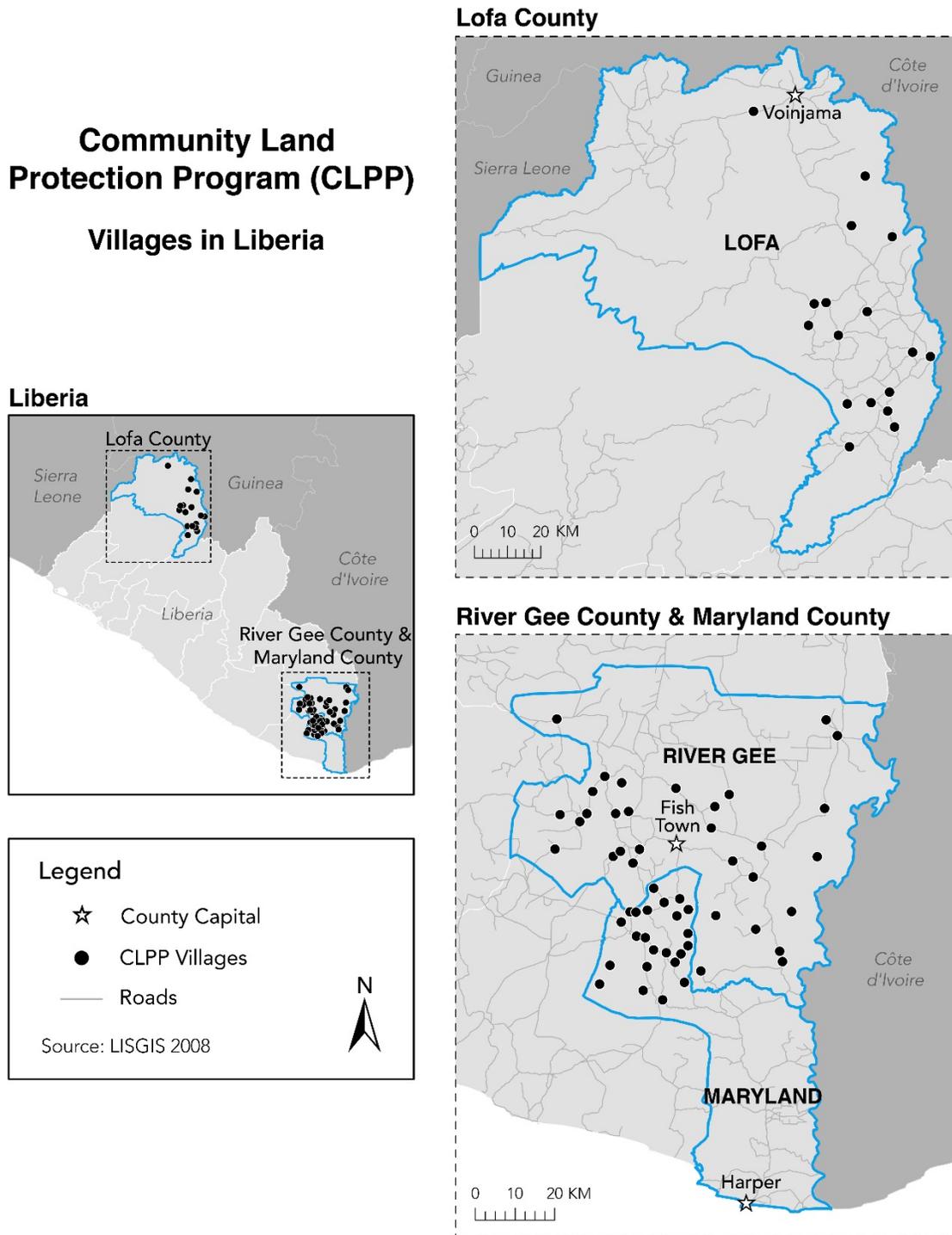


Figure 2: Getting Data Back to the Communities Facilitator Training, Monrovia, Liberia



Figure 3: Data presentation exercise, Lofa county, Liberia



Figure 4: Data presentation exercise, Lofa county, Liberia

