



SUCCESS STORY

Empowering Women To Establish Independent Markets

Strengthening leadership and accountability in Keymah Town



USAID/OTI/LIBERIA

The superintendent of the Keymah Town Market addresses participants at a marketing training session.

USAID/OTI's BRDG-Liberia program was initiated in September 2006 to support the political transition prompted by the free and fair election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected female head of state in Africa.

The Building Recovery and Reform through Democratic Governance (BRDG) program assists the Government of Liberia and other key actors to further the following political objectives:

- Improving capacity in such areas as planning, budgeting, communication, and coordination with relevant counterparts
- Mounting effective responses to high-visibility issues
- Strengthening the Mano River Union by supporting cooperative regional activities

The USAID Mission in Liberia, USAID's Africa Bureau, and the Office of Democracy and Governance are key players in the coordination of the BRDG program.

June 2007 – Many families in Liberia rely on income earned by selling locally grown produce, rice, fish, and imported goods at small markets. These neighborhood markets often belong to – and pay dues to – a national umbrella organization, the Liberia Marketing Association (LMA), although it is not always clear what benefits derive from membership.

In response to the lack of services and support provided by the LMA, the market women of Keymah Town collectively purchased an acre of land so they could establish their own marketplace. The newly organized market and the Community Empowerment Program partnered with OTI to strengthen the market's internal management and oversight structures and provide the women with a viable alternative to LMA membership.

To achieve this goal, an organizational development expert worked closely with the market women of Keymah Town to formalize their leadership and management structures, establish by-laws, and strengthen internal financial management systems. In addition to clarifying roles and responsibilities and holding elections, the market women established standard operating procedures for the market, including accounting systems, and learned how to expand and grow their businesses. The women are continuing to make progress toward formalizing a board of directors, improving vital services such as market sanitation, and establishing member services such as family planning, child care, and literacy and numeracy courses. The organization is also in the process of obtaining legal status as an independent market.

The Keymah Town Market's progress has been shared with the LMA, and practices developed during the project may be instituted in other neighborhood markets to promote good leadership, transparency, and accountability. The Keymah Town Market can provide an example of a successfully managed, independent local market founded on the key pillars of democracy.