

YOUTH HOLD DUTY BEARERS ACCOUNTABLE

ELBAG TRAINING – The story of Gbarmu Town (Power of Solidarity)

- Case Study



In 2020, ActionAid Liberia conducted a training on Economical Literacy Budgeting Accountability and Governance (ELBAG) which has strengthened the capacity and agency of young people to hold duty bearers accountable on SRHR information and services.

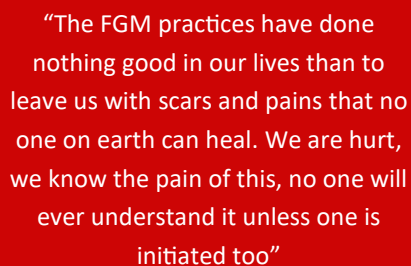
ELBAG is a process and methodological framework that combines organizing people who are at a grassroots level and empowering them with knowledge in the political economy around how the management of the county using participatory tools and methods for building accountability and transparency is implemented. ActionAid Liberia is working with communities through implementing partners to provide technical support, skills, and knowledge in the provision of access to SRHR information and services

Empowerment

Under the Just and Equal Communities project, ActionAid Liberia through Domafeign, one of the implementing partners conducted a series of refresher ELBAG trainings to sharpen the knowledge of young people in the project communities. As a result of these refresher training, young people in Gbarmu Town have managed to advocate for the closure of Poro and Sande bush schools and the step down of the Commissioner of the town for failing to execute his leadership duties.

Gbarmu is a mining town situated in the North-West of Bong County. There is no formal mining in Gbarmu, with bulk of the activities being done by artisanal and largely uncontrolled by authorities.

Power of Voice



“The FGM practices have done nothing good in our lives than to leave us with scars and pains that no one on earth can heal. We are hurt, we know the pain of this, no one will ever understand it unless one is initiated too”

As a result of the ELBAG refresher training and SRHR - Harmful Traditional Practices including FGM conducted in Gbarmu town, the young people especially women got a full understanding of how FGM has affected their lives, and they reconnected with what was happening to their bodies and the consequences that the practice caused in their bodies and relationships, to some, it costed them to lose their marriages. Knowing about FGM is one thing, but experiencing the 28 effects of FGM is another trauma

no one can heal or reverse in women's and girls' lives. Young people of Gbarmu town successfully engaged the local leaders including the commissioner, to express their decision and request for the closure of the Poro and Sande Bush schools. They noted that the operation of these schools has brought misery to their lives. The majority of young women affected fumed with anger, noting that this practice is evil in their lives and it affects the future of most women in Liberia. Their concerns included; the loss of sexual drive that has affected their marriages dearly (most of them are single mothers now), complications in giving birth; some noted that they have periodical unjustified pains that come and go. They further noted that this practice has drastically crippled their opportunities and interest in education after having spent three years in the bush and suffering from FGM pains.

Despite the continuous engagement meetings with the district authorities led by the commissioner of Gbarmu, there were no concrete results concerning the request to close down these schools. Gbarmu CBO with the help of Domafeign approached the County Superintendent in Bong County and expressed their vote of no confidence in the commissioner of the town for failing to execute the duties that he promised to implement.

The government of Liberia through the traditional council and with the help of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has banned the operation of Bush schools (Poro and Sand) until 2024.

Eventually, this led to the resignation of the Commissioner and the closure of the Poro and Sande bush schools in Gbarmu town. The majority of Gbarmu community dwellers in the town were happy about this decision. They also noted that there are many wrong decisions the commissioner had done to the town and were unaddressed.

ActionAid Liberia continues to provide technical support through its Human Rights Based Approach that empowers young people with knowledge and skills. It also encourages young people to connect and network with their peers and use the power of their voice to challenge bad systems implemented and find solutions that bring about healthy change in the communities they live in.