

## **Project Update: March 2010**

In 2009, the Skills and Agricultural Development Services (SADS) and the Advocacy Project- a Washington DC Human Rights based organization, reached a partnership with the aim of sending Peace Fellows to work at SADS during the summer for a period of three months. Mr. Adam Welti was then selected and sent to SADS as a 2009 Peace Fellow, where he works both in rural and urban communities. Based on the wealth of experience and competency Mr. Welti possesses working on environmental education-related issues in other African countries, SADS decided to take advantage of his presence. Upon this backdrop, SADS embarked on the concept of sourcing support to develop an integrated youth environmental rights and education outreach programme in communities with high youth marginalization in Liberia, with the aim of assessing the knowledge and understanding of youths on environmental conservation issues and how they can be trained as forerunner in the development and implementation of a more integrated environmental conservation outreach programme in Liberia.

The grant was then awarded to SADS for the implementation of this concept, and at which time Mr. Welti fellowship 3 months were expire and he had left for Washington DC. However, prior to the awarding of the grant, Mr. Welti started the initial designing of questionnaires which he administered through the interviewing of youths in the project communities. Mr. Welti worked along with SADS field staff as a team to administer the questionnaires, and it targeted cross section youths in community's schools, villages and community groupings. This team also considered interviewing some household heads and prominent individuals so as to assess their understanding about environmental issues. The questionnaires were later analyses upon Mr. Welti return to the Washington DC, and the result was subsequently sent to SADS. It is based on these results that SADS started to implement this project using the grant from the Rufford Small Grant for Nature Conservation.

SADS staff went back to the communities to reassess and vet the results of the assessment that was done under the supervision of Mr. Welti. This time around the team was more specific on trying to understand and document what the drivers of youth unsustainable activities that pose pressure on Wonegizi proposed protected area. The team visited 16 communities namely: Konia, Barziwen, Boi, Kpassigizia, Luyeama, Ziggida, Wakesu, Nekerbuzu, Vetesu, Ayema, Barwen, Borkeza, Karbota, Wozi, Zelemai, Zuwulor. In each of these communities, SADS organized focus group discussion, town hall meetings and other form of traditional forum to gather more information on what needs to be tackle in addressing the threats.

With this information and understanding, SADS tailored the environmental education and awareness messages to reach the appropriate audiences and youths. These education and awareness process followed right after the assessment and will continue throughout the life span of this project. SADS staff used existing environmental and conservation visual aids and literatures provided by the Forestry development Authority, Environmental Protection Agency, Fauna & Flora International and Conservation International for information dissemination and education purposes. In some communities, children where ask to state their understanding of good environmental conservation messages and they were later written on posters and

exhibited to their peers as a motivation. Because of these exercises, kids keep reciting those messages whenever they see SADS staffs in their communities.

Meanwhile, the environmental education and awareness component is an ongoing process. SADS is now in the process of translating the grievances and comments of youth and the information gathered to develop the first draft of the integrated youth environmental rights and education outreach programme with the purpose of changing the behavior of youth, while at the same time highlighting other alternative economic activities that they could undertake to contribute to the sustainable management of their forest resources. This first draft will, when developed, will be circulated to interested stakeholders as well as taking copies back to the communities for vetting before submitting it to donor. SADS want to ensure that youth are fully participate and are adequately consulted not only on this project, but on all project that are meant to promote environmental protection including climate change.



Left: Little Mohammed of Karbota community. Right: Kolubah and Sayba are regular attendance to our town hall awareness meetings in Barziwen community.