

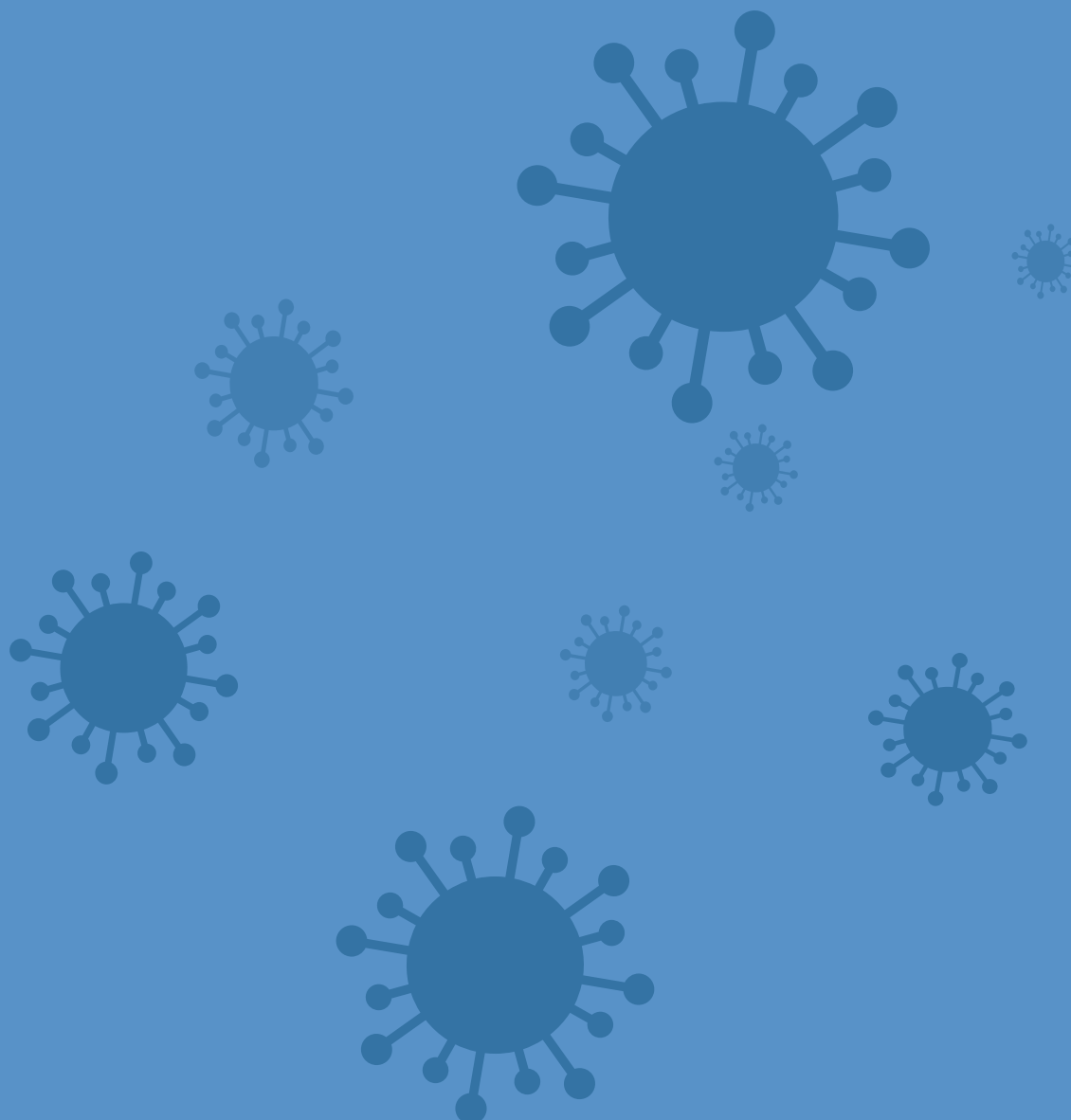


Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations



# National agrifood systems and COVID-19 in Liberia

Effects, policy responses and long-term implications





# National agrifood systems and COVID-19 in Liberia

Effects, policy responses and long-term implications

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Rome, 2020

Required citation:

**FAO.** 2020. *National agrifood systems and COVID-19 in Liberia. Effects, policy responses and long term implications.* Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2114en>

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FAO.

ISBN 978-92-5-133630-4

© FAO, 2020



Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/legalcode>).

Under the terms of this licence, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO logo is not permitted. If the work is adapted, then it must be licensed under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If a translation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: "This translation was not created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original [Language] edition shall be the authoritative edition."

Disputes arising under the licence that cannot be settled amicably will be resolved by mediation and arbitration as described in Article 8 of the licence except as otherwise provided herein. The applicable mediation rules will be the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization <http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules> and any arbitration will be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

**Third-party materials.** Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

**Sales, rights and licensing.** FAO information products are available on the FAO website ([www.fao.org/publications](http://www.fao.org/publications)) and can be purchased through [publications-sales@fao.org](mailto:publications-sales@fao.org). Requests for commercial use should be submitted via: [www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request](http://www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request). Queries regarding rights and licensing should be submitted to: [copyright@fao.org](mailto:copyright@fao.org).

This country profile covers responses and effects up to September 2020

## INTRODUCTION

---

The COVID-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on health systems all around the world. The drastic measures established to contain its spread are creating serious impediments to economic activity (including agrifood systems) and, consequently, to livelihoods and food security and nutrition.

The COVID-19 outbreak demonstrates both how health and food systems are linked to one another, and how local food systems are linked to global systems. High rates of urbanization and the globalization of trade and travel have contributed to the spread of the virus across countries. Lockdowns and movement restrictions within countries and across borders have disrupted national and local food and agricultural output and input markets and have caused sharp reductions in overall economic activity globally. In poorer countries, disruptions have further exacerbated the fragility of systems (including agrifood systems) and livelihoods.

The Global Report on Food Crises 2020 found that 135 million people in 55 countries and territories are facing acute food insecurity at “crisis” level or higher – a situation that requires urgent action. The report further concluded that over 183 million people were experiencing a “stressed” level of acute food insecurity and bore a high risk of sliding into a “crisis” level if confronted by with additional shocks (FSIN, 2020). The situation is particularly worrisome in light of the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the situation evolves, the question arises as to how, or whether, food, health and financial and economic systems could become better prepared to prevent similar outbreaks from escalating into a full-blown economic and social crisis.

This report is part of a series of country profiles that describe: (i) policy measures enacted by governments to contain the spread of the virus; (ii) policies and measures to stabilize the functioning of agri-food systems; (iii) potential effects of policies on agri-food systems and vulnerable groups. Finally, the profiles also assess longer-term options for agri-food system policies and investments so as to make them more resilient.

## POLICY MEASURES TO CONTAIN COVID-19

---

### What major measures have been taken to contain the spread of the virus? How are they evolving?

#### State of emergency

- On 10 April 2020, President Weah announced a state of emergency (SoE) and a lockdown, initially for a period of three weeks. The SoE was confirmed by the Parliament and extended to 90 days on 19 April. Under the SoE, residents could only leave their homes to seek medical assistance or obtain food. These trips were restricted to neighbouring communities and limited to one person per household for a maximum of one hour. On 8 May, the SoE was extended for an additional 14 days, with some flexibility to allow churches and mosques to reopen on 17 May at 25 percent capacity.
- On 17 June, President Weah requested the legislature to extend the SoE for an additional 30 days until 21 July based on reports of a drastic increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, which peaked at over 650 cases on 24 June. Curfew, which had been extended to 21.00, was brought back to 18.00.
- The SoE required a suspension of all international travel. Travel restrictions were eased in late June and international flights resumed on 28 June, albeit only for a few of the pre-COVID routes. Wide consultations were held to determine whether and when to reopen the Monrovia airport (United States Embassy in Liberia, 2020a). This resulted in the implementation of strict public health protocols, including screening, testing and quarantine procedures at the airport. Since the reopening of the airport, scheduled flights have been cancelled at the last moment for a variety of reasons.<sup>1</sup>
- The SoE expired on 21 July and the Ministry of Health (MoH) announced public health measures (WorldAware, 2020) on 22 July to curtail the spread of COVID-19. These include wearing face masks in public and at government institutions, social distancing and handwashing. In addition, the MoH established capacity limits for banks, supermarkets and public transportation for both employees and the general public (United States Embassy in Liberia, 2020b).
- Liberia's borders were closed at the time of the initial SoE restrictions. With the expiration of the SoE and the lifting of internal movements, all land borders remain closed until further notice. However land borders are porous so informal/illegal movement of goods might have been taking place.
- Despite the expiration of the SoE, intercounty movements are still restricted among Liberia's 15 counties, with the exception of Montserrado and Margibi Counties, which are quarantined as a single unit. During field visits, staff from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) witnessed such restrictions at county border points. Namely, commuters are not allowed to cross the border between Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties after 16.00. Coupled with poor road conditions, this situation hampers the free movement of vehicles, which is worrisome given that no special consideration appears to be given to vehicles carrying food items or medical supplies (Kapee, 2020), despite existing exemptions for food supply (United States Embassy in Liberia, 2020a).

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with local travel agents.

- It is still unclear whether and how other containment measures apply, including curfews and quarantine measures. In Monrovia, the situation seems to have returned to some form of normalcy.<sup>2</sup>

### Restriction on markets/trade

- When the news about COVID-19 pandemic appeared in international media together with the news about an outbreak and its spread in Monrovia, authorities started adopting some strict measures, even before the announcement of the state of emergency in April. Measures included the closing of street markets and Sunday markets. The Red-Light and Duala markets are the two largest markets in the city and they serve as a feeder to the other markets such as Old Road, Rally Time and West Point markets.
- Street markets (including for food) and sales on Sunday were suspended throughout the country when the SoE was announced in April (Daily Observer, 2020a). Following the expiration of the SoE on 21 July, street sales are allowed from 06.00–18.00.
- During the SoE, there were some exemptions to the movement and trade restrictions for: i) the production, distribution, and marketing of food,<sup>3</sup> beverages, pharmaceuticals and medicines; ii) environmental and sanitation activities; iii) members of the security forces; iv) essential staff of government, electricity and water authorities, telecommunications organizations, banks and hotels; and v) employees of fuel stations.
- With the expiration of the SoE, restaurants, and stores selling food, dry goods, building materials, and electronic appliances have been allowed to operate if they enforce 25 percent capacity and adhere to social distancing measures (WorldAware, 2020).
- Following the end of the SoE, face masks remain mandatory in public spaces, while churches and mosques are allowed to operate with 25 percent capacity.

## AGRIFOOD POLICY MEASURES TO RESPOND TO THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

### What are the major measures (in place or expected) to be enacted aiming at the food system directly?

The food distribution system in Liberia is heavily dominated by small, independent transporters. The movement restrictions imposed during the SoE have significantly affected the link between agricultural product/food producers and consumers. Imports of food were also impacted by the transport restrictions. According to a Public Service Announcement by the Ministry of Transport, transport and movement restrictions of commercial and non-commercial vehicles have disrupted the entire supply system (Ministry of Transport, 2020).

### Implemented measures

- At the onset of the pandemic, President Weah announced a **USD 25 million plan for affected counties**. The programme, which was to last 60 days, included food distribution to households, electricity and water support as well as the provision of loans under the Market

---

<sup>2</sup> Personal observation.

<sup>3</sup> The exemption for food production is because farmers have to be home by 15.00 in order to observe the movement restrictions. According to news media, farmers in Cape Mount even requested 'special consideration'.

Women and Small Informal Petty Traders Bank programme and a President's Tax Policy and Administration Stimulus Programme.

- The Minister of Finance and Development Planning and the Minister of Agriculture signed a **cash collateral guarantee agreement** with the Afriland Bank on 26 March. The facility will provide agricultural loans to enable rice processing companies to purchase paddy from smallholder rice farmers to process for the domestic market. Although the agreement was made before COVID-19, the implementation is timely since it allows Liberia to address the shortage of rice due to border closures.
- **The Market Women and Small Informal Petty Traders Bank Loan Programme** was approved by the Senate and House of Representatives to support businesses existing before 1 January 2020. Following the extension of the SoE, both legislative bodies passed a joint resolution to approve a modified version of the programme, adding credit unions and related entities that are registered and doing business (Browne, 2020). The main aim of the programme was to assist market women and small informal petty traders in all sectors to repay debt to commercial banks and other creditors. The programme sought to alleviate losses suffered from trading and selling due to curfew, movement restrictions and market closures. While the loan programme was created before COVID-19, the payback conditions were relaxed to alleviate the impact of the pandemic on the daily earnings of vulnerable groups.

Fisheries currently contribute at least 10 percent to Liberia's gross domestic product (GDP). The coastal area is home to some 58 percent of the country's population. The fisheries sector provides full-time employment and livelihoods for about 11 250 people and employ perhaps hundreds of thousands more on a part-time basis (World Bank, 2019). Ships headed for the deep sea once carried nine or ten fishermen, but due to COVID-19 safety protocols, the number was reduced to seven, while crews were cut back from 20 to 15 people (Harris, 2020a). As a result, the National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority (NaFAA), in consultation with major fish importers and the Liberia Marketing Association, agreed to **reduce the price of fish products by USD 2.00 per carton** (Daily Observer, 2020b). The reduction came into effect on 13 April and continues until now. According to different sources (FAO, 2018), Liberia's maximum annual fish catch – including by local fisherman – is around 7 136 tonnes. Six Chinese supertrawlers arrived in June with the capacity to catch more than 12 000 tonnes of fish in a year, almost double the local catch. This will affect the livelihoods of local fishing communities, especially in coastal areas and counties, such as Margibi (Marshall), Grand Cess and Robertsport, which have been hard hit by COVID-related restrictions (Brooks, 2020). Fishing communities and associations<sup>4</sup> have asked the government to only allow supertrawlers to enter Liberian waters if they have licences, follow Liberian law, practice sustainable fishing and do not threaten the livelihoods of local coastal communities.

- Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, price monitoring was largely inadequate, limited to a few commodities and only carried out in Monrovia. In Ganta, about 200 miles away from the capital, the business community complained that the lack of price regulation was “making things hard for the people” (Menkor, 2020) even before the COVID-19 crisis hit Liberia. Based on concerns over potential price hikes during lockdown, the MoA began **monitoring the market prices of basic agricultural products** in late April with support from the European Union-Liberia Agriculture Programme – Prosperous Agriculture Roadmap to Nutrition and Entrepreneurship, Reinforcing Sustainability (EULAP-PARTNERS) Programme. Data are

---

<sup>4</sup> With closed borders, it takes around 2-4 months for ships/cargos to reach Liberian ports from Asia and 2-3 months from Europe and America. Therefore, the announcement may have found supertrawlers already at sea.



reported weekly at four market levels: urban (Monrovia's Red Light and Duala markets), semi-urban (county capitals), rural (local communities) and county (MoA, 2020a). Initially Monrovia, Kakata, Greenville and rural markets in Margibi and Bomi were used for collecting the prices of various food commodities, including rice per cup, gari, wet fufu ball, bony fish and stock cubes, for which price increases had been observed in both urban and rural markets. However, food price increases due to COVID-19 have been difficult to isolate, due to the effects of high inflation, seasonal demand and poor road conditions brought on by the rainy season.

- On 8 May, Liberia's Executive Committee on Coronavirus (ECOC), and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) launched an **agriculture transport permit system**, the Movement and Control Service (MOCO). This allows farmers, food producers, processors and sellers to use a mobile phone-enabled platform to obtain cross-county passes for transporting their food products during the lockdown. The MoA's county coordinators report that lockdown restrictions on farmers are easing as they initiate the farming season (MoA, 2020a). In most counties, farmers are carrying out land clearing and preparation, while in others, they have already started planting (MoA, 2020a).
- The Department of Customs introduced procedures to facilitate trade and exchange with neighbouring countries, which included: i) measures to facilitate the cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies, including food; ii) measures to support the economy and sustain supply chain continuity through economic stimulus; iii) measures to protect customs staff from COVID-19; and iv) measures to stop the import of fake drugs and other uncertified medical supplies, including testing kits (MoA, 2020b).
- Civil society organizations (CSOs) and human rights activists have called for the borders between Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea to be reopened to transborder economic activities in early September; these exchanges were an important source of livelihoods for many families living in the most remote parts of Liberia.
- The MoA, CSOs, county farms and some private service providers are supporting **local food distribution and home delivery**. Producers from farms in northern and central Liberia as well as local farmers (those producing for and supplying to their own villages) are facilitating the supply of fruits and vegetables, oil palm, and poultry to their communities and local markets through phone orders and home deliveries (MoA, 2020b). Small-scale producers and farm owners have been encouraged by the government and CSOs to liaise with service providers to use digital technologies that link farmers to markets and to sell their produce in urban areas as well as in their own communities.
- **A rice seed voucher scheme** was launched in June under the USAID-funded *Feed the Future Liberia Agribusiness Development Activity* (LADA). The project aims to distribute quality rice seeds to 1 500 rice farmers in Bong, Nimba and Lofa Counties (New Dawn, 2020).
- Access to seeds and equipment.<sup>5</sup>
- The MoA and relevant stakeholders and partners have developed a joint COVID-19 Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihood Response Plan to face COVID-19 impact. Drawing on its regional and district agriculture coordinators, the MoA has started to collect data on rice stockpiles in all districts to facilitate the purchase of rice seed under the emergency food security response plan.

---

<sup>5</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) makes significant progress in the procurement circle of basic agro equipment, inputs and seeds covered under its World Bank's funded Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) to mitigate food security shocks.

- The MoA will expedite the local purchase of tools, equipment and seeds to support farmers during the upcoming planting season. The government and its development partners have reprogrammed many ongoing projects and activities to address the challenges of COVID-19, including by providing seed and other inputs, capacity building and purchases of produce from farmers. Despite border closures with neighbouring countries, local farmers are now exploring cross-border cultural ties to bring in vital agriculture inputs and tools, which are scarce along Liberia's border towns.
- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI) inspected the warehouse at the Freeport of Monrovia to ensure that there were sufficient stocks of rice (34 000 tonnes) to meet local demand during the SoE (Koinyeneh, 2020). Rice is the most important food commodity in Liberia. According to the National Investment Commission, the average Liberian consumes 120 kg of rice per year (NIC, 2020). The MoA is also assessing stock levels of major food commodities held by the commercial sector and is supporting the establishment of government food reserves, mainly for rice and cassava.

### Announced measures

The implementation of the MoA's COVID-19 Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihood Response Plan has been planned with the support of development partners, the United Nations agencies and CSOs. The plan articulates four key actions: i) purchase and pre-position emergency food stock to make it available where needed; ii) expand the cultivation of rice, cassava and vegetables; iii) improve coordination; and iv) support agroprocessing. The MoA is working closely with the national response coordinator for the ECOC to ease the restrictions of the lockdown on fishermen, cooperatives and rice farmers. The MoA has prompted discussions by the ECOC on whether and how to allow cross-border/cross-county movement of poultry feed, cattle and sheep (although food commodities were exempted from regional transport restrictions, the movement of livestock and poultry has been restricted to control the spread of the virus).

The MoA's COVID-19 Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihood Response Plan includes:

- Measures to allow formal and informal markets for food commodities to function safely. These include periodically opening and closing the markets to allow regular sanitization. Poor households sell and purchase from informal markets and keeping the markets open is expected to help protect them from plunging deeper into poverty. In addition, policies that facilitate opening 'green channels' for moving food commodities and agricultural inputs across counties are encouraged, aided by an effective platform for intercounty coordination (Schmidhuber *et al.*, 2020).
- Guidelines for social distancing when carrying out agricultural production and marketing activities, including land preparation and planting, and for regulating access to markets by buyers and sellers of food commodities. These guidelines are shared with communities and farmers through extension workers and farmer organizations. As mentioned above, farmers were allowed to work from 06.00 till 15.00. However, in practice, farmers either prefer to work early morning or in evening. The implication is that some of the farm work was not completed. To implement social distancing, farming groups were advised to reduce the number of farmers from 50 to five at a time, effectively abolishing group farming to contain the spread of COVID-19. However, such measures may cause a decline in the county's rice production (Harris, 2020b).
- Redesigning school feeding as 'pick-up/grab and go' programmes to protect the nutritional status of children that depend on feeding programmes.

- Extending the moratorium on repayment of agricultural loans offered through government programmes to include loans offered by the commercial sector.
- Promoting ‘corona victory gardens’<sup>6</sup> to increase household food production by facilitating access to farming implements, tools and seeds.
- Promoting labour-intensive agricultural production infrastructure, including secondary and tertiary irrigation infrastructure (canals), the rehabilitation of tertiary roads that connect farmers to markets, and other forms of rural infrastructure.
- Supporting input delivery networks. Upstream support enables wholesalers, distributors and agrovets to meet working capital needs, while downstream support involves organizing the distribution of seed, fertilizer, agrochemicals and extension and advisory services to farmers in places where input markets face severe challenges due to movement restrictions. For example, FAO and the Government of Liberia (GoL) distributed 1 500 kg of maize seeds to five communities in Nimba, while the MOA has plans to distribute 58 tonnes of processed rice seeds to 1 500 farmers in Bong, Lofa and Nimba Counties through a voucher system overseen by a certified agro-inputs dealer.
- The MoA plans to produce high-yielding and early maturing rice varieties under its Africa rice project. Those seeds are now at the tiller stage (MoA, 2020c). The state-owned *Liberia Agriculture Commodity Regulatory Authority* (LACRA) has begun the distribution of 500 high-yielding cocoa seedlings to farmers in Grand Cape Mount County in western Liberia. While this programme is not directly linked to the COVID-19 response, it will enable this region, which is noted for oil palm, cassava and fisheries, to diversify into cocoa production.
- Other partners<sup>7</sup> are contributing to the objectives of the emergency plan. The purchase of rubber came to a halt due to the number of COVID-19 cases reported in the counties therefore the private sector stopped its operations in rubber-producing areas.<sup>8</sup> On 15 July, Liberia’s largest and oldest foreign-owned rubber plantation, Firestone, agreed to purchase limited quantities of rubber (1.75 million dry lbs) from smallholders, who had depended on the company’s purchases for years.
- Constructing or rehabilitating warehouses for agricultural commodities with the understanding that the infrastructure would then be offered as part of a public-private-partnership (PPP) and that jobs would be created in the short run. Such PPP programmes and approaches promote and strengthen the local capacity, reduce the dependency on external resources and provide opportunities for skilled and unskilled employment at local level. The increased capacity will, in the long run, enable the expansion and implementation of warehousing receipt systems and commodity exchanges.
- Building assets for small-scale processing of staples, e.g. milling and drying maize; drying, packaging and agroprocessing cassava; fish smoking and drying; and milling and cleaning rice. For example, the MoA provided a power tiller to the Makona River Rice Farm to enhance its production capacity.

---

<sup>6</sup> Home Grown gardens to grow fruits vegetables and poultry to nourish families and communities with limited exposure to COVID-19.

<sup>7</sup> The Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization project (SAPEC), Smallholder Agriculture Transformation and Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Liberia Forest Sector Project (LFSP), The World Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the Asian Development Bank and the private sector.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Liberia Agriculture Commodity Regulatory Authority (LACRA), private agents that normally buy cocoa and coffee, who are mostly stationed in Monrovia, are no longer traveling leeward to buy these export crops. This may cause a shrink in Liberia’s revenue envelope and affect the livelihood of tree crop farmers in Lofa and Nimba Counties.

- Upgrading the sanitary infrastructure in wet markets, including the supply of water and sanitation services, and providing necessities such as sanitizers to market participants.
- Providing grants for communal infrastructure, such as boreholes, micropower generation, drainage channels, etc.
- Expanding mechanization to ramp up land preparation and alleviate short-term supply shortages of labour due to COVID-19-related movement restrictions. The approach might involve partnering with tractor booking service providers that operate akin to Uber and linking them with clusters of farmers across the country.
- Providing individual grants to farmers to support the purchase of irrigation equipment, the procurement of equipment for poultry production, innovative solutions for small-scale preservation of food, and biogas equipment for the green management of agricultural waste. For example, the MoA and World Bank-funded Smallholder Agriculture Transformation and Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P) plans to give USD 10 000 matching grants to small and medium agribusinesses, input service providers and agrodealers-aggregators to help them mitigate the impact of COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>
- Designing a national food and seed bank strategy and establishing reserves for long-term solutions to food insecurity in emergencies.
- An Executive Order was issued on 27 April that directed the National Food Assistance Agency (NFAA) to purchase unsold produce from farmers to be processed and stored for distribution to schools and other institutions in case of need or emergency. However, no action has yet taken place.

### What policy measures are in place or expected that aim to mitigate the effect of the crisis on vulnerable groups and their livelihoods?

Household food insecurity was an issue in Liberia prior to the COVID-19 crisis, with 18 percent of households considered food insecure in 2018 (CFSNS, 2018). The prevalence of undernourishment is reported at around 37.5 percent (2017-2019), while the prevalence of severe food insecurity in the total population is reported at around 60.4 percent (FAO *et al.*, 2020). Following the implementation of the SoE, it is expected that the proportion of food insecure households will have increased, particularly since many households engaged in informal employment will be left with little or no income in a country where 50.9 percent of households already live in poverty (LISGIS, 2016).

### Mitigating the effects of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups

The COVID-19 Household Food Support Programme (COHFSP) was established in April with the intention of providing a safety net for poor households during the lockdown (MoA, 2020d; IMF, 2020). It has since scaled up to become a national feeding programme whose aim is to tackle increased food insecurity triggered by the pandemic. The Liberian legislature passed a revised budget to free up resources to finance the programme, which also receives support from the World Food Programme (WFP). A joint resolution by the legislatures stated that the COHFSP will purchase locally-produced food for disadvantaged groups, including marginalized youth, the homeless, orphanages, senior citizens, people with disabilities, health workers and security personnel tasked with enforcing the SoE (Browne, 2020).

---

<sup>9</sup> 40 Formalized MSMEs Agribusinesses, input service providers and agro-dealers, aggregators for an amount up to 10 000 and about 60 Informal MSMEs agribusinesses, input service providers and agro-dealers, aggregators for a maximum amount of 1 000 USD.

The COHFSP programme is providing a month's supply of food (50 kg of rice, 10 kg of beans and 1 gallon of vegetable oil per household) to around 2.5 million people across Liberia. A national steering committee was established by the President to ensure that the COHFSP is implemented in the best interests of the most vulnerable populations. The steering committee supplies the broad terms of reference for the food support programme as well as providing strategic oversight and operational guidance. Data from the Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) data will be the primary basis for beneficiary selection, particularly for community-based distribution (Kollie, 2020).

On 27 April, an executive order mandated the NFAA to introduce food stamps and free meals for vulnerable categories of people, including people with disabilities, single parents, pregnant women and lactating mothers, the elderly, people living with a chronic disease, malnourished children and front-line workers. The NFAA is also required to establish storage and processing facilities for local crops (cassava, plantain, eddoes and rice) to be distributed to vulnerable communities.

As of 7 April, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) had started working on non-conditional social cash transfer programmes (both through existing programmes and under the COHFSP) for the poorest of the poor, conducting a series of virtual meetings of the social protection technical working group and developing a concept note for resource mobilization.

The Liberian Household Social Registry is a national information system that includes data on potential beneficiaries, enabling them to be matched with an appropriate social protection programme, including social cash transfers to vulnerable groups, such as women, disabled persons, street children and elderly people. The Social Registry is currently collecting data on over 200 000 households in four counties (Bomi, Bong, Maryland and Nimba) for use by COHFSP and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with LISGIS to conduct spot checks and household surveys in other food-insecure counties.

Supported by the World Bank, the MoGCSP is implementing the Liberia Social Safety Net Project, which provides income support to households that are both extremely poor and food insecure, a key step toward a basic national safety net delivery system.

The MoH and its partners have expanded their infant and young child feeding and complementary feeding programmes in response to COVID-19 pandemic. The WFP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other stakeholders, is providing take-home dry rations to nearly 100 000 girls and boys to avert child hunger for children who stayed at home to avoid exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic (UNICEF, 2020). Under this partnership, WFP and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) will assist the government to ensure that when the schools reopen, returning children benefit from school meals and health programmes. This will also provide an incentive for parents to send their children back to school. The school feeding programmes administered by the WFP have been modified to adapt to the lockdown: in-kind food support is now directed to take-home food rations and is estimated to cover around 45 000 vulnerable households (Parley, 2020, IMF, 2020). With additional financing, these can be scaled up to reach as much as 335 000 vulnerable households (Parley, 2020). The agencies are working together to track children in need of school meals through an online school meals map (WFP, 2020).

The MoA, MoH, FAO and other partner organizations have launched a number of campaigns to raise awareness around: i) the importance of dietary diversity, especially for children and women; ii) how to identify locally-available nutritious foods; iii) recipes using nutritious foods, which are

promoted during participatory cooking sessions; and iv) building the capacity of health workers, including community health assistants, on child feeding and providing accurate information on dietary diversity.

### How is the government funding the measures described above?

- The Liberian Government, Senate and House of Representatives have announced a USD 25 million stimulus package that includes a national food support programme for food distribution throughout all 15 counties, prioritizing the most badly affected<sup>10</sup> and relying on locally-produced food to the extent possible.
- The World Bank/International Development Association (IDA) approved USD 10.5 million in financing to help Liberia respond to the pandemic.<sup>11</sup> The programme targets food and agriculture, including distribution and increased production.
- The World Bank announced its intention to provide USD 17 million to partly finance the national emergency response plan.
- On 14 March, the government and the World Bank signed a financing agreement totalling USD 40 million dollars to provide direct budgetary support for FY2019/2020.
- The MoA's COVID-19 Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihood Response Plan has a budget of USD 20 million of which different development partners including The World Bank is contributing funds. Some of the funds needed to support the plan are being secured by reprogramming existing developmental projects and programmes, i.e. STAR-P, the Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization project (SAPEC).
- The NAFAA, WFP and the MoA signed a memorandum of understanding to activate a component of the Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) of the STAR-P project – valued at USD 5 million – in support of the COHFSP.
- On 5 May, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved the disbursement of USD 50 million to Liberia under the its Rapid Credit Facility to support the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The GoL and Afriland Bank have signed a cash collateral guarantee agreement valued at USD 700 000, to enhance rice production, processing and distribution.
- The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), announced initial funding of USD 488 983, which may increase, to help Liberia respond to COVID-19, and rebuild in the post pandemic period. These funds target support to small-scale producers and poor rural households.
- The European Union has agreed to disburse nearly USD 15 million from both pre-COVID-19 budget support and reallocations.
- With the announcement of SoE in Liberia, the African Development Bank (AfDB), in collaboration with the GoL, has planned to determine the Bank's support to Liberia under AfDB's recently announced USD 10 billion COVID-19 support to African countries. The Board of Directors of the AfDB approved USD 14 million direct budget support for Liberia. The funding is expected to be tailored largely towards financing vulnerable female-headed

---

<sup>10</sup> Montserrado and Margibi are the counties most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, but they are not the most food-insecure counties in Liberia.

<sup>11</sup> In response to a request from the GoL, this funding was drawn from the Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) of the World Bank-funded STAR-P project, which kicked off in 2019 and is supervised by the MoA.



household and children attending school. Other targeted beneficiaries include the business community and small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs).

- The Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT)<sup>12</sup> provided about USD 500 million in grant-based debt service relief, including a recent USD 185 million pledge by the United Kingdom and USD 100 million from Japan.
- China and the Netherlands have also announced they would extend their support.
- Under the President's plan, free electricity will be provided to residents of Monrovia. The Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC) received a check for USD 4 million dollars, representing a significant settlement of government arrears to the entity, to pay the electricity bills of households in the affected counties for the duration of the lockdown.
- Overall, more than 85 percent of Liberia's social safety net budget comes from donor contributions. The current fiscal environment has been aggravated by slow growth, recent fuel shortages, public salary arrears, limited economic opportunities, devaluation of the Liberian dollar and foreign exchange constraints constitute serious obstacles in the expansion of domestic financing of social protection programmes (OCHA,2020).

## IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS ON MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM

---

### What are the immediate effects of the crisis and the different sets of measures on agrifood systems?

The COVID-19 crisis arrived at a time when food prices had been rising across Liberia, mainly due to restrictions on imports, mostly of rice and frozen food (Sieh, 2020),<sup>13</sup> which left the country with a cereal deficit of about two million tonnes. In addition, the beginning of 2020 saw fuel shortages, which led to cost-driven price increases on commodities. Since the pandemic began, price fluctuations on basic commodities have been observed in local markets, where importers and big traders exploit the lack of price regulation mechanisms to increase prices (Menkor, 2020).

Cocoa bean production in Liberia is estimated at between 7 000 to 17 000 tonnes annually, with an unknown amount of cocoa beans informally exported to neighbouring countries, such as Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone (Bar Talks, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the export of cocoa and coffee as exporters are no longer buying from farmers due to fear of COVID-19 outbreak in the cocoa producing counties/areas. In the meantime, cocoa and coffee are rapidly perishing in warehouses.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> The Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT) allows the IMF to provide grants for debt relief to the poorest and most vulnerable countries hit by catastrophic natural disasters or public health crises. The relief on debt service payments frees up additional resources to meet exceptional balance of payment needs created by the disaster and actions needed for containment and recovery. Established in February 2015 during the Ebola outbreak and modified in March 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CCRT grants complement donor financing and IMF concessional lending through the Poverty Reduction and Growth Trust (PRGT).

<sup>13</sup> The restriction on rice was imposed before the COVID-19 pandemic but was implemented in March 2020. Rice importation is licensed to registered businesses, which must meet certain predetermined and published minimum requirements. One of these is the capacity to maintain buffer stock equal to 25 percent of their quota allocation. This allocation is subjected to a performance-based review annually and adjusted accordingly. The process is intended to ensure an uninterrupted supply of rice at an affordable price and to guarantee availability even during periods of challenge.

<sup>14</sup> Information provided by LACRA officials. The Liberian Agricultural Commodities Regulatory Authority (LACRA) serves as state regulator of all agricultural trade, particularly that involving cocoa, coffee, and oil palm.

COVID-related challenges add to structural problems in the sector such as old trees, aging farmers and lack of appropriate knowledge/capacity of smallholders and entrepreneurs.

The Farmers Union Network of Liberia, which has 54 000 members, has highlighted three key challenges faced by Liberian farmers due to COVID-19:

- limited access to planting materials and inputs due to high prices and disrupted supply chains;
- too many checkpoints along the highways, creating unnecessary delays for the transport of food commodities to markets;
- limited market access by farmers growing paddy rice for sale due to movement restrictions, mainly linked to the government difficulties to purchase from farmers at doorstep and stock/reserve for emergency (MoA, 2020d).

Oil palm farmers are now requesting payment in food instead of cash from large holders, raising concerns around food insecurity among smallholders if large holders cannot supply them with food items.<sup>15</sup> The price of imported food continues to be higher in rural parts of Liberia. According to Liberia's market price monitoring report (MOA *et al.*, 2020), markets in rural communities continue to report comparatively higher food prices compared to markets in Monrovia and environs. Imported food prices are also higher in rural areas due to poor road conditions.

## Markets

In Liberia, access to food depends on the flow of agricultural produce among the different counties and markets. Red Light and Duala are the two largest markets in Monrovia, and they serve as a feeder to other markets, such as Old Road, Rally Town and West Point. Because the flow of agricultural commodities to Monrovia was restricted during the SoE, producers experienced tremendous difficulties trying to source new markets for their goods. Informal markets have been relatively more affected than have organized value chains. Farmers that rely on wet markets found it difficult to move their goods to the markets, thus incurring higher losses than farmers connected to formal value chains.

## Food loss and waste

Disruption in food markets resulted in increased food loss across the value chains. Rice losses have relatively more impact at the farm level since most farmers rely on spot markets. The MoA, with the support of its agriculture coordinators, has sought to support farmers by purchasing the rice they were unable to sell due to the dearth of buyers in local markets. Perishable commodities, including fruits and vegetables, tomatoes, dairy and meat products, and fish, were badly affected; inadequate storage facilities and the lack of proper infrastructure and road networks caused the loss of significant amounts of food. In Grand Cape Mount County, the high cost of public transport from one location to another led to an increase in the price of 50 kg size of Gari, the local name for granulated/fermented cassava. Here, the MoA's coordinators report huge stocks of vegetables with no buyers. This region, with impassable dirt roads during this time of the year, includes Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Maryland, River Gee and Sinoe Counties.

## Price movements

As the SoE got underway, there were concerns that many commodities, especially perishables, would be lost, incurring huge economic losses for farmers (Daily Observer, 2020), while causing

---

<sup>15</sup> Information provided by officials from National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (NOPPOL).



shortages and price increases in other parts of the country. After initial increases in March and April, the prices of many commodities have stabilized (MoA, 2020f), although the situation seems to vary across the country. Food prices remain stable in many rural areas, according to some county agriculture coordinators reports (MoA, 2020f), while other coordinators highlight that the shortage of some fruits and vegetables in the market. For example, a 50 kg bag of cabbage that sold for USD 40 before the lockdown is now marketed at USD 75.

The effect of the COVID-19 containment measures on supply chains for perishables led to significant scarcity and higher prices. The weekly report *Liberia on market monitoring – food security and economic implications* published by ZOA (an international relief and recovery organization) collects data at four market levels as has been noted previously. The latest report available online, dated 24 April 2020, showed an increase in the price of basic commodities but the cause remains unclear. The report also points to differences between rural and urban markets in terms of price increases during the month of April. Livestock imports have been disrupted as a result of border closures and are unable to meet market demand for fresh meat. As a result, prices increased for mutton and beef, with a pound of cow meat that previously sold for LRD 450 (USD 4.50) now going for LRD 550 (USD 2.94), while the price of a pound of goat meat jumped from LRD 700 (USD 3.74) to LRD 800 (USD 4.27) in Monrovia.

### Access to agricultural inputs

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted agricultural input supply networks for seeds, fertilizers, agrochemicals and technical advice. Agricultural inputs have become less available due to restrictions on the movement of people, disturbances in transportation services, and border closures. Poor road conditions, heavy rains and high transportation costs further compound the issue. As a result, the planting season, which started during the SoE, has been heavily disrupted, putting the next season's harvest at risk. Limited access to quality inputs could result in lower than usual rice yields in the next cropping season. Local farmers are now exploring cross-border options to bring in vital agriculture inputs and tools, which are scarce along Liberia's border (MoA, 2020f).

While the lessons drawn from the Ebola epidemic in 2014-2016 point to the resilience of the agriculture sector, mainly in terms of maintaining production and distribution channels, movement restrictions were less extensive during the Ebola outbreak.

### Restricted labour movement

Restrictions in the movement of agricultural labour have also affected production across Liberia, particularly in the south-eastern region. The implementation of such restrictions was discretionary and varied from one local government to another. For example, some farmers in the southern region (River Gee County) were compelled to leave at 15.00. Farm sizes are relatively small in the south-eastern region, and the production systems are relatively labour intensive. The social distancing SOPs required by the government have drastically affected the practice of pooling family labour in the villages: the 'labour-go-round' and 'kuu' arrangements where villagers work on one farm at a time to carry out land preparation and planting activities.

In farming systems that are relatively more labour intensive, such as poultry and fish, the short-term effects of the containment measures of the movement of labour has been exacerbated by the morbidity effect as a significant number of people fell ill with COVID-19 in many counties.

### School programmes

All 5 423 schools of Liberia's were closed, affecting over 1.4 million students nationwide (including 650 000 girls). School closures not only interrupted educational progress, they also curtailed

normal social interaction, limited access to essential family services, including school nutrition and health programmes, and created additional burden for mothers, who have had to adjust food distribution within the household at a time when incomes are decreasing. While the national government is working on measures to continue school programmes, the logistics are likely to be challenging at least in the short term and this could have nutritional impacts.

### **What have been the effects of the crisis and government measures on livelihoods, food security and malnutrition status, and future prospects?**

COVID-19 might well exacerbate food insecurity in Liberia. The 2018 Comprehensive Food and Nutrition Security Survey reported that 18 percent of Liberian households are food insecure, while 42 percent are at the edge of food insecurity.<sup>16</sup> As mentioned above, the prevalence of undernourishment was around 37.5 percent from 2017 until 2019, while the prevalence of severe food insecurity in the total population was 60.4 percent (*FAO et al.*, 2020).

With the closing of local markets, smallholders struggle to sell their products, and petty traders (many of whom are women) have lost their main sources of income; many have not been able to recover even after the markets reopened due to debt burden, low production, reduced availability of imported goods due to border closures and delayed or declined shipments. Most Liberians are expected to face a reduction in their purchasing power due to job losses, reduced income and inflation.

Although inflation is much lower (13.83 percent) than in 2019 (26.97 percent), food prices remain comparatively high due to poor road conditions, the high cost of transportation and currency devaluation, which has also impacted the purchasing power – especially of the poor, who spend a large share of their income on food. Gas prices remain very volatile and it is unclear if this is the sign of a new upward trend or a repercussion from the April price increases.

COVID-19 has had a severe impact on the Liberia health care system, with 28 percent of health workers infected. Health facilities reporting cases among their staff have been fully or partially closed; some services (such as vaccines) have been suspended or scaled down, posing a risk of the re-emergence of preventable childhood diseases.

The decline in revenues from the export of cash crops jeopardizes employment opportunities. Informal cross border trade, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME), which constitute much of the informal economy, are also being affected. COVID-19 has upended the business climate in Liberia and may force companies to scale back their workforces. In response, the Minister of Labour (MoL) established a national policy stipulating that all employers must pay nonessential employees fifty percent of their salaries and benefits starting from 1 May (Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, 2020). While such measures mitigate some degree of hardship, the lack of government action to help cover salaries imposes further financial burdens on enterprises.

Remittances contributed 9.8 percent to GDP in 2019. Containment measures in countries affected by COVID-19 have made it impossible for many migrant workers to earn an income and send money back home to help sustain their family. This is particularly concerning as remittances are critical to the livelihood of many vulnerable households.

---

<sup>16</sup> Seven percent of the population is employing reduced coping strategies. Of these, 6.3 percent is engaged in medium coping and the remaining 0.7 percent exhibit high-coping strategies or behaviours.

Although handwashing has been identified as an important preventative measure against COVID-19, only 42 percent of the Liberian population is able to use improved sanitation facilities, with great disparities between rural and urban areas. Just 2.6 percent of the population has access to handwashing facilities and only 1.2 percent has access to soap. Within this very fragile context, the outbreak of COVID-19 has placed significant additional pressure on Liberia's already weak and overburdened social service delivery systems. One of the major concerns is that, after the Ebola crisis and the Civil War, the improvement and development which the country and its citizens have struggled and achieved so far will again be affected by COVID, in case the pandemic persists it will further impact the already add to poor livelihoods, weak health systems and low access to education and basic services.

### **Which groups are most likely to be severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated measures?**

As mentioned previously, Liberia had a high rate of food insecurity even before the COVID-19 crisis. More than half of the Liberia's population lives below the poverty line (LISGIS, 2016), with poverty being highly concentrated in rural areas (71.6 percent) compared to urban areas (31.5 percent).

Liberia has a high dependency ratio, with 52 percent of the population inactive and 11 percent unemployed. In addition, a large proportion of urban Liberians are employed in the informal sector where they earn daily wages and are thus unlikely to be eligible for the limited social protection programmes offered by the Government of Liberia.

Women in Liberia are disproportionately affected by the economic impact of COVID-19, with 90.9 percent of employed women working in insecure, poorly-paid, part-time informal jobs, with little or no income security or social protection (FHI360 and BRAC USA, 2019). The precarious nature of their employment could push them to take high risks during the pandemic to be able to meet family needs. Rural women were already considered to be economically vulnerable prior to the COVID-19 crisis. They account for a large proportion of the agricultural labour force, especially in subsistence farming, and perform most of the unpaid care work in rural areas. Yet rural women face social and cultural restrictions in accessing productive resources, such as land, agricultural inputs, finance and credit, extension services and technology; they also find it more difficult than men to obtain social protection, employment opportunities and information, or to access public services, innovative platforms and local and national markets. These pre-existing vulnerabilities are expected to be aggravated by the COVID-19 crisis (FHI360 and BRAC USA, 2019).

Already prior to the pandemic, Liberia experienced high levels of sexual and gender-based violence, affecting children in particular. As almost 50 percent of children aged 6-17 are out of school it is likely that the incidence of gender-based violence and violence affecting children (particularly girls) will increase (FHI360 and BRAC USA, 2019).

Finally, with health facilities under pressure to respond to the pandemic, access to reproductive health services might become more difficult for women and girls, particularly since the number of skilled personnel, including midwives, is already inadequate, leaving most rural facilities without adequate staff to care for pregnant women and their newborn babies (FHI360 and BRAC USA, 2019).

People with disabilities and/or chronic diseases (e.g. diabetes, hypertension) are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. An estimated 16 percent of Liberia's population lives with a disability; 99 percent of disabled people live in extreme poverty, mainly due to exclusion from education, skills training, work and opportunities for income generation (The Borgen Project, 2019).

Liberia hosts a small population of 8 115 refugees and asylum seekers (mostly from Cote d'Ivoire) in five counties (Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, River Gee and Montserrado). An estimated 4 percent are elderly, and another 6 percent have serious illnesses.

In remote camp locations overcrowding, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene provision, and under-resourced health services present enormous challenges. Lack of livelihood opportunities and poor nutrition among refugees and their host communities increase their vulnerability. In urban areas, many refugees are rapidly becoming destitute, as daily wage labour and other livelihoods opportunities vanish overnight (OCHA,2020).

## **FOOD FOR REFLECTION: LONG-TERM POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

---

### **Food reserves and the role of the NFAA**

The Ministry of Agriculture and relevant stakeholders, with the National Food Assistance Authority playing a key role, are assessing available stocks of major food commodities held by the commercial sector. The assessment will support trade policy decisions, such as the volume of imports needed to keep domestic prices at levels that incentivize farmers to produce without hurting consumers. The MoA is also working with large scale oil palm concessionaires as well as oil palm SME to buy available stocks of red palm oil and store them against any food shortage arising from the pandemic. As a short-term measure, the MoA, along with development partners such as FAO, has calculated the volume of staple crop availability (rice and cassava) in villages and at the national level; the plan is to purchase food from needy farmers for distribution to vulnerable communities. In the longer term, the NFAA will take the lead on establishing and distributing national food reserves for local crops with support from FAO and the MoA.

The NFAA will continue to work on other initiatives of national importance beyond the scope of the pandemic, such as making school feeding programmes sustainable and beneficial for both children and local producers by procuring nutritious, locally-grown food. NFAA will purchase surplus production of staple crops from farmers to be processed and stored for distribution to schools and other institutions in case of emergency. With a mandate to provide food stamps and free meals to vulnerable groups, the NFAA will play a growing role in establishing a robust emergency safety net for in Liberia. Particularly vulnerable groups include the physically challenged, single parents with young children, pregnant and lactating mothers, sick and malnourished children and children without parental guidance and support. The agency is also responsible for protecting the Liberian public from the harmful effects of substandard and counterfeit food commodities and ensuring their good health at all times.

### **One Health**

In the wake of COVID-19, Liberia is putting a greater focus on the One Health approach, which fosters collaboration between many sectors and disciplines to obtain optimal health for people, animals and the planet. FAO and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the leadership of the Director of the Veterinary Epidemiology Unit (MoA) and in close collaboration with Community Health Services Division of the Ministry of Health (MoH) have already trained 200 community surveillance officers in Montserrado County, 50 of whom are animal health workers and the rest health volunteers. The training was a practical application of the One Health approach, highlighting the need for broad collaboration to moderate the impact of zoonoses and build a health system capable of mitigating COVID-19 and future pandemics.

### Small, informal SME in value chains, versus larger modern businesses

The MoA aims to build thriving and a prosperous agricultural sector that brands Liberia as a source of high quality, ethically-produced, environmentally friendly food and agricultural products. The focus is mainly on strengthening farmers and enhance their productivity with the involvement of private sector actors in the agrifood system. Under the STAR-P project, the MoA plans to promote agricultural SME, input service providers, agrodealers and aggregators and to formalize the informal agribusiness sector, as part of its emergency response plan. A call for proposals was launched for a grant of up to USD 10 000 for duly registered agriculture SME with 60:40 matching grants against a business plan, and up to USD 1 000 for informal sector enterprises that have been in operation for at least six months.

### Building back better

A number of structural and policy issues need attention if Liberia is to make good on its plan to build a stronger and more vibrant agricultural sector. To resolve these issues, the government will need to:

- build and sustain resilient local food systems by strengthening the capacity of local organizations and farmers/producers;
- increase government investment in extension services, food safety and social protection;
- identify the drivers of food insecurity through market level analysis and monitoring and better forecasting;
- strengthen biosafety control and food quality assurance systems;
- establish a strategic food reserve system;
- close gaps in the legal and regulatory frameworks for food and nutrition security;
- strengthen the integration of food and nutrition early warning systems; and
- develop an integrated food and nutrition security information system.

### Are measures employed during the epidemic, such as food delivery and electronic transactions, likely to remain? If so, what are the implications for farmers, markets and employment?

The first lockdown announcement was followed immediately by the introduction of home delivery services through online bookings and the use of mobile phone applications (WhatsApp and SMS) by supermarkets, agrifarms<sup>17</sup> and local food vendors. The COVID-19 crisis has shown that information and communication technologies, digitization, and e-commerce can be critical to the sustainability of economic activities, including agrifood micro- and SMEs. Businesses with an online presence have proved to be relatively resilient. There is a serious need to make these interventions part of the development programmes of Government of Liberia, such as Liberian Agriculture Sector Investment Plan (LASIP-II) and Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD), to expand the services nationwide and increase their scope beyond emergencies to long-term development.

---

<sup>17</sup> A number of farm and agribusinesses are doing home deliveries in Liberia, mainly in Monrovia and Montserrado Counties. E.g. Sumo Farms, Passion Farms, FEED Organics, Matameth Farms, Liberia Agriculture Inc. and Evergreen Natural Juices.

## INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE

---

When the pandemic began, the National Incident Management System (IMS) was activated under the central command of the MoH. Immediately after detecting the index case, the government declared a health emergency. The MoA called an emergency meeting of the Agriculture Donor Working Group, requested the establishment of a food security cluster and drafted an emergency food security plan. FAO supported the preparation of the plan. A Special Presidential Advisory Committee on Corona Virus (SPACO) was established in February, under the chairmanship of the President. On 7 April, an Executive Committee on Corona Virus (ECOC) was established as the operational arm of the SPACO. Health experts, cabinet officials and members of the international and donor communities support these bodies; their responsibilities include helping to contain the virus and ease its impact on livelihoods and the economy.

The 22-member National Steering Committee, which is chaired by the MoCI, co-chaired by the MoA and appointed by President Weah, coordinates food security support including the COHFSP. COVID-19 response and preparedness has been devolved to the county level, with four counties currently in response mode and 11 in preparedness mode. The World Health Organization (WHO)'s planning and response scenario model is being used by all 15 counties as a framework for their COVID-19 preparedness and response plans.

The National Civil Society Council of Liberia (NCSCCL) established a taskforce to promote CSO engagement and serve as a collective voice for transparency, accountability and participation during the COVID-19 crisis.

The MoA, as lead agency for the Pillar on Food Security and Nutrition of PAPD (MFPD, 2020), hosted a virtual coordination meeting, led by its newly-restructured Programme Management Unit, with all stakeholders in the agriculture sector: state actors, UN agencies, donors, international nongovernmental organizations, farmers, agro-equipment suppliers and agribusiness chains. The core objective of this coordination structure -COHFSP was to identify specific food security needs of individuals and communities affected or threatened by the pandemic.

On 25 May, the General Auditing Commission (GAC) advised that, due to the role of the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFDP) in setting policies, guidance and procedure for financial management, it should not be involved with decisions regarding the direct implementation of the COVID-19 funds (Doodoo, 2020). The GAC emphasized that due to the massive corruption experienced with Ebola funding, the Executive Committee on COVID-19 should be extraordinarily transparent with the fund disbursements, followed by an audit of all operations (Doodoo, 2020). The GAC recommended establishing a centralized financial management and control system and control to manage accounting for the funds. The GAC insisted on transparency and accountability of COVID-19 funding streams and expenditures, to be guided by MoFDP authorities and not directly controlled by them so as to ensure checks and balances in order to guarantee probity and prudence in the handling of the funds.

## REFERENCES

---

**Bar Talks.** 2020. Liberian cocoa sector struggles to recover post-COVID-19. In: *Bar Talks* [online]. London. [Cited 3 November 2020]. <https://bartalks.net/liberian-cocoa-sector-struggles-to-recover-post-covid-19/>



- Borgen Project, The.** 2019. What you need to know about people with disabilities in Liberia. In: *Borgen Project* [online]. Seattle, USA. [Cited 30 June 2020] <https://borgenproject.org/disabilities-in-liberia/>
- Brooks, C.** 2020. Liberian fishermen unite to oppose the licensing of six Chinese supertrawlers. In: *Global News Network Liberia* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 14 October 2020]. <http://gnnliberia.com/2020/07/14/liberian-fishermen-unite-to-oppose-the-licensing-of-six-chinese-supertrawlers/>
- Browne, J.** 2020. Liberia: lawmakers extend emergency for 30 days. In: *The New Dawn* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 30 April 2020]. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202004210283.html>
- Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.** 2020. Liberia: Govt. orders employers to pay all non-essential. In: *Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. Latest news* [online]. London. [Cited 25 June 2020]. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/liberia-govt-orders-employers-to-pay-all-non-essential-workers-50-salaries-as-many-companies-scale-down-workforce>
- Daily Observer.** 2020a. Draw on lessons from Ebola and beware of the implications of a total lock-down! In: *Daily Observer* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 30 April 2020]. <https://www.liberianobserver.com/opinion/editorials/draw-on-lessons-from-ebola-and-beware-of-the-implications-of-a-total-lock-down/>
- Daily Observer.** 2020b. NFAA negotiates price reduction with fish importers. In: *Daily Observer* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 26 May 2020]. <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/nafaa-negotiates-price-reduction-with-fish-importers/>
- Dodoo, L.** 2020. General Auditing Commission raises eyebrow on COVID-19 account signatories – wants Finance Ministry back out. In: *Front Page Africa* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 4 June 2020]. <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/front-slider/liberia-general-auditing-commission-raises-eyebrow-on-covid-19-account-signatories-wants-finance-ministry-back-out/>
- ECOWAS Commission.** 2020. Summary of conclusions and recommendations of the 31 March 2020 video conference on the regional consultation of ministers of Agriculture. In: *ARAA* [online]. Abuja [Cited on 31 May 2020]. <http://araa.org/sites/default/files/news/pdf/VC%203103-2020%20Min%20Agric%20EN.pdf>
- FHI360 & BRAC USA.** 2019. Job demand and employment market analysis: Liberia. In: *FHI360.org* [online]. New York and Durham, USA. [Cited 14 August 2020]. <https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/resource-liberia-labor-analysis.pdf>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).** 2018. *The state of world fisheries and aquaculture 2018*. Rome. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9229en/ca9229en.pdf>)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), World Food Programme (WFP) & World Health Organization (WHO).** 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets*. Rome. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/3/ca9692en/online/ca9692en.html>)
- Food Security Information Network (FSIN).** 2020. *Global Report on Food Crises 2020*. Rome. (available at <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/documents/resources-detail/en/c/1272014/>)

**Harris, G.** 2020a. Liberian fishing communities adapt operations to stay afloat during COVID-19. In: *Coalition for Fair Fisheries Arrangements (CFFA)* [online]. Brussels. [Cited 22 August 2020]. <https://www.cffacape.org/coronavirus-crisis-impacts-on-african-artisanal-fisheries/liberian-fishing-communities-adapt-operations-to-stay-afloat-amid-covid-19-crisis>.

**Harris, G.** 2020b. How are farmers doing in the midst of COVID-19? In: *Daily Observer* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 26 May 2020] <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/how-are-farmers-doing-in-the-midst-of-covid-19/>.

**International Monetary Fund (IMF).** 2020. Policy responses to COVID-19: Liberia. In: *IMF & Covid: policy tracker* [online]. Washington, DC. [Cited 30 June 2020]. <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#L>

**Louis, M.** 2020. IMF Executive Board Approves a US\$50 Million Disbursement to Liberia to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic. In: *IMF News* [online]. Washington, DC. [Cited 30 June 2020]. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/06/05/pr20237-liberia-imf-executive-board-approves-a-us-50m-disbursement-address-the-covid19>

**Koinyeneh, G.C.** 2020. Minister of Commerce, importers debunk rice shortage hoax, say 34K metric tons in country. In: *Front Page Africa* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 5 May 2020]. <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/business/liberia-ministry-of-commerce-importers-debunk-rice-shortage-hoax-say-34k-metric-tons-in-country/>

**Kollie, J.** 2020. WFP outlines its role in COHFSP exercise. In: *Daily Observer* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 26 June 2020]. <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/wfp-outlines-its-role-in-cohfsp-exercise/>

**Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS).** 2016. Household income and expenditure survey. In: *LISGIS* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 30 April 2020]. [https://www.lisgis.net/page\\_info.php?&7d5f44532cbfc489b8db9e12e44eb820=Mzkw](https://www.lisgis.net/page_info.php?&7d5f44532cbfc489b8db9e12e44eb820=Mzkw)

**Menkor, I.F.** 2020. New commerce inspector, deputy urged to work with sincere integrity. In: *Daily Observer* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 30 April 2020]. <https://www.liberianobserver.com/news/new-commerce-inspector-deputy-urged-to-work-with-sincerity-integrity/>

**Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).** 2020a. *Market monitoring: food security and economic implications. Report #4.* Monrovia. (also available at [https://moa.gov.lr/doc/Market%20Monitoring%20report%20\\_LN4%20\(1\).pdf](https://moa.gov.lr/doc/Market%20Monitoring%20report%20_LN4%20(1).pdf))

**MoA.** 2020b. Movement control service for passes. In: *MoA* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 5 Aug 2020]. [https://www.moa.gov.lr/content.php?media&pic\\_detail\\_id=45&related=7&paddy=v3&pg=sp&pal=Movement%20Control%20Service%20For%20Passes](https://www.moa.gov.lr/content.php?media&pic_detail_id=45&related=7&paddy=v3&pg=sp&pal=Movement%20Control%20Service%20For%20Passes)

**MoA.** 2020c. COVID-19 food security response. Situation report #7. In: *MoA* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 22 Jun 2020]. [https://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/MOA%20SITUATION%20REPORT%20\\_%207%20%20JUNE%207,%202020.pdf](https://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/MOA%20SITUATION%20REPORT%20_%207%20%20JUNE%207,%202020.pdf)

**MoA.** 2020d. COVID-19 food security response. Situation report #1. In: *MoA* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 8 May 2020]. [https://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/MOA%20COVID%2019%20FOOD%20SECURITY%20RESPONSE%20SITUATION%20REPORT%20APRIL%2019,%202020\\_1.pdf](https://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/MOA%20COVID%2019%20FOOD%20SECURITY%20RESPONSE%20SITUATION%20REPORT%20APRIL%2019,%202020_1.pdf)



- MoA.** 2020e. COVID-19 situation reports. In: *MoA* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 17 Jul 2020]. [https://www.moa.gov.lr/content\\_list\\_sub.php?content&list&main=36&related=36&pg=mp](https://www.moa.gov.lr/content_list_sub.php?content&list&main=36&related=36&pg=mp);
- MoA.** 2020f. Market access for rice paddy farmers. In: *MoA* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 16 Oct 2020]. <https://www.moa.gov.lr>
- MoA.** 2020g. COVID-19 food security response. Situation report #8. In: *MoA* [online]. Monrovia. [22 Jul 2020]. [https://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/MOA%20COVID%2019%20FOOD%20SECURITY%20SITUATION%20REPORT%20\\_%208.pdf](https://www.moa.gov.lr/doc/MOA%20COVID%2019%20FOOD%20SECURITY%20SITUATION%20REPORT%20_%208.pdf)
- MoA, FAO and WFP.** 2020. *Market food price monitoring report*. Monrovia. (Unpublished).
- Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MoFPD).** 2020. *Pro-poor agenda for prosperity and development*. Monrovia. (also available at <https://www.mfdp.gov.lr/index.php/docs/national-development-plan/pro-poor-agenda-for-prosperity-and-development-papd/download>)
- National Investment Commission (NIC).** 2019. Invest in rice in Liberia. In: NIC – Investment opportunities [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 30 June 2020] [http://www.investliberia.gov.lr/page\\_info.php?&7d5f44532cbfc489b8db9e12e44eb820=NDg5](http://www.investliberia.gov.lr/page_info.php?&7d5f44532cbfc489b8db9e12e44eb820=NDg5)
- New Dawn.** 2020. LADA launches rice seeds cash voucher scheme. In: *New Dawn* [online], 8 June 2020. [22 Jul 2020]. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202006090334.html>
- Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).** 2020. Global humanitarian response plan – COVID-19. United Nations Coordinated appeal. Geneva. (also available at [https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP-COVID19\\_July\\_update.pdf](https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHRP-COVID19_July_update.pdf))
- Parley, W.W.** 2020. WFP responds to food package. In: *New Dawn* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 26 Jun 2020]. <https://thenewdawnliberia.com/wfp-responds-to-food-package/>
- Schmidhuber, J., Pound, J., Qiao, B.** 2020. COVID-19: Channels of transmission to food and agriculture. Rome, FAO. <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8430en>
- Sieh, R.** 2020. Liberia: Commerce Minister drops quota on importation of rice and frozen foods amid coronavirus. In: *Front Page Africa* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 4 Jun 2020]. <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/front-slider/liberia-commerce-ministry-drops-quota-on-importation-of-rice-and-frozen-foods-amid-coronavirus/>
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).** 2020. Futures of 370 million children in jeopardy as school closures deprive them of school meals. In: *UNICEF* [online]. New York, USA. [Cited 22 July 2020]. <https://www.unicef.org/liberia/press-releases/futures-370-million-children-jeopardy-school-closures-deprive-them-school-meals>
- United States Embassy in Liberia.** 2020a. U.S. Embassy robustly supports Liberia’s COVID-119 response. In: *US Embassy* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 14 Jul 2020]. <https://lr.usembassy.gov/u-s-embassy-robustly-supports-liberias-covid-19-response/>
- United States Embassy in Liberia.** 2020b. COVID-19 information. In: *US Embassy* [online]. Monrovia. [Cited 14 Oct 2020]. <https://lr.usembassy.gov/covid-19-information/>
- WorldAware.** 2020. COVID-19 alert: Liberia state of emergency expires July 21, international flights ongoing. In: *WorldAware* [online]. Annapolis, USA. [Cited 5 Aug 2020]. <https://www.worldaware.com/covid-19-alert-liberia-state-emergency-expires-july-21-international-flights-ongoing>

**World Bank.** 2019. Liberia sustainable management of fisheries (P172012). In: *World Bank. Project information document* [online]. Washington, DC. [Cited 5 May 2020].

<http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/483401576480235332/pdf/Concept-Project-Information-Documents-PID-Liberia-Sustainable-Management-of-Fisheries-P172012.pdf>

**World Food Programme (WFP).** 2020. Global monitoring of school meals during COVID-19 school closures. In: *WFP* [online]. Rome. [Cited 5 Aug 2020]. [https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/?\\_ga=2.23544890.1608590319.1587311560-1934460547.1538727870](https://cdn.wfp.org/2020/school-feeding-map/?_ga=2.23544890.1608590319.1587311560-1934460547.1538727870).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

This country profile is part of a series produced by the Food and nutrition security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation (FIRST) Programme. In developing these profiles, the FIRST Programme – a strategic partnership between FAO and the European Union – responds to calls for support from governments and development and humanitarian partners. In some countries, FIRST has joined forces with the Global Network against Food Crises.

The process to produce this profile was led by **Mehnaz Ajmal**, FIRST policy officer, in close collaboration with the FAO Representation in Liberia and the European Union Delegation to Liberia, and the Department of Planning and Development, MoA, Government of Liberia. This profile has benefitted from the contributions of **Geertrui Louwagie**, **Emmanuel Kapee**, **Octavius T. Quarbo**, **Abdul Wadudu Adam Mohammed**, **Jlopeh Dennis Wiagbe** and the FIRST management team.





CO-FUNDED BY THE  
EUROPEAN UNION

This publication has been produced with the assistance of the European Union.  
The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of FAO and can in no  
way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.