

World Bank completes its 2015 Implementation Support Mission (ISM) to WAAPP Liberia ahead of the Regional Wrap Up Meeting scheduled for November 2015.

Several Points that will see Liberia's Agricultural Sector massively improve within the next two years agreed upon.

By Elvis H. Sirleaf



Members of the Mission and the Dokodan Farmers' Cooperative at the 410 acres of lowland rice in Gbedin, Nimba County

The Ministry of Agriculture and the World Bank have agreed upon several counts that will boost the current efforts being made by both bodies as it relates to the agro sector. The Agreement was reached at the close of a week-long visit by a delegation from the World Bank, the West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (WECARD/CORAF), Mano River Union (MRU) and other WAAPP participating countries.



World Bank Senior Agric Specialist Dr. Abimbola Adubi (L) with Africa

The Senior Agriculture Specialist at the Liberia office of the World Bank Dr. Abimbola Adubi named a move to fast-track the establishment of a seed lab at CARI in the next three months and train technicians to manage it; the establishment of an independent seed board that will be made functional to implement the roadmap for the implementation of the ECOWAS Seed Regulation and

address the numerous challenges facing the seed sector; a move to quickly commence the multiplication of 10 hectares of Cowpea through AfricaRice and out growers to ensure the maintenance of the seeds for the next planting season and the services of the young scientists who have just returned from post-graduate studies be utilized in the Quick Impact Seed Program as measures agreed upon. He also named the recruitment of an M&E consultant to specifically follow the program to strengthen the M&E system and timely report on key performance indicators, facts and challenges to CORAF/WECARD and partners; a long term measure for seed storage which will include the rehabilitation of nine seed storage warehouses and infrastructure; private sector entrepreneurship and possibly NGOs to be identified and strengthened to produce and market foundation and certified seeds; as well as a stock taking of seed producing firms should be undertaken.

Dr. Adubi said appropriate post-harvest technologies will be adopted to ensure good and competitive grain quality of farmers produce, and a contacts with AfricaRice Post-Harvest Program and WAAPP-Guinea will be initiated to assist in this regard. The mission further suggested training of the youth in agri-business management and coaching them to take up jobs and serve in the rice value chain components of agriculture as an



Some of the returning students who formed part of the Mission & Tour

action agreed upon. Noting the financial constraints to some activities of production and possible value addition for the farmers, the mission recommended that alternative sources of financing be explored and actively supported by government in order to assist the farmers among other things.



Some Female Farmers working in the 410 acres of Rice Field in Gbedin

According to the Co Task Team Leader of the WAAPP Liberia Project, the bank supported project has built the capacity of farmers and their organizations, as well as other relevant actors in the agriculture sector. The Support Mission visited several project interventions including the Dokodan Farmers' Cooperative in Gbedin, Nimba County, where 410 acres of low-land rice is being cultivated through Africa Rice Center under a WAAPP Liberia supported arrangement.

Some of the farmers who spoke to journalists who also formed part of the tour said the project has helped improved their knowledge, skills and competence in rice production, which has eventually improved their livelihood. The head of the Cooperative said the over 250 farmers who are members are very grateful for the initiatives by the various partners. Mr. Jefferson Togbah was however quick to point out that the 410 acres of rice field was just the beginning of what the group is ready to do. He said more support in the forms of training, provision of implements and financing will take the group a long way in empowering the struggling farmers of Nimba County.

He disclosed that over 990 acres of land was still available to the group for cultivation, and it was their hope to see these partners support them in that light. He appealed for the clearing of the land, the provision of seed rice, fertilizers and other technical support that will enable them put the land to use. "There is a huge population in the towns and villages around here, and most of us are engaged with farming activities, so if the government and partners help us, they will be providing jobs for us and at the same time food for several people.

For his part, Agriculture Minister in both the opening of the visit on Monday Oct 26, 2015, and wrap up on Friday, October 30, 2015 praised the World Bank, Government of Japan and



Dr. Moses M. Zinnah
Agriculture Minister

other partners for the level of contribution made to what he called a very challenging sector at the moment.

Dr. Moses Zinnah said it will be important if all efforts currently being put into agriculture are time bound, noting that there is a Project Implementation Unit in the office of the Liberian President that is presently involved with evaluating projects, and the WAAPP project is at the top of the list for review.

Commenting on the gains made by the Project, the Agro Scientist noted that though there have been challenges along the way, the 1st phase was so far a success. He named the scholarships awarded to post graduate students, the strategic and master plans of the Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI), the empowerment of local farmers through capacity building among other things as accomplishments.



Assistant Minister Patrick Worzie (L) Listens to Dokodan Farmers ' Cooperative Head Jefferson Tokpah

The Assistant Minister for Planning and Development at the Ministry stressed the need for improvement in the M&E sector.

Hon. Patrick Worzie disclosed that USAID / FED had initiated a pilot project in four counties that will strengthen the county and regional offices, he however hoped that in the

design of future programs, the donors will consider the issue of agricultural statistic and monitoring and evaluation, as well as expansion of the project to other counties to have a greater impact.

Speaking when he toured several of WAAPP Liberia supported interventions in Bong, Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba counties, Hon. Worzie noted that though he had just joined the ministry of agriculture from another government ministry, he had seen far more than what was being spoken about the sector.

“Unlike in town where people always say nothing is being done, so much work is going on here and it is very impressive”, he said.



The Packaged Aromatic Rice Produced by Africa Rice

The tour also took the mission to the Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice) office in Bong County, where scientists are being groomed in the art of rice breeding under a WAAPP Liberia / Ministry of Agriculture arrangement. Dr. Innoussa Ikintayo, head of the Liberia office took members of the delegation on a tour of the facility where the soon to be famous Aromatic Rice is being produced.

He said the production was a start of what he knows will work out well and be welcomed by the locals.

He named a proper packaging method and good publicity as tools that can be used to promote and market the new variety of rice. Africa Rice is also leading the rice multiplication process of WAAPP Liberia in Bong and Nimba Counties.

The Coordinator of the Japanese Grant to the Mano River Union (MRU) Countries Madam Kenyeh Barlay who championed the issue of gender inclusion and promotion, was a part of the mission's delegation.

Also, the Co Task Team Leader (TTL) of WAAPP Liberia Dr. Sheu Salau who formed part of the mission to share WAAPP Nigeria's experience, especially in the Area of Monitoring and Evaluation talked about ways that Liberia can improve its M&E. CORAF/WECARD Chief of Party on Rice Dr. Ernest Asiedu represented his organization.

There were also meetings hosted with BRAC, a leading rice producing organization, AEDE, the implementing partner leading the Innovation Platform (IP) in Sinoe County, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning which approves most of the project loan and grant financing on behalf of the Government of Liberia (GOL), among others.