

CHANGING THE PERCEPTION

Bomi County Engages in Vast Agricultural Activities though the WAAPP Liberia Innovation Platform Intervention.

By William Q. Harmon



WAAPP Liberia Bomi County Focal Person Kehmon Sheriff (center) addressing members of the Innovation Platform

There is a perception in Liberia that compatriots from Western Liberia, especially Bomi County that is just a stone-throw from the capitol city, do not engage in farming activities, even on low scale that will feed themselves. Bomi citizens are continuously criticized for coming down to Monrovia (the Country's capitol) to purchase simple garden produce such as pepper, potatoes green, onions eggplants, etc. that can be easily grown in back-yard gardens. The county is endowed with rich soil, rainfall and others that are necessary to have good cultivations. But the residents of Bomi, who said that such perception about them is wrong are currently engaged in activities that may change this mindset of the people.

With the emergence of the West Africa Agriculture Productivity (WAAPP) Liberia Project that has existed a few years now, Bomi farmers through an Agriculture Innovative Platform, simply known as (IP), have begun to change in the county, relative to the vast cassava production activities being carried out in Bomi.

The Innovation Platform is the new module of farming that incorporates all actors along the value chain including farmers, processors, transporters, financial institutions, local authorities among others, with an introduction of new technologies in the production of food crop. There are platforms in the eight WAAPP Liberia operational counties.

The county, according to the WAAPP focal person in Bomi County, is now leading the other seven counties involved in the IP in the production of cassava and other value-chains in the country. One of the leading farming groups in the county, Youth for Positive Change (YPC) located at banana Farm, are leading the entire process in the county. YPC, producer of the famous Bomi Gari, has some of the largest cassava farms currently under cultivation.



The farmers, at a meeting with officials from WAAPP and Human Development Foundation (HDF) the local implementing partner, said other Liberians have perceived them as being lazy as a result of lack of support on the part of the central government and Non-Government Organizations that are involve the agric-sector. They noted that

most of the support that came for Agro were send to other counties because of their established infrastructures.

At the meeting which was held on Thursday, January 29, 2015 near Banana Farm outside of the County's capitol city Tubmanburg, farmers and other members of the platform were meeting with these partners to find others means through which the farmers can be assisted as the first phase of the program comes to an end in March of 2015.

“We want to change this wrong perception about us and tell the Liberian people what we are capable of doing in this county, the chairman of the platform said.

According to a local farmer, farmers in the county are seeking support to ensure that their county become food secured, but are not getting the needy support that will enable them get involved in the production of other food crops such as pepper, rice, eggplants and even animal husbandry. The WAAPP project focuses on Rice and Cassava.

“We don’t only want to involve in cassava production but this is the only place that we are getting support. We have a vision as a platform for our county to become the next bread basket of the republic,” members of the platform told this reporter.

“The only thing that is keeping as back from engaging in the producing other edible food items is support, but as soon as we begin to receive support, we will galvanize ourselves as a platform to ensure that Bomi becomes food sufficient and even an exporter. We have the willingness and manpower but only the funds are lacking” a local processor said.

The platform’s members are however in such of markets where the cassava products will be patronized. “You know when you produce and the market is available you become encouraged to do more, and we have been seeking that for while now, but we need more customers for our Bomi Gari,” the platform chair also said.



The Banana Farm Road Manually Rehabilitated by Local Farmers

One major thing that has been standing as an impediment to Banana Farm farmers is the condition of the roads leading to their farms. The road, for several years, has been in a deplorable condition, something that impedes quick movement. Sometimes road users, including farmers, are completely cut off due to bad road conditions.

Though they are trying the fix it manually in the absence of yellow machine, they are appealing to the government and others to come to their aid and recondition the road which links several key villages to the

county's capitol city. The Bomi component of the project targets 30 farming groups in 30 locations in three districts that include; Dewein, Senjeh and Klay Districts.



Hon. Ernest Davies, Development Superintendent, Bomi County

The Assistant Superintendent for Development who graced the occasion informed the farmers of the County's Local Government plans to begin road works soonest. Hon. Ernest Davies said, the only existing earth moving machine in the county was being repaired ahead of the planned road rehabilitation works.

He promised the government's continuous support to the local farmers whom he called heroes in the fight to end hunger in Liberia.

Also making remark at the resumption of full activities of the Innovation Platform that was halted due to the outbreak of the Ebola virus, HDF Executive Director Sensee L. Sirleaf said this is meant to properly work along with the farmers to ensure that they get all the basic necessary logistics and business contacts to make sure that when they produce their products there will be a market for them to sell.



Mr. Sensee Sirleaf Human Development Foundation Executive Director

According to recent reports from the European Union (EU) and the United Nations Children Fund, about 64% of Liberians fall below the absolute poverty line and 48% below the extreme poverty line. This means, approximately 300,000 households are below the poverty line and about 50,000 households are extremely poor and labor constrained. These 50,000 households do not have access to any temporary employment projects and have no formal means of support. It is known that people below the extreme poverty line suffer from chronic hunger and cannot meet their most basic needs. While all members of a household feel the impact, its effects are particularly pernicious on children.

Bomi is the home of several eminent Liberians including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, House speaker Alex Tyler, Internal Affairs Minister Morris Dukuly and many others.