



AGRO Digest

TCEP-II LOFA COUNTY



Editorial

The resounding success of the National Agriculture Fair (NAF) hosted by the Ministry of Agriculture and partners earlier this year is a motivation for smallholder farmers across the country. The NAF is a national engagement with farmers and provides the opportunity for smallholder farmers to displayed agricultural products produced around the country and to engage in dialogue with policy makers and network with other farmers around the country.



One of the cardinal points raised at the “NAF 2021” by smallholder farmers is the absence of agriculture loans to support farmers desirous of engaging in largescale farming. The farmers argued that the repayment terms and conditions proffered by commercial banks is a disincentive to smallholder farmers because financial returns on agricultural production is longer term than the regular business investment.

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In a quick response to the farmers' plead, President George M. Weah announced a 16 million dollars (16m) loan package supported by the World Bank. "The loan will be managed through a technical committee to include the Ministers of Finance and Development Planning, Commerce, Justice, State for Presidential Affairs, Agriculture and the Environmental Protection Agency to work with the banks to ensure proper codification, allocation and disbursement of funds to farmers. He urged the Ministry of Agriculture to develop a database of all smallholder farmers involved in rice, cocoa, oil palm and rubber production sectors in the country.

"My administration plans to invest substantially in the agriculture sector as a means to revolutionize the sector and provide the right incentives for smallholder farmers", emphasized the president.

This assurance is a welcome development by smallholder farmers who have struggled over the years to increase their economics of scales and venture into more enterprising agriculture investment.

Agriculture mechanization is a dream of many smallholder farmers. The introduction of loans to farmers will serve as an incentive for farmers to increase agriculture production and reduce or eradicate food poverty among the economically active farmers around the country.

Cocoa Sector Development in Lofa



Dedication and distribution of motobikes to DAOs

Improving the livelihood of smallholder cocoa farmers and providing sustainable household income is the goal of the Tree Crop Extension Project II (TCEP-II) in Lofa County.

TCEP II became effective in September 2019 starting with the mobilization of farmers across the seven districts by Young Professionals and Tree Crop Officer. Unlike the previous approached under the Smallholder Tree Crop Revitalization and Support project (STCRSP) where farmers were identified by Farmer's Cooperative Societies, the approached of the TCEP II is slightly different.. The new approached initiated by TCEP-II allows for Young Professionals (YPs) to conduct

mobilization and outreach where farmers are identified and grouped into *kuu groups* and the farmers are then linked to Farmer's Cooperative Societies in their catchment areas to provide support in marketing their produce.

According to the Tree Crop Officer, Allen Bohr James, in the first year of operation, the project worked with farmers to establish 220 kuu groups in the seven districts and each kuu group consist of 25 farmers, both male and female. In the seven districts the project established 143 village nurseries using improved high yielding

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Allen Bohr James—Tree Crop Officer

“The Mercedes variety is very high yielding and has the potential to produce 1.5 metric tons of cocoa per hectare”.

Allen Bohr James

hybrid seeds imported into the country from neighboring Ivory Coast. He referred to the seeds as the Mercedes variety and the germination rate was very impressive. He put the total germination rate at 80%. He said the seeds spent four (4) months on nursery and after the transplanting, farmer were able to commence harvesting in 18 months. He said the Mercedes variety is very high yielding and has the potential to produce 1.5 metric tons of cocoa beans per hectare.

According to a quarterly reviewed from the Project Implementation Unit in the county, the hybrid seeds were distributed across the seven districts based on established nurseries. In the seven districts, 2,915,291 seeds were sowed and 700,018 seeds were replaced. On the average, 2,760,667 seeds germinated successfully. This figure represents a significant boost and a promising result for cocoa farmers.

“The essence of establishing the kuu groups is to ensure that smallholder farmers work together in teams for better coordination and supervision” says Mr. James.

Mr. Eric Eesiah is the Institutional Capacity Building Officer and head of the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) in Lofa County.”TCEP-II is working to strengthen farmer groups, especially cooperatives.

“There was a rigorous assessment and due diligence process carried out to select seven farmer cooperatives societies out of the 21 cooperative societies in the county. We are strengthening the cooperatives by providing training and material support. We have provided training in marketing, business development, quality control, and record keeping” Under the capacity building component of the TCEP II, the project is providing institutional support to 7 farmer groups/cooperatives which has a combined membership of about 9,146 farmers

With the goal of sustainability for these farmers’ groups, the project in its second year created market opportunity by awarding business contracts with a combined value of 137,500 for the supply of plantain suckers for distribution to project beneficiaries.

The project is also providing both operational/logistical and financial support to key national stakeholders like CDA, LACRA, LNFCS, & CARI all aim at enabling them to adequately intervene as per their legislative mandate and signed MOU into the cocoa sector.



Mr. Eric Eesiah, ICBO & Head of PIU, Lofa County

The Voinjama District Farmer Cooperative Society (VDFCS) is one of seven collaborating cooperatives in the county. The cooperative is working with 1,500 farmers and is looking to recruit more farmers before the commencement of the next farming season. Mr. James Z. Kabbah is co-chairman of the Board of Directors of the VDFCS. He described the working relationship with the project as cordial. “We signed a memorandum of understanding with the TCEP-II project

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Mr. James Z. Kabbah Co-Chairman of the Board VDFCS

for capacity building which is expected to last for a period of one year. We have received logistical support including power saw to assist farmers in de-shading over grown tree branches and building solar dryers to help farmers process their cocoa safely” He said his cooperative distributed 48,861 plantain suckers to farmers.

The Young Professional programme in integral to the success of the project. The YPs work as extension officers providing technical backstopping for farmers in hard to reach communities. Under the supervision of the Tree Crop Officer, the YPs conduct farmer recruitment and registration, provide technical support in the establishment of village nurseries. Mr. Sylvester Bombo is a Young Professional assigned in the Voinjama District. “We are working with 800 farmers and we were able to establish 32 kuu groups in the district. The seed germination did not go as planned but we are happy that all our farmers received cocoa seedlings for planting on their farms. We have given assurances to the farmers that the next planting season will be better”. According to Mr. Bombo, as part of the post seedling distribution support, they make regular visits to the various farms to check and ensure that the seedlings are properly planted using the acceptable practices. “The farmers are very happy and they wholeheartedly support the project.

We will be recruiting new farmers this year and creating additional nurseries he concluded.



Sylvester Bombo—YP, Voinjama Dist.

“I received 254 seedlings from the nursery we established. I am a first time cocoa farmer but working with the TCEP-II project, I see a great relief to our economic condition if we remain engage with this project. Thanks to all the people who are supporting us. We are really grateful”

David M. Kollie

On a site visit to Mr. David M. Kollie’s farm in Selegar Town, Voinjama District, Mr. Kollie was seen planting seedlings received from the distribution. “I received 254 seedlings from the nursery we established. I am a first time cocoa farmer but working with the TCEP-II project, I see a great relief to our economic condition if we remain engage with this project. Thanks to all the people who are supporting us. We are really grateful”. He called on other farmers to join kuu groups and IFAD and the Ministry of Agriculture will support them in becoming viable farmers.



David M. Kollie Lead Farmer—Selegar, Voinjama Dist.



Klubo Gbama YP assigned in Salayea District

Ms. Klubo Gbama is a Young Professional assigned in the Salayea District. With a degree in General Agriculture, Klubo and her colleague, Abu Zele have facilitated the establishment of 16 kuu groups in the district comprising of both male and female.

She said based on experiences with other non-agriculture projects in the district, many farmers were skeptical initially in enlisting with the TCEP-II project. “We had to hold town hall meetings and community dialogues to convince the farmers that the TCEP-II is different. Some of them agreed reluctantly but today they are happy that they did”.

Klubo described the relationship with farmers as harmonious. “They are always around when we need them. This is a clear sign that they are interested in improving their lives through cocoa farming. The message I have for the farmers is that they should put their hands around the project because this project is for them. They will have their own farms and their livelihood will improve and poverty will be eliminated in their homes”.

Mr. Tokpa Towillie is one of the LEAD farmers in Gorlu, Gbalin Clan, Salayea District. He has been involved in cash crop production for many years but this is his first time venturing in cocoa production. “I received 450 seedlings this year from the village nursery we established. Even though this is my first cocoa farming season, I am proud that I took the decision to join the project. I want to use this opportunity to call on all my fellow farmers in our clan to join us. We are the beneficiaries of this project and we have all to gain”.



Tokpa Towillie lead farmer in Gorlu, Salayea District



Tokpa Towillie prepares cocoa seedlings for transplanting



Tokpa Towillie transplanting cocoa seedlings



Minister Jeanine M. Cooper in photo with vegetable farmer Garmai Gbusiwoi in Lofa



Minister Jeanine M. Cooper distributes power tillers to farmers in Lofa



Gender Inclusion and Gender Equity, a Core Value of IFAD Projects in Liberia

Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion are key components of all IFAD funded projects in Liberia. The goal is to provide opportunities for all Liberians (men, women, youth) to participate in the development of the agriculture sector in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) **One** and **Two** (No Poverty and Zero Hunger)

Since the activation of the Gender Section and the recruitment of a Gender Officer for both TCEP and TCEP -II, several visibility actions have been initiated to uplift the profile of the project. Mr. Allen Lincoln, a versatile project management professional with a background from UN Women says 60 project staff including partners and staff from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Project Implementation Unit have been trained on the fundamentals of gender mainstreaming and social inclusion

The training exposed the beneficiaries to the knowledge and skills needed to initiate gender mainstreaming in the cocoa subsector in both TCEP & TCEP II. In addition, "it made staff and implementing partners to appreciate gender and social inclusion concepts in community development and demonstrated that gender injustice is a key cause of poverty". The training also provided knowledge on the importance of men and women in the communities where they work, thereby engendering motivation and commitment to the project objective.

The Gender Unit also initiated dialogue with local authorities on the right to citizens' participation and social inclusion. The dialogues brought together 358 men, women, youths and people with different abilities in the two project counties. The dialogue provided a platform for discussion of traditional beliefs and practices and provided an insight on how these traditional beliefs have impact agriculture development both positively and negatively especially in the area of land ownership.

The Gender Unit also commissioned an assessment study of the gender gaps in the agriculture sector as it relates to the cocoa subsector in Nimba and Lofa Counties. The outcome of the study provided a quantitative and qualitative assessment that generated information on gender gaps as well as

and local leaders on child labor and Gender Based Violence (GBV), and the attending consequences. The campaigns increased public awareness and discussions on issues of child labor and GBV in the communities. It also provided the platform for students at different institutions of learning to educate the public on issues of SGBV and Child Labor through social discourses. The awareness campaign in the two counties was climaxed with sporting activities especially football and kickball in Voinjama and Sacleapea

Meanwhile, a Gender Targeting Strategy is ready for validation and rollout. The goal of the strategy is to have a tool that IFAD staff and partners will use as their guide in selecting the beneficiaries of their interventions; and it will help them

to focus their interventions on the specific group(s) of people.

IFAD is committed to providing appropriate and focused support for enhancing the productive potential of the rural poor so that they can help themselves to overcome poverty. Poverty is not just a condition of low income,

it is also a condition of vulnerability, exclusion and powerlessness.

needs, constraints and opportunities for women and youths in the project target areas as evidence-based data.

To institutionalize gender mainstreaming in the project and the project locations, a community awareness and sensitization campaign was undertaken specifically for national



Far Right: Gender Officer Allen Lincoln



Minister Robert Fagans, Emmanuel G. Vah and Ansu S. Konneh launched the distribution of seeds, tools and fertilizers to



The COVID-19 pandemic affected the global community in different ways. The untold loss of lives and food insecurity are just a few of the predicaments that engulfed the world. In Liberia, the Ministry of Agriculture introduced a three front proactive strategy to absorb any shock that possibly results from the

Ministry of Agriculture Distributes Farming Tools

(RPSF) through the repurposing of activities with a focus on local food production.

The official launched of distribution of farming inputs to farmers in Lofa County was held in Kluka about 10 kilometers away from the provincial city of Voinjama. 7500 farmers

development partners to source additional support for farmers in other counties. He cautioned the beneficiaries to use the support package for the intended purpose. He said the support is aim at stimulating farming activities and if the fertilizer, tools and seeds are used for the intended purpose,

“7500 farmers are receiving fertilizers, farming tools and assorted seeds as part of an emergency package to assist farmers affected by the interruption of imports of agriculture implements due to the global lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic”

pandemic and to guarantee continuous supply of food on the Liberian market.

The strategy involves the following: ensure uninterrupted supply of food and mitigate the impact of possible reduced food availability; maintain access to food and improved nutritional well-being for vulnerable populations and promote rapid domestic food production. The International Fund for Agricultural Development accepted the MOA proposal for the creation of the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility



L to R: Mr. Emmanuel G. Vah, Project Coordinator, Hon. Robert K. Fagans Deputy Minister, Mr. Ansu S. Konneh PMU Director and a beneficiary farmer.

received fertilizers, farming tools and assorted seeds as part of an emergency package to assist farmers affected by the interruption of imports of agriculture implements due to the global lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergency package targeted 1500 vegetable farmers, 2000 cassava farmers, 2000 upland rice farmers and 2000 lowland rice farmers in the county. At the launched of the RPSF, the Deputy Minister of Agriculture for Planning and Development Mr. Robert K. Fagans said the emergency support to farmers is in line with the government’s program to stimulate agricultural development in the country. “Agriculture is a major priority of this government’s Pro-Poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD)” he noted. Deputy Minister Fagans said the government is negotiating with other friendly governments and

the donor community will be encouraged to provide additional support.

Also speaking at the ceremony, the Director of the Program Management Unit (PMU) at the Ministry of Agriculture

Mr. Ansu S. Konneh commended the donor community for the support in stimulating agriculture activities in the country. He offered special thanks to President George M. Weah for providing the overall vision for agricultural development in the country. Mr. Konneh warned against the sale of the items noting that any community engaging in such practice will be reprimanded in accordance with the due process of law.

Various women groups including elders and citizens of Kluka town and nearby villages witnessed the program.

Women Groups benefits from Alternative Livelihood Support



Ms. Garmai S. Gbusiwoi's group receives power tiller from Minister Cooper

improved vegetable seeds, fertilizers, tools and onsite support from the Young Professionals

During a recent visit to the vegetable gardens of the women groups, the Minister of Agriculture Ms. Jeanine M. Cooper expressed satisfaction with the level of worked undertaken by the women. She assured of additional support in empowering rural farmers. Minister Cooper donated a power tiller to a lead farmer, Garmai S. Gbusiwoi to support her group in mechanizing their next gardening activities.

Women play a very important role in agriculture production in Liberia. They are involved in the entire farming circle from planting to harvesting of food crops. In addition to the farming obligation, they are also responsible to provide care for the children in the home.

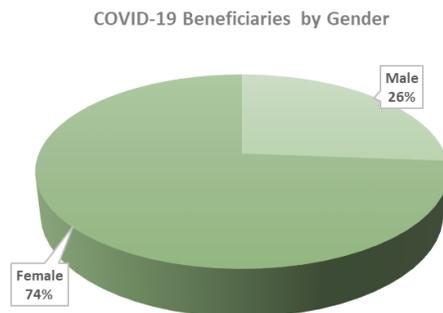
As a means of providing alternative livelihood for rural women, the project supported the establishment of 20 women groups with ten members in each group to engage in the cultivation of vegetable gardens for domestic and marketing purposes. The sole objective is to provide increase income and improve their livelihood. This recruitment exercise was carried out in five of the seven districts.

At the selection and verification process, each of the women groups received various inputs including

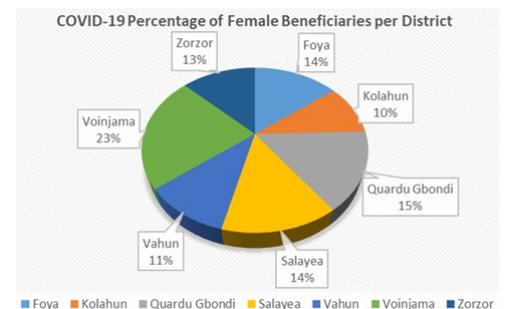
COVID-19 Farmers disaggregated by district

District	Total	M	F
Foya	201	40	161
Kolahun	200	90	110
Quardu Gbondi	200	29	171
Salayea	200	45	155
Vahun	150	33	117
Voinjama	295	43	252
Zorzor	254	113	141
TOTAL	1500	393	1107
		26%	74%

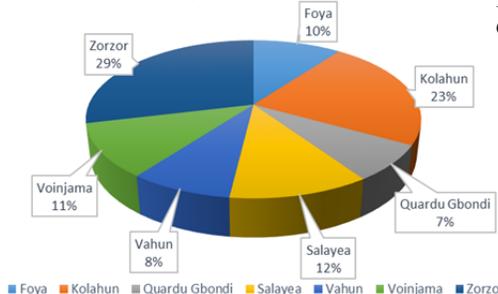
Percent of Beneficiaries by Gender



Percent of COVID-19 Beneficiaries per Female



COVID-19 Percentage of Male Beneficiaries per District



Percent of COVID-19 Beneficiaries per Male

Road rehabilitation and maintenance is a key component of TCEP-II. Farming activities in Lofa County is greatly impeded by the lack of access to road. Farmers are unable to bring large quantity of farm produce to markets because of impassable road access. The project is intervening to bring relief to farmers in the county. The project will support the rehabilitation of 110 kilometer of feeder or secondary roads. The identified road corridors will meet the standard of improved and climate-proofed access to markets. In addition, 270 km of Farm Tracks roads will be rehabilitated and climate-proofed as well.

72.16 km Road Assessed for Rehabilitation and Maintenance

The project engineers along with the County Resident Engineer from the Ministry of Public Works representatives from the farmers cooperatives, and with the consent of the County Agriculture Officer and the District Agriculture Officers have already assessed 72.16 km of roads to be rehabilitated in four of the districts. The districts includes Kolahun, Foya, Zorzor and Quardu Gboni. When completed, farmers will transport

agriculture produce to the market thus improving their financial income from farming activities.

Item No.	Description of Road to be Rehabilitated	District	Road Length
LOT #1	Samodu to Moibadu	Quardu Gboni	7.5 km
LOT #2	Jarmulor to Korlela	Quardu Gboni	7.5 km
LOT #3	Sazanor to Kanela	Quardu Gboni	8.26 km
LOT #4	Kambolahum to Fassawolo	Kolahum	6.0 km
LOT #5	Baowahum to Hangala	Wahassa/ Lukambeh (Kolahun)	10.2 km
LOT #6	Nyewahum to Betesu	Kolahum	10.3 km
LOT #7	Worsangar to Sodu	Foya	6.0 km
LOT #8	Solumba to Yealo	Foya	8.4 km
LOT #9	Yealo to Kpolornin	Foya	8.0 km
LOT #10	Ziggida Bridge	Zorzor	—
Total Road Length Assessed			72.16 km

The Farmers Field School and the positive impact on smallholder farmers

The Farmer Field School is an integrated adult learning forum where farmers gathered together in designated locations for about two weeks depending on the need to share ideas and deliberate on farming issues and strategies to improve farming practices and procedures. The Farmer Field Schools which are held rotationally, brings together “Lead Farmers” selected from the various established kuu groups. Lead Farmers are trained in various practices from establishment of village nurseries, seed sowing, pest and weed control, de-shading, harvesting, fermentation, drying, storage and marketing.

Under the TCEP-II, three farmer field school sessions have been conducted in Lawalazue, Foya and Kabbah’s town. A total of 98 LEAD farmers have been trained in the various cocoa farming methodologies. Each of the 98 LEAD farmers represents a kuu group in the seven districts and they serve as trainers to transfer the knowledge gained to other farmers in their kuu groups. The project, through a consultancy, has developed a FFS training manual which is use as a guide in the two projects. Below is an extract from the manual:

“Farmer Field School Concepts and Approaches”

FFS is a platform where farmers and facilitators analyze, debate observations or problems, apply their experiences in resolving the problems and present new information from outside the community. The results of the meetings are management decisions on what action to take. Thus, FFS as a new extension methodology is a dynamic process that is practiced and controlled by the farmers to transform their observations to create a more practical understanding of the crop/livestock

agro-ecosystem.

The FFS model is a farmer training approach, which is based on principles of adult education and applied knowledge. It is based on innovative, participatory, learning by discovery approach, which enables farmers to acquire an understanding of the principles of Integrated Pest Production Management (IPPM) that can be applied in any situation.

Farmers can learn how to analyze pest problems in the field and how to make sound management decisions from both ecological and economic viewpoints in the control of the pest problem.

This approach has led to substantial reductions in the use of pesticides, increased profits, and farmers have decreased sole dependence on agricultural extension agents. The long term goal is to expand the capacity of government, NGOs, and the private sector to respond to the needs of resource-poor farmers for knowledge and access to information that will enable them to upgrade their farming system;

The training and facilitation of knowledge takes place in the field; the field condition determines most of the curriculum; observation of real problems and analysis begin right from planting of the crop to harvest, market and processing;



Graduates of Circle 1 training in Lawalazu, Voinjama District



William B. Massaboi presents certificate to a female graduate in Lawalazu