





THE CASTRAP NEWSLETTER

A biannual newsletter of the Liberia national component of the West Africa Competitiveness Programme First Edition - Issue No.02 (October 2021 - April 2022)





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Implementing Organizations













Welcome to the first edition (issue No. O2) of the biannual newsletter of the Liberia national component of the West Africa Competitiveness Programme - The Cassava Transformation Project. This newsletter presents updates on the activities and the progress of the project. For further information about CASTRAP, visit: https://cerathdev.org/cassava-transformation-project

OVERVIEW OF WACOMP

The West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP) is a partnership initiative between the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the European Union (EU). It is aligned to support the implementation of ECOWAS regional policies and programmes including the West Africa Quality System Programme (WAQSP).

WACOMP was adopted under the 11th European Union Development Fund (EDF) Regional Indicative Programme for a total amount of €120m, and highlight a commitment to the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and West Africa.

WACOMP seeks to support several selected value chains at the national and regional level, so as to promote structural transformation and better access to regional and international markets while taking into account social and environmental concerns.

Some Selected Value Chains Of The WACOMP



The principal objectives of WACOMP are to strengthen the competitiveness of West African countries, and to enhance their integration into the regional and international trading system.

The programme will work to:

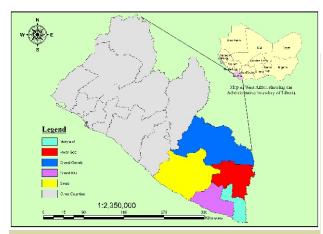
- improve performance, growth and contribution to the industry,
- improve regional trade and exports of selected value chains,
- and improve the business climate at national and regional levels.

The Programme has 16 National components and 1 regional component. While each country is individually responsible for the implementation of its component, the ECOWAS Commission, with the support of the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU/ UEMOA) Commission, is responsible for the implementation of the regional components and for the coordination of WACOMP.

WACOMP IN LIBERIA

WACOMP in Liberia seeks to improve the competitiveness and regional integration of Liberia's cassava sector through a value chain approach. Cassava is the second most consumed crop in Liberia, and estimated to be cultivated by 65% of Liberia's farmers. This notwithstanding, a myriad of factors along its value-chain impedes the competitiveness of Liberia's cassava sector. These factors include access to quality inputs, low technical skills of essential value chain actors, limited access to finance, low entrepreneurial skills, absence and weak organization of essential value chain actors and their linkages, limited infrastructure, unstructured markets, and weak public sector support.

In Liberia, WACOMP targets the South Eastern counties of Sinoe, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, River Gee and Maryland. The South East Region of the country is estimated to be the poorest and with also a comparatively smaller population.



Map of the project landscape in the South East of Liberia

Enhancing the cassava value chain in the South Eastern Region can lead to a significant revival of the food processing industry, among others, and provide socio-economic opportunities including job creation, food and nutrition security, and poverty reduction. It can also contribute to the empowerment of women and youth, who constitute the majority of small producers, carrying out 80% of activities in rural areas.

ABOUT CASTRAP

The Cassava Transformation Project (CASTRAP) is the Liberia component of WACOMP. The goal of CASTRAP is to enhance the competitiveness and the regional integration of Liberia's cassava sector through a value chain approach focused on sustained production, value addition, entrepreneurship, and sustainable markets.

CERATH Development Organization in partnership with Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment, Conservation Alliance Liberia, and Center for Enterprise Learning are implementing the project in Liberia's South Eastern counties of Sinoe, Maryland, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, and Grand Kru.

CASTRAP Objectives and Expected Outcomes

Objective 1

Strengthened efficiency of actors engaged in the cassava value chain to improve access to inputs, and markets



Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened and efficient farmer cooperatives and other value chain actors: One integrated production, processing, and commercialization system (IPPCS) established in each county.

Objective 2

Enhanced production, processing, and commercialization of the cassava value chain



Expected Outcomes

- Increased cassava value addition with commercialization in the project landscape.
- Reduction in post-harvest losses.
- Improved food and nutrition security.
- Increased awareness and adoption of climate-smart practices, quality standards, and gender equality and social inclusion principles.

Objective 3

Cassava value chain enhanced to be financially sustainable, and commercially viable



Expected Outcomes

- Increased cassava value chain connectivity in the project landscape.
- Increased inclusive employment and entrepreneurship within the cassava sector of Liberia's South Eastern Region.
- Increased access to financing for cassava enterprises.

Objective 4

Policies, programs, and incentives to stimulate the commercialization of the cassava sector advocated for and implemented



Expected Outcomes

- Increased collaboration between sector partners particularly bakeries and upstream value chain actors resulting from advocacy activities.
- Improved legal framework and capacity of the national standards laboratory (NSL) to offer conformity services (testing, inspection, certification, quality award, and metrology).

CASTRAP IN FOCUS

1. The Launch of the Cassava Transformation Project



A cross-section of Stakeholders at the end of the launch of the Cassava Transformation Project

On October 28, 2021, the Cassava Transformation Project was launched at the Corina Hotel in Liberia. The project is scheduled to last four years, from 2021 to 2025. The launch's goal was to raise awareness about the project, present progress so far, and present baseline findings.

CASTRAP's agri-business case and county-based techniques were praised by Stefania Marrone, Head of Section "Infrastructure and Resilience" of the European Union Delegation to Liberia. In addition, EU Delgation to Liberia, Geetrui Louwagie stated that the EU intends to strengthen the agribusiness strategy by connecting producer groups, aggregators, processors, dealers, and market actors across the cassava value chain. She also stressed the CASTRAP's county-based strategy and needs approach.



A section of stakeholders seated at the project launch



Project Manager, Isaac Donkor, delivering a presentation on findings from the CASTRAP baseline survey

Hon. Robert K. Fagan, Sr., the Ministry of Agriculture's Deputy Minister for Planning and Development, attended the event and officially launched the project. A diverse range of participants from the development and business communities, as well as the media, attended the project launch. The German Ambassador to Liberia, the Deputy Minister of Industry, representatives from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and UN representatives were also present.

The event featured presentations about the Cassava Tranformation Project, as well as key findings from the project's baseline survey, which was conducted in each of the five project counties.

2. CASTRAP Signs Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) with the Cooperative Development Agency (CDA)

In October 2021, CASTRAP signed a MoA with the Cooperative Development Agency (CDA). This was an outcome of a series of meetings between the CDA and the lead implementing partner of the CASTRAP

Among other things, CDA has agreed to trained all CASTRAP technical and field staff in cooperative management using the training of trainers (ToTs) approach. Furthermore, CDA will assist these technical and field officers in providing training to the selected farmer cooperatives in order to strengthen and consolidate them.

This arrangement is aimed at preparing project officers to provide high-level assistance to farmer cooperatives, especially since CDA has no physical presence in the intervention counties.



CASTRAP team members with officers from CDA at the project county office in Sinoe.

3. Training of Project County Officers on Farmer Field School Approach



The project team with the Gbawaken Tender Rural Women Project in Maryland county during needs assessment exercise

CASTRAP hosted a two-day training workshop for county field officers in November 2021. Cassava cropping calendar, cassava farm size measurement and yield estimation, varietal selections, features and uses, and other topics were covered during the course. In addition, county field officers were given an online course to help them improve their ability for teaching f a r m e r g r o u p s . . (https://elearning.fao.org/course/view.php?id =724)

The CASTRAP Agronomist and project manager were in charge of the training sessions. The goal of the training was to lay the groundwork and prepare county field officers for farmer group training.

4. CASTRAP Completes Needs Assessment for Cooperatives



Needs assessment engagement of the Gbawaken Tender Rural Women Project, Maryland county

The assessment of farmer groups and cooperatives within the project landscape has been completed. The needs assessment exercise was carried out across the project counties between November and December 2021. The goal of this activity was to identify, strengthen, and consolidate cooperatives and farmer groups during the project's first year. In total, 12 farmer groups were evaluated. Following that, eight groups were chosen to be strengthened and consolidated into a viable groups in order to obtain or renew its CDA license.

The assessment was completed with the help of an adapted cooperative evaluation tool created by the project. The assessment classified farmer associations into four stages of development, from which a well-defined set of support interventions will be provided. These stages are as follows: start-up, developing, consolidating, and mature.



An engagement with Gbawaken Farmers Association

5. CASTRAP Trains Members of Selected Farmer Groups and Cooperatives



Training of the members of the Green Life Liberia farmer association, Konmanah Town, Sinoe county.

Subsequent to an assessment of farmer groups and cooperatives by CASTRAP, the project has began supporting 8 farmer groups and cooperatives to be strengthened and consolidated. The assessments of various cooperatives served as the foundation for training and development. After the review, eight cooperatives were identified to be improved and solidified.

The assessment revealed that none of the eight groups had a fundamental comprehension of the basic norms that govern the operation of a functional cooperative. CASTRAP and the cooperatives collaborated on a series of training sessions aimed at giving the cooperatives a firm foundation for efficiently organizing themselves.

The training consisted of four modules: Basics of Agricultural Cooperatives, Cooperative Governance, Management, Capital Formation, and Finance, each of which tackled a different topic.

Presentations, plenary discussions, question and answer sessions, and group exercises were all part of the program. The activity was engaging, resulting in a high degree of engagement and input from the many cooperative members.



Members of the Panama Women for Future, Panama Town, Sinoe County after a training session.

6. Setting up Farmer Field School (FFS) for the Training on Smart Agricultural Practices.



CASTRAP Agronomist addressing cassava farmers at a demonstration and nursery site in Panama Town

CASTRAP identified participants from 12 farmer groups that expressed interest in being taught on climate smart agriculture practices in November 2021. The focus of the instruction was on farm size, yield estimation, and cutting-edge harvesting procedures. Farmers from Zwedru, Gbawaken, Panama, and a number of other villages offered agricultural lands as demonstration grounds and also participated in the training.

The training took place in the five project counties from November to December 2021. It included topics like estimating farm size and yield, as well as cutting-edge harvesting procedures. In addition, field officers were assigned to assist farmers in enhancing their skills in cassava production. By the end of the activity, 494 farmers were trained including, 311 women and 172 youths.



Cassava farmers in Panama town constructing mounds to plant improved cassava cuttings

7. CASTRAP supports the renovation of 2 cassava processing enterprises

The project team has supported to the refurbishment of two (2) agro-processing centers in Maryland and Grand Gedeh counties in South East of Liberia. This inspiring achievement is part of the project's goal of improving the efficiency of key actors in the cassava value chain in order to enhance inputs and increase cassava production, processing, and commercialization.

The businesses, Agro Green and Faith Temple benefited from CASTRAP's refurbishment assistance. Because of their failing infrastructure, the two (2) agroprocessing facilities lacked a competent quality management system (OMS).



Previous state of Agro Green processing enterprise



Renovated structure of Agro Green processing enterprise

These two recipients were overjoyed to receive this assistance from CASTRAP, and they worked closely together to ensure a successful refurbishment. The buildings were re-roofed, a reinforced furnace was built with suitable heat-escape systems, production floors were concreted, and proper enclosures were built to protect the facilities from vermin and theft. Both centers have been painted and will be commissioned in May 2022 to commence operations.

As part of the next steps, CASTRAP will contract an expert to help the two enterprises to strengthen their capacity to set up a quality management system (QMS) that helps improve their products to become competitive in both the local and national markets.



Previous state of Faith Temple processing enterprise



enterprise

8. CASTRAP embarks on Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) formation, training and establishment.



VSLA mobilization and sensitization at Sinoe County

Since April 2022, the project has supported the development of four (4) VSLAs in Sinoe and Grand Kru counties, with a total membership of 120 people, nearly 70% of whom are women. By the end of May 2022, six more VSLAs are projected to be operational, bringing the total number of members to 300. Each VSLA that has been established was given a complete VSLA kit as well as a financial injection of USD 200.00. The cash contribution will be used to lay a solid foundation, establish a loan portfolio, and reduce the risk of the first loan distribution.



Project officer during the establishment of VSLA explaining meeting procedures to VSLA group members

Over 460 community members participated in the exercise, which began with community sensitization and awareness. The project was able to close registration ahead of time because the registration procedure received over 98 percent subscription. As a result, there are already calls for the number of VSLAs to be increased to 20.



Question & answer session during VSLA formation

Apart from being a savings club, CASTRAP sees VSLAs as a way to improve business skills through training and mentoring. Members of the CASTRAP VSLA intervention's already structured and formed groups have expressed excitement and enthusiasm after getting training from the project team lead by its agribusiness and enterprise development officer. They claim that the training has instilled in them a culture of management and saving, which is key to improving the livelihoods of their particular households.

7. Up & Close with President of Panama Women for the Future Farmers Association

The journey of Panama Women for the Future- from an Association to a Full-Fledged Licensed Cooperative.



Mrs. Alecia Toe Keita, President of Panama Women for the Future Farmers Association

Mrs. Alecia Toe Keita is my name, and I was born and raised in Panama Community, Kpayan District, Sinoe County. I am currently the president of Panama Women for the Future. I am also an entrepreneur in the retail of household goods.

As an adult, I moved to Greenville City, Sinoe's capital, in search of greener pastures. While in Greenville, I was able to obtain 6 months of training in organizing village saving and loans associations (VSLAs) from EDU-Care thanks to funding from the United Nations Women's Program. Following the training, I was inspired to organize a community loan and savings club in Greenville with the help of my neighborhood women. The Cross-Border Women's Association replaced this club. Since its inception in 2010, the group has grown and thrived.

In 2019, I returned to Panama, where I was born, and launched a domestic supply store. During my daily interactions with clients, the most of whom are women and young girls, I noticed that the majority of them wanted to start their own off-farm businesses. They were, however, limited in their ability to obtain early funding to launch the company. I was moved yet again.

As a result, I started pressuring the women in the village, the majority of whom were farmers, to form a VSLA. It marked the start of the Panama Women for the Future initiative. The Panama Women for the Future was formally formed on January 1, 2020.

At the county level, the Ministry of Agriculture has provided significant technical and management assistance to the association. The organization already has 160 members, comprising 140 women and 20 men from Panama and the surrounding areas. Each member owns a cassava farm of around 1 acre and is entitled to invest in the VSLA for \$100.00 (LRD). Last year, the Panamanian VSLA saved \$4,387,000 (LRD).

Panama Women first came into contact with CASTRAP in June 2021 and has since benefited from the programme. The CASTRAP team evaluated the organization and recommended that it be strengthened in order to become a licensed cooperative, the first of its kind in the county. CASTRAP has provided training and coaching to Panama Women for the Future members on cooperative management, record keeping, and dispute resolution thus far.

We intend to open a [bank] account and raise finances to open our office and training center as soon as possible. Most significantly, we wish to take advantage of CASTRAP initiatives to improve the economic condition of the association's members, such as climate-smart, good agriculture practices, value addition, and marketing support. As president of the association, my long-term goal is to construct one of the most successful cooperatives and maybe the county's first cooperative credit union.

8. A March Towards the Industrialization of the Cassava Crop - A Look at the Impact of Liberia's National Cassava Strategy in the South East Landscape

"A dynamic industry contributing significantly to Liberia's economic development, national peace and stability, as well as the improvement of living standards of the Liberian people"

- Vision of Liberia's Cassava Sector Strategy

Cassava as a major staple in the South East of Liberia

That, cassava is perhaps the most important staple crop in the South East of Liberia leaves very few in doubt. Cassava root finds itself, daily, on the dining table of many households in various forms: the popular fufu, gari, (including its heroic cousin, the super gari), deepah (also called deepor or depot), GB (Glea-gbar), Dumb-boy (cassava dumplings) or simply as boiled roots. For those who would dare not consider one of these cassavabased staples, and perhaps will forgivingly opt for rice, cassava leaf soup is easily the preferred accompaniment. Considered by many as a poor man's crop due to its versatility in varied production conditions, cassava has, and continues to serve the consumptive needs of farming households in the South East of Liberia where about 65 percent of farmers are engaged in its cultivation. But, is the crop, so loved and vet, not so valued, ready to become an industrial crop in the South East of Liberia?



Fufu is an important cassava staple particularly in the South East of the Country

Cassava as an industrial crop

According to Singh (2009), crops are commonly categorized as food, feed or industrial, based on their use. Rice for example, is considered a food crop while yellow maize grown for the poultry industry may be considered as feed crop.

A crop like cotton is mostly considered as an industrial crop owing to its primary purpose as crops for large industrial processing with little or no food value. How a crop is categorized may be spatial, and or temporal, i.e., depending on where it is utilized, and or, at the time of utilization. For instance, cassava in the spatial sense is largely considered a food crop in Liberia, Ghana and Nigeria (West Africa), but is cultivated in Thailand and Vietnam, purely as an industrial crop. Historically, maize oscillates between being a feed crop and serving as food crop for many across the world. Industrial crop does not in any way mean that the final product obtained from processing that crop may not be food. In fact, in most cases industrial crops are mainly processed into food products. For example, 60% of industrial cassava is mainly used in the food industry, as opposed to 33% in animal feed with the resulting 7% in the textile, paper and food fermentation industries (Perez et al., 2017).

Today, increasing awareness and shift towards sustainable production have acted to bring into focus the need to look for industrial raw materials from renewable and environmentally friendly sources, of which, plants have come to play a central role. At the same time, research and development into the production, and processing of different crops into various forms of industrial products have accelerated. This has resulted in gradual shift towards the utilization of hitherto, food crops such as cassava, and oil palm as industrial raw materials.

The most important cassava part is its root, precisely its starch. It is used in a number of products such as foods, confectionery, sweeteners, paper glues, textiles, plywood, biodegradable products, monosodium glutamate and pharmaceuticals. Cassava chips and pellets are used in animal feed and alcohol production and energy including the production of ethanol and biodiesels.

click on the link to read the full article on our website: https://cerathdev.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/A-March-Towards-the-Industrialization-of-the-Cassava-Crop-1.pdf

AT A GLANCE

Donor	*	European Union
Implementing Organizations	*	CERATH Development Organization (Lead) Rural Integrated Center for Community Empowerment Conservation Alliance Liberia Center for Enterprise Learning
Target Beneficiaries	***	Smallholder Farmers/Cooperatives; Agribusinesses and Agri Focused Entrepreneurs; Financial Institutions and Sector Regulatory Agencies (The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry)
Duration		April 2021 – April 2025
Budget	*	€ 5, 625, 000

CASTRAP'S CONTRIBUTION TO SGDs









Cote D'ivoire

Lead Ministry: Ministry of Regional

Implementing Partner: Chamber of

WACOMP'S COUNTRY INTERVENTION

Amount: €9m

Ministry of Trade



Lead Ministry: Ministry of Finance Implementing Partner: GIZ Selected Value Chains: Soya, ICT

The Gambia

Lead Ministry: Ministry of Trade,

Industry and Employment (MOTIE)
Implementing Partner: UNIDO;
United Purpose Selected

Amount: €4m

Value Chain: Onion



Lead Ministry: Ministry of Trade, Industry and Handcraft Implementing Partner: Chamber of

Selected Value Chains: Honey, Cotton, Renewable energy

Ghana

Lead Ministry: Ministry of Finance,

Selected Value Chains: Tropical Fruits;

Cassava & Derivatives, Cosmetics and Personal Care products



Amount: €5m Lead Ministry: Competitiveness Unit (Office of Prime Minister) Implementing Partner: UNDP **Selected Value Chains:** ICT; Renewable energy, Culture, Tourism &



Amount: €5m **Lead Ministry:** Ministere De L'industrie Et Des Pme Implementing Partner: UNIDO Selected Value Chain: Pineapple



Amount: €4m Lead Ministry: Ministère de l'Industrie et des PME, Cellule de Gestion du Fonds européen de Développement (CGFED) Implementing Partner: UNIDO Selected Value Chain: Mango

Amount: €5m

Amount: €9m

Integration



Implementing Partner: UNIDO

Amount: €5m **Lead Ministry:** Ministry of Finance and Development Planning

Implementing Partner: CERATH

Development Organization

Selected Value Chains: Cassava

Liberia



Amount: €4m Lead Implementing Ministry: Ministère de l'Économie et de l'Industrie (MEI) Selected Value Chains: Poultry; Skin, Hide & Leather; Gum Arabic



Amount: €5.5m **Lead Ministry:** NAO, Ministry of Industrial Development and Investments Promotion, Ministère du Développement Industrie Selected Value Chain: Tropical

Ministère du Commerce extérieur et de la Promotion du Secteur privé Implementing Partner: Ministère du Commerce et de la Promotion du secteur

Niger

privé (MCPSP) Selected Value Chains: Skin, Hide &

Lead Ministry: Ministère des Finances,



Amount: €10m **Lead Ministry:** Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade & Investment Implementing Partner: GIZ Selected Value Chains: Ginger; Tomato/Pepper; Textiles & Garments; Skin, Hide & Leather



Amount: €9m Lead Ministry: Ministère de l'Economie, des Finances et du Plan, Ministère du Commerce, Ministère de l'économie et des Finance

Implementing Partner: ITC Selected Value Chains: Mango; Onion;



Amount: €5m Lead Ministry: National Authorising Office, Ministry of Trade Implementing Partner: UNIDO Selected Value Chains: Cassava & Derivatives, Cocoa, Palm Oil



Lead Ministry: l'industrie Ministère du commerce de l'industrie du développement du secteur privé et de la promotion de la consommation locale Implementing Partner: GIZ Selected Value Chain: Pineapple

FUNDING ORGANIZATION & IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS



CASTRAP is financed by the 11th European Union Development Fund under the West African Competitiveness Programme.



CERATH Development Organization is a non-profit entity focused on catalyzing development within rural and urban poor communities in Africa.



RICCE is a not for profit right based organization working to empower rural communities in Liberia. RICCE emphasize participation in decision making and the sustainable use of natural resources.



CAL is an organization that serves as a catalyst for biodiversity conservation and improved socio-economic conditions of fringe communities. Its vison is to empower communities in Africa to lead in biodiversity conservation and create opportunities for economic growth and improved human well-being.



Ghana is focused on transforming ideas into impactful businesses, and supporting businesses to launch, scale and accelerate. CEL is focused on providing a cocktail of context-based solutions to businesses in Africa particularly within the agricultural and green space.



The West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP) aims to support a number of selected value chains at national and regional level to promote structural transformation and better access to regional and international markets, while taking into account social and environmental concerns. The WACOMP consists of one regional and sixteen national components (15 ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania). The West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP) is financed under the 11th European Development Fund (EDF).

www.wacomp.ecowas.int

NATIONAL COMPONENT

WACOMP Liberia targets the cassava value chain In the South Eastern Region. The Cassava Transformation Project (CASTRAP) is the Liberia National component of the WACOMP. The CASTRAP seeks to enhance the competitiveness and regional integration of Liberia's cassava sector through a value chain approach focused on sustain production, value addition, entrepreneurship, and sustainable markets. The project is being implemented in the South Eastern counties of Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Grand Kru, Maryland, and Sinoe.

DISCLAIMER

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of CERATH Development Organization and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union neither ECOWAS.

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