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TALKING AGRIBUSINESS IN LIBERIA PROJECT

FIRST COMMUNICATION EVENT

THE STATUS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN AGRIBUSINESS

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The Talking Agribusiness in Liberia Project

The Status of Youth Engagement in Agribusiness

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13 October 2022

Presentation Outline



Background & Context of Research



Rationale and Objectives of Research



Methodology



Results & Findings



Conclusions

Background and Context of the Research

➤ Context of the EU-funded Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project

❑ West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP)

The programme aims to strengthen the competitiveness of West Africa and enhance the countries' integration into the regional and international trading system.

❑ Expected Project Outcome

To disseminate information and raise awareness about opportunities:

- for business performance and growth (competitiveness),
- regional (trade) integration of Liberia's agri-/food business value chain, as well as
- an improved environment for agri-/food businesses to thrive in accord with the objective of the WACOMP.

Background and Context of the Research

➤ Context of the EU-funded Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project

❑ Project Activities

- ✓ Validate agribusiness topics of interest among stakeholders
- ✓ Undertake background research on topics
- ✓ Organise events for information dissemination & stakeholder discussions on research findings
- ✓ Integrate research findings with outcomes of stakeholder discussions

First Research Topic

“Youth in agribusiness: the way forward for the competitiveness of Liberian agribusinesses?”

Background and Context of the Research



- ❑ Youth engagement in agribusiness is a vital strategy to create employment opportunities for the youth and to enable them “to become the engine driving new agriculture and agribusiness enterprises as well as rural transformation” (Sanginga, 2015, p. i).
- ❑ Concurrent consensus that most young Africans/Liberians have negative perceptions of agriculture, disinterested in the sector, and would like to transition from the sector altogether (Sanginga, 2015; Losch 2016; Mercy Corps, 2017; Yami, et al., 2019; FAO, 2020; Stakeholder engagements).
- ❑ There remains a need to generate empirical evidence on young people’s perspectives and experiences of the agribusiness sector to inform the design of strategies for youth development and the development of the agribusiness value chain.



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Background and Context of the Research



Liberian Context

- ☐ Youth aged between 15 and 35 years old constitute about a third (33%) of the total population.
- ☐ Agriculture contributes 30-40% of the GDP.
 - ✓ evidence of youth perspectives and experiences in the agribusiness sector is critical in any effort to enhance the growth and performance of the sector.

Rationale and Objectives of the Research

Research Goal

- To assess the status of youth engagement in agribusiness in Liberia toward the prospects of a competitive agribusiness sector. The context of interest includes (i) government actions, (ii) actions of the development community, and (iii) young people's perspectives and experiences of these actions.

Research Objectives

- Ascertain the diversity of youth's interests, aspirations, and perceptions in relation to Liberia's agribusiness sector
- Describe the sector experiences of young people and youth-led agri-/food enterprises, and
- Indicate the context of youth perspectives and experiences in the agribusiness sector

Rationale and Objectives of the Research

Analytic Approach

The approach combines lessons on the conditions necessary for successful youth in agribusiness interventions in Africa and the factors necessary for achieving a competitive agri-/food business sector

- For youth engagement in agribusiness to be considered as a route to a competitive agribusiness sector in Liberia, three conditions must be met ---
 - ☐ positive aspirations, interests, and perceptions of Liberian youth in relation to the sector
 - ☐ enabling environment for youth to build sector-relevant capabilities to improve their motivations and capacities for entrepreneurship and employment
 - ☐ enabling business environment for the performance and growth of youth-led agribusiness enterprises.



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Methodology

Data Sources	Data Collection Method	Sample Size	Data Variables
Youth (tertiary-level students)	Survey (structured questionnaire)	1701	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aspirations, interests, perceptions and expectations concerning Liberia's agribusiness value chain Experiences of the Liberian agribusiness value chain
Youth-led agribusinesses*	Key informant interviews	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experiences of access to relevant education and skills training, finance & innovative technology Skills and capacities assessment of youth employed in the agribusiness value chain Experiences of the Liberian business environment
Educational and training institutions	Key informant interviews	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agri-/food business value chain-relevant curriculum & delivery Entrepreneurship & employability training and resources Challenges to agriculture & agribusiness skills development
Relevant public institutions	Key informant interviews	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opportunities for youth involvement in the agribusiness sector Challenges to agriculture & agribusiness skills development Programming, youth targeting, & building interests
Secondary data	Desk review of relevant literature	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Engagement in Agribusiness in Africa/Liberia

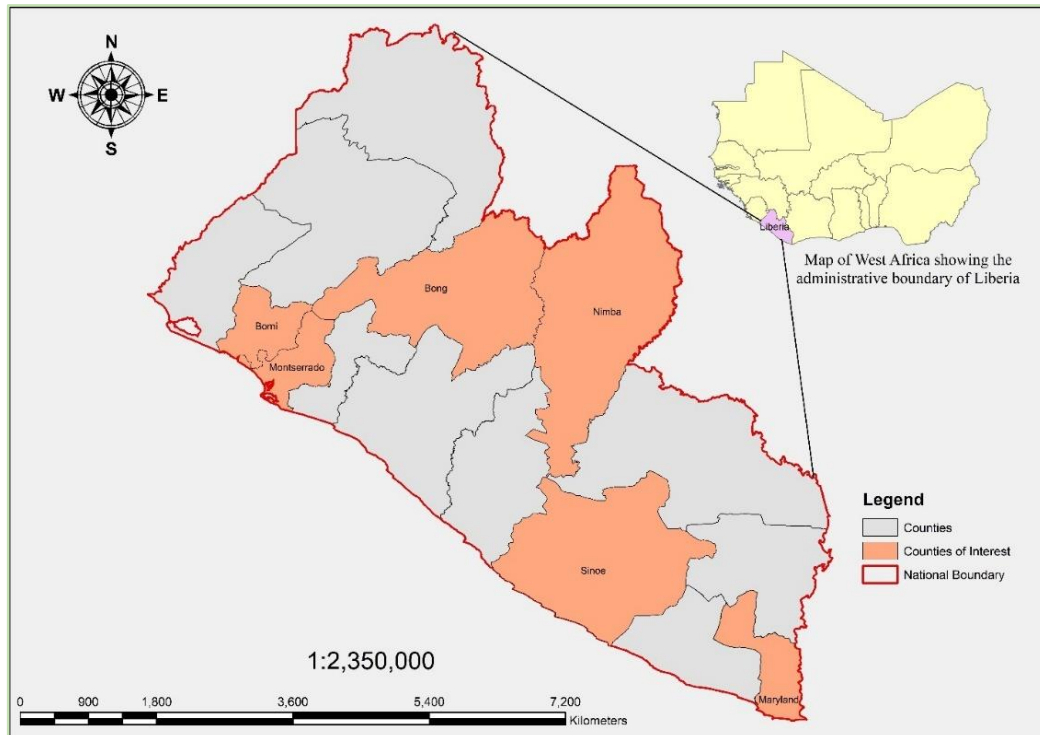


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Methodology

Map showing students' survey areas



Counties	Tertiary institutions
Montserrado	University of Liberia
	Stella Maris Polytechnic University
Bomi	Bomi Community College
Nimba	Liberia International Christian College
	Nimba University
Bong	Cuttington University
	Bong County Technical College
Maryland	William V.S. Tubman University
Sinoe	Sinoe County Community College

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

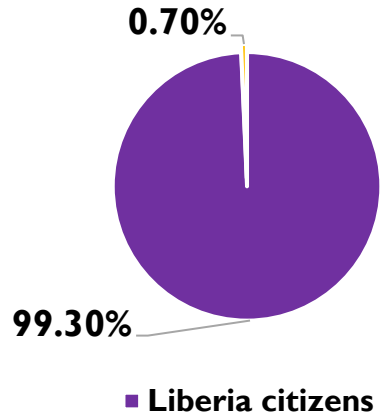


Socio-Demographics (Students Survey)

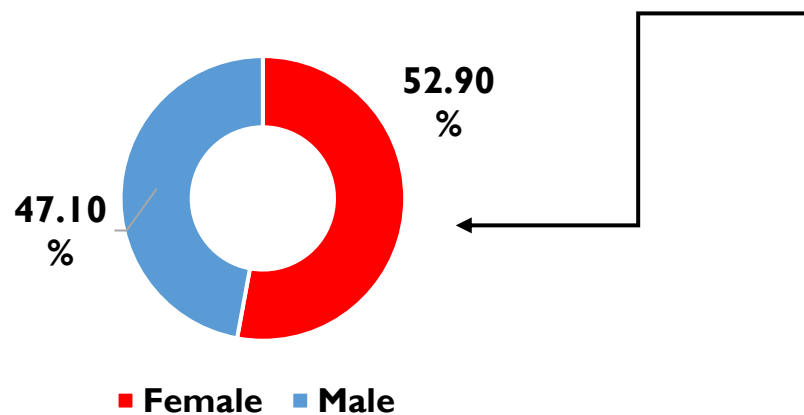


A total of **1701** students were interviewed for the research

Citizen status



Gender



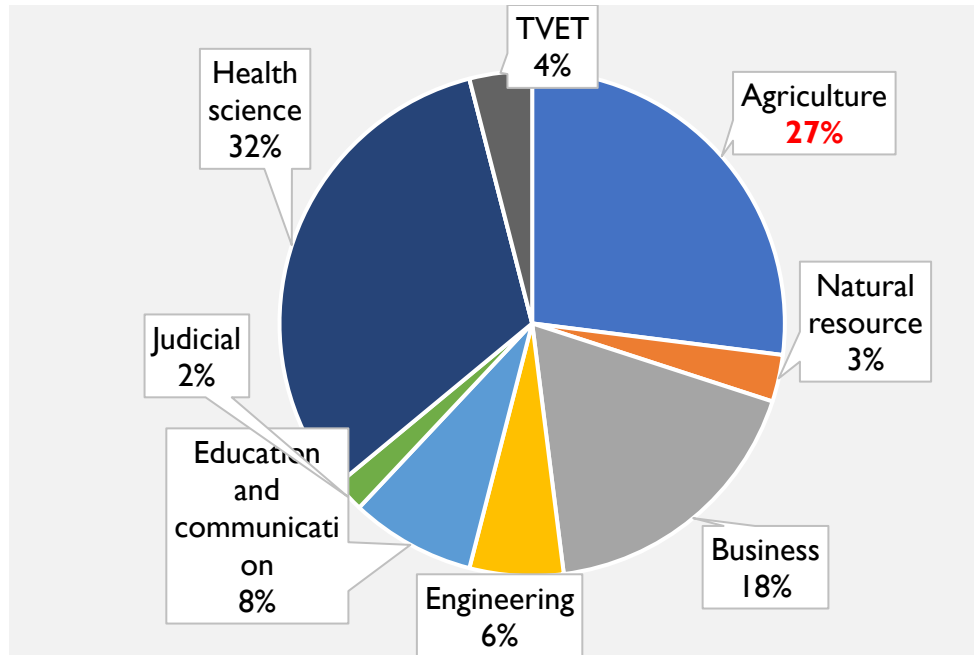
Age category/gender

Categories	Females	Males
15 – 20 years	8.6%	6.4%
21 – 25 years	34.9%	30.4%
26 – 30 years	35.9%	34.3%
30 – 35 years	20.6%	28.9%

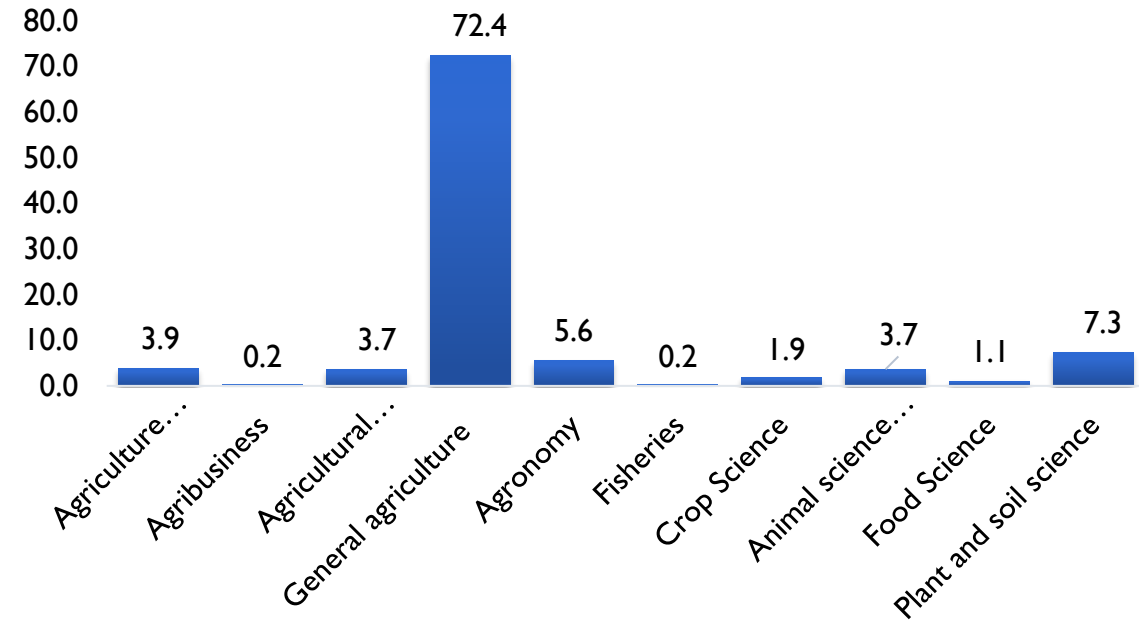
Few respondents were citizens of other West African countries, and one (1) respondent was a citizen of a country outside Africa.

Socio-Demographics (Students Survey)

Programmes of study

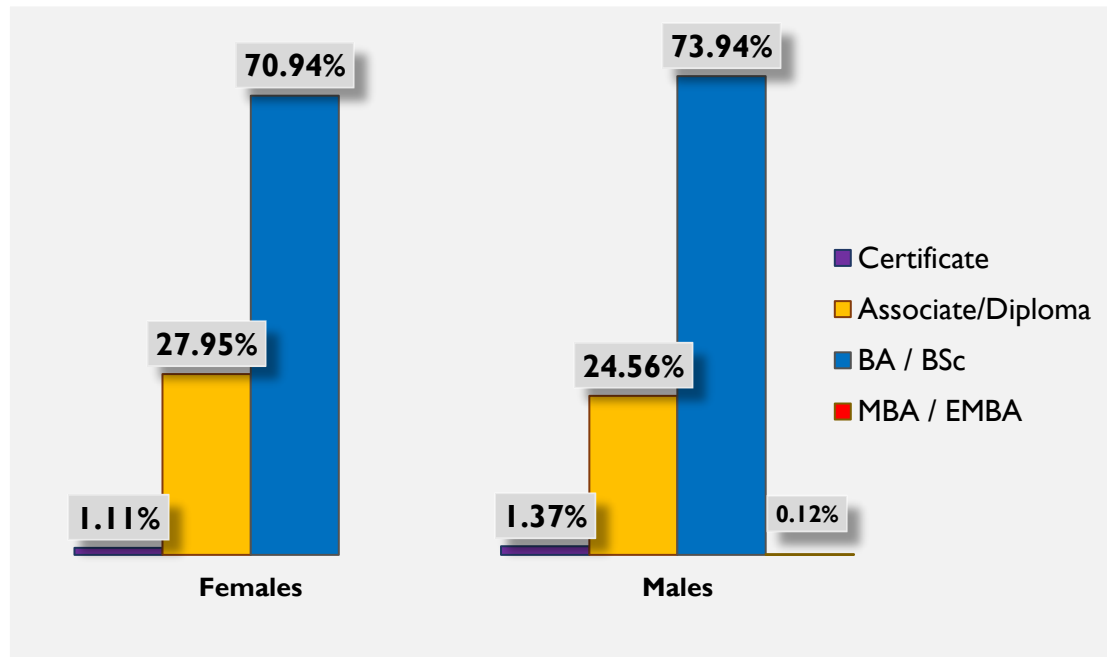


Specialisations in agriculture



Socio-Demographics (Students Survey)

Degree/qualifications being pursued



- ☐ The majority of respondents were in Bachelor's degree programmes
- ☐ More females (**27.95%**) were likely to be pursuing Associate degrees than were males, and
- ☐ More males (**73.94%**) were likely to be pursuing Bachelor's degrees
- ☐ Consistent with findings from the 2019-2020 DHS report – men have greater educational attainment than women in Liberia (LISGIS, 2021)

Characteristics of Agribusiness Enterprises

Type of agribusiness enterprises

Agri-/food Producer & Processor

- Poultry, piggery, vegetable
- plantain chips

Agri-/food Processor

- Chocolate production

Agri-support Services Provider

- Enterprise development and agriprenurship training

Agri-/food Processor (with Packaging)

- Cassava flour, gari, green plantain flour, fufu flour)

Agri-/food Processing

- Dried (powdered) spices

Input Supplier, Agri-Support Services Provider & Food Producer

- Agro-chemicals
- Farm management services and training on agronomic practices
- Cassava farming



Six youth-led agribusiness enterprises were interviewed for the study



- ☐ Two enterprises owned and managed by young females
- ☐ One enterprise owned and managed by a young male
- ☐ One enterprise co-owned and managed by a young male
- ☐ One enterprise was co-owned by a young female and managed by a male older than 35 years when it was established 10 years ago*



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Socio-Demographics (Students Survey)

Age distribution of the youth leaders

- ☐ The leaders were aged 26-30 years old.
- ☐ Historical perspective – young people started their enterprises from ages 21-25 (2) and 26-30 (3).

Educational & skills background of youth leaders

- ☐ Formal education & skills with recognised qualifications in food, agriculture, business and/or technology
- ☐ Exposure to some form of skills training non-formally & informally
 - ICT, particularly YouTube videos were significant
 - Experiences/Lessons of trial and errors/mistakes

Formal education & skills background of youth business leaders*



MBA in Technology



BSc General Agriculture



BSc Business Management



Electrical engineering (TVET)



Trade School certification (Catering)



BSc Agronomy



BA Religious Studies

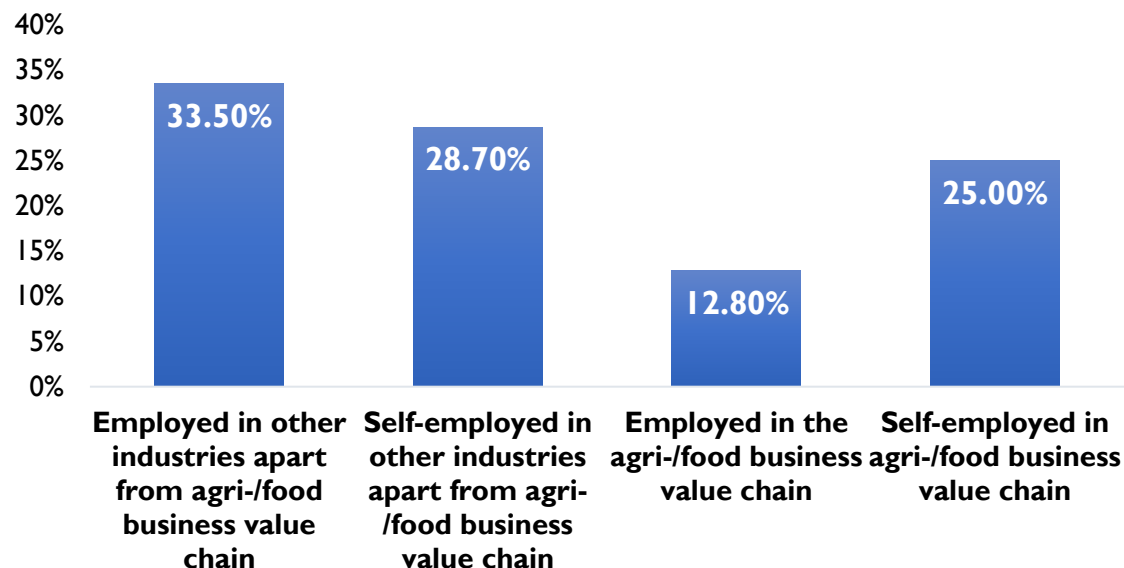


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Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Career development aspirations of the youth

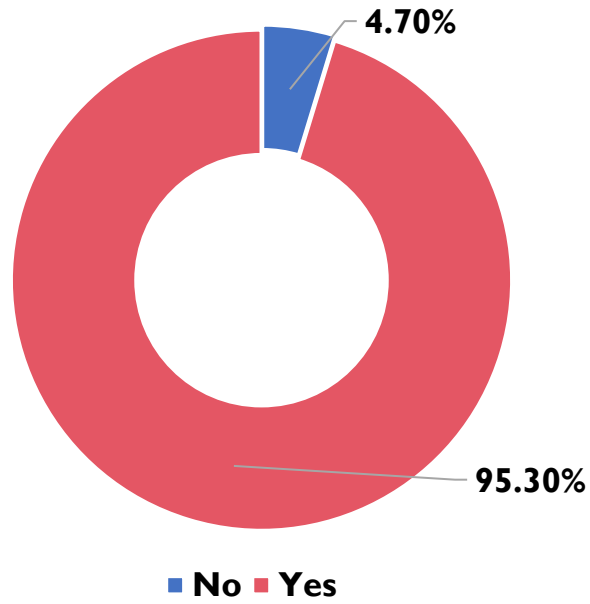


- ☐ Most young people (**62.2%**) had career development aspirations outside the agribusiness sector.
- ☐ A little over a third (**37.80%**) had career development aspirations in the agri-/food business value chain.
- ☐ Students who had career aspirations in the agribusiness sector were more likely to aspire to be **self-employed** than to be **employed** in the sector.

Limited employment opportunities in the sector OR the best way to be involved in the sector is self-employment?

Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Are you willing to be an agripreneur?

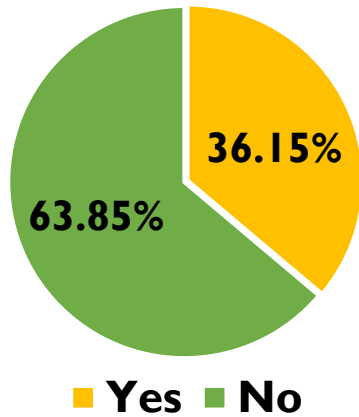


- ❑ The majority of the respondents (95.30%) indicated a willingness to become agripreneurs
 - Not aligned with the respondents' reported career development aspirations

An indication that efforts to increase young people's uptake of agripreneurship will not encounter much resistance?

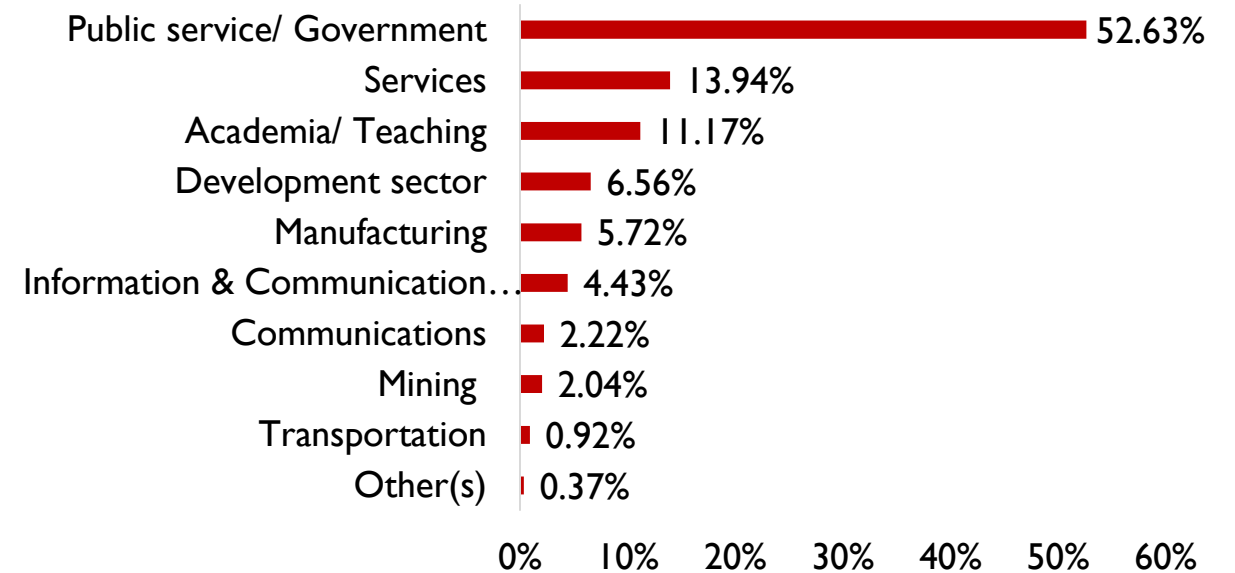
Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Youth labour force participation interest in the agribusiness sector



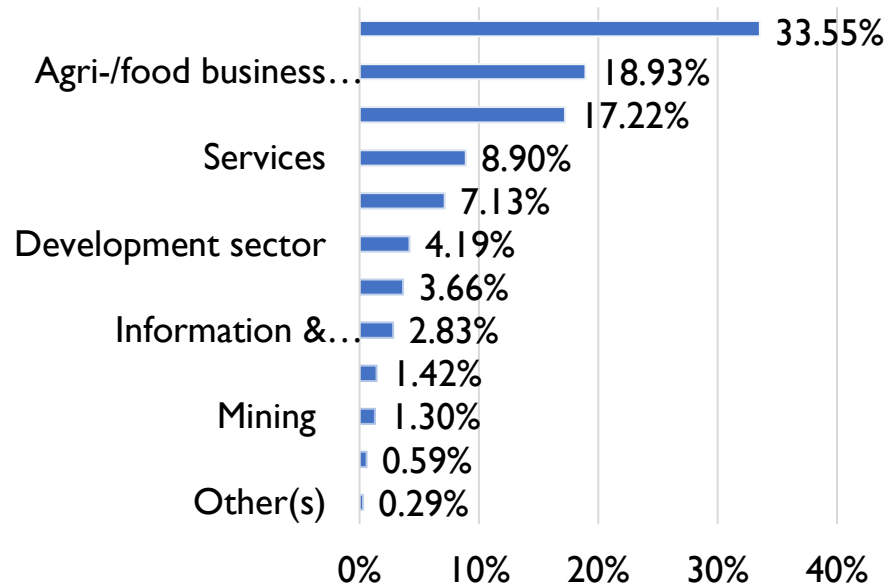
Public Service!
Job Security?

Disaggregated labour force participation interests outside the agribusiness sector



Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Comparative labor force participation interest

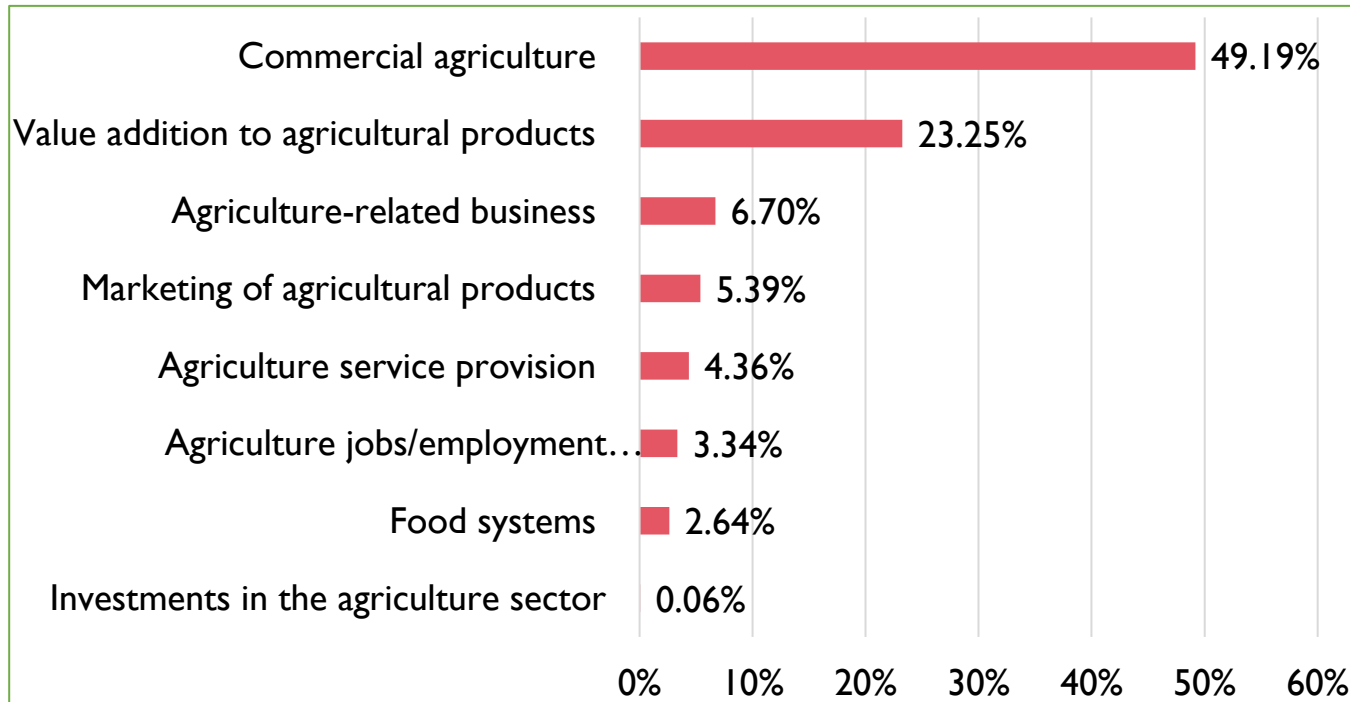


Sector of Interest	Females	Males
Agri-/food business sector including fisheries	18.08%	19.88%
Agricultural support services (incl. research, provision of credit)	16.18%	18.38%
Public service/ Government	37.72%	28.88%
Development	3.57%	4.88%
Academia/ Teaching	6.25%	8.13%
Manufacturing	2.68%	4.75%
Services	10.38%	7.25%
Communications	1.67%	1.13%
Information & Communication Technology	1.45%	4.38%
Mining	0.89%	1.75%
Transportation	0.78%	0.38%
Other(s)	0.33%	0.25%

- ☐ Holding for agricultural support services makes a difference!
- ☐ The highest proportion of males expressed interest in the agribusiness value chain, while the highest proportion of females expressed interest in the public service/government sector.

Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Youth perception of what the agribusiness value chain entails



About **5%** of the respondents did not answer the question.

For nearly half (**49.19%**) of the respondents, commercial agriculture best described what the agribusiness value chain entailed

Is there a need to define agribusiness in the discourse of youth in agribusiness?

Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Youth perceptions on the categories of individuals best-suited for agribusiness sub-sectors

Subsectors	Males	Females	Anyone with passion	Rural folk	Other(s)
Input supply	18%	8%	58%	7%	8%
Production/ farming	18%	9%	54%	15%	4%
Processing	17%	16%	56%	3%	8%
Marketing/sales	5%	41%	48%	2%	3%
Transportation	43%	6%	42%	3%	6%
Distribution	26%	12%	53%	3%)	6%
Agricultural support services	16%	7%	63%	3%	11%

- ☐ The higher proportion of respondents believed that anyone with a passion was best suited to work in any agribusiness subsector
- ☐ Exception in the transportation sector

The perceptions do not reflect the manifestation of the distribution of social categories of people within the sector



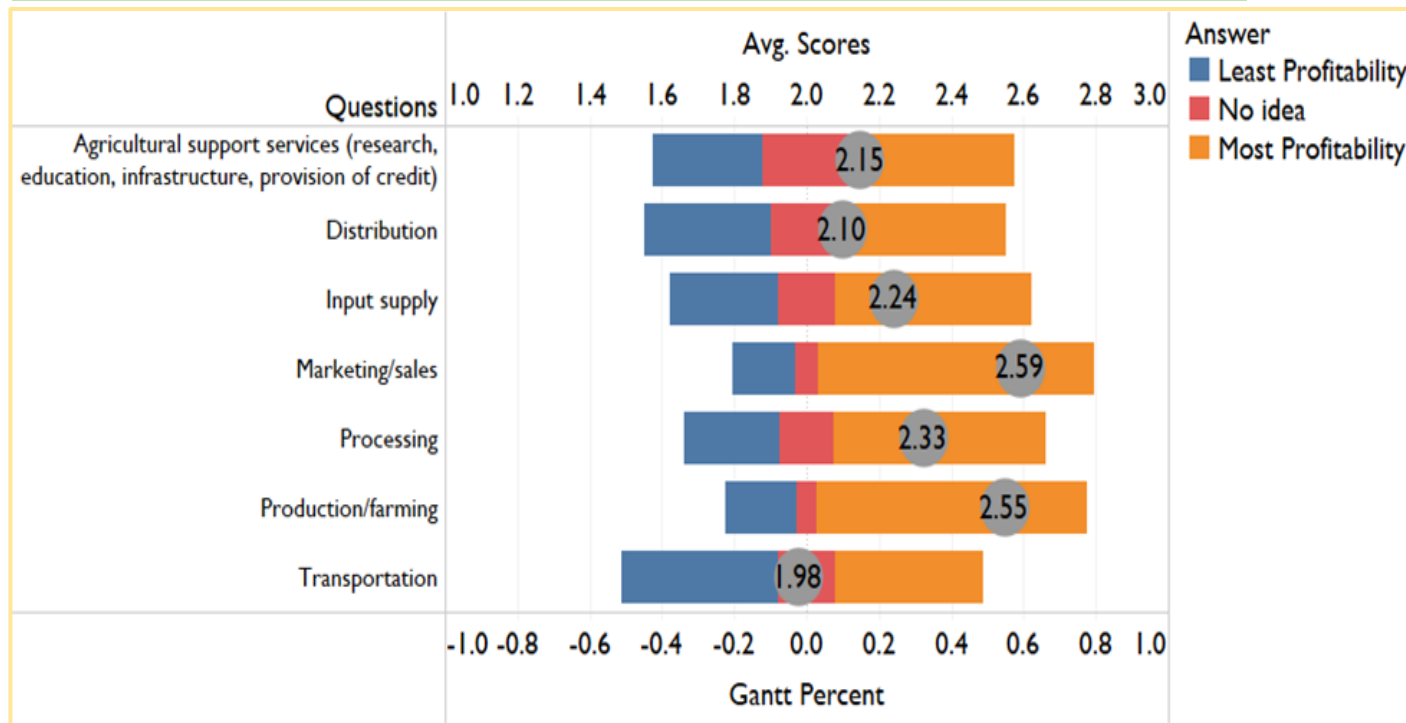


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Youth Aspirations, Interests & Perspectives relating to Liberia's Agribusiness Sector

Youth perceptions on the profitability of agribusiness subsectors



❑ Marketing/sales was perceived as the most profitable sub-sector with an average score of **2.59** points

❑ The transportation subsector was the least profitable recording the least average score of **1.98**.

- Poor road infrastructure in most part of the country, which are seasonally impassable
- High marginal cost and high truck and maintenance costs that transportation businesses accrue

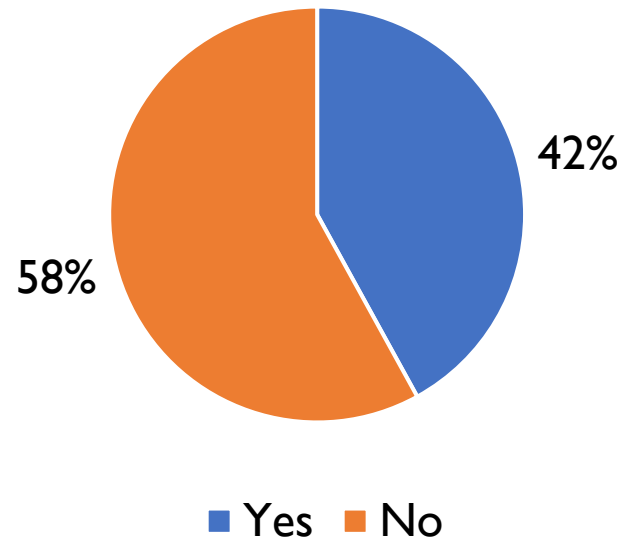
Experiences of Youth & Youth-Led Businesses

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Education & Skills Training

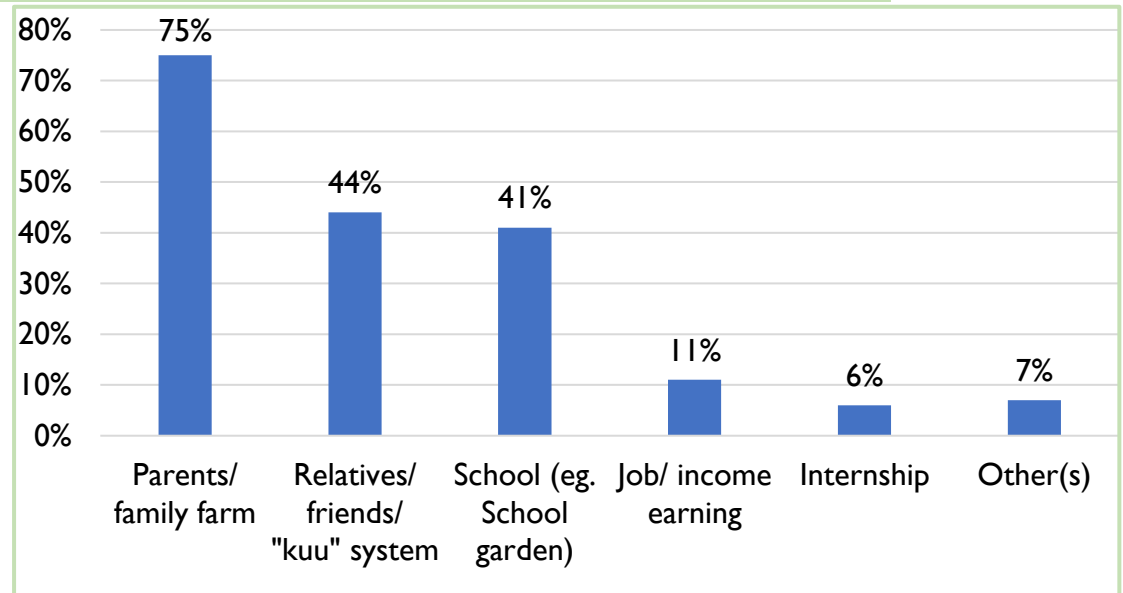
- Different avenues to access agribusiness sector-relevant education in Liberia
 - ❑ Public & private formal, non-formal & informal education & skills training avenues
 - Universities/Colleges/TVET entities including trade schools providing training in at least General Agriculture at the Certificate, Associate & Bachelor degree levels
 - INGOs/NGOs; Hubs, BSOs, state entities (e.g. Youth Connekt)
 - YouTube videos and other online platforms
 - ❑ The question of competency-based training
 - Most education & skills training centers/avenues do not have any practical learning opportunities to enable practical skills acquisition or school-to-work transition

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Education & Skills Training

Students' participation in any agriculture or agri-/food business value chain activity



Only about 4 out of every 10 youth have participated in an agribusiness value chain activity



- ☐ Most of the youth (**75%**) who had participated in the sector had gained exposure through their parents'/family farms
- ☐ Limited internship opportunities

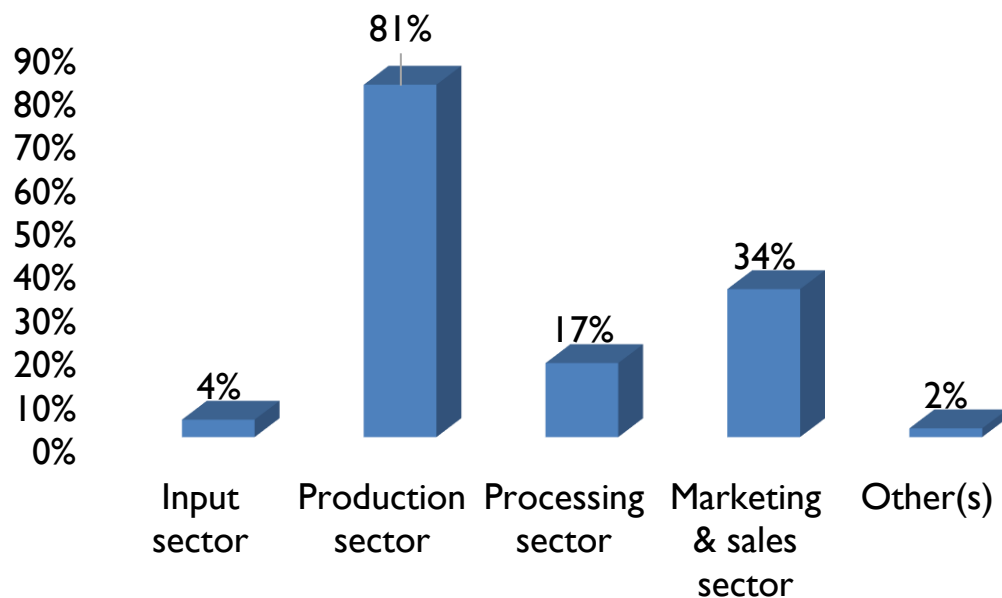


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Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Education & Skills Training

Student participation in any agriculture or agri-/food business value chain activity



Youth experiences of the sector are skewed towards production – smallholder production. Is this a strength?



Among those who had participated in an agribusiness value chain activity, **81%** engaged in **production/farming**



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Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Education & Skills Training

“One major challenge is [the] technical know-how to produce different kinds of [the product] right now except for what we know – what we are doing... I think if we can produce [other kinds], it will also help the business to grow and will also help the Liberian economy because it will not be just one product”

“The problem in Liberia is that we lack the expertise...I lost the poultry because I did not buy the right breed from the right parent stock”

“Most young people we work with often have limited to no practical skills that could be applied to work”

Youth-led agribusinesses are impacted by a skills deficit and trial & error with little support from responsible agencies

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Access to Finance

☐ Constrained Financing Environment

☐ Loans and grants: commercial banks, microfinance institutions, credit unions and village savings and loans associations (VSLAs) provide loans, and development partners and donors offer grants, sometimes through government agencies.

☐ No national agricultural financing framework or strategy

☐ Sources of financing for youth-led enterprises

Personal savings, family & friends

- All agribusinesses engaged in this study relied mainly on personal savings or funds from family and friends

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Access to Finance

❑ Constrained Financing Environment -- Sources of Finance

Grants

- Grants from development interventions have been principal. Two application formats
 - A. Schemes that provide capacity-building training including writing business plans for applicants who are then allowed to pitch their business ideas
 - B. Schemes in which applicants apply for advertised funding opportunities with their business plans
 - ❖ Mostly, grants go into infrastructure and technology
 - ❖ Youth business leaders did not believe being youthful was an advantage in determining access to grants

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Access to Finance

❑ Constrained Financing Environment -- Sources of Finance

Loans

- Only one of the enterprises had accessed/was accessing any form of loan – micro-loans accessed and repaid every 3 months
 - ❖ High cost of borrowing
 - ❖ Lending services are short-term and with low capital

Other Financing Schemes

- Labour for raw materials
- Service provision as in-kind payment for farm labour

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Education & Skills Training



Technology is limited, and we had to import an incubator from China which was not suited for our environment... one that use regular rod bars pulling almost 2,000 watts. To get solar power to run that is high [cost]. With my electronics background, it was better for me to build one...

- Innovative technology is limited in Liberia's agri-/food value chain sector both at the level of training and business operation for MSMEs.
- Nevertheless, the agribusiness value-chain-related training institutions, engaged in the study, make use of existing opportunities in the country to expose their students to such technologies.
- The extent to which the enterprises accessed and used innovative technology in their operations was a feature of the education and skills background and/or socio-cultural exposure (including access to information) of the leader of the business, and access to low-risk finance

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Access to Innovative Technology



- Some private educational institutions explore avenues such as exposing students to the use of innovative technologies through internships/on-the-job learning.
- Public institutions offering agriculture-related programmes have secured some relevant contemporary technologies in crop production through funding from the Government of Liberia and its development partners.

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: Opportunities

Education & Skills Development

- ☐ YouTube!!
- ☐ Volunteerism
- ☐ ATVET curriculum development (smallholder farmer businesses)
- ☐ ITC-SheTrades
- ☐ MoE –Skills Gap Assessment

Access to Technology

- ❖ Access to finance programmes
 - ❖ Local fabrications
- ❖ ATVET institutions upgrade (Youth Rising Project)
 - ❖ IFAD/MOA - TCEP
- ...

Access to Finance

- ☐ MOA – RETRAP, STAR P,
 - ☐ MOCI/UNDP -- Livelihoods and Employment Creation Project
- ☐ UNDP Business Accelerator Programme
- ☐ Mercy Corps Business Accelerator
- ☐ CASTRAP Cassava fund
-

There are opportunities

- Accessibility, integration & consistency of opportunities
- Coordination among duty bearers; communities and development
- Key role of the private sector

Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: The Business Environment

- Despite existing provisions to usher in a favourable business climate, some other factors necessary for an enabling environment were absent
 - ❑ No agricultural financing framework or strategy
 - ❑ *...business registration centres are not readily available in the counties. Some people don't have the resources to travel to Monrovia to get registered. As a result, people with the mind to develop agribusinesses or cooperatives do it informally. The government established service centres in some counties that are meant to provide several services including business registration. However, these institutions don't even function well...*
 - ❑ *There are opportunities for tax incentives, but the medium to acquiring them here is a challenge because we buy in small quantities and so it is shipped to Liberia with other goods and the shipping fee, and custom charge are all embedded in the transportation fees. We can only have access to incentives when we order in large quantities, and the container is solely for our company.*



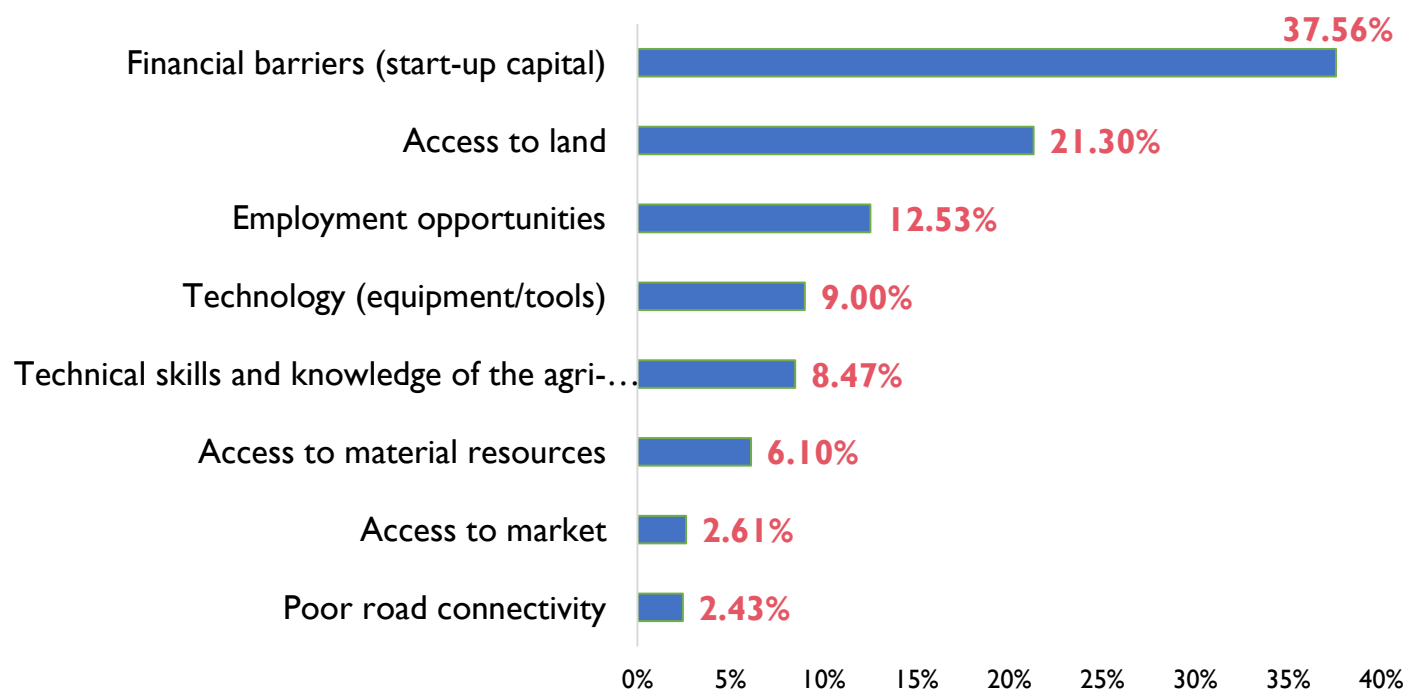
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Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: The Business Environment



Barriers to youth engagement in the agribusiness sector in Liberia – Youth Survey



A higher proportion of student respondents (**37.56%**) indicated that **limited access to start-up capital** was the most critical deterrent.

Access to land (**21.30%**) was identified as the second most critical barrier to entry.



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Experiences Of Youth And Youth-led Agribusinesses: The Business Environment



Facilitation of youth entry into agripreneurship – Youth expectations

No.	Structural Interventions at enhancing the agri-/food sector	Responsible state institutions
1	Tax holidays for the agri-/food business industry	MoCI
2	Technical assistance & mentorship for potential and existing agripreneurs	MoA
3	Ease of access to agricultural lands (long term)	MoA
4	ATVET promotion, scholarships & training	MoE and MoA
5	Access to financing (through low-interest loans)	MoCI and MoA
6	Agricultural-themed infrastructural support	MoCI and MoA
7	Enhance business registrations and license acquisitions	MoCI

Which state institution is responsible for what action?

Conclusions

- Liberian youth have the foundations of positive attributes necessary for youth engagement to be considered as a route towards the competitiveness of the agribusiness sector.
- Youth experiences in the sector points to deficits in their access to relevant material and immaterial resources necessary for the emergence of favourable outcomes for youth in agribusiness in Liberia
 - ❑ Also point to opportunities available for the success of youth-led agribusinesses.
- The business environment is a challenge not only for youth-led agribusiness but also challenges the emergence of new ones.

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**THANK
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