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# TALKING AGRIBUSINESS IN LIBERIA PROJECT



## FIRST COMMUNICATION EVENT REPORT

### *Youth in Agribusiness: The Way Forward for the Competitiveness of the Liberia Agribusiness Sector?*

**VENUE: CORINA HOTEL, MONROVIA**

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### **Disclaimer**

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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. Its overall objective is to strengthen competitiveness of West African countries and enhance their integration into the regional and international trading system. Specifically, the programme will work to: (i) Improve the performance, growth and contribution to industry, regional trade and exports of selected value chains, and (ii) improve the business climate at national and regional levels.

The WACOMP consists of one regional component and sixteen national components (15 ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania)

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### **Cover Photo**

*Participants at the First Communication Event of the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project [Credit: CERATH Development Organization (CDO)]*

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## **Acknowledgments**

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CDO would like to thank all stakeholders who helped in conducting the research. The project team expresses its gratitude to the various education, research and skills development institutions and students for their reception and insights, and their presence and contributions to the event. Our profound gratitude also goes to all the representatives of agri-/food enterprises and the private sector who were present and/or presented their products for the exhibition during the event.

CDO further acknowledges Janet Alamisi Dabire for moderating the event and the representatives of the donor and development communities in Liberia. We also appreciate all the participants of the first communication event of the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project including those who joined virtually through the various social media platforms.

We appreciate the media houses present for capturing the event and relaying it to the general public. A special thank you goes to SPOON FM and TV for the live telecast of the event, and ELBC radio and OK FM.

And finally, we thank the Almighty God for His providence and guidance.

## Acronyms

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| AMEZU   | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University              |
| ATVET   | Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training |
| BDOTC   | Business and Domestic Occupational Training Center       |
| CASTRAP | Cassava Transformation Project                           |
| CDO     | CERATH Development Organization                          |
| EU      | European Union   |
| GoL     | Government of Liberia                                    |
| MOA     | Ministry of Agriculture                                  |
| MOCI    | Ministry of Commerce and Industry                        |
| MOE     | Ministry of Education                                    |
| MOYS    | Ministry of Youth and Sports                             |
| NGO     | Non-governmental Organisation                            |
| PWDs    | Persons with Disability                                  |
| SMPU    | Stella Marie Polytechnic University                      |
| TVET    | Technical Vocational Education and Training              |
| UMU     | United Methodist University                              |
| WACOMP  | West Africa Competitiveness Programme                    |

## **BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION**

The European Union (EU) through the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP) has committed funds for the implementation of the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project. WACOMP aims to strengthen competitiveness of West African countries and enhance their integration into the regional and international trading system. It consists of one regional, and sixteen national components including Liberia. The Liberia national component, the Cassava Transformation Project (CASTRAP), began in 2021.

The Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project is complementary to and implemented along with CASTRAP. The project is focused on the agri-/food business value chain and seeks to disseminate information and raise awareness in Liberia on:

- i. opportunities for business performance and growth (competitiveness),
- ii. regional (trade) integration of Liberia's agri-/food value chains, and
- iii. an improved environment for agri-/food businesses to thrive in accordance with the objective of the WACOMP.

The implementation team is expected to organise six (6) communication events preceded by respective thematic background research on agribusiness topics validated among stakeholders in Liberia. The events are to create platforms for (1) deliberations by stakeholders on the requirements for the competitiveness of agribusinesses in Liberia, regional (trade) integration of Liberia's agribusinesses, and the role of policies and different actors; and (2) participatory forums for key conversations among vital stakeholders and wider audiences toward raising awareness of the opportunities for growing Liberia's agribusiness sector.

As a key output for the project, CDO organised the first project communication event dubbed "The Status of Youth Engagement in Agribusiness" on October 13, 2022 at the Corina Hotel in Monrovia, Liberia. The objectives of the events were to:

- create awareness on the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project
- disseminate the findings of research on the topic, "Youth in Agribusiness: The Way Forward for the Competitiveness of the Liberian Agribusiness Sector?" to spur exchanges among stakeholders.
- enhance the awareness of, and visibility of the progress made by youth-led agribusinesses.

The event elicited exchanges on the status of youth engagement in agribusiness and its potential for the competitiveness of the agribusiness sector in Liberia. It also provided a platform ("Marketplace") for the showcasing and tasting of agri-/food products produced by Liberian youth-led agribusinesses. There were 140 participants in attendance from the public sector, the donor and development communities in Liberia, education, research, and skills development institutions, the private sector, and the media (See Annex B: List of participants). The event was streamed live via Facebook, television and radio.

## **PROCEEDINGS FROM THE WORKSHOP**

### **Program Opening, Welcome Address and Purpose of Gathering**

The program was ushered in with a prayer by the Finance and Administration Manager of CERATH Development Organization (CDO) Liberia, Gladys T. Gborie.

The Regional Director of CERATH Development Organization (CDO), Paa Kofi Osei-Owusu, delivered the welcome address. In his address, he acknowledged all dignitaries, Government of Liberia (GoL) officials, other stakeholders including the private sector, the students and lecturers of the tertiary institutions of learning/universities represented at the communication event. He also acknowledged the European Union for financing the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project and the Cassava Transformation Project (CASTRAP) under the WACOMP. He informed that the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project is aimed at communicating opportunities in Liberia's agri-/food business sector.

Additionally, he indicated that the purpose of the event was to share the findings from the project team's background research on youth engagement in agribusiness. He mentioned that youth unemployment is at a high rate within the sub-region and noted that as a key factor influencing instability within the region besides climate change. Paa Kofi Osei-Owusu further mentioned that the idea of the agricultural sector as an avenue for job creation was a complex one. He highlighted that the project team was glad to facilitate the discussions of the research findings between the youth and older generation. He then encouraged all participants to be actively involved in the event and also visit the agricultural products exhibition stands.



*Figure 1: The Regional Director, CDO, presenting the purpose of the gathering*



## **Opening Remarks from the EU and Representatives of the Government of Liberia**

### **Remarks from the European Union**

Remarks from the EU were delivered by Jeroen Witkamp, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Liberia. In his delivery, Jeroen Witkamp noted that as the new Head of Cooperation in Liberia, the event provided a good opportunity for him to meet an extensive audience that worked at the intersection of agriculture/food systems on one hand, and business/private sector on the other hand.

He stated that the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project funded under the WACOMP and the WACOMP national component of Liberia, CASTRAP, both implemented by CDO, together represented an EU investment of about USD 5.75 million (about EUR 5.9 million) in Liberia. He informed that while the CASTRAP focused on improvements in the cassava value chain, the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project looked at a broader sphere – improvement of the country’s agribusiness value chain in its entirety.



*Figure 2: Jeroen Witkamp, Head of Cooperation, EU Delegation to Liberia delivering his opening remarks*

Jeroen Witkamp said that the EU had contracted CDO, under the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project, to conduct research and disseminate information on the opportunities for the competitiveness and regional (trade) integration of Liberia’s agri-/food value chain, and an improved environment for the businesses to thrive. He informed that CDO would organize six (6) events on different issues that target the agribusiness sector. For the event of the day, he said that CDO was expected to conduct a well-informed discussion with stakeholders to help identify ways of engaging the youth in agribusiness to transform Liberia’s food value chain. He concluded by stating that the EU would work with various ministries to support private institutions in agribusiness in Liberia.

### **Remarks from the Ministry of Youth and Sports**

Minister Millias Sherriff, Assistant Minister for Technical Vocational Education and Training, commended CDO and the EU for engaging stakeholders, and the selection of the theme, “youth in agribusiness.” He opined that the

theme was timely and appropriate and that the event would stimulate minds on the agricultural value chain towards making agriculture impactful and transformative in Liberia.

He argued that with young people constituting about 65% of the Liberian population and the agriculture sector being central to livelihoods, youth engagement in agriculture could strengthen the sector and improve the agribusiness value chain. Furthermore, he emphasised that the formal sector cannot absorb all the youth and expressed dissatisfaction about the disinterest and unwillingness of citizens to participate in agriculture although the country is blessed with favourable weather conditions that promote agriculture. He said that such had affected agricultural output in Liberia. The Minister explained that the low interest of youth in agriculture was a result of inadequate skills and noted a need for the diversification of Liberia's system to technically engage the youth in technical vocational education and training/agricultural technical vocational education and training (TVET/ATVET). He mentioned that the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) had various projects aimed at promoting ATVET programmes to stimulate youth interest in agriculture.

Further, the Minister lamented that Liberia was endowed with the requisite talents related to agribusiness to produce and export but was not utilising the full potential of all the talents. He said that the event was important for the TVET department of MOYS to help in the operationalisation and training of the youth. He concluded by saying that all stakeholders were needed towards the realisation of the full potential of talents within the agriculture sector to seize the opportunities within the agribusiness sector.



Figure 3: Minister Millias Sherriff, Assistant Minister in Charge of TVET, MOYS, delivering his remarks

### **Remarks from the Ministry of Education**

In his remarks, Adolphus H. Collins, TVET Program Officer responsible for Agricultural Education and Training, highlighted the National TVET Policy and the Pro-poor Agenda for Prosperity and Development (PAPD) as key government policies supporting Liberian youth's participation in the agricultural sector. He explained that the National TVET Policy aims to promote productivity, and sustainability of ATVET. He also noted the key strength of the policy is its encouragement of the acquisition of business and TVET skills for the agriculture sector,

particularly for rural dwellers, women, and youth. This, he said, offers the advantage of increasing the incomes of disadvantaged business groups and promoting agricultural productivity, sustainable livelihood, and political stability. He indicated that as part of policy measures to ensure TVET contributes to the stimulation of youth participation in the agriculture sector, young people, including persons with disability (PWDs) would be equipped with the skills and techniques in producing, processing, marketing, and value addition of agricultural products. He also highlighted the need for an impacted development through education and TVET in areas such as farm mechanization, land preparation, food processing, livestock productivity, agribusiness, marketing, and non-farm micro-enterprises.

Adolphus H. Collins also mentioned that GoL had received support from the EU and the Swedish Government to develop a new curriculum to achieve specific educational goals. He stated that the Ministry of Education (MOE) was committed to providing the enabling environment, skills, attitude, and values required to enable youth contribute to the competitiveness of the agribusiness sector.



Figure 4: Adolphus H. Collins, TVET Program Officer responsible for Agricultural Education and Training, MOE delivering his remarks

### **Remarks from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry**

Minister Angel Banda, Assistant Minister in Charge of Small Business Administration, began her opening remarks by thanking CDO for inviting the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI) to the event. She affirmed that the research findings would assist MOCI in the development of new programmes to improve youth engagement in agribusiness. The Minister also encouraged the event participants to engage in the discussions on the research findings with open minds as the ideas birthed out of the discussions would be used to make informed decisions. She reaffirmed MOCI's commitment to building the capacity of the youth.



Figure 5: Hon Angel Banda, Assistant Minister in Charge of Small Business Administration, MOCI delivering her remarks

### **Remarks from Ministry of Agriculture<sup>1</sup>**

Ansu S. Konneh, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister of Agriculture (MOA), and Focal Person for the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia, delivered his remarks on behalf of the Minister. He acknowledged the presenter of the research findings, the Delegation of the EU and the representative of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for their continuous support to Liberia's agriculture sector, GoL officials and all participants at the event. He also commended WACOMP, and CDO for the research work. He mentioned that the theme of the event fed into the youth in agriculture programming started by GoL in the previous year. He said that MOA was concerned with why the youth were not interested in agriculture. According to him, available information indicated that the youth presumed agriculture to be unprofitable accounting for their unwillingness to participate in the sector.

Ansu S. Konneh opined that mitigative efforts which could help change such mindset of the youth include the use of multimedia platforms to showcase the resilience and profitability of the agribusiness sector to the youth. He expressed his belief that would ignite passion among the youth to engage in the sector. He also informed that GoL had put in place stringent mechanisms targeted at youth involvement in the agriculture sector. He further explained that GoL is working collaboratively through an inter-ministerial/agency framework to achieve their objectives. He highlighted that an initiative that was worth noting was the institution of the 'Youth in Agriculture' desk at the ministries and agencies that had links to agriculture to encourage and support youth participation in agriculture. He also opined that the sports betting industry could also be used as an avenue to promote the agribusiness sector, as space where young people may frequent. He admonished agribusinesses to use sports betting newspapers as avenues to promote visibility on the profitability of the agribusiness sector. Further, Ansu S. Konneh mentioned that the use of educational institutions to provide start-up business services, coaching, and mentorship for youths who want to venture into agribusinesses, was another approach that could be adopted to promote the

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<sup>1</sup> The remarks were delivered after the presentation and some discussions on the findings of the background research.

agribusiness sector. For youths who were not interested in university and college education, he advised that the universities could run short courses where such youth could also get involved to have access to essential development and support training in agriculture and agribusiness.

He concluded and reiterated his commendation of the project team, the EU Delegation and USAID.



Figure 6: Ansu S. Konneh, Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister of Agriculture delivering his remarks

## PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Maame Kyerewaa Brobbey, Project Lead for the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project, presented the findings of the event background research into the status of youth engagement in agribusiness in Liberia. She communicated the context of the research in its linkages to the WACOMP and the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project, that is, the dissemination and awareness raising on opportunities for the competitiveness and regional (trade) integration of Liberia's agri-/food business value chain, and an improved environment for the businesses to thrive in accord with the objective of the WACOMP. She mentioned that undertaking the research as well as the organisation of the event, the expected stakeholder discussions at the event and an integration of the findings with the discussions were key activities under the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project. She also stated that the research sought to generate empirical evidence to answer the inquiry raised in the first research topic of the project, "Youth in agribusiness: the way forward for the competitiveness of Liberian agribusinesses?" Her presentation also included the methodology employed for the research, and the findings of the study.

The Project Lead in her overview of the research stated that the goal of the study was to assess the status of youth engagement in agribusiness in Liberia towards the prospects of a competitive agribusiness sector. Specifically, it aimed to (1) ascertain the diversity of Liberian youth's interests, aspirations, perceptions, and expectations in relation to the country's agribusiness sector, (2) describe the sector experiences of young people and youth-led agribusiness enterprises, and (3) indicate the context of youth perspectives and experiences in the agribusiness sector. She explained that these objectives were based on the conditions, established in scholarly works, for youth in agribusiness to be considered as a route to a competitive agribusiness sector. The conditions included (i) positive aspirations, interests, and perceptions of youth in relation to the sector, (ii) enabling environment for youth to build sector-relevant capabilities to improve their motivations and capacities for entrepreneurship and employment, (iii) enabling programmatic contexts for youth in agribusiness interventions, and (iv) enabling business environment for the performance and growth of youth-led agribusiness enterprises.



*Figure 7: Project Lead, Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project presenting the research findings*

Presenting on the key findings of the research, the Project Lead highlighted the demographic characteristics of the youth respondents and youth-led enterprises of the study. She also highlighted youth aspirations, interests, perspectives and experiences relating to Liberia's agribusiness sector, as well as the business environment of the enterprises.

She said that a majority (62.20%) of the total number of student youth interviewed (1701) had **career development aspirations** in non-agri-/food business sectors compared to agri-/food business sectors. However, those who had aspirations in the latter were more likely to aspire to be self-employed than to be employed in the sector. With regards to youth **interest in labour force participation**, the findings indicated that the majority of the respondents (63.85%) were interested in participating in other sectors apart from the agribusiness value chain with more than half of that distribution (33.6%) aiming to work in the public sector. However, holding for agricultural support services made a difference in the distribution of young people's comparative interests in the agribusiness value chain and other sectors of the economy a difference – when the team held for agricultural support services, more young people (36.15% of the total survey population) wanted to work in the agribusiness value chain comparative to the public sector (33.55%). Also, 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. In spite of the findings earlier noted, she noted that the study surprisingly found that 95.30% of the students interviewed were willing to become agripreneurs. The findings also showed that young people **perceived** the marketing and sales subsector as the most profitable and the transportation sub-sector as the least profitable in the agribusiness value chain in Liberia.

Her presentation of the findings on youth experiences in the agribusiness value chain centred on their access to relevant education and skills training, finance, and technology. She highlighted only about 40% of the students were found to have had any practical **experience in an agribusiness value chain** activity, and the majority (75%) of those who had had any experience had gained such through their parents'/family farms. She emphasized that the data pointed to a concentration on the production sub-sector and limited internship opportunities for students in relation to their experiences in the agribusiness sector. Additionally, the students had very little exposure to innovative technology used in the contemporary African agribusiness value chain.

On the experiences of the youth-led enterprises, she highlighted that non-formal and informal avenues including YouTube videos and trial and error practices had been the strongest source of their access to technical skills learning although educational and skills training institutions in Liberia had provided their leaders with some relevant training and qualifications. She further stated that the findings of the study revealed that youth-led agribusinesses experience Liberia's constrained financing environment limited access to and use of innovative technology in their operations. Personal and family were reported to be the main sources of finance for the youth-led enterprises. Unsurprising, she stated that the study revealed financial barriers (start-up capital), access to land and employment opportunities as the top three barriers to youth engagement in agribusiness.

In conclusion, she indicated that the youth have foundations of positive attributes necessary for their engagement in agribusiness to be considered as an opportunity for the competitiveness of the sector. Also, that although youth experiences in the sector pointed to deficits in their access to relevant material and immaterial resources required for the emergence of favourable outcomes, there were opportunities. The opportunities, she noted included the availability of YouTube videos, the GoL development of an ATVET curriculum, local technology fabrication and development interventions providing grants for agribusinesses. She also noted that the business environment was a challenge for both youth-led agribusiness and the emergence of new ones.

### **Questions, Answers & Discussions**

The questions, commentaries and exchanges that arose from the presentation mainly concentrated on enhancing youth engagement in agribusiness. They were related to the nature, context and timing of relevant education and skills training of Liberian youth, particularly in institutions of higher learning but also in the context of development interventions. The need to financially support youth-led agribusiness start-ups and enterprises was also highlighted. Other points raised related to the reasons for young people's disinterest in agriculture, the aim of the research and the methodology used were also issues that came up in the discussions. Participants expressed their appreciation for the research findings, and recommended their wider dissemination.

The Coordinator of the National Cassava Sector Committee pointed out that his Committee aimed to promote the cassava value chain in Liberia and expressed their readiness to support the project. Responding to the topic of the event and the findings of the study, he opined that the *youth were not attracted to the agriculture sector because of low incentives within the sector*, and suggested that the youth desired to work for the public sector compared to the agriculture sector because the former gave more financial rewards.

The Executive Director of Community-Based Farmers Association Inc. and Acting Dean of the Agriculture College of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion University (AMEZU) lamented on *the theoretical nature of various agriculture programmes*. He admonished stakeholders to advocate for more practical approaches to attract the youth into agriculture. He also affirmed that the *small and medium agribusinesses were struggling and needed help*.

A representative from the Liberian International Christian College (LICC) said that the *research was an eye-opener*. He wanted to know if the team was satisfied with the findings of the study in relation to their expectations. Also, he asked why Lofa county, tagged as the bread basket of the country, was not sampled for the study.

Another participant cited a pilot intervention that concentrated on modern farms that processed their produce in Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba counties. He informed that the intervention *engaged young people at the age of 15 years with the expectation that by the time they became adults, they would have learnt both business and entrepreneurship skills*. He recommended that the concepts must be introduced in other interventions and that *funding must be provided for prospective youth-led agribusinesses at the early (start-up) stages to guarantee early start and success of youth engagement in the agribusiness sector*.





Figure 8: A participant making his submission

The Dean, Agriculture College, Stella Maris Polytechnique University (SMPU), highlighted that *agriculture and agribusiness had cross-cutting effects on everybody*. He suggested that the relevant stakeholders should *advocate for and introduce agriculture at all levels of education including the elementary level*. He highlighted and *acknowledged students who were already engaged in agribusinesses and using their micro/personal resources to operate them*.

A participant from DAJE Farm, shared her experience in the sector and lamented that *young agri-entrepreneurs did not receive needed support to overcome financial challenges and sustain their investments in the sector*. She bemoaned the *absence of any public-private corporation/partnership to support her business*. She also opined that implementors of agribusiness projects/programmes spent much money on the organisation of activities such as workshops, and training thereby reducing the funds available to support agribusinesses. Her question was on *the research team’s messaging to stakeholders within the public and private sectors in relation to their support*.



Figure 9: Representative of DAJE making her submission

A representative from the United Methodist University (UMU) expressed that contrary to her expectations of the event, she had *learnt a lot from the research conducted on youth participation in agribusiness*. She mentioned that Liberia was in a transition, but it was at crossroads in terms of food security. She wanted to know how the

research could help to reduce the barriers to food security. She suggested that the academic community had been left out of the project and emphasised her commitment and that of her institution to training young people towards the attainment of skills to enable them to engage in agriculture. She informed that UMU had secured 52 acres of land for practical training and had 60% practical work and 40% theory in their curriculum. She recommended that *the universities should also have access to resources towards the development of the agriculture sector.*

*In commenting on the submissions and comments, the Project Lead explained that the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project targets all agriculture value chains including food and cash crops, animals and fish. She also clarified that the project was different from the CASTRAP which solely focused on the cassava value chain in Liberia's South East.*

*She also agreed that the academic community was an important avenue for youth to access relevant education and skills training to effectively participate in the agri-/food business value chain of the country. She said that was the reason why the project team had involved private and public universities and TVET institutions as stakeholders in the project, and had interviewed some of their officials for the research. She also noted that the comment on the concentration on theory than the practical aspects in various agriculture-related training institutions was in accord with findings from the study. Additionally, she highlighted that the Ministry of Education's work with the African Development Bank to conduct a feasibility study on understanding the skills gap in the economic growth sectors of Liberia<sup>2</sup> would be helpful in bring forth the problems that can then rectified with transformations in the education and training curriculum.*

*The Project Lead also mentioned that the background research adopted a situational analysis perspective with the aim to identify the strengths and opportunities in youth engagement in agribusiness in Liberia. She also explained that the sampling technique employed in the students survey necessitated that some counties and therefore universities were selected and not others. The selection was thus not done conveniently.*

*On the messaging to stakeholders within the public and private sectors in relation to their support to youth-led agribusiness enterprises, the Project Lead noted that coordination among the stakeholders was key. She also emphasised that such coordination was necessary for the improvement of the agri-/food business value chain, generally.*

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.moeliberia.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Expression-of-Interest-for-the-Liberian-STEM-gaps-Study-revised.pdf>

## PANEL DISCUSSIONS

A panel discussion session was conducted to discuss the engagement of youth in agribusiness in Liberia. Janet Alamisi Dabire, the moderator, introduced the panel discussants consisting of three agribusiness youth leaders – Caroline Armah (Founder of Calaw Foods), Goretti Itoka (CEO and Founder of AgroRetti Liberia), Jarius Andrews Greaves (Founder and CEO of YONER Liberia) and two GoL officials – James Moore, MOA and Minister Millias Sherriff, MOYS. The youth-led agribusinesses included two agri-food processing entities and a capacity development and training enterprise. Submissions from the participants and the two discussants from the public sector included the commendation of the youth agripreneurs. Other key submissions made by the discussants and the event participants are captured below.



Figure 10: Mr. James Moore, MOA talking during the Panel Discussion

### **Motivation and focus of youth engagement in agribusiness**

The youth leaders indicated that challenges they identified in Liberia’s development, particularly in the food systems and their passion mainly motivated their participation in the agribusiness sector. Some of the issues included malnutrition-based infant mortality and high food importation. The challenge of youth capacity development also motivated one of the leaders whose organisation provided training for potential entrepreneurs.

A student participant suggested that youth are influenced and inspired by the success of other young people in the sector. Consequently, he appealed to MOA and MOE to provide networking and fellowships for students in agriculture from various universities, something akin to the Agrofair at the national level.

### **Challenges of potential agripreneurs & barriers to youth engagement in agribusiness**

As a leader of an organisation that facilitates capacity development for (potential) youth agripreneurs including in business ideation, Jarius Andrews Greaves commenced the discussions on the challenges of young agripreneurs. He stated that there was no qualified mentoring program to assist young people in moving beyond the ideation phase of their businesses and into the start-up and expansion phases as entrepreneur. This was affirmed by a youth

micro enterprise leader who stated that most young people, when they got involved in small businesses, did not manage them well. She wanted to know how young people could get access to business and product management capacity development opportunities.

He also highlighted access to finance as a major challenge for prospective youth agripreneurs. He used the opportunity to provide details and urge the potential agripreneurs to apply for a time-sensitive seed grant provided by the EU through the EU-Liberia Agriculture Programme–Prosperous Agriculture Roadmap to Nutrition, Entrepreneurship and Reinforcing Sustainability Project. He said that those who wanted to manage agriculture processing facilities could also apply. He further said that students should be mentored and made aware of opportunities in the agribusiness sector. He also highlighted that his organisation was raising awareness on innovative ways of engaging in agribusiness with the support of USAID.

Additionally, Minister Millias Sheriff, MOYS, made a submission on what GoL was doing to ensure that barriers indicated by the findings of the research would be mitigated to encourage youth engagement in agribusiness. He highlighted that his Ministry had a specific role to play with regards to education and supervision – reform of the TVET sectors specifically the informal and non-formal. He emphasised that the human mind was a fundamental resource and said that both the issues of curriculum and human capacity development (of instructors) were being approached simultaneously with support from the EU under the Youth Capacity Project. He informed that the support focused on three main issues – human capacity development, holistic infrastructure development, and the provision of modern equipment. He mentioned that the TVET department under the Ministry of Education operated a business and domestic occupational training center (BDOTC), two farmers' vocational training centers which were not functioning at the time, and three agricultural vocational training centers. He said that it was evident that agriculture was a focus in TVET in Liberia but acknowledged is the limitation of finance to ensure the full experience of practical learning. Additionally, trainees/graduates did not have capital or tool kits to actualise the skills learnt. The Minister asserted the vision of GoL was to see young persons engage in agribusiness. He informed that the Ministry had sent out 72 individuals from various counties to countries including Kenya and Zambia to upscale their training as TVET/ATVET instructors. He informed that the recruitment process was opened to people in TVET institutions but focused on those who already had TVET education with Bachelor of Science degree. He said that 20 of these were ATVET instructors, an indication of the importance placed on agriculture. He further said that GoL believed that the first thing to start with was to get young people's mentality informed, get research established, and most importantly create passion. He highlighted passion of the youth as an important component of their success in the sector.

James Moore, MOA, reiterated the importance of passion and positive mindset for youth engagement in agribusiness and cautioned that the place of passion should not be downplayed. He mentioned that the youth, particularly those in the universities were not passionate about agriculture as they perceived it as an 'old man's business' and as a 'dirty job.' He noted that such perception and attitude and the findings of the study should

trigger the government's interest in creating specialised services in all of its educational and other agricultural sectors to ensure that agricultural curriculum is built and enforced for implementation in all levels of education including the elementary and university levels.

Another challenge to youth engagement in agribusiness in Liberia highlighted during the discussions was a lack of entrepreneurship and practical agribusiness-related training at the university level of education. The academic community was encouraged such forms of training in their institutions. It was noted that the training young people have implications for the interests they develop.

Additionally, it was communicated that gaps in Liberia's agri-/food business value chain, particularly innovations in storage and packaging. For some of the youth-led agribusinesses, this increased their cost of operations as packaging particularly had to be outsourced to institutions outside of Liberia. Responding to the challenge of technology was also recognised as critical for growing young people's interest in the sector.

Another challenge raised during the discussions related to the unavailability/inaccessibility of statistics on agribusiness and its improvements in Liberia as well as market information. The expectation was that GoL should be able to collect and make the relevant data available to stakeholders.



*Figure 11: Janet Alamisi Dabire moderating the panel discussion*

### **MOA's role in coordinating the different aspects of youth engagement in agribusiness**

James Moore indicated that MOA pursues its role of coordinating all the efforts towards engaging young people in the agribusiness value chain through partnerships. He explained that the Ministry works in partnership with international and local NGOs, actors with bilateral agreements with GoL, sponsors and the private sector – development partners – who provide special support to the agriculture sector. He mentioned that the partnership meant that MOA took stock of what each actor/partner did and use it as the basis for establishing proper coordination among themselves and ensure complementarity of efforts. The aim, he said, was to ensure that

various aspects of the agriculture sector receive support to ensure that the support benefit those it should benefit, particularly the farmers, micro, small and medium-scaled enterprises (MSMEs) and even those who provide other specialised services to the agriculture sector, like the extension services provider and machine operators. He emphasised that ultimately the efforts and services provided are expected to strengthen the agricultural development of Liberia and be meaningful so that everyone benefits and see agriculture as a business.

He also recognised the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project as a significant platform for the communication of MOA's activities as very little was known about what MOA did. He suggested that many participants did not know about the made-in-Liberia agri-food products that were displayed during the event, He said the project was a grand opportunity that Liberia needed to take advantage of and strategize her approach to agriculture. He said having agripreneurs who were Liberians and outside of the government was a dream come true – the Minister's vision of a private sector-led development. He emphasised that there was a need to support the agripreneurs.

### **Opportunities for young agripreneurs**

James Moore also pointed out to young entrepreneurs the opportunities available in public-private partnerships citing the existence of structures (particularly in the country's South Eastern Region) from previously implemented development projects in the sector. He lamented that the structures which were intended to be agribusiness centers had become now white elephants and advised that young agripreneurs should not just operate in Monrovia, the capital, but take advantage of the structures that the government through its development partners had built.

An agripreneur in the cassava value chain bemoaned that advances to take advantage of such structures had been met with resistance. He recommended that the older generation must encourage as well as enable young agripreneurs' access to capacity building opportunities and resources. He suggested that the number of beneficiaries of development opportunities available in MOA were few and not widespread.

It was also established that, the poultry sector, although neglected in favor of crops, provided opportunities for prospective youth agripreneurs. One of the youth agribusiness leaders indicated that their enterprises were open to work with agripreneurs who would want to work in the distribution subsector.

In relation to available opportunities for youth in the sector, James Moore advised that prospective youth agripreneurs should not concentrate on the production and processing sub-sectors to the neglect of the other gaps in the agri-/food business value chain. He also said that the businesses should specialize in single subsectors and challenges prospective agripreneurs at the event to become expert marketers and packagers that would take Liberian agri-/food products outside the country.

### **Roles of different stakeholders and actors**

One of the points raised from the event participants during the panel discussions section included that it was encouraging that Liberia's development partners and funding agencies were promoting the enhancement of Liberia's private sector and the strengthening of people's capacities. The submission also emphasised that the citizens needed to be involved. The discussions noted that the role of the government was to create an enabling environment and make the necessary reforms that will enable people to operate profitably in the private sector. Specific to MOA, it was communicated that the Ministry is responsible for facilitating the processes in the agriculture sector through relevant policies and with strategic partners and decision-makers. It was recommended that GoL should create avenues to provide technological tools and equipment for universities and schools. It could also be land for students to practise their lessons.

Access to finance was noted as a key challenge to private sector enhancement. It was recommended that GoL should work with the private sector and financial institutions on the provision of lending to the agricultural sector meaningfully. It was noted that there were no loan products that catered for the distinctive needs of the sector.

### **Programmatic context of interventions**

James Moore informed that MOA had taken new trends in project designs with implications for how support is offered to beneficiaries. Beneficiaries interest in the sector and their involvement in the agriculture value chain must be proved to be supported. He mentioned that in the design of World Bank supported Smallholder Agriculture Transformation and Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P) and Rural Economic Transformation Project (RETRAP) responds to the challenge of agro-financing through a matching grant scheme. He highlighted that applications were open. The projects will also work with its beneficiaries all through their production processes to ensure that they are strengthened. A participant from the business development community agreed with the MOA submission that businesses were developed along with people rather than in silos and then later bring the people to the businesses. He thus recommended that support for business should be collaborative to capture the needs of the business being supported.

Issues were raised with regards to the communication of programmes, projects and opportunities of the Ministry of Agriculture. It was recommended that more should be done to announce opportunities to the public so that they would be able to participate.

### **Visibility of Liberia's agri-food business value chain and products**

It was acknowledged that the Talking Agribusiness in Liberia project event had created the platform for many participants to be informed about Liberia-made agri-/food products. Some participants questioned whether such products were on the market. The event did not only include a 'Market Place' side-event for the exhibition and sale of agri-/food products produced by Liberian youth-led agribusinesses but also served some of these products

to the participants. It was recommended that as a big spender, GoL and its ministries including MOA could adopt such a strategy for their own workshops and events.



## CLOSING REMARKS

The final remarks to draw the curtain on the event were delivered by Janet Alamisi Dabire, the moderator. She first commended participants for taking time off their busy schedules to participate in the event. She then called on all stakeholders to join forces in engaging the youth in agribusiness. Gladys T. Gborie then said a short word of prayer to officially close the event.



*Figure 12: Janet Alamisi Dabire, Moderator of the event delivering her closing remarks*

## APPENDIX A: PROGRAMME OUTLINE

| Time          | Main Activity   | Responsible Party   |
|---------------|---|---|
| 8:00 -9:00    | Arrival/ Registration   | CDO   |
| 9:00: 9:05    | Opening Prayer  | CDO   |
| 9:05 - 9:10   | Welcome Address & Purpose of Gathering                        | Paa Kofi Osei-Owusu, Regional Director, CDO   |
| 9:10 - 9:20   | Opening remarks from the European Union Delegation            | Jeroen Witkamp, Head of Cooperation,<br>EU Delegation to Liberia                              |
| 9:20 - 9:25   | Opening remarks from the Ministry of Agriculture              | Ansu S. Konneh,<br>Chief of Staff, Office of the Minister                                     |
| 9:25 - 9:30   | Statement by the Ministry of Youth and Sports                 | Minister Millias Sherriff,<br>Assistant Minister, Technical Vocational Education and Training |
| 9:30 - 9:35   | Statement by the Ministry of Education                        | Mr. Adolphus H. Collins<br>Programme Officer in charge of TVET                                |
| 9:35 - 9:40   | Statement by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry            | Hon Angel Banda<br>Assistant Minister in Charge of Small Business Administration              |
| 9:40 - 9:45   | Statement by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning    | Representative of the Minister of Finance and Development Planning                            |
| 9:45 – 10:30  | Presentation Background Research                              | Maame Kyerewaa Brobbey, Project Lead – Talking Agribusiness in Liberia                        |
| 10:30 - 10:50 | Q&A and Discussions   | Moderator   |
| 10:50 -11:15  | Coffee/Tea/Cocoa Break & Group Photo/Visit to the marketplace | All participants  |
| 12:15 -12:40  | Questions and Answers   | All participants and the moderator  |
| 12:40 - 12:45 | Closing remarks from by Moderator                             |   |
| 12:45-12:50   | Closing prayer  |   |
| 12:50 onwards | Lunch   | All Participants  |

**APPENDIX B: LISTS OF PARTICIPANTS**

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>           | <b>Organization</b>  |
|------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1          | Abedidnrgo G. Z. Mehn | Fauna & Flora International                                |
| 2          | Abel P. Varney        | Agro Links Enterprise                                      |
| 3          | Adolphus H. Collins   | Ministry of Education                                      |
| 4          | Afiyah Tamoura        | United Methodist University                                |
| 5          | Alex E. Sarkor        | United Methodist University                                |
| 6          | Allen G. Diggs        | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University                |
| 7          | Andrew S. Mulbah      | Smart Agriculture  |
| 8          | Angel B. Banda        | Ministry of Commerce and Industry                          |
| 9          | Anthony N. Williams   | Liberia Broadcasting System                                |
| 10         | Arlene N. Chineh      | Christian Humanitarian Service                             |
| 11         | Asa D. Choir          | Forumciu   |
| 12         | Ashong Joseph         | Welthungerhilfe (WHH)                                      |
| 13         | Austin B. Tarr        | Stella Maris Polytechnic                                   |
| 14         | Austin M. Sombai      | SSGBE  |
| 15         | Bannaiy Gayelown      | Catalyst   |
| 16         | Blessing E. Fully     | STARZ University   |
| 17         | Boakai K.C. Hina      | YONER Liberia  |
| 18         | Boimah G.H. Kollie    | Booker Washington Institute                                |
| 19         | Caroline Armah        | Calaw Foods  |
| 20         | Charles Brewer        | BASA Development Initiatives                               |
| 21         | Choice N. Menlor      | Booker Washington Institute                                |
| 22         | Chris F. Pewu         | Media  |
| 23         | Christopher Willie    | Agro Tank  |
| 24         | Cyrus J. Saygbe Sr.   | United States Agency for International Development (USAID) |
| 25         | Daikai Yorwate        | Ministry of Agriculture                                    |
| 26         | Dave Weedor           | Agro -Africa Liberia                                       |
| 27         | David Y. Forkpa       |  |
| 28         | Davidetta Moore       | Catholic Relief Services                                   |

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>         | <b>Organization</b>  |
|------------|---------------------|--|
| 29         | Dennis M. Doe       | Booker Washington Institute                                    |
| 30         | Diana G. Chea       | United Methodist University                                    |
| 31         | Edward S. Miaway    | Liberia International Christian College                        |
| 32         | Eldred W. Thomas    | Global New Network   |
| 33         | Elton D. Yoko       | STARZ University   |
| 34         | Emma Blauchaud      | l'Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement (IECD)  |
| 35         | Emmanuel M. Johnson | Ministry of Youth and Sports                                   |
| 36         | Emmanuel S. Tambah  | National Cassava Producers                                     |
| 37         | Emmanuel Wilson     | CARE Liberia   |
| 38         | Emmett C.K. Zoeta   | Community Empowerment Initiative Network (CEINET)              |
| 39         | Eric Clarke         | Orange Money   |
| 40         | Fedilia D. Bedell   | University Of Liberia  |
| 41         | Folton P. Blasin    | Ministry of Agriculture  |
| 42         | Galima Mawolo       | Liberia International Christian College                        |
| 43         | Geetrtrui Louwagie  | European Union (EU)  |
| 44         | Germai Koffi        | l'Institut Européen de Coopération et de Développement (IECD), |
| 45         | Gladys T. Gborie    | CERATH Development Organisation                                |
| 46         | Goretti Itoka       | AgroRetti Liberia  |
| 47         | Grace M. Lloyd      | CERATH Development Organisation                                |
| 48         | Habibus R. Khan     | BRAC   |
| 49         | Hawa Paasewe        | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University                    |
| 50         | Henry Nana          | STARZ University   |
| 51         | Homid Monah         | Prospects TV   |
| 52         | Husaina Ali Krayee  | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University                    |
| 53         | Innussa Akimtay     | Africa Rice  |
| 54         | Jacob A. Samboi     | Mercy Corps  |
| 55         | Jacob I. Walker     | University of Liberia  |
| 56         | Jacqueline Wungko   | Wungko's Farm  |

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>            | <b>Organization</b>                                      |
|------------|------------------------|--|
| 57         | James T. Moore         | Ministry of Agriculture/ Police Support Unit             |
| 58         | James W. Jasay         | BDI  |
| 59         | James W. Walker        | Booker Washington Institute                              |
| 60         | Janet Alamisi Dabrie   | CERATH Development Organisation                          |
| 61         | Jarius A. Greaves      | YONER Liberia  |
| 62         | Jemiamma T. Dasen      | DAJE Farm  |
| 63         | Jeroen Witkamp         | European Union (EU)                                      |
| 64         | Jerry K. Bleh          | SHIFSO   |
| 65         | Jonathan J. Williams   | Excellent Venture and Service                            |
| 66         | Jonathan S. Steward    | Agro Tech  |
| 67         | Joseph K. Massaquoi    | Youth Connekt Lberia                                     |
| 68         | Joseph M.V. Carter     | BOCHT (Ministry of Health)                               |
| 69         | Joseph N. Kodah        | Poultry Association                                      |
| 70         | Joseph S. Morris       | National Cassava Sector                                  |
| 71         | Judoenaue M. Kollie    | Daily Observers  |
| 72         | Lawerance Naimah       | Ministry of Agriculture                                  |
| 73         | Leroy Kanmoh           | CERATH Development Organisation                          |
| 74         | Leroy W. Cegbe         | University of Liberia                                    |
| 75         | Linda V. Madison       | Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO)        |
| 76         | Lorpu Quaue            | Society for the Conservation of Nature of Liberia (SCNL) |
| 77         | Louise H. Miller       | United Methodist University                              |
| 78         | Maame Kyerewaa Brobbey | CERATH Development Organisation                          |
| 79         | Margretta S. Gereral   | United Methodist University                              |
| 80         | Marolyne N. Elliott    | United Methodist University                              |
| 81         | Martha S. Jimmy        | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University              |
| 82         | Matune J.C. Dolo       | Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO)        |
| 83         | Maybel Koah            | Maybel Koah Enterprise                                   |
| 84         | Meatta T. Sirleaf      | Booker Washington Institute                              |
| 85         | Melvin Y. Duo          | Agro -Animal Innovation Lib.                             |

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>         | <b>Organization</b>                               |
|------------|---------------------|---|
| 86         | Menda F. Tamba      | Capacity For Youth                                |
| 87         | Michael Kangba      | Fauna & Flora International (FFI)                 |
| 88         | Micheal C.G. Geroge | Rapid Food Production Initiative (RFPI)           |
| 89         | Micheal S. Doe      | Solidaridad Network                               |
| 90         | Mohamed Alpha       | Concern   |
| 91         | Mohamed Massaquoi   | Flawah  |
| 92         | Molly Scott         | The new News Paper                                |
| 93         | Mongar David        | Bravo Sister Enterprise                           |
| 94         | Moses B. Demue      | STARZ University                                  |
| 95         | Moses D. Gargar     | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University       |
| 96         | Moses S. Kelleh     | UN Women  |
| 97         | Mulbah K. Yorgbn    | Micro Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) |
| 98         | Musu A. Hejazi      | STARZ University                                  |
| 99         | Nathan F. Gibson    | Ministry of Commerce and Industry                 |
| 100        | Nathaniel Q.W. Gee  | Wulu Enterprise                                   |
| 101        | Nii W. Lante        | VIAMO   |
| 102        | Noah L. Kollie      | Excellent Youth Outreach                          |
| 103        | Nuwoi J. Kiamu      | Liberia International Christian College           |
| 104        | Oliver K. Tarzo     | Stella Maris Polytechnic                          |
| 105        | Oliver Kumeh        | AgroRetti Liberia                                 |
| 106        | Paa Kofi Osei-Owusu | CERATH Development Organisation                   |
| 107        | Patrica M. Kun      | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University       |
| 108        | Patrick A. Blama    | National Standards Laboratory                     |
| 109        | Patrick G. Karngbo  | African Methodist Episcopal Zion University       |
| 110        | Paul Bolorunduro    | Africa Rice                                       |
| 111        | Pauline M. Ponyene  | DAI   |
| 112        | Peter K. Welaken    | University of Liberia                             |
| 113        | Pius Kumeh          | Emmotus Waste                                     |
| 114        | Prince D. Gaye      | Action Aid  |
| 115        | Quarbo Oauwy        | Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO) |

| <b>No.</b> | <b>Name</b>            | <b>Organization</b>   |
|------------|------------------------|---|
| 116        | Rachel S. Tamba        | Mercy Corps   |
| 117        | Randolphlyn D. Johnson | TRIBE   |
| 118        | Richlieu M. Kaman      | IDH   |
| 119        | Romon T. Vivanco       | European Union (EU)   |
| 120        | Rufus L. Cole          | Welthungerhilfe (WHH)   |
| 121        | Samuel Cooper          | Excellent Youth Outreach (EJO)                                  |
| 122        | Samuel K. D. Slinger   | Stella Maris Polytechnic  |
| 123        | Selena S.F. Montgomng  | United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) |
| 124        | Staphen Y. Mambu       | National Standard Lab   |
| 125        | Sylvester E. Trinity   | United Methodist University                                     |
| 126        | Tama J. Jabba          | TNOLT   |
| 127        | Taneliwe Mugombi       | Welthungerhilfe (WHH)   |
| 128        | Tarnue Jeke            | Ministry of Agriculture-RETRAP                                  |
| 129        | Thomas J. Moore        | Maybel Koah Enterprise  |
| 130        | Thomas K. Roulbac      |   |
| 131        | Trokon Flashma         | Spoon TV  |
| 132        | Tryphma Moulton        | Christian Humanitarian Service                                  |
| 133        | Urias J. Tumu          | Women Empowerment for Self-Employment (WE4SELF)                 |
| 134        | Valarie S. J.Suah      | Sandra Farm Incorporation                                       |
| 135        | Victor Ngorbu          | Action Against Hunger   |
| 136        | Wallace J. Suku        | United Methodist University                                     |
| 137        | Washington K. Seward   | Booker Washington Institute                                     |
| 138        | Wilson O. Tuelor       | Ministry of Education / Ministry of Transport                   |
| 139        | Yar D.G. Gono          | United Methodist University                                     |
| 140        | Yarzue R. Duwah        | Community Empowerment Initiative Network (CEINET)               |

## **APPENDIX C: PRESS CLIPPING**

Links to press releases:

1. <https://fb.watch/g7BejfsA5/>
2. <https://www.facebook.com/STLLIB/videos/5414511025252198>
3. <https://fb.watch/g87LtHh4Pf/>
4. <https://fb.watch/g8SMawmI9h>



## APPENDIX D: GALLERY



Figure 15: A participant registering at the communication event



Figure 13: EU delegation listening to the research presentation



Figure 14: Representatives of GoL ministries



Figure 18: Cross-section of participants at the event



Figure 16: A display of made-in-Liberia agri-food products at the event



Figure 17: Youth-led agribusinesses showcasing their products

## **WACOMP**

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The West Africa Competitiveness Programme 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. WACOMP consists of one regional component and sixteen national components (15 ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania)

### **Disclaimer**

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