



# Talking Agribusiness in Liberia Project

## CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON LIBERIA'S FOOD SYSTEMS

### Fourth Communication Event





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# The Talking Agribusiness in Liberia Project

## Children's Perspectives on Liberia's Food Systems

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09 April 2024





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## Presentation Outline



**Background & Context of Research**



**Objectives of Research**



**Methodology**



**Discussion of Key Findings**



**Implications for an Improved Environment for Agri-/food Businesses to Thrive in Liberia**



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## 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, and
- an improved environment for agri-/food businesses to thrive in accord with the objective of the WACOMP.





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## Background and Context of the Research

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

#### ☐ *Project Activities*

- ❖ Research six (6) validated agribusiness topics
- ❖ Organise events for information dissemination and stakeholder interactions on research findings

#### ☐ *Project Outputs*

- ❖ *Output 1: The Status of Youth Engagement in Agribusiness*
- ❖ *Output 2: AfCFTA in Liberia - The Ratification Process and Involvement of Agribusinesses*
- ❖ *Output 3: Fisherfolk Access to Financial Services in Liberia*
- ❖ *Output 4: Children's Perspectives on Liberia's Food Systems*



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# TALKING AGRIBUSINESS IN LIBERIA PROJECT (THIRD COMMUNICATION EVENT)

In Collaboration with

## THE CASSAVA TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

**WEBINAR**

### THEMES

*Stakeholder Validation of the National Agricultural & Rural Financing  
Framework for Liberia &*

*Fisherfolk Access to Financial Services in Liberia*

### WEBINAR SPEAKERS



Maame Kyerewaa Brobbey  
Project Lead,  
Talking Agribusiness in  
Liberia Project



Isaac Donkor  
Project Manger,  
Cassava Transformation  
Project



Gabriel Ayiglo  
Consultant for the National  
Agricultural Rural Financing  
Framework

### JOIN US ONLINE



9 am  
April 11, 2024



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## Background & Context of the Research

- ❑ Liberia ranks 117th out of 125 countries in terms of hunger conditions on the 2023 Global Hunger Index, which classifies Liberia's level of hunger as 'serious.' In August 2022, 47% of Liberian households were recorded to be food insecure, with 8% being severely food insecure and global acute malnutrition at 7% (LFSNLMA).
- ❑ Liberia's agri-/food business value chain is part of the country's food systems and is essential to strengthening food access and diet quality among the population. Yet evidence has shown that business and trade do not always work for development outcomes without conscious efforts.
- ❑ Trade in agricultural products and Liberia's agri-/food business value chain are expected to increase over the coming decades, affecting the extent and nature of food security and nutrition.
- ❑ The project aims to initiate stakeholder discussions on enhancing coherence between enhancing the competitiveness of the agri-/food business value chain and the goal to eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.



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## Background & Context of the Research

- ❑ As a constituency, children are present and future actors in Liberia's agri-/food systems and are among the most vulnerable groups. Thus, any efforts at transforming the value chain should consider their perspectives and needs.
- ❑ Several efforts and interventions carried out by the Liberian Government and development partners, particularly in Education, Health & Nutrition and Social Protection, are impacting children and adolescent experiences of the country's food systems
  - ❖ How are these working for children, and how could their experiences be improved?
  - ❖ What opportunities may exist [in this effort to improve] for the ideation, growth and expansion of agro-MSMEs?





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## Objectives of the Research



### Research Goal

To examine children's experiences and perspectives on Liberia's food system as an important constituency for which the food systems must work.



### Research Objectives

- ❖ Determine the perspective of Liberian children on food security
- ❖ Explore children's expectations of future food systems in Liberia
- ❖ Examine the nutritional understanding and perception of children about food types

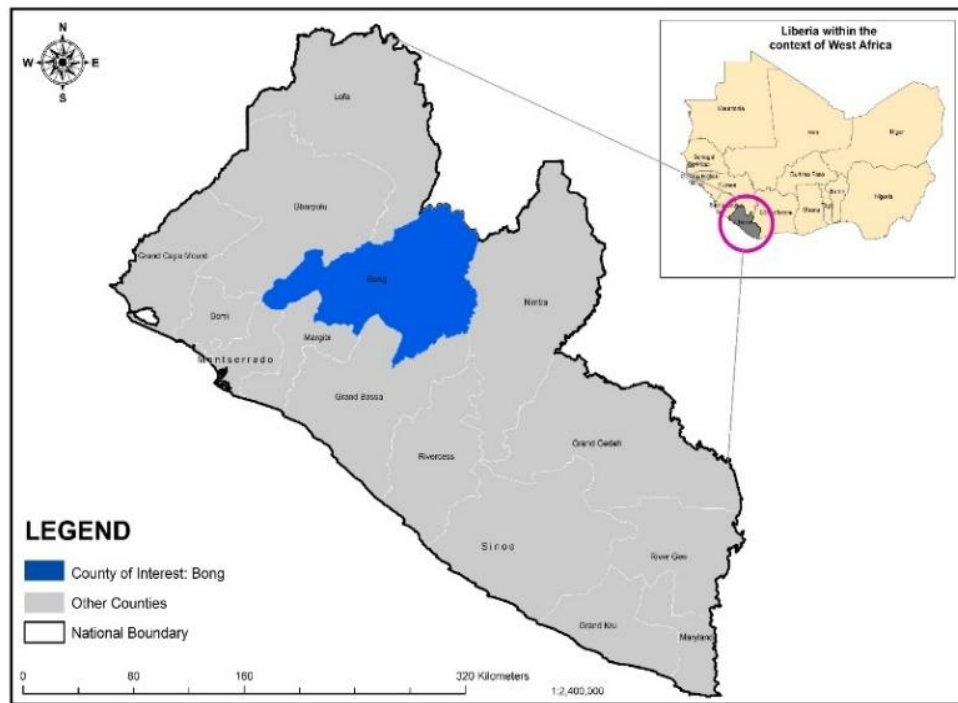


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## Methodology

### The study area: Bong County



- ❑ Population and food security profiling
  - ❖ It is the third-most populous county, with the highest percentage of children (35%), with the majority being between 12 and 14 years old.
  - ❖ It also has the most food insecure individuals (40,000) and the proportion of child malnutrition resulting in anaemia and stunting is 37% and 66%, respectively.
  - ❖ The percentage of stunting is 7% greater than the national average, making it the second-highest County with the condition.
  - ❖ More than a fifth of the population does not have access to improved water.



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## Methodology

- ❑ The study was qualitative and employed a visual methodology
  - ❖ Group discussions and individual interviews were conducted to explore the views, experiences, understanding and expectations of 60 children aged 9-17 years old.
  - ❖ Half of the children were enrolled in school, while the other half were not
  - ❖ Group discussions and interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed with the children's assent and consent from some caregivers/teachers.
  - ❖ The transcriptions were analysed using content analysis.
  - ❖ About 50 coloured photographs (some negative and others positive) representing experiences, ideals, and interactions regarding food and food systems were used as aids to facilitate discussions and elicit the perspectives of the children respondents.



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## Methodology

Cluster of children	Description of Respondents	Sample size
Children in school	Children in Amos Rader Salvation Army Senior High School	10
	Children in John Flomo Bakalu Junior High School	10
	Children in Jerome Francis Clake Elementary School	10
Children out of school	Children working as motor bike riders	2
	Children working in a welding shop	3
	Children working in a tyre shop	2
	Children working in a car washing bay	10
	Children selling on the street	3
	Children not engaged in school or any economic activity	10
Total		60

# DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

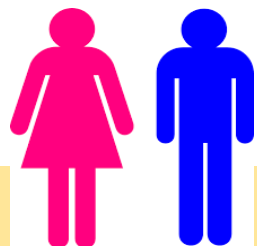




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## Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents



About a third of the respondents (19) were girls, while two-thirds (41) were boys.

- One-half (50%) of the respondents were enrolled in school across the primary, JHS and SHS levels, while the other half were not enrolled.
- The girls were more likely to be enrolled in school (84%) than were the boys (34%).



- Respondents were principally adolescents\* aged between 9 & 17 years old.
- The mean age for respondents not enrolled in school was 12 years.
- The mean age for respondents in JHS and SHS was 16 years, and 12 for respondents in primary school.

## Children's Perspectives on Food Security

- ❑ This was explored through the three fundamental pillars that define food security—access, availability, and utility. Particularly affordability, sufficiency and satisfaction and choice were discussed.
- ❑ The findings show that the children recognised the central place of rice in the Liberian diet and how different food types can be accessed. They also viewed rice as the country's most consumed food—at home and school. Cassava, plantain and potatoes are also significant.

*“Food from the market is mostly imported... We get rice out of the country...We import rice from abroad...from America..., Ivory Coast, and China... We need to grow more food in the country in order to make sufficient food available...We need to make agriculture useful in our country.”*

*“We eat rice both at school and at home...Gari is eaten in the house... We get food from the garden and also from the market. Excess food produced from our garden is sold in the market...Fish is from the market. Fruits and vegetables are obtained from the garden.”*



## Children's Perspectives on Food Security



- ❑ There was a dilemma on rice importation.
  - ❖ Concerns over the volumes of rice imported and an over-reliance on such importation translated into neglect of raising local rice productivity levels.
  - ❖ The importation of rice and other food items meant that rice and those food items could be 'readily available' on the market.
- ❑ They saw local rice production as the approach to ensuring sustained food security.
- ❑ The consumption of fruits and vegetables was a factor of the seasonality of these foods and whether a family produced them in their garden. For a period of time annually, there is a shortage of locally produced foods.
- ❑ Locally produced food is sold in the market only after there is a surplus from household consumption.





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## Children's Perspectives on Food Security

*“My parents don't have money to buy rice sometimes...they have to sell, get money and buy rice sometimes”*

*“In school, sometimes I can buy bread and eat...If I am not having money, I can't buy it...If I come to school, I can't eat because my parents can't give me recess [money]... I can't afford the food”*

- ❑ Children in schools with school feeding programmes indicated they did not pay for meals because the school provided them. These children and, in some cases, their families could afford one meal per school day and a free grocery list per month, respectively.

- ❑ Children's access to, choice, and consumption of particular foods are influenced by their parents, peers, and school. Parents choose their children's food (Fleming et al. 2021), whether it comes from the market or their backyard garden.
- ❑ Money/finances remain significant to food accessibility.

*“I will buy rice [rather] than fruit if I have more money because the rice will give me more strength. The rice will fill my gut”*





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## Children's Perspectives on Food Security

- Children also raised issues on food quality and safety, malnutrition and access to [portable] water.

When I eat the fish from the fresh water at the farm, I can feel fine more than when I eat fish from the cold storage...fish from the cold storage make me feel bad after eating it..."

I feel fine when I eat fish, rice, gari..."

For me, it is the chicken from the cold storage that makes me feel bad when I eat it. I think there are chemicals in both the fish and chicken that are in the cold storage"

We use hand well, we go to people's houses to draw water, mainly this dry season time, owners of wells lock it...in the dry season when water gets dirty, we buy mineral water to drink.

"Water is difficult to come by... we are not satisfied...we experience water shortage"



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## Children's Perspectives on Food Security



- ❑ Most of the children regarded malnutrition as a unique newborn circumstance caused by their mothers' actions, including those related to poor nutrition.
- ❑ When photographs of both were shown, the children primarily identified with the healthy-looking child vis-à-vis the malnourished one. They reported that they did not consume fruits and vegetables frequently or enough nutrient-dense food. They, however, considered themselves to be healthy.
- ❑ The malnourished child was viewed as someone who required quick attention.

*“The person is sick and dry...I have never seen a malnourished person before”*

*“Someone who was pregnant and did not take the tablets on time, they give birth to a child who then looks like this [malnourished] child in the picture.*

*It means a child's mom who is not breastfeeding the child. It also means someone who does not eat on time”*



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## Children's Expectations of Liberia's Future Food Systems

- ❑ *Children agreed that Liberia, in the future, needed to boost rice production*
- ❑ *While many children anticipated and advocated for a future when agricultural (rice) production is supported/ conducted with improved technology and machinery to boost production in Liberia,*
  - ❑ *Others indicated that simple instruments used presently have not outlived their usefulness*
  - ❑ *Yet others were concerned about their jobs and employment opportunities with the introduction of mechanised rice farming on a large scale*

TO MECHANISE OR  
NOT TO MECHANISE





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## Children's Expectations of Liberia's Future Food Systems

TO MECHANISE OR  
NOT TO MECHANISE



*“We should use machines for planting rice as the machine makes work easy...I think it [increased rice production] should happen using machines because our people suffer when they bend down to use tools like hoe; their back hurts... the machine can make it simple and faster to do your work...”*

*“We can use a cutlass and a hoe for planting rice as hoe helps to stretch the farm...We should use cutlass and hoe since we are used to these agricultural tools..... I recommend hoes and cutlass to the machine because when you use a machine, sometimes the machine can mix up the soil, and it can kill the plant. So it is good to use the hoe to plant”*

# Children's Expectations of Liberia's Future Food Systems

- ❑ “Planting food on farms and gardens, our parents can help to plant it, especially parents without jobs. We have large land, let our government help us to work to produce our own food. **Liberia should produce more food enough for Liberians and other countries to purchase.**”
- ❑ “We want the Agricultural Minister to encourage people to plant so it can always be in our midst”

- ❑ Investments in pump technologies to enhance access to water in Liberia
- ❑ No Malnourished Children  
They urged the government to identify malnourished children and provide them with proper care, such as food and medicine.

## School Feeding Programme in Every School

“I want the government to bring school feeding programme here as lot more people don't have money when they come to school... with school feeding programme, during recess period, people will go in the cafeteria and get food and eat to get stamina to sit for the next class....school feeding programme will encourage you to learn”



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## Children's Nutritional Understanding & Perceptions about Food Types

- ❑ Most of the children could not define what constituted a balanced diet and thus could not distinguish between an unbalanced and a balanced diet.
  - ❖ Those who spoke concerning a balanced diet depicted it as a diet designed for persons aiming to achieve a certain objective, such as weight loss.
- ❑ Schoolchildren were able to recognise different nutrients and understand how they work in the body. They understood both the roles of nutrients in the body and the nutrients found in their food.
  - ❖ The exercise of identifying the nutrients found in foods and the role those nutrients play in the human body involved foods such as fish, poultry, rice, fruits, vegetables, bread, mushrooms, and fufu.
  - ❖ On the other hand, the children who were not enrolled in school could not articulate the differentiation of nutrients in foods. They mostly indicated that the different fruits and vegetables shown were all high in protein.



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## Children's Nutritional Understanding & Perceptions about Food Types

- ❑ Liberia has drafted a biosafety law to govern genetically modified foods.
- ❑ Although the country does not yet produce genetically modified foods, it allows for importing GM foods with authorisation.
  - ❖ The children often did not understand the topic of genetically modified (GM) food
  - ❖ Their attempts at distinguishing/guessing fruits that were genetically modified relied on colour and shape (of fruits)
  - ❖ Some of the children felt that GM foods were higher quality than non-GM foods because they were more enticing, while others disagreed

*“The Non-GMO is quality as non-GMO apple is red more than the GMO..GMO apple looks appealing”*





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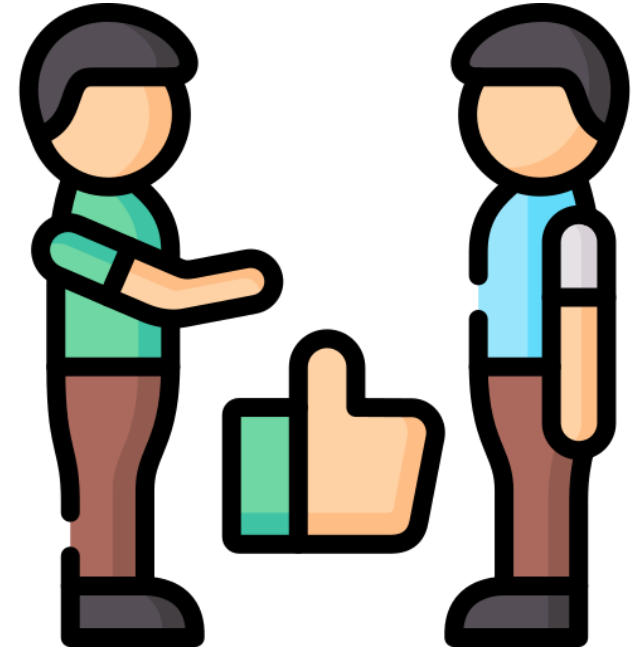
## Children's Nutritional Understanding & Perceptions about Food Types

- ❑ The children's understanding of processed food was mostly based on how long it took to prepare them before eating. Others thought that if you could not see the materials used to produce a product, then it was processed
- ❑ However, there was a prevalent belief that 'already prepared' food, such as (soft) drinks and biscuits, were more processed than food, such as rice, which required further cooking.

*“Rice is processed because when you eat the rice, your stomach gets full; soft drink is just for appetite...”*

*“Soft drink is processed because you cannot see the materials used to make a soft drink.”*

# IMPLICATIONS FOR ENHANCING THE COMPETITIVENESS OF THE AGRI-/FOOD BUSINESS VALUE CHAIN IN LIBERIA



## Summary of Findings

- ❑ Rice is King, so is money. Let us increase productivity to satisfy the domestic market - food and nutritional security and trade.
- ❑ In their own season -- Fruits and vegetables are planted (and harvested) seasonally. Thus, children cannot consume adequate amounts despite growing some in the backyard garden.
- ❑ For the children interviewed, the future version of Liberia's food systems should have room for mechanisation of agriculture production, particularly rice; enhanced access to water; no malnutrition, and school feeding programme in every school
- ❑ Children's experiences in Liberia's food systems show that there are impactful people-level outcomes associated with school feeding programmes.
- ❑ There are some gaps in children's understanding of nutritional diversity and food types. However, being in school is noted as significant for their understanding of nutritional needs.



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## Implications for Enhancing the Competitiveness of the Agri-/food Business Value Chain in Liberia

- ❑ Liberia's private sector is not well developed. However, could they be involved in further improving children's experiences of Liberia's food systems while they enhance their own performance and growth?
- ❑ What opportunities exist to align food and nutritional security for children in Liberia?

*Processing of fruits and vegetables to beat the seasonal nature seasonality*  
*-- pickled fruits/vegetables*  
*--Condiments*

➤ *A question of technology*

*School feeding programme*  
*✓ Domestic content*



## The Talking Agribusiness in Liberia Project

*THANK YOU FOR  
YOUR ATTENTION*