





Empowering Growth and Innovation: Highlights from Agribusiness Training, Partnerships, and Success Stories

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### 1. AN EXCITING FUTURE: GROW-2'S CAPACITY BUILDING **BENEFITS LVSA MANAGEMENT**

FIGURE 1: Training at LVSA in Paynesville





The Liberia Vegetable Sellers Association (LVSA) completed a three-day leadership and management training program to improve the competencies and skills of their team. The program, facilitated by GROW-2, took place at LVSA's headquarters from June 26th to 28th, 2024. It was attended by 38 participants (19 women), comprising coordinators, department heads, and deputy directors. The training focused on refining LVSA's goals and vision, identifying growth opportunities within the organization's structure, and studying successful leadership traits.

Through interactive sessions such as role-playing, group activities, and practical exercises, the program fostered a collaborative learning environment. Participants not only developed their leadership skills but also strengthened their cohesion as a management team. The training equipped LVSA with the necessary skills and strategies to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness while enhancing the management team's preparedness and unity of purpose—key factors for LVSA's future success.

The training was an eye-opener for me. I learned not only about effective leadership but also how to better motivate my team. I feel more confident in my role and am excited to implement what I've

Edwin L. Massaley, Office Administrator

This training has transformed my understanding of organizational management. Each of us now knows what to do, unlike before when one person was handling everything. The interactive sessions allowed us to share ideas and learn from each other. I am eager to apply these strategies to improve our operations at LVSA.

Glady Kankeh, Finance Manager



#### Looking forward

The LVSA leadership team is committed to putting the training lessons into action as they plan for the future. A follow-up session is being scheduled to reinforce the learning outcomes and ensure continued growth and development for the organization.

2. BUILDING SUSTAINABLE HORTICULTURE PARTNERSHIPS: SHOWCASING THE BENEFITS OF DEMONSTRATION PLOTS AND SHADE NET GREENHOUSES WITH 3 COOPERATIVES IN MONTSERRADO, BONG AND NIMBA

FIGURE 2: Shade Net House at Nimba Women Cooperative (left) and Land Preparation at Nimba Women Cooperative Farm (right)





GROW-2 is committed to enhancing the livelihoods of smallholder farmers by promoting sustainable horticulture production. This initiative is being undertaken in collaboration with three cooperatives and aims to empower over a thousand farmers across Montserrado, Bong, and Nimba counties. One of the key interventions is the establishment of demonstration plots, where improved agronomic practices are implemented in close collaboration with partner cooperatives while sensitizing

others. These facilities serve as practical learning environments where cooperative members and other farmers in their cluster areas can observe and engage in organic farming practices firsthand. Simple production guides and crop-specific manuals will also be developed to enhance the dissemination of knowledge from the fields.

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#### FIGURE 3: GROW-2 is committed to enhancing the livelihoods of smallholder farmers







The intervention tackles key challenges faced by smallholder farmers, such as limited knowledge, lack of access to quality inputs, and outdated farming techniques. This partnership is vital, as it leverages the collective strength of cooperatives to facilitate knowledge sharing

and optimize resource allocation among farmers. By collaborating, they build a stronger support system that empowers individual farmers and enhances their access to markets.



We are thrilled about the opportunity GROW-2 has provided us to cultivate tomatoes under optimal conditions. The shade house is new to us and has been effective in protecting the tomato seedlings. Previously, we didn't know the exact type of tomatoes we were planting, which led to small, poorly formed fruits with a sour taste. Thanks to GROW-2, we are now cultivating the F1 Cobra 26 tomato, which is large, red, and sweet. Given the high market prices and our reliance on imports from neighboring countries, we are confident that local farmers will greatly benefit from this new variety by the end of the planting season.

Plenseh McCoy, CEO of Nimba Women Agriculture Cooperative (NWAC)



Our new improved tomato seedlings are thriving, largely due to GROW-2's support. The establishment of a demonstration farm and a shade house has protected the seedlings from heavy rains and pests. We expect this new variety to improve livelihoods and contribute significantly to the economic growth of smallholder farmers in the Phillip Farm community.

Glady Kankeh, Finance Manager



### **Looking forward**

After transplanting has been completed across all open field sites, it is anticipated that in the coming months, GROW-2 partner cooperatives will supply fresh, healthy vegetables to the market. The next phase will focus on scaling up the intervention, engaging additional cooperatives, and ensuring that the knowledge and resources provided translate into tangible improvements in farmers' livelihoods.

Two cooperatives, enthusiastic about the new tomato varieties, have shared positive feedback regarding their experiences with these innovative interventions.



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#### 3. HARNESSING THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR AGRIBUSINESS SUCCESS



GROW-2 webinar on "Social Media as a Marketing Tool" aimed to empower MSMEs with the knowledge and skills to maximize the full potential of social media platforms. It highlighted the cost-saving benefits of social media marketing and covered various platforms, targeting strategies, audience engagement, and customer conversion techniques. Attended by 34 MSMEs, the session offered practical tips on profile optimization, analytics usage, and creating engaging content to enhance their online presence.

Participants left with actionable suggestions to improve their digital footprint, expand their customer base, and achieve long-term success. This webinar is part of a series organized by GROW-2 to support MSMEs in the agricultural sector by equipping them with the tools they need to thrive in the digital world.

Testimonials from attendees underscored the significant impact of understanding social media strategies on boosting sales and fostering the growth of sustainable small businesses.

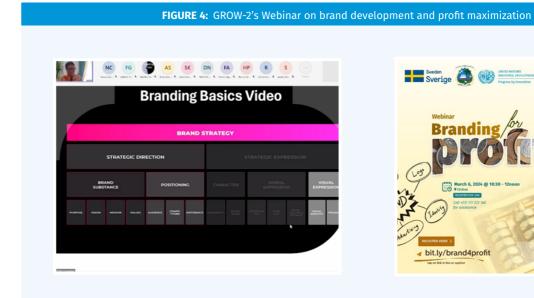
As a small business owner, I am constantly trying to drive traffic to my storefront. I found the webinar incredibly informative and am eager to apply what I learned right away. GROW-2 understands the needs of those of us who are less familiar with social media.

Norwu Howard, Owner of Taizue Royal Inc

In my role, I oversee marketing for businesses at the Liberia Chamber of Commerce, with a focus on locally produced products. I found the networking opportunities particularly valuable and believe GROW-2 is fostering a supportive community of MSMEs that will thrive because of the insights

Diamond Kamu, Liberia Chamber of Commerce

### 4. BRAND DEVELOPMENT AND PROFIT MAXIMIZATION: **KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM GROW-2'S WEBINAR**





PAGE 8 PAGE 9 The first webinar of the GROW-2 series, titled "Branding for Profits," was a success, bringing together over 75 participants from various MSMEs in Liberia. The session aimed to empower attendees with the tools necessary to enhance their brands, increasing their chances of success and longevity in the industry.

The webinar provided participants with a wide-ranging understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and outcomes associated with branding for MSMEs. The resource person emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent brand image, utilizing

storytelling to engage consumers, and creating a memorable logo. Attendees learned how to differentiate themselves in a competitive market and build trust and loyalty through strategic branding.

The knowledge and skills gained from the webinar can be immediately applied by MSMEs, setting them on a path to long-term success. The GROW-2 series is committed to equipping MSMEs with the information and resources they need to thrive in today's dynamic market. Stay tuned for the next webinar, which will delve deeper into the fundamental concepts of branding.



The webinar trainer was excellent. My takeaway from the training is that effective packaging goes beyond aesthetics; it captures the essence of a brand and creates a memorable experience for customers.

Jeremy Titoe, GIZ



### **Key takeaways**

- Consistency in brand image is essential for success across all platforms.
- Narratives are powerful tools for promoting and enhancing brand identity.
- Tips for creating a memorable brand appearance.
- The importance of customer feedback in shaping brand development.
- Utilizing branding to foster consumer loyalty.
- Strategies for differentiating your brand from competitors.

# 5. GROW-2 ESTABLISHES FIVE REGIONAL CASSAVA NURSERIES TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES OF ACCESS TO IMPROVED VARIETIES

In Liberia, cassava is not just a crop; it is a lifeline. As the second most important food crop after rice, it plays a critical role in agricultural practices, primarily serving self-consumption, though commercialization efforts are on the rise. Despite its importance, cassava production faces numerous challenges that impede its full potential. Traditional farming methods, compounded by a lack

of high-yield and disease-resistant varieties, result in modest yields of only 5.8 and 8.2 metric tons per hectare - well below the regional averages in West Africa.

Cooperatives and farmers have identified two major concerns: low production from local cassava sticks and insufficient knowledge about the varieties they plant. To



tackle these issues, the GROW-2 project partnered with various cooperatives to establish 12-acre rapid cassava multiplication nurseries in Bong, Nimba, Lofa, Margibi, and Montserrado counties. As part of the initiative, four improved varieties of cassava have been acquired from the Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI). These varieties show high yield potential and disease resistance—critical factors for enhancing productivity on

rural farms. During the training, the farmers learned the names of the improved cassava varieties while planting the 12 acres nursery bed.

Three regional nurseries are located in Nimba County: Zawolo Village, Beatuo, and Nyor Diaplaye. The other two nurseries are situated in Gbartala and Goll Farm in Bong County. This strategic distribution ensures that improved cassava varieties are easily accessible to farmers. By providing high-yielding, disease-resistant planting materials, these nurseries directly address the productivity challenges faced by cassava farmers. More importantly, this systemic approach integrates the nurseries into the local agricultural ecosystem, making improved cassava varieties a consistent feature of the farming landscape rather than a one-time intervention.

Two cooperatives partnering with GROW-2 shared their valuable insights on the impact the nurseries with improved cassava varieties will have on their members.



Tuber crops play a crucial role in agricultural value addition due to their economic potential. GROW-2's assistance in establishing our cassava nursery will enable seed multiplication and the distribution of improved cassava stick varieties to our farmers, helping to increase their yields. The output from these sticks is unique compared to local cassava varieties; they are much purer and more profitable. Additionally, the improved varieties are pest-resistant, which reduces labor demands and allows our farmers to focus on crop diversification to supplement their income while the cassava grows.

Yarkeh Gongbo, Multipurpose Cooperative Society, LAIMCOS Ltd

"

The partnership between GROW-2 and United Women has been immensely beneficial in establishing the cassava nursery at our cooperative. GROW-2 has introduced us to a diverse range of cassava varieties, each with specific names that we can document. Understanding these varieties helps us anticipate their expected yields and taste profiles, which is crucial for our gari production processes. This knowledge empowers us to identify which cassava varieties are likely to command better prices, allowing us to share improved cassava cuttings with other farmers.

Plenseh McCoy, CEO, Nimba Women Agriculture Cooperative (NWAC)



#### **Looking forward**

After multiplying a significant amount of the improved cuttings at the regional nurseries, the cassava plants will be rationed the improved planting materials will be distributed to smallholder farmers, cooperatives, MSMEs involved in cassava production and processing.

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# 6. GROW-2, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SIX CASSAVA FARMER COOPERATIVES, ESTABLISHED SIX FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS (FFS) TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES IN TRADITIONAL FARMING METHODS

**FIGURE 6:** GROW-2 team with United Women Cooperative (left) and Youth preparing cassava sticks for planting at Sua-Yelle Cooperative (right)





To increase productivity, sustainability, and overall agricultural success, it is essential to address the reliance on low-yielding cassava varieties and inadequate soil management practices. Many farmers cultivate these varieties continuously, resulting in low yields and soil degradation. Traditional methods often lack effective pest and disease management strategies, leaving cassava crops vulnerable to diseases such as Cassava Mosaic Disease (CMD) and Cassava Brown Streak Disease (CBSD), which can significantly diminish yields. This vulnerability contributes to economic instability for farmers, limiting their ability to invest in improved practices or technologies.

To tackle this challenge, the GROW-2 project, in partnership with the Central Agricultural Research Institute's Root and Tuber Unit and the district agriculture offices of the Ministry of Agriculture in Nimba and Bong

counties, has initiated six farmer field schools (FFS) for six cooperatives in these counties. A total of 204 farmers participated in the training, including 113 women and ten individuals with disabilities. The FFS serves as a practical learning environment where smallholder farmers can observe, learn, and adopt improved cassava production technologies and practices. During field days, farmers will evaluate new approaches and select those that best suit their needs. These field schools are crucial for promoting innovation and building farmers' capacity through experiential and peer learning, and their impact on these farmers cannot be underestimated.

As participants reflect on their experiences, their insights highlight the value of the training.

I appreciate what I am learning at the Farmer Field School. I invest the 'little money' I earn into my farm and understand the value of planting the new cassava cuttings from CARI, using improved methods like intercropping with cowpeas. Farmers need something to sustain their families and businesses while waiting to harvest the cassava.

Ms. Esther Flomo, United Women

Cassava farming is lucrative, as both the cuttings and the roots provide significant sources of income. CARI's new project (P-P) discourages the use of older cassava sticks and traditional planting techniques. The activities of the Farmer Field School will transform cassava farming practices in Liberia, and GROW-2's intervention in post-harvest processes will yield additional economic benefits.

Jonah M. Yarnlay, Root and Tuber Unit (CARI).

# 7. GROW-2 PREPARES 2,765 FARMERS AND 2 EXPORTERS FOR ORGANIC COCOA CERTIFICATION AUDIT

FIGURE 7: Mock Audit at United Women Cocoa Farm Gbarnga, Bong County (left) and Document review at Nyor-Kwalokwakou Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative, Nimba County (right)





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The demand for organic cocoa is increasing in Liberia, attracting more farmers to the industry. The GROW-2 project is supporting the efforts of 2,765 farmers in Bong and Nimba counties, along with two exporters, in preparation for an upcoming organic cocoa certification audit. A mock audit was conducted to assess the current farming practices of the cooperatives, including their records and Organic System Plans (OSP), to identify areas for improvement to meet organic standards.

For cocoa growers, obtaining organic certification is a significant achievement that provides access to premium markets and higher prices. The GROW-2 project has been instrumental in facilitating training and equipping these farmers with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet organic certification standards. This preparation empowers farmers to tap into the growing global market for organic products, where demand for organic cocoa is rising.

One farmer from Bong County shared his experience: "The training we've received through the GROW-2 project has been transformative. Before, I didn't know much about organic farming practices, but now I understand how to avoid prohibited substances, such as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. This certification will open up new markets for us, and I'm excited about the potential income it could bring." — Nelson Kerkulah, Farmer from Bong County.

Another participant, a cocoa trader from Nimba County, expressed her optimism: "The organic certification process has been challenging, but it's a necessary step to access better markets. With the global demand for organic cocoa increasing, this certification will make our products more competitive. I'm confident that the benefits will far outweigh the efforts we are putting in. We are grateful to GROW-2 for all the technical support." — Rachel Mulbah, Cocoa Trader from Nimba County.

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#### **Looking forward**

As GROW-2 continues to support farmers and exporters for the certification process, the future looks promising. The international market for organic cocoa is expanding, and with Liberia's favorable climate and growing conditions, the country is well-positioned to become a key player in this market. The benefits of organic certification extend beyond immediate financial gains; they include long-term sustainability, improved farming practices, and greater resilience against market fluctuations.



# 8. GROW-2 TRAINS LACRA'S NEW MANAGEMENT AND TECHNICAL TEAMS ON EUDR

FIGURE 8: LACRA Board Chair Ms. Josephine Francis



The Liberia Agriculture Commodity Regulatory Authority (LACRA) is enhancing the capabilities of its new management and technical team through a partnership with GROW-2, focused on the European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). This partnership aims to equip the team with the expertise needed to ensure that Liberia's cocoa exports remain sustainable and compliant with European market requirements.

Through training conducted by GROW-2, LACRA's team gained insights into key aspects of the EUDR, which mandates that commodities like palm oil, cocoa, and

coffee must not contribute to deforestation and must adhere to stringent traceability requirements. LACRA's new team members gained insights into the legal, technical, and operational facets of the EUDR, essential for ensuring Liberia's compliance and competitiveness in the global market. Participants engaged in interactive discussions, practical exercises, and case studies, which allowed them to grasp the complexities of the regulation and its implications for Liberia's agricultural sector.

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The training provided by GROW-2 was an eye-opener. The EUDR is a complex regulation, but the trainers broke it down in a way that was easy to understand and highly relevant to our work. This knowledge will be invaluable as we strive to align our operations with international standards and ensure that our commodities meet the EUDR requirements.

Christopher Sankolo, Director General, LACRA

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The interactive nature of the training was particularly beneficial. We were not only taught the theoretical aspects of the EUDR, but also how to apply this knowledge practically. The case studies provided real-world scenarios that we are likely to encounter, making the training highly applicable to our daily operations.

Philip Torborg, Director of Programs, LACRA



#### **Looking forward**

The knowledge and skills acquired are instrumental in strengthening the regulatory framework governing Liberia's agricultural exports, ensuring that they meet the stringent requirements of the European market. This initiative also reflects LACRA's ongoing commitment to fostering sustainable agriculture practices and enhancing the global competitiveness of Liberia's commodities.

As LACRA continues to build on this momentum, future collaborations with GROW-2 and other international partners are anticipated. These partnerships will further bolster the capacity of the team and contribute to the overall growth and sustainability of Liberia's agricultural sector. The successful completion of this training marks a significant step forward in LACRA's mission to promote sustainable development and compliance with international trade regulations.



# 9. LIBERIAN INSTITUTIONS AND MSMES PARTICIPATE IN THE 3RD INTERNATIONAL CLUSTER CONFERENCE IN GHANA

FIGURE 9: Liberian Delegation (L-R): Fredrick S. Gibson Jnr (GROW-2), Estelle Liberty Kemoh (Purukpeh Agriculture),
Benedict A. Dolo, Deputy Minister for Small Business Administration (Ministry of Commerce and Industry),
Zogbo Luther, Assistant Minister for Planning (Ministry of Agriculture), Charles K Sackey (GROW-2), Edwina J. Boima, Deputy Registrar
General, (Cooperative Development Authority) and Christopher D. Sankolo, Director General (LACRA).



**FIGURE 10:** Fredrick Gibson (GROW-2) during a panel discussion (left) and Attendees meet vendors displaying products (right).





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The GROW-2 project supported a delegation of Liberian institutions and MSMEs to attend the 3rd International Cluster Conference and SME Expo in Accra. The event provided a crucial platform for knowledge sharing, networking, and fostering collaborations both regionally and internationally. Participants gained valuable insights into the experiences of Ghanaian business clusters and explored strategies for scaling this model across Africa, including Liberia.

In recent years, MSMEs have been acknowledged as pivotal in driving economic growth and development across Africa, significantly contributing to employment, GDP, and innovation. Despite their potential, MSMEs face challenges like limited market access and insufficient financial resources. The conference convened business leaders, government agencies, and industry experts to address these challenges, explore opportunities, and showcase innovations in the MSME sector. The event featured various interactive activities, such as workshops, keynote speeches, panel discussions, and networking events. These sessions were designed to equip participants with the knowledge and tools needed to advance their businesses. During the field visits,

the Liberian delegation engaged with various cluster members, including R&R Luxury, Oxy Industries Ltd, Ghana Export Promotion Authority, Ghana Cooperative Council, and Ghana COCOBOD, each providing unique insights into their respective sectors.

The outcomes for the Liberian delegation were substantial. Delegates gained practical exposure to advanced strategies relevant to Africa's trade context. The conference also facilitated networking, leading to potential collaborative ventures, supply chain improvements, and increased market access. Furthermore, interactions with policymakers and government agencies provided insights into regional economic policies that could bolster Liberia's MSME sector.

Two participants who attended the conference were Estelle Liberty Kemoh, representing Purukpeh Agriculture Farm, and Benedict A. Dolo, the Deputy Minister of SME Development at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shared their insights and feedback regarding the discussions and outcomes of the conference.



Attending the 3rd Ghana Cluster Conference was an eye-opening experience. The knowledge gained and the connections made are invaluable. We are excited to implement the best practices we learned to boost our production and market reach.

Estelle Liberty Kemoh, representing Purukpeh Agriculture Farm.



The conference provided us with a comprehensive understanding of the potential within the MSME sector. The insights we gained will significantly influence our policies and initiatives aimed at SME growth

Benedict A. Dolo, Deputy Minister of SME Development at the Ministry of Commerce and Industry



#### **Looking forward**

The study tour was a unique opportunity for the Liberian delegation to engage with regional counterparts, gain essential business insights, and contribute to broader economic development and regional integration in West Africa. These experiences and knowledge will help strengthen MSME practices in Liberia, ensuring the growth and sustainability of the sector through the adoption of proven strategies from the Ghanaian model.

# 10. THE 2ND PROJECT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OF GROW-2 SUCCESSFULLY HELD

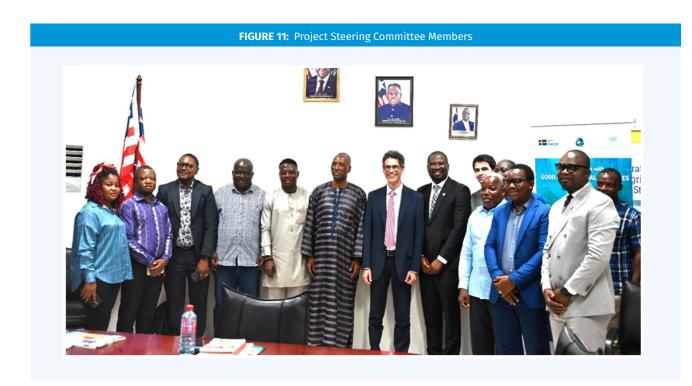


FIGURE 12: Project Steering Committee in session



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The Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting was held on April 11, 2024, to review the project's achievements, interventions, and challenges from October 2023 to March 2024. The meeting was chaired by Mr. David K. Akoi, Deputy Minister for Planning and Development at the Ministry of Agriculture. Representatives from the GROW-2 project included Fabio Russo (Project Manager), Mr. Charles K. Sackey (Chief Technical Advisor) and Irhad Puce (Associate Expert). Mr. Jenkins S. Flahwor (Programme Officer) represented the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia.

Mr. Russo and Mr. Sackey presented the project's key achievements, including the organic certification of two cooperatives and two exporters. They also highlighted ongoing collaboration with LACRA to establish a traceability system for organic certification. Other successes included training over 1,000 farmers in the horticulture value chain in organic and climate-smart agriculture, including pest management strategies. In the cassava sector, the project enhanced cooperative capacities in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and educated communities on child labor practices. The project will continue to work with LACRA to provide technical assistance and information exchange for industry compliance with the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). In horticulture, the team identified the need for a stronger internal organizational structure at the Liberia Vegetable Sellers Association (LVSA). Additionally, cassava planting cooperatives lacked access to high-quality and diverse planting materials to boost productivity.

Deputy Minister Akoi expressed appreciation for GROW-2's progress, particularly in value addition for organic cocoa, and encouraged similar efforts in cassava for starch production. He announced the government's upcoming National Agriculture Development Plan (NADP), which includes cassava and vegetables as key value chains aligned with GROW-2's focus.

Mr. Russo stated that the discussion was encouraging and aligned with GROW-2's objectives, emphasizing that the project will prioritize cassava and horticulture in line with government priorities. He also noted that Market System Development (MSD) will be integrated in the next quarter to ensure sustainability.

Mr. Jenkins underscored the importance of coordination at operational and development partner levels, stressing the need to align GROW-2 intervention with the government's agricultural agenda.



# 11. CELEBRATING RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION: MADE IN LIBERIA FAIR SHOWCASES GROW-2 SUPPORTED AGRO-PROCESSORS

FIGURE 13: Liberia Vegetable Sellers Association (LVSA) selling produce at Made in Liberia fair



**FIGURE 14:** Evergreen's hibiscus tea (left) and Purukpeh showcasing cassava and plantain powder (right)





The Monrovia City Hall came alive on July 20th, 2024, as the Made in Liberia Fair, themed "Bounce Back," unfolded. Organized by the brand Made in Liberia at the Monrovia City Corporation, the fair showcased the resilience and innovation of Liberian entrepreneurs. MSMEs demonstrated their locally produced products,

with several agro-processors supported by the GROW-2 project taking center stage.

From processed foods to artisanal crafts, the goods on display were a testament to the creativity and determination of Liberian MSMEs. The GROW-2 partners

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Evergreen and Purukpeh Agricultural arrived well-prepared, presenting a diverse range of products designed to attract sales and capture the attention of potential investors. The fair went beyond being a marketplace; it was a celebration of the Liberian entrepreneurial spirit that GROW-2 is tapping into, nurturing local agro-processors through strategic partnership.

The Made in Liberia Fair proved to be a resounding success for GROW-2 partners, providing them with the opportunity to market their products and connect with potential investors and collaborators.

Looking ahead, GROW-2 remains committed to supporting its partners in scaling their businesses and expanding their market reach. By providing strong support and platforms for growth, GROW-2 will continue to play a pivotal role in their journey toward sustainability and profitability.

GROW-2 partner Evergreen, led by its CEO Verity Sonkarly, actively engaged with attendees at the Fair. With a vibrant and enthusiastic demeanor, she shared insights about the company's recent developments, "Since GROW-2 facilitated our visit to Ghana, we have successfully launched two new tea varieties: hibiscus and ginger. Our customers cannot get enough of the tea. We have been busy, and our sales are going extremely well."

The Liberia Standards Authority (LiSA), in collaboration with the GROW-2 project, carried out a five-day evaluation of MSME processing facilities across twelve sites in four counties: Nimba, Bong, Margibi, and Montserrado. This assessment, part of GROW-2's efforts to boost market development for MSMEs, focused on evaluating the suitability of equipment, compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), identifying technical gaps, and assessing the feasibility of implementing the Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) system.

The evaluation categorized value-chain actors into startup and accelerated agri-businesses, aiming to identify gaps between current practices and required standards, particularly regarding food-grade equipment, safety, quality, and regulatory compliance. The assessment also identified potential hazards in processing and risks to consumers. A comprehensive capacity-building initiative will follow to enhance processors' technical expertise.



#### **Looking forward**

The assessment has been successfully completed, and the information gathered will guide partners and facilitators in implementing HACCP and delivering targeted training.

# 12. GROW-2 PARTNERS WITH LIBERIA STANDARDS AUTHORITY TO ASSESS AGRO-PROCESSORS FACILITIES

**FIGURE 15:** Exposed gari parching equipment attracts dust, dirt and pollutants (left) and Visible accumulation of cassava residue and rust on processing machine (right)





# 13. NIMBA WOMEN AGRICULTURE COOPERATIVE AND SUA-YELLE MULTIPURPOSE COOPERATIVE JOIN FORCES TO BENEFIT MEMBERS

FIGURE 16: Nimba Women Agriculture Cooperative (NWAC) and Sua-Yelle Multipurpose Cooperative pose with the signed MOU (left); Sua-Yelle gains access to mechanized farming with the MOU (right)





In an exciting development for the agribusiness sector, Nimba Women Agriculture Cooperative and Sua-Yelle Multipurpose Cooperative have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that promises to bring significant benefits to their members. Facilitated by GROW-2, this partnership sets a precedent for collaboration and resource-sharing among cooperatives, ultimately strengthening the entire agricultural community.

Under the terms of the MoU, Nimba Women Cooperative will provide land preparation equipment and technicians to Sue Yelle Multipurpose Cooperative at a reduced cost. This will enable the cultivation of 300 acres of land for cassava, directly benefiting over 100 members of Sua-Yelle Multipurpose Cooperative. By pooling their resources, these cooperatives are not only addressing immediate needs but also paving the way for future collaborations.

GROW-2, a key facilitator of this agreement, is committed to fostering an environment where local partnerships can thrive. By encouraging cooperatives to share facilities and work together on solutions, GROW-2 is helping to build a more resilient and self-sufficient agribusiness sector in Liberia.

The success of this partnership between Nimba Women Agriculture Cooperative and Sua-Yelle Multipurpose Cooperative will serve as a model for other cooperatives seeking to maximize their resources through shared efforts. GROW-2 will continue to support such initiatives, ensuring that more stakeholders along the agribusiness value chain can benefit from similar agreements in the future.

Both cooperatives are enthusiastic about the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) as it offers mutual benefits in attracting new business, expanding their networks, and creating additional opportunities for rural farmers.

Plenseh P. McCoy, CEO of Nimba Women Agriculture Cooperative (NWAC) "The partnership presents a major milestone for Nimba Women because it showcases Nimba Women potential to undertake farming activities not just for herself or members but also other farmers that are beyond Nimba County. The MOU will promote 1,500 smallholder farmers in Bong and Nimba and help other women farmers who want to engage in mechanized farming."

Musu Nana, CEO of Sua-Yelle Multipurpose Cooperative emphasizes that the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is particularly timely. She said, "The cooperative recently secured a contract with the Gov't of Liberia to farm 200 acres of cassava. Establishing this cordial relationship with Nimba Women which gives us access to a mechanized tractor will improve the income, growth, and production of the cooperative."

### Feature Stories

14. DARING TO DREAM: PURUKPEH AGRICULTURE ENTERS THE LIBERIAN AGRO-PROCESSING SPACE WITH VIGOR AND HOPE









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### How did you learn about the GROW-2?

I view my contact with GROW-2 as a serendipitous encounter that opened significant opportunities for my business, Purukpeh Agriculture. After attending the "Branding for Profit" social media webinar organized by GROW-2, I contacted the Embassy for more information about the project. They connected me with Mr. Charles Sackey and he immediately showed interest, involving his technical staff to learn more about my business. Mr. Sackey visited our center and provided invaluable feedback on various aspects of our operations. His insights included recommendations to improve the safety of our processing area and potential opportunities for growth.

### What motivated you to enter the agriculture sector?

During the 1990s, Liberia was engulfed in a desperate war. I was around six or seven years old when my family fled to the interior. My father started a farm so we could eat and survive. I was tasked with carrying water to help irrigate our small farm. I loved contributing and held it as a badge of honor. As we moved around, my dad continued to plant gardens to supplement our diets with potato greens and other vegetables. Life was difficult, but I enjoyed playing with the soil and spending time with my father, planting and nurturing vegetables. There is an old saying in Proverbs: "Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it."

As a young adult and until quite recently, my passions led me to a career in journalism. I started as a reporter, moved up the ranks to newscaster, assignment editor, secretary general at the Female Journalist Association of Liberia, became the first female president of the Legislative Press Corp, and most recently, the Director General of the Liberia Broadcasting System. These opportunities took me to every county and district of Liberia. I began to realize that agriculture is the pulse of our nation and that we all have a role to play in the sector.

I have chosen to make a meaningful impact on the lives of two groups that I frequently encounter during my travels: youth and traditional women. I am confident that my involvement in agribusiness can provide valuable support to elevate their circumstances.

### Why cassava processing?

When I was a child, I enjoyed the growing process. A few years ago, I decided to purchase five acres of land in Margibi and planted cassava, plantain, and intercropped with corn and watermelon to make sales while we waited for the cassava and plantain to mature. Unfortunately, the workers ate most of what we grew, frustrating my efforts.

I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit an agricultural processing plant located in Bomi County. During this visit, I met with a Deputy Minister of Agriculture, where I was able to share my experiences and articulate my vision for working within the agricultural sector. My focus was specifically on the processing of cassava and plantain. During our conversation, the Deputy Minister introduced me to a woman who is actively involved in agricultural processing. She provided valuable guidance and directed me to a skilled fabricator who specializes in creating essential tools for agricultural processing. Due to this connection, I acquired equipment such as cassava chippers, hammer mills, and a dryer. We started processing at our location in Paynesville in February 2024, though we need more equipment, in particular, dryers, I am very appreciative of the women and youth working with Purukpeh Agricultural.

### As an MSME, what does GROW-2 mean to you?

I believe GROW-2 is focused on elevating the financial standing of farmers and helping them with livelihood creation. When you empower a farmer, you help them as individuals, then you impact their families, and subsequently, the community. Food is a fundamental way to achieve self-reliance. As the saying goes, "If a nation can feed itself, it can make wiser decisions." I believe GROW-2 stands in the gap when rural farmers try to stand on their feet. It is a remarkable project.

# How has GROW-2 impacted the trajectory of Purukpeh agricultural goods?

The project invited me to the 3rd Cluster Conference in Ghana in March. It opened my eyes. I met women and men with degrees in every subject yet fully engaged in agribusiness. None discussed looking for jobs in government. It's a new playing field and the most educated are finding financial success in agribusiness. I learned that the success of my Purukpeh will come from consistency. I met upstarts like me and realized that we had shared experiences such as staff issues and finding financing. Most importantly, I learned that Purukpeh could face these challenges and succeed. I was thrilled to meet counterparts participating in the cassava supply chain. I saw cassava processed to such a fine powder and learned about the equipment that did the processing. Because of what I learned, I will be able to improve the quality of my products, increase production efficiency, reduce labor costs, and ensure consistent product quality.

GROW-2 also included Purukpeh in a field visit with the Liberia Standards Authority (LiSA) to assess our processing facility's compliance with GMPs and the suitability of our processing equipment. What we learned from that visit will inform us about what to look for when purchasing processing equipment and help identify our weaknesses. Because of the visit, I held a three-day training course on sanitation and hygiene and adjusted the layout of our processing center to improve the flow and exposure to contamination.

### What are your goals for Purukpeh?

The mission of Purukpeh is to produce high-quality and nutritious food throughout the cassava and plantain value chain while simultaneously empowering youth and women to contribute actively to the economy. I believe cassava and plantain should not cost more than rice to feed a family, so I am striving to manage the cost in the business.

Our customer base includes local fishermen who often express their desire for healthy food options despite not having significant financial means. They often tell us, "We are not big people, but we want to eat good, healthy food." We sell our products at 500 LD on the beach and \$2.00 in supermarkets, making them accessible to a wider audience.

This is our first year so our business our goals are to ensure that every Liberian becomes aware of our offerings and for 50% of the population experience our products firsthand. Additionally, we have plans to expand our operations into Grand Bassa and Nimba counties, which are key regions for growth and outreach.

We also want to grow with the GROW-2 project. They have provided a clear trajectory for Purukpeh Agriculture with the exposure they provided us at the UNIDO-WACOMP 3rd International Ghana Cluster Conference in Accra.

At the heart of our mission is to alleviate hunger and foster economic development. We recognize that achieving these ambitious goals requires collaboration and support from partners and we hope to work with those that are passionate about food security and will partner with Purukpeh Agriculture.

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# 15. DIFFERENTLY ABLED FARMERS EXCEL AT GROW-2 PARTNER COOPERATIVE: UNITED WOMEN









The United Women Cooperative, located in Bong County, was formed in 2012 by its energetic and innovative CEO, Ms. Denise Litopoe Karway. The cooperative manages 125 acres of land, including 38 acres of cocoa, 15 acres of cassava, and 8 acres of legumes and maize. They also engage in some animal husbandry. Inspired by her mother's struggles during the Liberian war, Denise promised to serve her community if she survived. She delivered on this promise and has created an inclusive environment where farmers, regardless of age, gender, or disability, participate fully in agriculture along the cassava and organic cocoa value chains.

The cooperative has established a strategic partnership with GROW-2 and engages in regular collaboration to enhance rural farmers' capacity. This initiative emphasizes inclusivity, with a particular focus on empowering women and youth.

Denise is of the opinion that each person has something to offer, and if they are willing to work to improve their lives, she will find a place for them at United Women. Her vision for United Women is one of empowerment through inclusion, recognizing the unique skills of farmers with different abilities.

During a GROW-2 sponsored Farmer Field School, we met special farmers like Ms. Esther Flomo, an advisor to United Women Cooperative. Despite losing her legs in a car accident at the age of 22 while pregnant, she manages two farms and draws inspiration from Denise and the supportive United Women community. Denise describes Ms. Flomo as a loving mother who sets high standards for all farmers.

We also met another group of women from a different generation. They were in their late 70s and 80s, fully engaged in planting seedlings for the cooperative's cocoa farms. These women exhibited remarkable agility, moving lightly on their feet as they worked to their own rhythm. Their work was accompanied by songs and conversations in the local dialect, Kpelle, which created an atmosphere of camaraderie and joy. Denise ensures they have suitable tasks like providing water to members in the fields and weeding in preparation for planting. She said they also serve as role models for younger women facing challenges like illiteracy, poverty, and early pregnancy.

And though the United Women Cooperative is a remarkable organization where women comprise 85% of its membership, men play supportive roles within this cooperative framework and benefit from Denise's integrative community. Emmanuel Sumo, the chief driver, lost his leg in an accident in 2007 but continues to contribute significantly. He transports products, tools, and staff across 68 communities where United Women operates, ensuring timely delivery of cocoa to buyers and transporting essential farming supplies. He is a valued member to UW and a right hand to Denise.

With the support of GROW-2's technical experts, United Women were encouraged to implement best practices through comprehensive training in sustainable farming techniques, crop health monitoring, record-keeping, and resource management. These initiatives have resulted in substantial improvements for United Women:

- ► Increased cocoa production by 60% and cultivated 30 acres of high-yield cocoa, boosting income for 650 farming families and contributing to the local economy.
- ▶ Diversified income sources with an 18-acre cassava farm, enhancing food security and generating additional income through cassava-based products.
- ► Established nurseries for 150,000 improved cocoa seedlings, providing sustainable income opportunities for women farmers.
- ► Increased farmers' income by 80% with the construction of an organic cocoa warehouse and solar dryer, enabling high-quality cocoa processing and export.

Empowering Growth and Innovation: Highlights from Agribusiness Training, Partnerships, and Success Stories

United Women is committed to increasing productivity among their differently abled staff by introducing innovative projects that utilize sustainable practices. An upcoming project involves the production of soap and body scrubs, utilizing waste materials derived from cocoa beans. This approach promotes environmental sustainability through the repurposing of what would otherwise be discarded.

United Women incorporating differently abled farmers is in harmony with the principles of GROW-2, which prioritizes inclusion and gender equality within the agricultural sector. Their achievements to date reinforce the project's objectives, which focus on delivering technical assistance in post-harvest and preprocessing activities. This targeted support empowers rural farmers to diversify their income sources, particularly through the organic cocoa and cassava supply chain, thereby improving their overall livelihoods.





www.unido.org



grow2liberia@unido.org

