



ISSUE 4

## Building Systems, Unlocking Opportunities: GROW-2 Advances Inclusive Agricultural Development in Liberia

UNIDO NEWSLETTER. AUGUST 2025

# Content

1	GROW-2 AT A GLANCE: FUELING LIBERIA'S GREEN GROWTH	4
2	STEERING THE COURSE: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE THIRD GROW-2 PSC MEETING	6
3	THEORY MEETS IMPACT: REAL-WORLD MSD IN ACTION AND WHAT’S NEXT FOR GROW-2 FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE	8
4	MSMES CLINIC EMPOWERS OVER 150 ENTREPRENEURS ACROSS LIBERIA	10
5	A CELEBRATION OF ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION	13
6	OPENING DOORS TO PREMIUM MARKETS: LIBERIA’S ORGANIC COCOA CERTIFICATION AUDIT IN FULL SWING	16
7	BETTER BEANS, BETTER BUSINESS: UNIDO FACILITATES A TRAINING FOR LACRA STAFF, BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CONSISTENT, HIGH-GRADE COCOA ACROSS THE CHAIN	18
8	BREAKING BARRIERS: CONNECTING LOCAL COCOA PRODUCING COOPERATIVES WITH GLOBAL BUYERS TO UNLOCK NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBERIA	20
9	INSIDE GROW-2 COCOA FIELD DEMONSTRATIONS: TESTING TREATMENTS, TRACKING PROGRESS, AND SHAPING BEST AGRONOMIC PRACTICES FOR HIGHER COCOA YIELDS	22
10	BRIDGING THE GAP: STRENGTHENING HORTICULTURE MARKET LINKAGES WITH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE	26
11	GROW-2 CASSAVA FIELD DEMONSTRATIONS: STAGGERED PLANTING, LIME AND FERTILIZER TO INCREASE YIELDS AND PROMOTE YEAR-ROUND PROCESSING	28
12	HARVESTING INNOVATION: GROW-2’S STAGGERED PLANTING BOOSTS LIBERIA’S CASSAVA FUTURE	30
13	CULTIVATING CHANGE: GROW-2’S INNOVATION SPURS A NEW ERA IN LIBERIA’S VEGETABLE FARMING	31
14	SETTING NEW STANDARDS: GROW-2’S POLICY DIALOGUE DRIVES FOOD SAFETY IN LIBERIA’S AGRO-PROCESSING SECTOR	33
15	LEVELING THE FIELD: GROW-2 CHAMPIONS WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN LIBERIA’S AGRICULTURE	36
16	EMBASSY OF SWEDEN DELEGATION ENGAGES UWSD COOPERATIVE ON GROW-2’S MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH	39
17	UNIDO AND MERCY CORPS COLLABORATE WITH EMBASSY OF SWEDEN TO STRENGTHEN MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT IN LIBERIA	40
18	GROW-2 LAUNCHES MSME CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT: A FIRST STEP IN TAILORING SUPPORT TO BOOST SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH	41
19	TURNING EFFORT INTO EARNINGS: HOW I BROKE THROUGH AND FOUND A PROFITABLE PATH WITH GROW-2 (VOICE FROM THE FIELD)	43



www.unido.org



UNITED NATIONS  
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

© United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) – 2025 All rights reserved.

This document has been produced without formal United Nations editing. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this document do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries, or its economic system or degree of development.

Designations such as “developed”, “industrialized” or “developing” are intended for statistical convenience and do not necessarily express a judgement about the stage reached by a particular country or area in the development process. Mention of firm names or commercial products does not constitute an endorsement by UNIDO..



# 1. GROW-2 AT A GLANCE: FUELING LIBERIA'S GREEN GROWTH

GROW-2 is a dynamic partnership between the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia, UNIDO and the Ministry of Agriculture. It's designed to do one thing: unlock the potential of Liberia's agriculture sector — with a strong focus on sustainability, inclusion, and resilience.

## What Is GROW-2 Trying to Achieve?

At its core, GROW-2 supports economic diversification, green growth, and poverty reduction in rural Liberia. The project targets smallholder farmers—especially women and youth—who are facing food insecurity and economic challenges.

Rather than just increasing farmland, GROW-2 puts its energy into smarter farming:

- Boosting productivity through modern methods.
- Encouraging local value addition.
- Creating market access and jobs in agriculture.

## Where GROW-2 Works

The project is active in five key counties: **Nimba, Lofa, Bong, Margibi,** and **Rural Montserrado**. It's supported by a project office in **Monrovia**, Liberia's capital and a field office in **Gbarnga**, Bong County.

## Value Chains in Focus

GROW-2 focuses on three priority value chains: cocoa, cassava, and horticulture. Each has its own set of targeted interventions:



### COCOA

- Reviving old, low-yielding farms.
- Improving crop production through adequate protection and nutrition.
- Supporting certification processes and traceability for premium market access.



### CASSAVA

- Introducing production through adequate, more productive varieties.
- Promoting intercropping with nitrogen-fixing legumes.
- Staggered planting and harvesting for year-round root supply to processors.
- Easing weed control to address labor shortages.



### HORTICULTURE

- Installing drip irrigation for dry-season farming.
- Using plastic mulch to conserve moisture and reduce weed competition.
- Boosting the efficiency of fertilizer and manure use.



## A Smarter Way to Intervene

GROW-2 applies the Market Systems Development (MSD) approach by using the in-depth market diagnostics and facilitating systemic change across the cocoa, horticulture, and cassava sectors. It strengthens key support functions while building clusters that foster coordination among producers, service providers, and buyers. By aligning incentives and building local capacity, GROW-2 creates sustainable, scalable improvements that go beyond individual actors to transform entire market systems.



## 2. STEERING THE COURSE: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE THIRD GROW-2 PSC MEETING

On January 23, 2025, partners and key value chain leaders gathered for the Third Project Steering Committee (PSC) Meeting to review progress, share insights, and plan the next steps for GROW-2 implementation for the year.

This meeting wasn't just a routine update—it marked a pivotal moment to review project achievements, key interventions, and challenges across the three targeted value chains.

### Who Took Part?

Mr. David K. Akoi, Deputy Minister for Planning and Development at the Ministry of Agriculture, chaired the meeting, demonstrating the government's strong commitment to advancing agriculture.

Representing key partners and experts were:

- Dr. Kerstin Jonsson Cissé and Mr. Jenkins S. Flahwor from the Embassy of Sweden.
- The UNIDO technical team, including Mr. Irhad Puce, Associate Expert, and Dr. Charles Kwame Sackey Chief Technical Advisor.
- Value chain leaders: Mr. Michael Kpoghomou (Cocoa), Mr. Joseph Morris (Cassava), and Mr. Sumo Mulbah (Horticulture).

### What Did They Discuss?

The committee reviewed key achievements and challenges across cocoa, cassava, and horticulture. Some key highlights included:

- Improved productivity through targeted training and critical inputs.
- Expanded outreach to women and youth farmers.
- Strengthened market linkages and increased value addition.

The PSC discussed how GROW-2 aligns closely with Liberia's National Agriculture Development Plan (NADP) 2024–2030, ensuring national goals drive local actions.

Dr. Kerstin Jonsson Cissé expressed optimism about the journey ahead and the implementation strategy of GROW-2 and also acknowledged the team for their transparency in highlighting challenges they are confronted with. Mr. Irhad Puce from UNIDO reaffirmed the organization's full commitment to inclusive growth and sustainability, emphasizing how strong partnerships help overcome agricultural challenges. Deputy Minister Akoi highlighted the crucial role of Sweden's support and UNIDO's leadership in enabling GROW-2 to deliver tangible impact, while underscoring the importance of government ownership in the project's success.



### What's Next?

The PSC committed to strengthening coordination among partners, ensuring that all activities align with the priorities of the National Agriculture Development Plan (NADP) 2024–2030, and expanding GROW-2's reach and impact across the cocoa, cassava, and horticulture value chains. Liberia moves closer to food security and inclusive growth as GROW-2 shows how strategy, science, and solidarity can drive true transformation.





3. THEORY MEETS IMPACT: REAL-WORLD MSD IN ACTION AND WHAT’S NEXT FOR GROW-2 FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Few development projects in Liberia actively apply the Market Systems Development (MSD) approach. GROW-2 is among the exceptions.

The project champions systems thinking and facilitative development, avoiding handouts and instead strengthening the market actors already driving change.

MSD isn’t about doing the work for people, it’s about fixing the system so people can do the work themselves.

GROW-2 embodies this. It challenges failing structures, brings actors together, and builds capacity from the inside out.

“Instead of solving problems for people, we’re building systems that allow them to solve problems on their own.

Frederick Gibson Jnr - Senior VC and Business Engagement Expert.

Grounding the Approach: Listening First

Early on, GROW-2 conducted a Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) with local partners, cooperatives, and farmers. This wasn’t a box-checking exercise, it directly shaped every intervention.

As the findings came in, the team quickly adapted activities to reflect Liberia’s unique market realities, not theoretical models. That flexibility is a cornerstone of MSD.

“We’re not following a script. We’re co-writing a story with the people in the market.

Dave Asa Newton - Senior National Value Chain Expert.

Cocoa: Exporting More Than Beans



In the cocoa value chain, GROW-2 doesn’t just facilitate exports, it creates space for cooperatives to establish business relations with exporters and with international buyers as well.

The project links cooperatives with international buyers. At the same time, it supports production of finished products like locally made chocolate and pursues organic certification to unlock premium markets.

These aren’t side efforts, they’re market signals that Liberia is ready to compete on quality, not just volume.

Cassava & Horticulture: MSMEs in the Spotlight

In other sectors, GROW-2 uses MSD to build business linkages.

At the Made-in-Liberia Trade Fair, MSMEs showcased their products, networked, and learned how to pitch to buyers. At the MSMEs clinic that was facilitated, entrepreneurs tackled real-world challenges, such as pricing, packaging, and market readiness.

These platforms spark confidence and create business momentum that no one-off training or subsidy can replicate.

Lessons That Drive Evolution

GROW-2 doesn’t pretend to get it right on the first try. The team openly documents challenges and uses these insights to adapt strategy and earn trust. From understanding informal market behaviors to uncovering

“You can train a business owner for a day or you can build a market that keeps training them every day.

Dave Asa Newton - Senior National Value Chain Expert

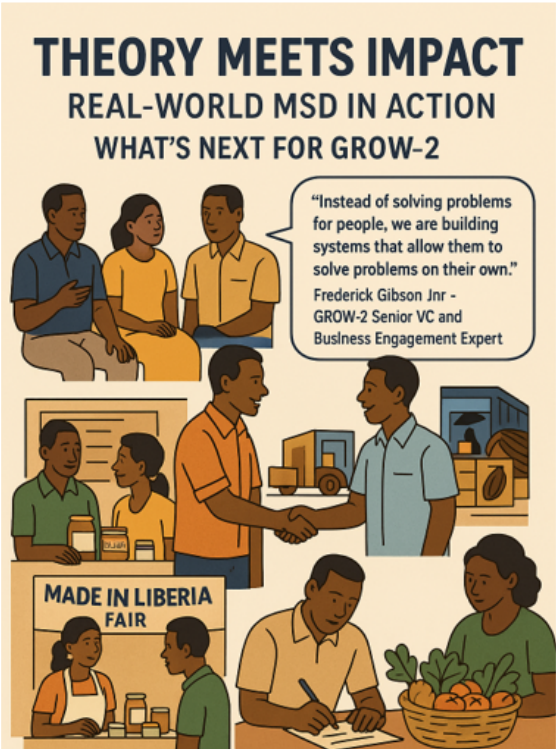


What’s Next: Market-Driven, People-Powered

GROW-2 has proven that MSD works when local ownership leads. As it moves into the next phase, the project will double down on:

- Strengthening linkages between MSMEs and buyers
- Aligning interventions with market incentives
- Creating feedback loops from the bottom up

This isn’t just development. It’s system reform from within. GROW-2 is shifting from giving answers to building capacity so people write their own answers.



## 4. MSMEs CLINIC EMPOWERS OVER 150 ENTREPRENEURS ACROSS LIBERIA

GROW-2 Liberia rolled out its two-part MSMEs Clinic in September 2024, delivering high-impact support to over 150 entrepreneurs in Liberia’s capital city Monrovia from

September 24–25, 2024 and in Ganta, Nimba County from Sept 27–28, 2024.

### The goal?

Equip Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)—especially in the agribusiness sector—with the tools, networks, and insights to operate more efficiently, scale faster, and navigate Liberia’s business environment with confidence.

The MSMEs Clinic delivered practical, targeted support by tackling the core challenges small businesses face—accessing finance, managing bookkeeping, improving financial literacy, navigating legal compliance, strengthening branding and digital marketing, and meeting export standards.

### Expert Guidance, Real-Time Feedback

Entrepreneurs engaged with over a dozen business development professionals, institutions, and regulatory bodies during breakout sessions. They chose the sessions

Rather than passively listening to lectures, participants engaged in one-on-one consultations with experts who helped them troubleshoot in real time. Each session focused on actionable strategies, offering entrepreneurs custom-fit solutions they could implement immediately. As one attendee put it, “This wasn’t theory. It was hands-on help, right when businesses needed it most.”

most relevant to their unique business needs. Breakout sessions included are listed below.


Topic	Facilitators
Business Planning	Agro Life, Independent Consultants
Access to Finance	Ecobank Liberia, Bloom Bank, UBA Liberia
Bookkeeping	Independent Consultants
Branding & Social Media	Independent Consultants
Export Readiness	(AfCFTA/AGOA) Ministry of Commerce & Industry
Tax Filing & Compliance	Liberia Revenue Authority
Business Registration	Liberia Business Registry
Product Quality & Compliance	Liberia Standards Authority

The MSMEs Clinic went beyond information-sharing—it actively bridged the gap between entrepreneurs and the institutions essential to their growth.

From government regulators to financial institutions, each session and interaction helped small business owners plug into Liberia’s broader support ecosystem.

These connections gave MSMEs more than advice, they gained access, allies, and a clearer path forward.

As one participant put it, “It’s one thing to know what to do, it’s another to meet the people who can help you do it.



### Voices from the Ground

As a small agribusiness owner, the MSMEs Clinic was exactly what I needed. The one-on-one consultations helped me understand how to better structure my business, access finance, and improve my branding and marketing. I travelled from Grand Bassa to attend the Monrovia session because of how important this was. I never regretted coming.

**Kate Johnson, Founder & CEO, Green Harvest, Grand Bassa, Liberia.**





Building Momentum

The MSMEs Clinic was more than a two-city event, it marked the beginning of a broader push to elevate small businesses across Liberia.

GROW-2 is laying the foundation for a stronger entrepreneurial ecosystem, one that’s better informed, better connected, and better positioned to grow.

By targeting key pain points and offering practical, real-time support, the clinic proved that when MSMEs get access to the right tools and networks, transformation follows. The energy in both Monrovia and Ganta was proof that entrepreneurs are hungry not just for advice but for action.

Going forward, GROW-2 plans to scale this model. The goal is to create a series of national touchpoints that build business confidence, encourage formality, and foster collaboration between MSMEs and the institutions designed to serve them.

The road ahead is clear: small businesses aren’t just Liberia’s backbone, they are its future. And with the right support, they’ll lead the country toward inclusive, sustainable economic growth.



5. A CELEBRATION OF ENTERPRISE AND INNOVATION

Elevate Her: Showcasing Local Power, Driving National Potential

The SKD Sports Complex burst to life on March 15, 2025, as the forecourt transformed into a vibrant celebration of Liberian talent, enterprise, and creativity at the Made-in-Liberia Trade Fair.

Held in honor of International Women’s Month, this year’s theme, “Elevate Her: Empowering Creativity and Commerce,” spotlighted the ingenuity and determination of Liberian women entrepreneurs and the broader MSME ecosystem.

With the support of GROW-2, 15 businesses from the cocoa, cassava, and horticulture value chains showcased everything from cassava flour and cocoa-based confections to herbal teas, fresh juices, and farm-fresh produce. Each product was a statement of pride and potential.





Beyond the Booths: Building Skills and Connections

What set this trade fair apart wasn't just the products on display, it was the capacity-building foundation beneath it. In the days leading up to the event, GROW-2 and Made-in-Liberia, Inc. conducted a hands-on workshop for participating vendors.

Sessions focused on branding, smart pricing, social media strategy, and professional presentation, practical skills many MSMEs often lack the opportunity to refine. These lessons weren't left in the classroom; vendors immediately applied them to improve their booths and sharpen their pitches during the fair.



Strategic Matchmaking and Real-Time Support

Throughout the event, GROW-2 and MIL facilitated business matchmaking sessions, where MSMEs met with potential partners, buyers, and investors.

This wasn't networking for its own sake, it was structured, intentional, and outcome-focused. GROW-2 experts moved through the fairgrounds offering real-time guidance on booth layouts, packaging improvements,

and storytelling techniques. Their support amplified the fair's impact and ensured participants walked away with more than sales—they gained visibility, confidence, and a clearer roadmap forward.

Growing Institutional Support

The Ministry of Agriculture's Division of Marketing participated and their presence marked a critical step forward in connecting government support structures directly with grassroots enterprises. It also demonstrated

that institutions are beginning to see MSMEs not just as beneficiaries, but as drivers of economic growth that deserve investment and visibility.

Lessons for the Future

While the fair was a success, it also revealed some important lessons. Vendor infrastructure needs strengthening, and public outreach and patronage of Liberian-made products still require a cultural shift.

Feedback pointed to the need for deeper community engagement, improved logistics, and more consistent post-event support, particularly through mentorship, investment access, and follow-up engagement.

Moving Forward Together

The GROW-2 project remains committed to the fact that, when MSMEs rise, communities thrive. Events like the Made-in-Liberia Trade Fair offer more than market exposure, they plant seeds of transformation. As the project continues to work within its three core value

chains, it will keep investing in these moments where Liberian enterprise meets opportunity. Because when Liberian entrepreneurs succeed, the nation moves forward.



## 6. OPENING DOORS TO PREMIUM MARKETS: LIBERIA’S ORGANIC COCOA CERTIFICATION AUDIT IN FULL SWING

### Unlocking Global Opportunities for Liberian Cocoa Farmers through Organic Certification

Liberia’s cocoa farmers are stepping confidently toward a global stage. Under the GROW-2 project, an Organic Cocoa Certification Audit was recently conducted within selected farming communities in Nimba and Bong Counties. This audit wasn’t just a checklist exercise, it was a strategic push to ensure Liberian cocoa meets the highest international organic standards, specifically the EU Organic Regulations. The goal? To unlock premium market opportunities for farmers who have committed to sustainable, organic practices.

Five cooperatives, Boe-Kpar, Nyor-Kwalokwakou, Beo-Sehgren, Monleh, and United Women for Sustainable Development led the charge. Across 19 communities, auditors meticulously inspected 156 farms, processing

units, and warehouses. They scrutinized everything from farm management to traceability systems and storage conditions.

The audit verified compliance with rigorous EU standards, assessed documentation accuracy, and identified gaps to be addressed. It also involved collecting cocoa samples for residue testing, ensuring the product’s purity and safety for discerning global buyers.

What stood out was the robust cooperation between auditors and farmers. GROW-2’s technical team was present in the field, bridging communication gaps.

The results? All cooperatives demonstrated verifiable traceability from farm to storage.

The audit process highlighted both achievements and opportunities for growth. While cooperatives demonstrated strong adherence to organic principles, some areas, such as internal documentation consistency and pre-audit monitoring require further strengthening.

This comprehensive and collaborative process positions Liberian cocoa farmers to confidently access premium international markets and strengthens Liberia’s reputation as a source of certified organic cocoa.



	<b>Audit participation</b>	All five cooperatives fully participated in the audit with strong leadership and farmer engagement.
	<b>Inspections</b>	156 total inspections were conducted on farms, processing units, and warehouses. Sampling was based on the square root method to ensure representative coverage.
	<b>Traceability &amp; Documentation</b>	All cooperatives demonstrated strong systems for tracking cocoa from farm to storage.
	<b>Corrective Actions</b>	All non-conformities identified during the audit process have since been rectified.
	<b>Residue Testing</b>	Cocoa bean samples were collected for lab analysis to confirm compliance with organic residue thresholds.



## 7. BETTER BEANS, BETTER BUSINESS: UNIDO FACILITATES A TRAINING FOR LACRA STAFF, BUILDING CAPACITY FOR CONSISTENT, HIGH-GRADE COCOA ACROSS THE CHAIN

### Empowering Liberia’s Cocoa Sector to Meet Global Quality Standards and Unlock Premium Markets

Liberia’s cocoa sector is gaining momentum on the global stage, propelled by a strategic partnership between the Liberia Agricultural Commodities Regulatory Authority (LACRA) and GROW-2. The project facilitated a targeted training program designed to build capacity of technical staff of LACRA and exporters in cocoa quality control and ensure adherence to the Federation of Cocoa Commerce (FCC) standards, key to unlocking premium international markets and improving livelihoods for farmers and exporters alike.


150 LACRA quality control officers and 24 exporters staff were trained across two crucial hubs in Ganta in Nimba County and Monrovia in Montserrado County. Under the guidance of a seasoned cocoa quality expert from Ghana, participants engaged in both theoretical lessons and practical exercises. They mastered cocoa grading, moisture content analysis, fermentation quality evaluation, and sensory testing, all aligned with FCC protocols.

The training stands as a watershed moment for Liberia’s cocoa value chain. It empowers participants to conduct independent, certification-ready analyses, bolsters quality assurance frameworks, and sharpens Liberia’s competitive edge in global markets. Hands-on group and individual sessions ensured that skills were not just taught but deeply embedded, ready for immediate application.

Beyond technical skills, the program emphasized environmentally sustainable farming practices, responding to increasing global demand for eco-conscious products. This focus positions Liberia’s cocoa as a responsible choice for buyers worldwide.

Looking ahead, the impact is already clear. Newly equipped quality control officers are set to work with cooperatives and exporters to support them implement measures aimed at improving their cocoa quality. With stronger quality assurance systems, Liberia’s cocoa sector is primed to become a cornerstone of economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development.

LACRA and GROW-2 remain steadfast partners in this journey, working hand-in-hand to ensure Liberia’s cocoa is not only better but globally recognized as some of the finest on the market.

Key Highlights

Extensive Training Reach

150 LACRA quality control officers and 24 exporter staff members trained across Ganta (Nimba County) and Monrovia (Montserrado County).

Expert-Led Knowledge Transfer

Training delivered by a seasoned cocoa quality expert from Ghana, combining theoretical instruction with hands-on exercises.

FCC-Compliance Capacity

Participants learned to perform FCC physical and chemical tests, enabling certification-ready cocoa quality analyses.

Immediate Practical Application

Group and individual practical sessions ensured real-world mastery of cocoa grading, moisture content, fermentation, and sensory evaluation.

Strengthened Quality Assurance Systems

Improved technical capacity reduces quality-related rejections and enhances Liberia’s reputation as a reliable cocoa exporter.

Environmental Sustainability Emphasis

Focus on sustainable, eco-friendly farming methods to align with international market demands for responsible sourcing.





## 8. BREAKING BARRIERS: CONNECTING LOCAL COCOA PRODUCING COOPERATIVES WITH GLOBAL BUYERS TO UNLOCK NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIBERIA


### Forging Global Links to Elevate Liberia’s Cocoa Industry into Premium, Sustainable Markets

Liberia’s cocoa sector is surging forward with fresh energy. Thanks to strategic partnerships and market-driven initiatives, local cooperatives are building direct connections with international buyers, opening the door to sustainable growth, heightened quality, and lucrative export opportunities. GROW-2, in collaboration with African Cocoa Marketplace (ACM) <https://cocoamarket.com/>, is spearheading efforts to position Liberian cocoa firmly within the international cocoa markets worldwide.

Recently, seven cooperatives representing around 8,000 farmers across Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties have

been successfully linked with international exporters. These connections have led to strategic deals, including a significant 500-metric-ton organic cocoa agreement between Granex and ICAM Spas, and a 2,450-metric-ton conventional cocoa trade involving 500 farmers. These deals demonstrate the real, impactful benefits of connecting local producers to global demand.

A comprehensive assessment by ACM and GROW-2 teams across five counties reaffirmed Liberia’s strong potential to be a successful player in organic cocoa exports.

 **Key Highlights**

Cooperative Linkages

Seven cooperatives, representing 8,000 farmers, connected to international exporters in Lofa, Bong, and Nimba counties.

International Market Breakthrough

Facilitated a 500 MT organic cocoa trade between Granex and ICAM Spas.

Boost in Conventional Cocoa Sales

Facilitated a 2,450 MT trade involving an exporter and 500 farmers in Lofa and Nimba.

Sector-Wide Assessment

A cocoa sector evaluation covering Lofa, Nimba, Bong, Margibi, and Montserrado counties conducted with ACM under UNIDO’s facilitation.

Strategic Findings

Liberia showing strong potential to be a successful player in organic cocoa exports.

 **Looking forward**

The collaboration between ACM and GROW 2 promises an exciting future for Liberia’s cocoa industry. Over the coming year, focused marketing campaigns will onboard Liberian sellers onto ACM’s platform, connecting them directly with foreign buyers. Training programs will target quality standards, improve compliance measures, and build resilience against new regulatory challenges like the EUDR.

Through these initiatives, Liberia is poised not just to enter the global cocoa market but to carve out a niche as a producer of premium, organic-certified cocoa. Together, we are breaking barriers and setting new benchmarks for Liberian cocoa farmers, cooperatives, and exporters, shaping a more prosperous and sustainable future.





## 9. INSIDE GROW-2 COCOA FIELD DEMONSTRATIONS: TESTING TREATMENTS, TRACKING PROGRESS, AND SHAPING BEST AGRONOMIC PRACTICES FOR HIGHER COCOA YIELDS

### Innovating Solutions to Boost Liberia's Cocoa Productivity and Quality

Liberia's average cocoa yield stands at approximately 160 kg per hectare, which is significantly below the expected potential yield of 800–1,000 kg/ha under improved agronomic practices. Years of unrest, poor farm management, and a near-total absence of pest and disease control have left Liberian cocoa vulnerable and unproductive. The destructive black pod disease and widespread insect damage ravage pods and branches alike. On top of this, Liberia's inherently acidic and nutrient-poor soils aggravate the problem.

GROW-2 is tackling these challenges head-on with a comprehensive field demonstration program. The initiative tests organic fungicides and insecticides to preserve the organic certification pathway, while farmers not doing the organic certification path are testing conventional fungicide and insecticide treatments to evaluate economic benefits and efficacy. Soil acidity and nutrient deficiencies are addressed through lime application in organic farms and by lime plus mineral fertilizer in farms using the conventional approach.

The program spans 22 demonstration sites and 123 trial plots across four districts in Nimba and Bong Counties: Saclepea Mahn, Buu-Yao, Tweh River, Tappita and Gbongoi. Trials include:

- Flexibility in the choice of patentability criteria, including for chemical entities and biologics.
- Farmers' usual management (control).
- Best Agronomic Practices (BAP) alone.
- BAP combined with organic fungicide.
- BAP with organic fungicide and insecticide.
- BAP plus organic fungicide, insecticide, and lime.
- In non-organic plots, BAP combined with conventional fungicide.
- BAP, conventional fungicide and insecticide.
- BAP, conventional fungicide and insecticide and lime, and fertilizer.

Four skilled field technicians from local cooperatives were trained in the correct application of all protocols, from BAP to safe pesticide application and data collection, ensuring rigorous management of trials. Farmers and cooperative members received hands-on training and practical guides to empower sustainable adoption.

Looking ahead, GROW-2 will build the capacity of cooperatives and farmers to address aging farms by managing shade reduction, cocoa tree replacement, and rejuvenation. These measures require careful long-term

planning to balance crop losses during the rehabilitation phase with farmers' income generation. Improved pest and disease control will cushion the production dips during this phase.

The ultimate goal: identify the best performing, affordable treatments to sustainably boost yields, improve cocoa quality, and build resilience in Liberia's cocoa sector. These innovations will strengthen connections with local buyers and processors and unlock access to premium value-added markets.







Typical situation in an older cocoa farm: pod set is good but all pods are destroyed by black pod disease.



Extremely high level of pod set on a cocoa tree that received conventional fungicide and insecticide treatment. Pod set is on the stem and on branches. None of the pods showed symptoms of black pod infestation.



Red ants, often labeled as “farmers’ friends” planting mealybugs on cocoa pods. The ants do not directly cause damage to the cocoa but the mealybugs suck on the pods and reduce their growth and often if infested early cause the death of pods.



A red ant collecting young mealybugs from an infested young cocoa shoot. The older mealybugs in the photo are either already dead or old and not producing honey dew. At this time the ants transfer the young mealybugs to either pods or other young shoots to re-establish a population from which they will harvest the honey dew.




## 10. BRIDGING THE GAP: STRENGTHENING HORTICULTURE MARKET LINKAGES WITH THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE

### Collaborative Moves to Connect Farmers, Boost Sales, and Build Trader Capacity

Liberia’s horticulture sector has long struggled with a glaring weakness in market linkages. While farmers ramp up production, getting fresh fruits and vegetables to consumers efficiently remains elusive. Poor communication and fragile connections among farmers, transporters, and traders create bottlenecks, leading to shortages, gluts, and unstable prices.

GROW-2 in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture’s Division of Marketing and the Liberia Vegetable Sellers Association (LVSA) is pioneering practical, sustainable solutions to tighten these loose chains.

The first step? Mapping produce flows, from farm, through transporters, to traders and consumers, to identify bottlenecks and imbalances. This ongoing monitoring will empower producers to better align planting with market demand, preventing costly missteps and stabilizing prices for consumers.

Key Highlights

Partnership with Liberia Vegetable Sellers Association (LVSA)

LVSA represents over 2,000 traders, mostly women, across Liberia, especially in Montserrado County. GROW-2 facilitated a Training of Trainers (ToT) on safe handling of fruits and vegetables, training 30 key players, including LVSA leaders and Ministry officials. These trainers then reached 300+ traders in Monrovia and Paynesville markets. Traders reported improved food safety awareness and stronger trust between institutions and market actors.

Infrastructure & Practice Improvements

Efforts are ongoing to boost LVSA's management of vegetable kiosks and cold rooms, reducing post-harvest losses and raising produce quality, critical steps toward steady incomes for traders.

Raising Sector Visibility

The Division of Marketing made its debut at the “Made in Liberia” fair. With support from GROW-2, it significantly elevated its profile, opening doors for new partnerships and sector engagement.

Looking Ahead

GROW-2 plans to improve LVSA leadership capacity in record keeping, data management, and governance. A pilot for a standard vegetable weighing system is underway to promote fair pricing and transparency. Most importantly, efforts will focus on expanding direct market access for farmers.

This GROW-2 - LVSA partnership exemplifies what is possible when institutions collaborate, listen to each other, and act on real-world needs. Together, we are creating a horticulture sector that is more connected, efficient, and equitable, benefiting Liberian farmers, traders, and consumers alike.





## 11. GROW-2 CASSAVA FIELD DEMONSTRATIONS: STAGGERED PLANTING, LIME AND FERTILIZER TO INCREASE YIELDS AND PROMOTE YEAR-ROUND PROCESSING

As part of the GROW- 2 cassava value chain strategy, which helps smallholder farmers, cooperatives, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), and cassava entrepreneurs, the project continues to promote sustainable intensification by introducing and testing improved cassava varieties, improving farming practices, connecting farmers to markets and processors, optimize value addition, and working with key regulatory bodies such as the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), the National Cassava Sector Coordinating Committee (NCSCC), and the Liberia Standards Authority (LiSA).

A new key strategy introduced is the pilot Staggered Planting and Harvest Approach (SPHA), designed to strengthen cassava producers’ capacity to consistently supply processors and markets throughout the year, while reducing labour peaks and poor management of cassava fields. The SPHA method features three carefully timed planting windows at three-month intervals, covering the entire rainy season during which cassava can be planted. The cassava field planted in each planting window will be

harvested on three to four different dates, depending on the field size and cassava demand. By doing this, a farmer who plants on three dates and harvests each planting on four dates can stretch the harvest across most of the year and thus ensure root supply to a processor all-year-round. At the same time, the labour peak usually encountered if farmers only plant and harvest once a year is much smaller because to plant the same area at three dates, the labour demand for each planting and the follow-up weeding is reduced to about one third of the normal labour requirement. This will enable the farmers to better manage weeds and thus eliminate one of the most important yield-limiting factors. With more, yet smaller harvests across the year, income flow is more stable, farmers can harvest more or less cassava according to price hikes or price lows and thus attain overall higher revenue from the crop.

### Key Highlights

Embedded within this approach is the use of improved high yielding cassava varieties, the multiplication of improved varieties, the use of regular planning patterns, the insertion of the planting stakes vertically into the soil, which in previous research produced higher yields than the traditional burying of several stakes in a horizontal position, the use of fertilizer and / or lime and intercropping legumes to improve the soil fertility and the use of tillage to better control weeds and ease planting and harvest operations.

Improved methods of weed control have been introduced in the 2025 planting season to further reduce the labour demand and to allow for higher cassava root yields.





## 12. HARVESTING INNOVATION: GROW-2’S STAGGERED PLANTING BOOSTS LIBERIA’S CASSAVA FUTURE

### Unlocking year-round yields and steady incomes for farmers through smart agriculture


Cassava is a cornerstone of Liberia’s food security and rural economy. Yet, many farmers face challenges: fluctuating harvests, intense labor demands, and limited access to markets. The GROW-2 cassava value chain project, led by experts Dans and Stefan, is rewriting the story.

At the heart of this transformation is the Staggered Planting and Harvest Approach (SPHA) — a game-changer for smallholder farmers, cooperatives, and MSMEs. Instead of planting once a year, SPHA encourages planting cassava in three staggered windows spaced three months apart throughout the rainy season.

Why does this matter? It stretches out the harvests over many months instead of concentrating labor and supply into a single peak. This means farmers face less

exhausting workloads for land preparation, planting and have more time for more intensive weed management. Weeds are a major cause of lost yields. More importantly, with this approach farmers can supply cassava processors steadily year-round, they can observe prices and adjust their harvest dates to high price phases, creating a more reliable and increased income stream.


This approach doesn’t stop there. It is embedded in a package of improved techniques proven to raise yields: planting stakes vertically instead of horizontally (boosting root growth), using fertilizers and lime to enrich soil, intercropping legumes for natural nitrogen fixation, and applying tillage to control weeds and ease harvesting.

 **Key Highlights**

- **Staggered Planting and Harvest Approach (SPHA):** Three planting windows over the rainy season, enabling year-round harvests.
- **Reduced Labor Peaks:** Smaller fields, more frequent planting and harvesting reduce labor intensity by two-thirds.
- **Higher and More Stable Income:** Farmers can respond flexibly to market prices with staggered harvests.
- **Improved Practices:** Vertical planting of stakes, use of fertilizer and lime, legume intercropping, and tillage for better soil health and weed control.
- **Partnerships:** Collaboration with Liberia’s Ministry of Agriculture, National Cassava Sector Coordinating Committee, and Liberia Standards Authority.
- **Future Innovations:** Introduction of new weed control methods planned for 2025 to further boost yields and reduce labor.

## 13. CULTIVATING CHANGE: GROW-2’S INNOVATION SPURS A NEW ERA IN LIBERIA’S VEGETABLE FARMING

### Smart solutions for healthier soils, efficient water use, and stronger harvests

 **Key Highlights**

- **Lime Application:** Corrects the low pH of the dominantly acidic soils, unlocking nutrient uptake and boosting yields.
- **Plastic Mulch:** Conserves moisture, reduces fertilizer needs and losses, and cuts labor-intensive weeding.
- **Drip Irrigation Systems:** Deliver water directly to roots, allowing dry season cropping, when pests and disease are less of a problem.
- **Crop Diversification:** Widen the variety of vegetables grown to stabilize income and improve nutrition.
- **Real-Time Monitoring:** Trained technicians collect yield, labour and input cost and sales prices data to assess the economics of vegetable farming and to fine-tune practices and scale success.
- **Scaling Impact:** Demo sites serve as models driving wider adoption beyond project fields.

Smallholder vegetable farmers in Liberia face significant challenges that constrain productivity and income generation. These include acidic and nutrient-depleted soils, unpredictable weather patterns linked to climate change, and limited access to technical knowledge, improved inputs, and extension services. For many, hard work alone doesn’t translate into sustainable profits or improved livelihoods.

Here GROW-2 steps in, partnering with vegetable cooperatives in Nimba and Montserrado Counties to usher in smart farming techniques that tackle these challenges head-on. Under the guidance of senior agronomists, the project has set up demonstration sites that double as learning hubs, where innovation meets practical application.

One of the standout breakthroughs is lime application. By neutralizing soil acidity, lime improves nutrient availability. This simple step transforms depleted fields into fertile ground for robust vegetable growth, boosting yields and farmers’ income potential.

Another game-changer is the use of plastic mulch. Beyond reducing water loss, it acts as a weed barrier, slashing the hours farmers spend battling invasive plants. Maintaining soil moisture during dry spells becomes easier, ensuring crops thrive even in tough conditions.

Water management gets a major upgrade with drip irrigation systems. Traditional manual watering is laborious and inconsistent. GROW-2’s modern irrigation setups include pumps, filters, and pressure regulators, delivering water precisely where plants need it most.



The result? Healthier crops, more efficient water use, and less physical strain on farmers. Where power supply is unreliable or simply not available these systems can be powered by solar panels, reducing the risk of failure due to power cuts.

But GROW-2 interventions are not just about technology, crop diversification is a critical strategy here. By growing tomatoes, peppers, onions, cabbage, cucumbers, eggplants, and more species from different families, the cooperatives reduce the risks of crop failure through pests and diseases spreading rapidly in large fields with the same or related crops. Planting a large number of

different crops in the same field, fills seasonal supply and gaps, and s diverse market and nutritional needs. This larger variety of crops opens new avenues for trade and supports consumers' better community health through improved diets.

To amplify and scale up these advantages, GROW-2 has trained field technicians to monitor crop performance in real-time. This data-driven approach ensures continuous learning and adaptation, helping farmers apply the best practices tailored to their unique conditions.



Looking Forward: A Model for Scalable, Climate-Smart Farming

The enthusiasm around these demo sites is palpable. Farmers and stakeholders alike are witnessing tangible benefits, sparking wider adoption even beyond GROW-2-supported demonstration fields. These sites are becoming living examples of how innovative, climate-smart agriculture can contribute to elevate Liberia's agriculture landscape.

GROW-2 envisions scaling these successes across the horticulture sector, in partnership with key stakeholders to empower farmers to sustainably increase productivity, stabilize incomes, and improve nutrition for communities throughout Liberia.

14. SETTING NEW STANDARDS: GROW-2’S POLICY DIALOGUE DRIVES FOOD SAFETY IN LIBERIA’S AGRO-PROCESSING SECTOR

Uniting stakeholders to champion food-grade equipment and safeguard public health



Key Highlights

- 41 stakeholders from government, industry, cooperatives, and media convened to tackle food safety risks.
- Assessment findings by Liberia Standards Authority revealed critical gaps in equipment quality.
- Strong commitments from the Ministry of Commerce, equipment fabricators, LiSA, and donor projects.
- Focus on capacity building with TVET institutions and technical training for fabricators.
- Promise to prioritize food-grade materials in procurement and production.





Food Safety Takes Center Stage in Liberia’s Agro-Processing

On August 7, 2024, GROW-2 in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in partnership with the Liberia Standards Authority and Liberia Chamber of Commerce organized a one-day Policy Dialogue focused on food processing equipment safety. This timely workshop aimed to throw a spotlight on the risks posed by the widespread use of non-food-grade materials in the country’s agro-processing industry, a hidden danger that threatens product quality, consumer health, and market competitiveness.

A diverse group of 41 participants included government officials, agro-processors, equipment fabricators, cooperative leaders, and media. Their common purpose: to understand the current state of equipment quality and forge practical steps forward.

The dialogue featured a detailed presentation of an assessment conducted by the Liberia Standards Authority (LiSA), which exposed significant gaps in the materials and fabrication standards currently employed. These findings underscored an urgent need for improved regulation, technical skills, and stakeholder collaboration to safeguard the entire value chain.



Shared Commitment for Safer Food Processing

The event culminated in a series of bold commitments:


- **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**, represented by Assistant Minister Hon. Jekeh Koian, pledged to actively support equipment fabricators in acquiring food-grade materials tailored for MSMEs.
- **Liberia Standards Authority (LiSA), GROW-2 and LIFSI projects**, promised to lead capacity-building efforts targeting processors and technical institutions.
- **Equipment fabricators** vowed to pursue further training, embracing international food-grade fabrication standards.
- **Donor projects**, including IFAD and the World Bank, committed to prioritize food-grade materials in all procurement related to agro-processing equipment.
- **Together**, these pledges mark a decisive step toward transforming Liberia’s agro-processing landscape, building trust with consumers, elevating product safety, and unlocking access to premium markets.





## 15. LEVELING THE FIELD: GROW-2 CHAMPIONS WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN LIBERIA’S AGRICULTURE

Turning commitment into action for a fairer, more inclusive agricultural sector

 **Key Highlights**

- 72 stakeholders engaged—58 women and 14 men—representing farmers, policymakers, donors, civil society, and private sector.
- Women constitute 80% of Liberia’s agricultural workforce, yet face barriers in land access, finance, training, and leadership.
- Major policy proposals endorsed: Gender-Responsive Agricultural Financing Facility (GRAFF), National Mentorship & Leadership Program, and gender targets in National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP).
- Government launch of eight mechanization hubs aimed at easing women’s and youth’s farm labor.
- Pledge for inclusive leadership and better financial access for women in agriculture.



## Women in Agriculture: From Margins to Mainstream

In a powerful demonstration of collective will, GROW-2 partnered with the Liberia Agricultural and Environmental Journalists Network (LAEJN) to host a one-day Policy Dialogue on Women in Agriculture. The event, held under the theme “Leveling the Field: Enhancing Women’s Participation in Agricultural Value Chain Development,” convened 72 committed voices, including a strong majority of women, to tackle the persistent challenges limiting women’s full participation and leadership in Liberia’s agriculture sector.

Despite making up over 80% of the agricultural workforce, women still face systemic obstacles, from limited access to land and affordable financing to underrepresentation in cooperative leadership and scarce mentorship opportunities. This dialogue was more than a conversation; it was a rallying cry for tangible change.

## Concrete Actions to Empower Women

Participants reached consensus on clear policy priorities:

- Gender-Responsive Agricultural Financing Facility (GRAFF):** A tailored financial platform to provide women in agricultural endeavours with affordable, flexible loans and services attuned to agricultural production cycles.
- National Mentorship and Leadership Program:** A purposeful initiative to train and mentor women leaders who will spearhead cooperatives and influence policies.
- National Agriculture Investment Plan (NAIP) Updates:** Integrating explicit gender targets, dedicated funding, and accountability mechanisms to ensure women’s empowerment is a central objective.







Voices Driving Change

Deputy Minister David Akoi of the Ministry of Agriculture highlighted government efforts, announcing the launch of eight mechanization hubs designed to ease women’s and youth’s labor burdens on farms. Dr. Charles Sackey, GROW-2’s Chief Technical Advisor, emphasized inclusive leadership and the critical need for women’s financial empowerment. Mr. Jenkins Flahwor from the Embassy of Sweden reiterated the Embassy of Sweden’s plans to support women-led MSMEs in Liberia’s development strategy through 2030.

Key discussions that mattered:



The **dialogue** sparked rich conversations around gender integration in agricultural policies. Officials from the Ministry of Gender and Ministry of Agriculture unveiled plans to develop a national gender policy for agriculture. This policy aims to ensure that women’s voices are not just heard but actively shape decisions at every level of the sector’s development.



**Access to finance** was another major focus. Panelists highlighted how existing banking systems often exclude rural women and youth, making it difficult for them to secure loans suited to the agricultural production cycle. The call was clear: financial products must be tailored to the realities of the agricultural sector, complemented with enhanced financial literacy and training to empower them to manage funds effectively.



**Leadership in agriculture** remains a significant hurdle for women. Representatives from women-led cooperatives shared inspiring stories of pushing back against discrimination and creating more inclusive organizations. The Cooperative Development Agency (CDA) committed to strengthening support for women’s leadership, recognizing that empowered women leaders are critical to driving systemic change in the sector



The Way forward

This policy dialogue was not an end but a beginning, a collective promise to move beyond rhetoric and ensure women’s empowerment is woven into Liberia’s agricultural future. GROW-2 and partners stand ready to collaborate with the Ministry of Agriculture and others to transform these policy commitments into lasting impact on the ground.

16. EMBASSY OF SWEDEN DELEGATION ENGAGES UWSD COOPERATIVE ON GROW-2’S MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

A delegation from the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia visited the United Women for Sustainable Development Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd. (UWSD) in Gweeta, Bong County, on March 21, 2025. This field engagement spotlighted the impact of the Market Systems Development (MSD) approach championed by the GROW-2 project.

The team, including Jenkins Flahwor, Officer-in-Charge of GROW-2 at the Embassy, Joseph Mensah, Program Officer, Gun Eriksson, Senior Trade and Market Development Specialist, and Anna Hallen, Program Specialist, Market Development, joined forces with GROW-2 experts Dr. Charles Kwame Sackey, Chief Technical Advisor, and Frederick Samuel Gibson Jr., Senior Value Chain and Business Engagement Expert.

Dennise Karway, CEO of UWSD, alongside cooperative leaders and around 30 members of cooperative members, shared candid reflections on their evolving partnership with GROW-2. They described how the MSD approach has reshaped their market insights and nurtured a spirit of co-investment for long-term growth.

“It was difficult to reorient to the MSD approach at first, but gradually we are getting there. We now understand the importance of co-investment, cost-sharing and thinking long-term about our interventions” Karway explained.

The Embassy delegation probed the challenges faced by cooperatives in adopting MSD principles. UWSD leaders pointed to the initial mindset shift required to embrace co-investment, ongoing hurdles accessing finance to upgrade production processes, difficulties in navigating market linkages, and the pressing need for more targeted capacity-building, especially for women and youth engaged in agribusiness.

This visit underscored the real-world power of inclusive, market-driven strategies to uplift women-led cooperatives and promote sustainable agriculture in Liberia.





## 17. UNIDO AND MERCY CORPS COLLABORATE WITH EMBASSY OF SWEDEN TO STRENGTHEN MARKET SYSTEMS DEVELOPMENT IN LIBERIA

Market Systems Development (MSD) is gaining momentum in Liberia, thanks to a focused joint working session held on March 24, 2025, between GROW-2, Mercy Corps, and a visiting delegation from the Embassy of Sweden. Both UNIDO and Mercy Corps are implementing MSD-driven projects funded by the Embassy, aiming to foster inclusive and sustainable private sector growth.

Gun Eriksson, Senior Trade and Market Development Specialist at the Embassy, led the session, emphasizing the critical role of MSD in Liberia's fragile markets. "MSD is particularly relevant in thin markets like Liberia, where private sector development requires intentional facilitation and inclusive strategies," she noted. "It's essential that women and youth are not only included but empowered to co-create and sustain the transformation we seek."

The session also showcased each organization's achievements, shared valuable lessons, and addressed ongoing challenges. The conversation reinforced MSD's potential to drive resilient market access and economic growth for smallholder farmers, youth, and MSMEs.

Adaptive learning, innovation, and coordinated action emerged as key themes, underscoring how collaboration can unlock new opportunities and strengthen Liberia's agricultural and market systems.



## 18. GROW-2 LAUNCHES MSME CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT: A FIRST STEP IN TAILORING SUPPORT TO BOOST SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH

GROW-2 Liberia has kicked off a bold initiative aimed at transforming the future of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and cooperatives across key agricultural value chains. Recognizing MSMEs as critical engines of economic growth, this new capacity development assessment seeks to pinpoint strengths, uncover gaps, and customize support for small businesses, cooperatives, and producer groups within Liberia's cocoa, horticulture, and cassava sectors.

This assessment marks a crucial milestone in building a strong support framework for Liberia's emerging business community. Through a rigorous evaluation process,

GROW-2 aims to boost governance and leadership, elevate marketing and branding skills, improve financial management, and strengthen sustainable market linkages. Working closely with business development service providers (BDSPs) and technical experts, GROW-2 will deliver coaching, training, and mentoring designed to enhance competitiveness and drive long-term growth.





Key focus areas include:

- **Governance and Leadership Development:** Empowering MSMEs and cooperative boards through training on governance principles, leadership, financial transparency, and inclusive practices that prioritize women, youth, and persons living with disabilities.
- **Trade Promotion and Investment Readiness:** Providing technical assistance to improve business plans, grant writing, pitch deck preparation, and participation in investment and trade promotion events, positioning MSMEs to attract capital and partnerships.
- **Marketing, Branding, and Packaging Enhancement:** Evaluating existing marketing capabilities, developing authentic brand identities, implementing effective digital marketing strategies, and designing eco-friendly packaging that resonates with local values.
- **Strengthening Market Linkages:** Facilitating buyer-seller engagements, organizing radio and road shows, and connecting MSMEs to both national and international markets to unlock access to higher-value opportunities.
- **Access to Finance:** Coaching MSMEs to improve bookkeeping, financial management, and business planning to meet financial institutions’ requirements and attract critical investment.



Looking Ahead

As the assessment phase unfolds, GROW-2 envisions a dynamic ecosystem where MSMEs and cooperatives are fully equipped to scale operations, penetrate new markets, and secure vital financing. Future efforts will deepen mentorship, deliver tailored business development services, and champion inclusive participation across Liberia’s agricultural sectors.

Together with its partners, GROW-2 is laying a solid foundation for resilient, thriving small businesses capable of driving broad-based economic prosperity.

19. TURNING EFFORT INTO EARNINGS: HOW I BROKE THROUGH AND FOUND A PROFITABLE PATH WITH GROW-2 (VOICE FROM THE FIELD)

For years, the United Women for Sustainable Development (UWSD) quietly operated as a small Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA), providing basic loans to women farmers trying to support their families and small farms. But limited resources and lack of formal organization kept us from scaling up or accessing bigger opportunities. Everything changed when we crossed paths with the GROW project. What started as a simple effort to improve farming practices transformed into a story of international recognition, thriving trade, and renewed hope. The GROW project brought training and mentorship that reshaped UWSD. We evolved from an informal VSLA into a strong, structured cooperative.

Learning Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), improving financial record-keeping, strengthening management, and mastering trade negotiation, marketing, and branding laid a solid foundation for sustainable growth.

With GROW-2, we pushed further, embracing value addition through organic certification and preparing for export. Today, UWSD is on the verge of organic certification and ready to make our first international cocoa shipment, a dream that seemed impossible just few years ago.



Key Highlights

- **Organizational Strengthening:** Transitioned from a small VSLA to a fully structured cooperative with clear leadership and governance.
- **Capacity Building:** Received training in GAP, financial management, and trade negotiation skills essential for market success.
- **Market Success:** Sold 150 metric tons of premium cocoa, generating \$900,000 USD in revenue last year.
- **Grant Achievement:** Secured a \$150,000 grant from the U.S. African Development Foundation (USADF) with support from GROW-2 to improve financial access.
- **Export Readiness:** Near completion of organic certification and preparing for first-ever international export.
- **Future Expansion:** Planning to obtain an independent export license to broaden trade opportunities and increase incomes for women and youth farmers.



“Before GROW, we were just a group of women trying to make ends meet. Today, we are an internationally recognized cooperative on the verge of exporting organic cocoa to global markets. GROW-2 didn’t just teach us how to farm better, they taught us how to dream bigger. With the skills, knowledge, and opportunities we’ve gained, our women are creating new legacies for their families and communities”.

Denise Karnway, CEO.

The journey is far from over. With organic certification nearly secured and international export imminent, UWSD is setting sights on attaining an independent export license. This next step will empower more women and

youth to add value to their cocoa, boost incomes, and break cycles of poverty. Thanks to GROW-2, we are no longer just farming—we are shaping a powerful future.





[www.unido.org](http://www.unido.org)



[grow2liberia@unido.org](mailto:grow2liberia@unido.org)



UNITED NATIONS  
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION