



Republic of Liberia Ministry of Agriculture

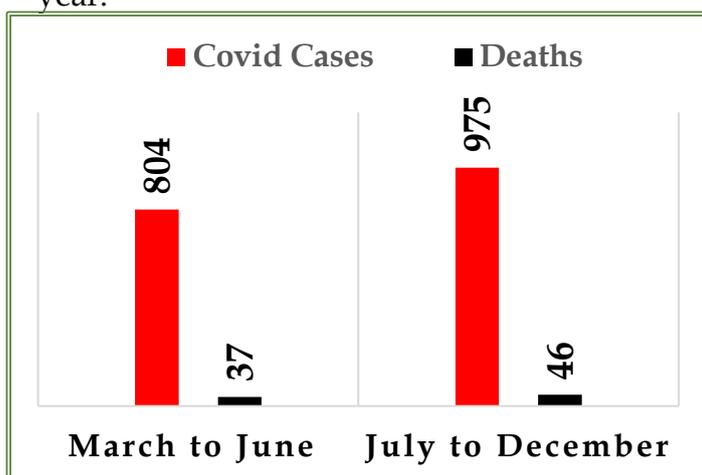
COVID-19 FOOD SECURITY RESPONSE YEAR-END SITUATION REPORT # 10

Reporting Period:
July 1- December 31, 2020

Release Date:
December 31, 2020

Highlights

- Liberia is no longer under a State of Emergency which His Excellency President George Manneh Weah, Sr. declared in April to contain COVID-19 spread. It had three extensions, but ended in July.
- Graciously, H.E. President Weah issued Executive Order # 102 suspending tariffs on several needed agriculture implements, inputs and equipment for a one-year period as relief to the farming community amidst the pandemic.
- During the period under review from July 1 to December 31, 2020, there has been a surge in COVID-19 cases in Liberia as compared to the first half of the year.



- Montserrado, where Liberia's capital is located and noted for peri urban farming, continues to be hotspot of COVID-19 cases with the highest caseload of 1,325.

- The Government of Liberia (GOL) through the Ministry of Agriculture's donor-funded projects have procured fertilizers, seedlings, farming tools,

safety gears and agrochemicals and are being distributed to farmers to alleviate difficulties they face in sourcing them locally during this pandemic.

- Borders closures with Liberia's sisterly Republics of La Cote D'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone are impacting border farmers' acquisition of basic agriculture inputs like fertilizers, seeds and farming tools.
- Food prices have stabilized in many parts of the country as production of rice and other food crops is gradually picking up.
- The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) gave a boost to the Cassava sector through purchases of locally processed cassava products -gari, deepah and fufu flour for emergency food positioning.
- Livestock producers also received MOA's feeds mills and incubators to help increase local production of poultry and pig products.

- In spite of the pandemic and due to their resilience, there is a surge of local agribusinesses in the production of varieties of plant-based products.

Situation Overview

- There are increased outputs of rice productions in Lofa and Rivercess counties as compared to pre COVID-19 pandemic period -last year.
- The two counties -Lofa which lies between Guinea and Sierra Leone has less than 30 COVID-19 position cases, while the seemingly isolated coastal county of Rivercess registered five cases.
- For the Western Region, which comprises of Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount Counties noted for cassava production, there were good yield of this important food crop which the country's second staple next to rice.
- This region, known as Region One, as defined under the MOA's Regional Zone Coding, had 36 cases cumulatively during the reporting period.
- Largely noted for producing rubber, rice and vegetables, Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties in central and northern Liberia [Region Three] still experience fertilizer shortages.
- Sadly, MOA's field officers say there is low yield of all forms of vegetables, pepper and bitter balls in that region.
- More than three months of scorching sun was experienced in two of the counties in Liberia's heavily forested southeastern region, precisely, Sinoe and Maryland Counties. The lack of rainfall, during the critical growing period for rice, affected production.



Food Security

- During the reporting period, the MOA introduced a ONE STOP SHOP for farmers and farming information, where training manuals on how to plant cassava, rice and cocoa, have been uploaded.
- The website <https://www.moa.gov.lr/> will be regularly updated to include farming information on vegetables and other food crops in a bid to increase knowledge on food production.
- A Joint Liberia Government (MOA, Gender, LISGIS) along with the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Programme, Concern Worldwide and ZOA released a "*Liberia Food Security Assessment Report*" in November 2020.
- The Assessment notes that "Among the 2,347 respondents with access to farmland, 1,731 (73.8%) indicated that they had farmed in the previous season. However, widespread limitations on production were reported by most of those who grew crops, with shortages of money, tools, labor and seeds all reported by large numbers of farmers".
- Despite those challenges among farmers, food crops farming improved, helped in part by the provision by the MoA of farm inputs throughout the last quarter of 2020.
- About 488,000 Liberians were considered Borderline Food Insecure (IPC Classification Phase II). This Phase is where "for at least 20 percent of

households, food consumption is reduced but minimally adequate without having to engage in irreversible coping strategies. These households cannot fully meet livelihoods protection needs.”

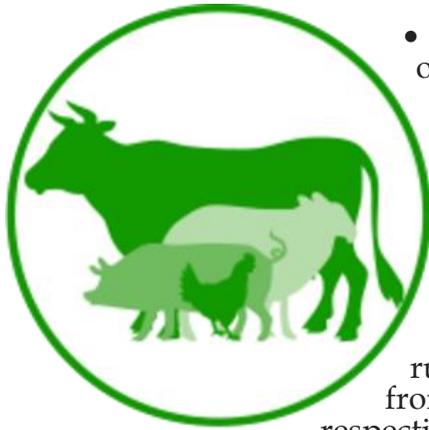


- The prices of locally grown and imported rice have stabilized -returned to pre COVID-19 period - in the hinterland with the exception of **Sinoe County** where a price of 25kg bag of rice has gone up to LD\$[Liberian Dollar] 4,000 from 3,500 due to bad road connectivity from Monrovia to this coastal county with a harbour.
- **Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Margibi, Maryland and Sinoe Counties** experienced low rice production because of erratic rainfall patterns, an impact of climate change.
- Unusually heavy rainfall destroyed lowland rice farms in **Grand Bassa** while **Maryland** and **Sinoe** a three-month of scourging sunlight caused rice planting failure in these counties.
- The MoA County Coordinator in Sinoe estimates that possibly up to eighty-five percent of rice farms in Sinoe got destroyed as a result of the lack of rains during the growing period.
- Lack of access to seed rice in **Grand Gedeh** caused farmers not to plant more, but they are hopeful to acquire seeds before the next planting season early 2021.
- Yet still, rice production improved in **Bong, Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Kru, Lofa, Nimba, Rivercess and River Gee Counties**. There are several tons of paddy rice in those counties, but no buyers. Farmers used proceeds from paddy rice sales to be able to replant.



- While there is pleasing output of vegetables in Gbarpolu, grasshoppers are gradually plaguing on vegetable farms in rural **Montserrado** and destroying them. The need for agrochemicals is huge.
- Montserrado also experienced the increased in more home gardens during the lockdown and up to now. Cucumbers yield is encouraging in Montserrado.
- **Grand Gedeh** reports insects destroying corn farms in that heavily forested county.
- **Bong** is experiencing scarcity of vegetable seeds as most agro-importers based in Monrovia, where the Central Liberia’s farmers acquire their seeds, ran out of supplies.

- MOA has embarked on the procurement of seeds and other Agro-inputs to mitigate the impacts of scarcities on the market. Distribution of these inputs began in the last quarter of 2020 and will continue over the next few months.

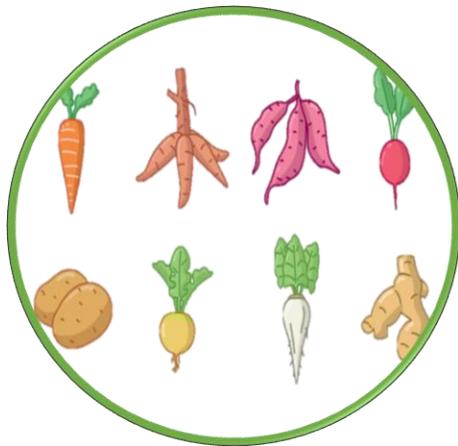


- Amidst sealing of borders, sourcing and processing of locally grown animal feeds are challenges facing poultry producers in Liberia.

- Moreover, closure of neighbouring countries' borders -especially Guinea, the main export nation of cattle and sheep to Liberia- is causing high prices of these key meat products.

- The price of a cow has climbed from US\$ 900 to US\$1500 thus affecting retailed costs while small ruminants' purchases - goat and sheep -have gone up from US\$ 50 to US\$ 150 and US\$ 100 to US\$ 200 respectively.

- MOA distributed poultry incubators and a number of feed mills to agribusinesses to boost the production of chicks and livestock feeds.



- **Grand Cape Mount** reports high harvest of cassava, while **Bong County** is excited over more eddoes and sweet potatoes being produced.

INTERVENTIONS

MOA secured over \$15 million funding through persuasive efforts with the Government of Liberia, African Development Bank (ABD) (\$3.1 million), \$2.29 million from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and \$10.525 million from the World Bank to support the COVID-19 National Emergency Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihood Plan

Of this last amount, \$5 million was channeled through the World Food Program as contribution to the Government's COVID-19 Household Food Support Program.

The funding is meant to mitigate the impacts on farmers should the Covid-19 pandemic continue amidst global shut down of supply chains, which may affect food

imports and food systems. Empowering local farmers and supporting agribusinesses to thrive are the focus of this plan.

- a) **Agro Machineries Support** – More than 200 pieces of agro-processing equipment including power tillers, rice mills, tractors, cassava processing machines are being procured under MOA’s STAR-P to enable our farmers across the country to shift from subsistence to mechanized farming.
- b) **Provision of agrochemicals and fertilizers** – More than 50 tons of various types of fertilizers and thousands of gallons of different insecticides and fungicides have been purchased through MOA’s STAR-P to protect insects and diseases damages to food and tree crops which farmers face at times.
- c) **Provision of seeds** – Vegetable seeds were also purchased to bring relief to farmers who have lost incomes as a result of COVID-19. In addition, under the emergency plan, cassava cuttings, rice seeds and oil palm seedlings have been procured with IFAD’s financing and African Development Bank’s financing commitments. ADB funds MOA’s Smallholder Agricultural Productivity Enhancement and Commercialization Project (SAPEC).

Since last week, the MOA kicked off the distribution of varieties of fertilizers and agrochemicals as well as safety gears to farmers beginning with 70 farmers groups in Montserrado.

With more transport logistics arrangements already in place, the distribution moves Bong, Bomi, Gbarpolu Grand Bassa, Lofa, Grand Cape Mount, Margibi and Nimba counties next.

Distribution for other counties in southeastern Liberia are being planned.

For Livestock producers, MOA has empowered six large producers with feed mills to be able to process feeds for their poultry, while a main producer in Central Liberia received incubators to increase hatchery.

Vegetable seeds for Nimba and Lofa counties have been procured, while orders are in for 30 power tillers for those two counties under the IFAD’s financed TCEP projects.

Additionally, more cassava processing and rice threshers and other agro machineries for farmers will arrive in the country early next year.



Livelihood



- Cocoa farmers, during the reporting period, struggled to source cocoa seedlings due to the closure of Liberia's borders with La Cote D'Ivoire and the late resumption of air travels between Ghana and Liberia. The two West African nations are the sources of cocoa seedlings for Liberia.
 - The lack of seedlings has reduced the output of cocoa in the **Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa and Nimba Counties**. Only five thousand metric tons have so been harvested much lower than 18,000 metric tons produced prior to the pandemic.
 - The MOA, through its Liberia Forest Sector Project and its Tree Crops Extension Project, has placed orders for a large number of cocoa seedlings, meant to address the shortages. This measure, which will bring respite to cocoa farmers, is set to continue until the National Cocoa Seed Garden comes into full production.
- Government's institution responsible for monitoring of cocoa and other agriculture produce exports, the Liberia's Agriculture Commodities and Regulatory Agency (LACRA) reports a decline in cocoa exports during this period.
- Last year's final quarter, LACRA says 10 exporters were active; but for this year, only four are exporting in low volumes.



- The National Oil Palm Platform of Liberia (NOPPOL) reports smallholder oil palm farmers in **Bomi, Grand Cape Mount and Lofa** face shortage of oil palm seedlings.
 - Oil Palm farm workers could not work on the maintenance of their farms as a result of the lockdown, but they are now gradually returning to their farms.



- During the lockdown from April to July, and with shutdown of global supply chains of natural rubber, Liberia's rubber farmers faced huge challenges in selling their rubber and keeping their farms open.
- From the third quarter of 2020 to now, rubber concessionaires began purchasing rubber from smaller farms, although at a lower scale.
- Exports of this key agricultural commodity, which provides bulk of Liberia's export earnings, declined during this pandemic period due to the limited shipping activities, global downturn in demand for natural rubber, and the shutdown of several rubber factories.
- However, in the third quarter of this year, for the first time, a Liberian-owned enterprise, Nimba Rubber Company, began processing and exporting Technically Specified Rubber from its factory in Nimba.
- The re-opening of this concession provides a huge boost to the rubber economy which is highly dependent on just a few companies to purchase rubber.

INTERVENTIONS

For the first time, Liberia now has a 30.4-hectare land cocoa seed garden in Beeplay, Nimba. Planting of cocoa in this garden began earlier this year and is progressing.

By 2025, the Garden will provide cocoa seedlings to thousands of Liberian cocoa farmers who will not have to travel or import cocoa seeds from the West African region.

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) through the MOA's Tree Crops Expansion Program (TCEP) is financing the garden's development.

The MOA under its joint IFAD and World Bank financed Smallholder Agriculture Transformation and Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P), distributed 23,000 high-yielding oil palm seedlings to smallholder farming groups in five counties.

They include Bomi, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Lofa and Nimba counties. This will boost the planting of new acreage of oil palm.

The STAR-P will purchase palm oil from local processors in order to stimulate purchasing from farmers who have limited access to markets. The palm oil that is purchased will form part of the national food reserves currently being managed by the General Services Agency.



Emergency Food Purchase

- With \$5.525 million in funding from the World Bank under the MoA's STAR-P emergency component, the Government awarded contracts to several Liberian businesses in the cassava value chain for the emergency purchase of food to be distributed to vulnerable households.
- More than 200 metric tons of Gari, cassava and fufu flour has been purchased. The purchase empowers local cassava producers in the face of supply chain constraints and limited market access.

- They are being purchased and released to the General Services Agency (GSA), the Government's assets management agency, for distribution to vulnerable communities in Liberia. Similar interventions are in place for the purchase of rice and palm oil.

INTERVENTION

Distributions of gari and fufu flour has already started in various communities in Monrovia as excited recipients commend the GOL for the donation.



Agribusiness Stimulus

- There is a surge in the production of plant-based consumer packaged goods (CPG) in Liberia by small and medium enterprises. Their products are being favorites in supermarkets.
- They are producing soap and cosmetic products from palm and coconut oils and from local shea butter; several companies producing rum from sugar cane; fruit juices, baking and cooking mixes, food snacks like plantain chips and granola, dried fruit, spice rubs and seasonings.
- The cassava sector received a boost through MoA supply contracts for gari, deepah and fufu flour. Cassava farmers have sales outlets and the processors have secure markets for their produce, allowing for much-needed growth in the sector.
- With World Bank's funding, the Government, through the MOA, has completed the evaluation of Liberian agribusinesses for both the formal and informal agribusinesses that applied for matching grants to minimize the effects of COVID-19 on them.
- The matching grants are at an amount up to 10,000 on a 60:40% basis for formalized and US\$ 1,000 for Informal agribusinesses.
- An inter-ministerial panel consisting of the Ministries of Agriculture, Commerce Finance and Development Planning, State Without Portfolio conducted the evaluation.
- Forty-six formal businesses passed the evaluation while 63 persons in the informal sector successfully won.
- Payments are now being processed through the MOA's STAR-P and qualified entities and persons will be called to receive them.



Funding

- In September, IFAD announced additional funding through a grant of US\$488,983 for its Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF) project under the MOA which kicks off January 2021 and ends December 31, 2021.
- Then in November, the Rome-based agency commits additional US\$ 576, 328 which sums up the RPSF's project's funding to US\$ 1, 065, 311 and modalities are being worked for the release of the second funding tranche.
- RPSF is meant to support farmers in Nimba and Lofa counties, who faced challenges during this pandemic, to finance the supply of agricultural tools, fertilizer, improved planting materials, provision of extension services, training of technicians and farmers among others.

- The Global Adaptation Fund has also approved a grant of \$9.8 million to be supervised by IFAD, to build climate resilience in the cocoa and rice sectors in Liberia. The project will be implemented by the MoA with a portion for the Environmental Protection Agency.

The MOA is setting up an effective management framework that will integrate the RPSF and upcoming project under the ongoing IFAD's backed TCEP projects, and that will coordinate with other project interventions of the Ministry.



Coordination

- In accordance with Section 28.4 of the Act that established MOA under the New Executive Law of May 11, 1972, the Minister of Agriculture named the Assistant Minister for Administration to lead the MOA's COVID-19 Coordination and Response Committee to farming stakeholders with technical support through the ministry's Program Management Unit (PMU).
- With support from MOA's field officers, the Committee has started registering farmers in the counties to receive agro inputs that will assist farmers in boosting productions.

INTERVENTION

While IFAD's two support programs to the MOA's COVID-19 response end in June and December 2021 respectively, the Government, through the MOA, has requested for an extension of the World Bank's Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) from December 31, 2020 to June 30, 2021. The CERC is where MOA sources World Bank's funding for its COVID-19 intervention program.



Household Food Distribution

- GOL's COVID-19 Household Food Support Program (COHFSP) in collaboration with UN food assistance agency World Food Programme, set up in May and which the MOA co-chairs, has made significant progress.
- At the issuance of this report, food distributions continue in Margibi, Montserrado and Nimba counties.
- The next phase of distribution targets Bomi, Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Grand Kru, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Maryland, Rivercess, River Gee and Sinoe counties.
- Thus far, WFP says a "total of 10,403.7 mt has been dispatched to distribution points, representing 32 percent of the overall planned quantity of 32,364 mt. A total of 28,966.75 mt of commodities were contracted through local purchase, among which 19,187".

INTERVENTION

The World Food Programme, through the MOA has requested for an extension of the World Bank's Contingency Emergency Response Component (CERC) from December 31, 2020 to June 30, 2021 to allow WFP completes the remaining counties. Funding of the food distribution is from the MOA's CERC.

**PRODUCED BY THE PROGRAM MANAGEMENT UNIT (PMU)
MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE**

For further inquiries, please contact:

Ansu Sekou Konneh, akonneh@moa.gov.lr