

**AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS, INC.**

**THE WEST AFRICA INITIATIVE**

**2022 FINAL REPORT**

**YOUTH AGRICULTURE PROGRAM**

**SUBMITTED TO**

**GROWING HOPE GLOBALLY**

**AND**

**THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM**

**AND**

**THE WEEK OF COMPASSION (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST)**

**COMPILED BY**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **Overview:**

This report covers the second year of the community food security program supported by Growing Hope Globally (GHG), facilitated by the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP); and the Week of Compassion (WOC) of the Disciples of Christ. WOC also provided the support for the gender rights program. To maximize the use of human and financial resources, both the food security and the gender rights programs were implemented within the existing Youth Agriculture Program (YAP) of the West Africa Initiative (WAI). The WAI program is being implemented by Agricultural Missions, Inc (AMI) in collaboration with country partners - the West Africa Initiative of Liberia (WAIOL) in Liberia and the Village-to-Village Federation (V2VF) in Sierra Leone. Both WAIOL and V2VF are country based non-governmental organizations which are legally registered with the relevant public agencies.

### **BRIEF HISTORY AND GOALS OF WAI:**

The implementation of the WAI program at the community level commenced in April 2009 following a two-year period of community assessments and planning, in collaboration with the Councils of Churches in both Liberia and Sierra Leone and the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) of the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA). WAI began as a response by the PCUSA to assist both countries in the post-civil war reconstruction and rehabilitation processes, designed and implemented by Agricultural Missions, Inc. (AMI). The initial phase of the program was designed to improve food security through village-based food production, following the return of refugees and internally displaced persons after the civil wars in both countries ended. Within 2 years of its inception, this aspect of the program became self-sufficient in terms of providing inputs to local farmers and in the process, the initial farmers groups were organized.

The farmers' groups provide the frameworks and mechanisms for the implementation of the program, which evolved into a multi-dimensional integrated community development effort that was in great demand in both countries, with the following goals:

1. To support and strengthen the capacity of rural community groups to develop self-reliant and independent organizations that are engaged in food production and marketing, thus contributing to the improvement of community food security and the economic and social well-being of their members.
2. To develop the management and technical capacity of local partner organizations to fully assume the responsibility of operating the WAI program.

These goals have not changed since they were first adopted in 2011 and have guided the program since that time. However, objectives and activities are revised on an annual basis to reflect the changing needs and priorities of the rural communities participating in the program.

## **PROGRAM SUMMARY**

### **Main goal of the 2022 program**

The main goal, as originally outlined in the original (2021) application, is to improve the food security status in six villages in Liberia and Sierra Leone (3 villages in each country) through the development of locally controlled and resilient food systems in each village. The secondary goal is to provide livelihood opportunities in farming for the youth of the communities, in support of the primary goal.

**Promoting Gender Rights Program Goal:** After the submission of the applications GHG and PCUSA, the Week of Compassion (WOC) of the Disciples of Christ- a partner of WAI for several years- decided to continue their support for the 2022-2023 program year which covers the period June 1, 2022, through May 31, 2023. In addition to partially supporting the food security program, WOC's primarily focused on improving the status of women and girls in the society, thus the goal of Promoting Gender Rights was added. This aspect of the program focuses on activities that address gender-based violence against women and provided educational support for girls enrolled in Junior Secondary Schools. This decision was made in consultation with country partners, and:

- Is consistent with the priorities of the country partners, groups and society.
- Does not change the budgetary allocations of GHG or PCUSA as stated in the original application but adds to some line items allocated for the food security activities. All costs resulting from the addition of gender component were covered exclusively by the support of WOC.
- Is implemented concurrently with the food security aspects of the program in the YAP groups and communities, resulting in more efficient use of human and financial resources.

*In summary, the goal in 2022 was to extend and replicate the 2021 program, both the Food Security and Gender Rights aspects, in six additional communities in both countries.*

### **Context and Need:**

Both countries suffer from chronic and recurring food insecurity, especially during the "hunger season" just before the annual harvest. The World Food Program (WFP) Country Reports and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicated that both countries are "marked by food deficits", resulting in the prevalence of undernourishment of 39% of the population in Liberia and 27% in Sierra Leone. The existence of extreme and persistent poverty, where more than 50% of the population live on less than \$1.25 per day, is noted as the most significant factor contributing to the scale of food insecurity. As the market-based economy extends to more

remote communities, the availability of cash incomes is an increasingly significant measure of food security. This is exacerbated by other factors such as health emergencies (Ebola in 2014-2016 and COVID-19 in 2020) and climate change as manifested in the change in rainfall patterns. At the village level, the absence of adequate food storage facilities results in significant post-harvest food loss due to insect, rodent, and mold infestations – estimated to be as high as 25 to 30%- has a negative impact on food security. Availability of adequate food storage facilities would lead to increase in food production, food availability and family incomes.

With respect to gender-based discrimination, pervasive inequities rooted in historical, social, and cultural practices severely limit women's to access educational and occupational opportunities, preventing their full participation in the workforce and in the development of their communities. An assessment of the WAI communities on women's rights and empowerment indicated that acts of violence against women do not only take place in homes, but also in workplaces, schools and even places of worship. Although legislation exists that render these acts illegal, enforcement and awareness are often lacking, especially in remote rural communities. School attendance rates are lower for girls when compared to boys resulting in women with lower literacy and educational levels when compared to men. Most families that cannot afford to educate all their children give preference to boys. The World Bank reported that, between 2013 and 2017, 60% of the adolescents who dropped out of school were females, citing economic and cultural factors as major contributing factors. Although there have been improvements with respect to legal reforms and increased gender awareness and activism, entrenched cultural beliefs and practices that discriminate against women and girls are persistent. Stereotypical perceptions of women and girls remain significant challenges in achieving gender equality and women's advancement.

Women and girls in rural communities are more vulnerable to gender-based violence and other inequalities than their urban counterparts due to entrenched customary practices, the lack of awareness in the general population and lack of supportive social and legal services. In cities and large towns these services are provided by government departments and ministries and non-governmental organizations.

### **Groups and Participants:**

In 2022, six groups- three in each country, began participating in YAP in 2022, as follows:

**LIBERIA:** Total 65 direct participants- 650 beneficiaries.

- 1) Friendly Farmers Development Association (FFDA), Zleh Town, Grand Gedeh County, with 22 youth (13 men and 9 women)
- 2) Tappita Women's Group, Guyeh Village, Nimba County, with 26 youth (18 women and 8 men)

- 3) Old Force Farmers Group, Kpen Village, Nimba County, with 17 youth (8 men and 9 women).

SIERRA LEONE: Total 90 Participants -520 beneficiaries.

1. Rogblan Farmers Group, Rogblan Village, Bombali District, with 30 youth (12 men and 18 women)
2. Rokon Farmers Group, Mathathu Village, Kambia District, with 30 youth (15 men and 15 women)
3. Kalom Farmers Group, Mapoli Village, Port Loko District. With 30 youth (19 men and 11 women)

For both countries combined, there were a total of 158 youth participants and 1260 direct beneficiaries (persons living in the same household as participants). The anticipated numbers, as stated in the application, were 120 participants and 840 direct beneficiaries. This represents a 38% increase in both the participants and beneficiaries. The increase was the result of high demand within the communities and the staff accepted more than the planned number, even as many others were interested but could not be accommodated. While most of the increase in 2021 was due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions which resulted in many youths returning to their villages from the towns and cities, in 2022 this was due to the impact of high inflation and poor economic conditions. The number of participants remained stable throughout 2022.

The increase in the number of participants was manageable from a budgetary standpoint as this did not impact the fixed costs. The variable costs, mainly meals and transportation, were supplemented by the groups and participating individuals.

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS:**

### YOUTH AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Unlike 2021, when many activities were delayed or uncompleted due to abnormally higher than normal rainfall, 2022 was a year of more normal and favorable climatic conditions for both farming and construction activities. As a result, there were no weather-related delays in implementing the planned activities. As indicated in timeline of activities (Appendix I) for 2022, the only activities which will be carried over to 2023 relate to home gardening and harvesting and preparation which are normal dry season (November to April) activities.



*Food Security -Youth members of Tappitta Group Prepare Cassava for Storage-Liberia (Photo: Thomas Hackor)*

Tables II and III present the summaries, by country, of the achievements of the food security activities of the 3 groups engaged to the program in 2022. The data indicate the area planted

and the food produced and stored by the youth as a contribution to community food security. From the data presented and in discussions with group members and community leaders it can be concluded that:

- For participating communities, the food security situation showed significant improvement over previous years in that families that used the stores had food for longer periods than those who did not. However, some level of hunger still exist during the “hunger season”.
- The results demonstrate the potential of the program to make significant gains in eliminating food insecurity at the community level, with increased production, proper post-harvest handling and improved storage.
- Group members are planning to increase the area under cultivation in 2023, resulting from the availability of improved storage within the communities.
- Youth demonstrated that there is potential for them to address a vital community need while advancing their own livelihoods in terms of incomes.
- Group members and many in the wider community now believe that they are empowered to improve their food security through their own actions.



*Sierra Leone-Youth of the Sorbeh Group place harvested rice to store. (Photo: Sento Conteh)*

#### PROMOTING GENDER RIGHTS AND SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GIRLS.

Note on the Gender Rights and Girls School Support Activities:

Since WOC program year is from June 2022-May 2023 and funds for this aspect of the program were not available until the first week in June, the activities described in this report are for the first seven months of this program and not for the full year. This period coincides with the

beginning of the school year in August/September and also with the school girls' support activities. The status of these activities are summarized in Appendix IV and indicate that many activities are ongoing or scheduled to commence in January-May 2023, consistent with WOC's program cycle. Led by staff, and facilitators, the planned activities, to date, are on schedule, with broad community participation and support of the Boards of the partner organizations and other stakeholders in both countries.



*School Supplies: Sierra Leone -Sorbeh Group: School girls, with their parents receive school supplies (Photo: Sento Conteh)*

#### Additional Comments:

- The training of trainers (TOTs) workshops in gender rights and awareness conducted in 2021 were designed to build capacity and enable the staff, board members and facilitators to conduct future sessions at the village level. As a result, the 2022- 2023 community-based workshop sessions are being conducted by WAI in-house personnel.



- The village level community awareness sessions were open to all. Men and local leaders were specially invited to attend as they exert significant influence and control over conduct of individuals within their communities.

Appendix V present a summary of the achievements of this aspect of the program for both countries and indicate the following conclusions:

- Strong participation in the village based awareness sessions on reducing gender based violence, by both women and men. The village committees report a reduction in incidents and most were handled within the villages by the committees established by the program.
- Only one incident in both countries was reported to the police.
- The school support program for girls at the Junior Secondary level is very much needed and much appreciated by the girls and their families. All the participants, except for those who dropped out of school, are performing well.
- The drop-out rate was less than 1 percent among the participants in this program compared to a national rate of 17 percent, historically, among girls. (World Bank)
- The girls who dropped out have the option to re-enroll and participate in the program, should they decide to do so.



*Sierra Leone-Girl and Her Mother with School Supplies (Photo: Sento Conteh)*



*Sierra Leone Village based Gender Awareness Workshop (Photo: Francis Conteh)*

## **CHALLENGES AND HOW THEY WERE MANAGED**

- High inflation and the continued deterioration of economic conditions continued to be the most difficult challenge faced by the population within both countries. Unprecedented inflation and almost daily currency devaluations other macro-economic policies of the governments resulted in steep price increases for essential goods such as food, medicines building materials and most important, fuel. Double digit increases in the cost building materials for stores and travel costs for staff and facilitators are impacting the program significantly. To meet this challenge the staff and groups devised strategies to contain costs to minimize the impact on the program in terms of goals and activities, including:
  1. Obtaining interest free credit, up to 3 months, from businesses, with partial cash payments. This was only available where a group member, staff or board would guarantee payment.
  2. Future sales of current year's harvest. Some groups with established relationships with "middlemen" were able to get cash advances for crops yet to be harvested, at discounted prices. This reduced the potential incomes to the groups from such transactions but allowed for timely availability of materials.
  3. Coordinating delivery of materials to more than one group where this was logistically feasible, to reduce transportation cost.
  4. Reducing staff travel costs by combining visits to groups, where possible. This, however, usually result in longer workdays for staff.
  5. Requesting cash contributions from group members.
- As was the case in 2021, a significant challenge faced by YAP was not being able to meet the demand for participation in the communities. Although this demand in 2022 was

below that of 2021, due to easing of the COVID-19 restrictions, the 2022 number was higher than proposed. In response, staff continued the practice of accepting an increased number of participants to the extent possible within the financial and human resource constraints.

- The school support program for girls also faced a significant challenge in terms of not being able to meet the demand due to high number of girls needing and requesting support. Although not a solution, girls with the most need were served first.
- Unusual weather was not a factor in 2022 compared to 2021, but the adaptations suggested to mitigate the impacts of excessive rainfall were implemented and accepted as standard practice for the future. They include:
  1. Begin the making of bricks for construction of the storage facilities as early as possible, to take advantage of the dry season, and store them in a sheltered location.
  2. Revise the construction process to install the roof before the walls. This would provide sheltered space for drying and storage of the bricks.
  3. Institute division of labor and team work to complete the construction process before the onset of the rains. This may impact land preparation and planting schedules which have some level of built-in flexibility.

The above provisions are also viewed as appropriate adaptation and mitigation practices to build resilience in the era of climate change.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

- The most important lesson learned is that the groups and youths are eager to engage in farming. While it is widely believed that the youth are eager to migrate to the cities and towns in search of employment, many have expressed the willingness to farm and remain in their communities if they have the support to do so. At the village level youth are eager for opportunities to deliberate and engage in decision making, which have been usually denied them by tradition.
- Previously, local communities had little or no control over the major factors that affect their food security, namely climate, lack of infrastructure and macro-economic conditions. The unpredictability in weather is expected to continue in the coming years. However, as a result of the YAP, the participating communities demonstrated that they can have significant control over their food security through increased production and storage of staple foods.
- The youth were largely responsible for the creative solutions, as described above, in securing additional funds needed for the purchase and transport of building materials for the stores.

- Market Based approach to addressing food security is being developed although it is not identified as such. In this approach, perishable farm produce products are sold upon harvest and the funds saved in the groups' bank account for use in times of food emergencies. These funds are monitored, but not controlled, by the facilitators and field officers.

## **KEY PROGRESS INDICATORS**

The data presented in the appendices indicate that the established goals were accomplished, for the most part, although there were seasonally determined activities which were carried forward to 2023. In addition to the items listed in the Program Achievements section of this report, the following are the key indicators:

- Overall improvement in the food security status in participating communities as a result of increased food production and improved storage capacity.
- Increased availability of money to address food emergencies. Funds were earned by the groups by producing and marketing perishable items, mainly vegetables.
- Increased involvement of youth in decision making and planning and actual production of food.
- Improved incomes to the youth through crop production and sale, demonstrating that farming offers livelihood opportunities in rural villages.
- Awareness of the gender-based discrimination and violence against women and establishment of community-based systems for intervention where needed.
- Improved enrollment and attendance of girls from the participating villages in Junior Secondary Schools and supportive counselling and mentorship to successfully reduce dropout rates.

## **STORIES**

### LIBERIA

Annie Juwoe; the youth leader of the David-TA Farmers Group.

***“My family can have food for a long time because it will not spoil.”***

Let me first extend very big thanks to the almighty God above us. I also say many thanks and appreciations to all of the people who joined hands to help us with this project.

We are very happy for our project, especially the storage we built for us to keep our food and farm tools and seeds. I believe that it could enable us to continue farming at all seasons, and our products and tools will be safe. We were suffering for very long, because our products were spoiling every year and criminals were stealing away our harvest and our tools. With my food safe in this place, I will grow more in the next season by the Grace of God.

I put my rice and other food from my farm this store house, and my family can have food for a long time because it will not spoil, and robbers will not take it away. We have food all the time, even in the hungry season. If some people are sick or the old people who cannot work, I can help them with food to eat. I can even earn more money by keeping rice until the price is good and then I sell some to get money to send my children to school.

### SIERRA LEONE

Santigie Kalokoh; facilitator of the Sorbeh Group in the Makai community in the Bombali District.

***“the food security and the girls’ school support programs have brought hope to the youth of Makai community.”***

The youth of Makai community now have new hopes to stay in the community instead of migrating to the cities. The Youth Agriculture Project (YAP) project and the girls’ school support programs have brought hope to the youth of Makai community. Hope of better lives without migrating to the cities and not dropping out of school. Before now, most of the boys would leave this place for to the town of Makeni and even as far as Freetown in to look for work. The youth did not see a future in agriculture in this community. Now many are staying, because of the YAP they see how they can earn money from farming without traveling far away from home.

For the girls, most drop out after completing primary school at ages 10 to 12 years old because their parents cannot afford the cost of uniforms, books and other supplies needed for the Secondary Schools. Many soon become pregnant or are married off by their parents to ease the financial burden of supporting them. These outcomes are not wanted by neither the girls nor their parents, but poverty often force these choices. The school support program for girls helps many girls stay in school through the JSS (Junior Secondary School). This is the time when they are most vulnerable to pregnancy.

We also now see less of men beating their wives because the WAI program is teaching both men and women of the laws against this practice. The Chiefs and community leaders are leading the way in this

effort. Before now, no one in the villages knew about these laws. The police came to the community and talked to the people about these laws and men have stopped beating the women.

**APPENDICES.**

**APPENDIX I:** LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE YAP FOOD SECURITY ACTIVITY TIMELINE AND STATUS.

**APPENDIX II:** LIBERIA - FOOD SECURITY PRODUCTION – CROPS AND QUANTITIES HARVESTED

**APPENDIX III:** SIERRA LEONE – FOOD SECURITY PRODUCTION – CROPS AND QUANTITIES HARVESTED

**APPENDIX IV:** LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE – GENDER RIGHTS AWARENESS AND GIRLS’ SCHOOL SUPPORT ACTIVITY TIMELINE AND STATUS

**APPENDIX V:** LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE -GENDER RIGHTS AWARENESS AND GIRLS’ SCHOOL SUPPORT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**APPENDIX I**

**LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE: YOUTH AGRICULTURE FOOD SECURITY PROGRAM ACTIVITY  
TIMELINE AND STATUS JANUARY-DECEMBER 2022**

ACTIVITY	MONTH SCHEDULED	STATUS	COMMENTS
Awareness/Agreements/Baseline Data Collection	Jan	Completed in February	Well received by groups and communities with full participation.
Land Preparation	Feb- Mar	Completed	
Planting	Mar-Apr	Completed	
Crop Maintenance	May – Jun	Completed	
Storage Construction	Jan-Jun	Completed	
Train Store Managers	Feb	Completed	
Nutrition Training	May	Completed	
Home Gardening	May	Ongoing	Monitoring to March 2023. Normal dry season activity.
Harvesting/Preparation for storage	Nov-Dec	Ongoing	Carried over to 1 <sup>st</sup> quarter of 2023 (normal seasonal)
Group and Leader Training	Jan-Dec	Completed	Conducted during regular group meetings
Final Eval/ Reporting	Dec	Completed	Board and Staff led



**APPENDIX II**

**LIBERIA FOOD SECURITY PRODUCTION BY YOUTH GROUPS (2022)**

	<b>Old Force</b>	<b>Tappitta</b>	<b>FFDA</b>
<b>Number of Youth</b>	Men: 18 Women: 12	Men:12 Women:22	Men: 14 Women: 16
<b>Area planted (list crops) and Yield</b>	12 Acres-Rice, Cassava, vegetables in mixed cropping system	10 Acres Rice and vegetables, Interplanted	10 Acres Rice, corn, and vegetables interplanted
<b>Quantity harvested or expected</b>	30 Bags rice; 70 Bags cassava, 50 Bags vegetables	36 Bags Rice, 45 bags vegetable	40 Bags Rice; 55bags vegetables
<b>Use of harvest</b>	Rice-16 Bags of stored and 14 bags distributed. Other products-50% distributed to youth and 50% sold and funds set aside for food emergencies.	Rice-16 Bags of stored and 20 bags distributed. Other products-50% distributed to youth and other 50% sold and funds set aside for food emergencies.	Rice-24 Bags of stored and 26 bags distributed. Other products-50% distributed to youth and other 50% sold and funds set aside for food emergencies.
<b>Status of food storage construction</b>	Completed	Completed	Completed.
<b>Number of Demonstration Home Gardens</b>	8	9	7

**APPENDIX III****SIERRA LEONE FOOD SECURITY PRODUCTION BY YOUTH GROUPS (2022)**

	<b>Kalomp</b>	<b>Rogblan</b>	<b>Rokon</b>
<b>Number of Youth</b>	19 Men 11 Women	15 Men 15 Women	12 Men 18 Women
<b>Area planted (list crops) and Yield</b>	5 acres of rice, 2 acres of cassava	7 acres rice; 3 acres cassava and vegetables	6 acres rice
<b>Quantity harvested or expected</b>	50 bushels rice 30 bags cassava tubers;	30 bushels rice; 40 bags cassava tubers; quantity vegetables	40 bushels rice
<b>Use of harvest</b>	Rice-50% sold and 50% saved for seed bank.	Rice-50% stored for emergency or seed bank and 50% distributed to youth participants	Rice-50% stored for emergency or seed bank and 50% distributed to youth;
<b>Status of food storage construction</b>	Completed	Completed	Completed.
<b>Number of Home Gardens Established</b>	7	5	8

**APPENDIX IV**

**LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE: PROMOTING GENDER RIGHTS AND SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GIRLS  
PROGRAM ACTIVITY STATUS-JUN 22 TO May 2023**

ACTIVITY	MONTH SCHEDULED	STATUS	COMMENTS
Conduct Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshops for facilitators and staff	Jul 2022	Completed	By public agencies, police, activists.
Conduct community- based awareness sessions for men and women	Aug 2022- Mar 2023	Ongoing	Village based for women, men, local leaders.
Establish local monitoring, mediation and counselling committees.	Aug2022- Mar 2023	Ongoing	Led by staff and Board
Engage local stakeholders (parents, schools, community leaders to identify girls who qualify	June-Aug 2022	Completed	
Establish transparent process to select participants	Jul-Aug 2022	Completed	Led by WAI staff, school staff
Orientation for selected girls and distribution of uniforms, books, and school supplies	Aug 2022	Completed	Expectations, support services
Establish peer counseling and mentoring program for teenagers in high schools.	Oct 2022- May 2023	Ongoing	Older girls and women teachers act as mentors
Establish system for monitoring and reporting on progress of girls. Interventions as needed	Sep 2022- May 2023	Ongoing	Monitor and intervene as needed
Evaluation and Reporting	May 2023	Incomplete	Board and staff

**APPENDIX V:**

**LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE -GENDER AWAENESS AND GIRLS' SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM  
ACCOMPLISHMENTS 2022**

	<b>LIBERIA</b>	<b>SIERRA LEONE</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
<b># Village Based Awareness Sessions</b>	12	12	6 groups from 2021 - 22 and 6 from 2022-23
<b>Average Number of Persons Attending, by Gender</b>	36 Men; 68 women	35 Men; 130 Women	Village based sessions
<b>Number of Girls receiving School support</b>	90 (Including 45 from 2021)	75 (Including 30 from 2021)	15 from each participating village
<b>Age range of Girls receiving support</b>	12-20	12-18	Older girls dropped out earlier and later re-enrolled
<b>Number of dropouts</b>	5 (3 in 2021 due to pregnancy; 2 in 2022 due to illnesses)	1 (in 2022 due to pregnancy)	All expected to re-enroll.