

AGRICULTURAL MISSIONS, INC.

THE WEST AFRICA INITIATIVE

YOUTH AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

2021 REPORT

SUBMITTED TO

GROWING HOPE GLOBALLY

THE PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM (PCUSA)

WEEK OF COMPASSION

SUBMITTED BY

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INTRODUCTION:

This report presents the details of the 2021 program year of the West Africa Initiative (WAI) involving the six groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone supported by Growing Hope Globally (GHG), the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) and the Week of Compassion (WOC) of the Disciples of Christ, which focused on food security and gender equality. It should be mentioned that the WAI program is a multi-dimensional integrated community development effort which was initiated in 2009 and currently partners with 51 rural farmers' groups that are engaged in several other community development activities. At the end of 2019, there were 24 groups in Liberia with a total membership of 672 and 4700 direct beneficiaries, while in Sierra there were 27 groups, 864 members and 6650 direct beneficiaries.

BRIEF HISTORY AND GOALS OF WAI:

Following a two-year period of community assessments and planning, the implementation phase of WAI began in April of 2009 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 was an initiative of the PCUSA to assist both countries in the post-civil war reconstruction and rehabilitation process, designed and implemented by Agricultural Missions, Inc. in collaboration with the country-based partners mentioned above. The initial phase of the program was designed to improve food security through the stimulation of village-based food production, following the return of refugees and internally displaced persons after the civil wars ended. Within 2 years of its inception, this aspect of the program became self-sufficient with respect to providing inputs to local farmers and in the process, the initial farmers groups were organized. The WAI program then proceeded to address other community needs, 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 adopted in 2011 and have guided the program since that time. However, objectives and activities were developed on an annual basis which reflected the priorities for each year. This report focuses on the 2021 activities to address the problems related community-based food security and gender-based discrimination, supported by GHG, PCUSA and WOC, as detailed in the applications submitted to each of these organizations.

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Goals of the 2021 Program

The goals of the program in 2021, as described in the applications are:

- 1) Improving 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.
- 2) Provide livelihood opportunities in farming for the youth of the communities, in support of goal 1.
- 3) Promoting Gender Rights with emphasis on activities that address gender-based violence and provide educational support for girls enrolled in Junior Secondary Schools.

NOTE: WOC- a partner of WAI for several years- current priorities include improving the status of women and girls in the society, thus goal 3 was added in consultation with all stakeholders. This decision was made in consultation with country partners that:

- 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 applications but adds to some line items 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 with the YAP groups and communities, resulting in more efficient use of human and financial resources.

The related activities were implemented through the ongoing Youth Agriculture Program (YAP) and led by local community-based organizations in each country – the West Africa Initiative of Liberia (WAIOL) in Liberia and in Sierra Leone, the Village-to-Village Federation (V2V).

Context and Need:

Both countries suffer from chronic and recurring food insecurity on an annual basis, 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 chronic 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 -present) and climate change as manifested in the change in rainfall patterns. At the village level, the absence of adequate food storage facilities result 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.

With respect to gender-based discrimination, there are pervasive inequities rooted in historical, social, and cultural practices which severely limit the ability of women to gain access to educational and occupational opportunities. This prevents 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 the homes, but also in workplaces, schools and even places of worship. 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 in most cases. 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 causes for this situation. 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, and stereotypical perception 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 customary practices, the lack of awareness in the general population and lack of supportive social and legal services. In some cities and large towns such services are provided by the government departments and ministries and non-governmental organizations.

Groups and Participants:

There are six groups- 3 in each country, that began participating in YAP in 2021, as follows:

Liberia: Total 90 direct participants- 650 beneficiaries.

1. David-Ta Youth Group, David-Ta Village, Bong County. 30 members- 18 men and 12 women
2. Kerker-Ta Group, Kerker-Ta, Bong County. 30 members -10 men and 20 women
3. Kukatonon Group, Fetuah Village, Nimba County. 30 members -14 men and 16 women

Sierra Leone: Total 75 Participants -520 beneficiaries.

1. Ataya Base Farming Group. Masera Village, Lower Yoni Chiefdom, Tonkolili District. 25 members -10 men and 15 women
2. Kakamathor Youth Group. Kakathamor Village, Safroko Limba Chiefdom. 20 Youth - 10 men and 10 women

3. Sorbeh Farmers Group, Makai Village, Gbanti Chiefdom. Bombali District. 30 members 15 men 15 women.

For both countries combined, there are currently a total of 165 youth participants and 1175 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. Most of the increase was due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions imposed by the governments which resulted in many youths returning to their villages from the towns and cities. The number of participants has remained stable since the beginning of the program in January of 2021.

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

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: YOUTH AGRICULTURE FOOD SECURITY

Table I reflect the status of the end of planned program activities and timelines for both countries.

TABLE I

YOUTH AGRICULTURE PROGRAM ACTIVITY STATUS JANUARY-DECEMBER 2021

ACTIVITY	MONTH SCHEDULED	STATUS	COMMENTS
Awareness/Agreements/Baseline Data Collection	Jan	Completed	Well received by groups and communities with full participation
Land Preparation	Feb- Mar	Completed	Delayed by weather- completed in April
Planting	Mar-Apr	Completed	Delayed by weather- completed in July.

Crop Maintenance	May – Jun	Completed	Significantly impacted by heavy rainfall.
Storage Construction	Jan-Jun	4completed 2 Ongoing	Weather related (see below)
Train Store Managers	Feb	Completed	
Nutrition Training	May	Completed	
Home Gardening	May	Ongoing	Monitoring to March 2022
Harvesting/Preparation	Nov-Dec	Ongoing	Late harvest due to weather (See below)
Group and Leader Training	Jan-Dec	Completed	Conducted during regular group meetings
Final Eval/ Reporting	Dec	Completed	Board and Staff led

Additional Comments:

Higher than normal rainfall, in terms of duration and intensity, delayed many farming activities and the construction of the grain storage facilities. Although the delayed farming activities were later implemented without significant impact on yield, some activities could not be completed within the 2021 program year and will carry over into the first quarter of 2022. Most significant activities which will be carried over to 2022 are:

- Incomplete status of 2 storage facilities in Sierra Leone. In the Kakamathor group, the external walls are not finished as the high level of water in the river prevented the collection of sand which is need for this activity. However, the structure is being used in its current state as the interior has been completed.
- The walls of the Ataya Base store suffered total collapse during an unusually heavy and prolonged rainstorm and this group will need to re start this process in 2022.
- Harvesting and drying of rice in Sierra Leone was delayed due to extended rainfall in some areas of Sierra Leone. The post-harvest activities, prior to storage, were delayed and will extend into January of 2022.

- Monitoring and data collection of home gardens will continue to the first and second quarters of 2022.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES: PROMOTING GENDER RIGHTS AND SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GIRLS.

NOTE ON THE PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT (GENDER RIGHTS AND GIRLS SCHOOL SUPPORT):

Since WOC program year is from June 2021-May 2022 and funds for this aspect of the program were not released until the first week in June, the activities described in this report is for the first six months of this program and not for the full year.

The status of these activities are summarized in Table II. The planned activities, to date, have been completed with broad community and participation of the Boards of the local organizations in both countries.

Additional Comments:

- The training of trainers (TOTs) workshops in gender rights and awareness were designed to build capacity and enable the staff, boards, and facilitators to conduct the sessions at the village level. These TOTs were conducted by personnel from the various government departments, police and social development agencies and non-governmental organizations working on this issue.
- At the village level community awareness sessions were open to all. Men and local leaders were specially invited to attend.

PROGRAM ACHIEVEMENTS

Most of the goals and activities of the program established for 2021 have been fully achieved although many will continue given the nature of the program initiatives. Youth, group members and their families and communities will continue to benefit in future months and years in terms of increased food security and improved livelihood incomes for youth. In addition to the increased availability of food and community awareness in nutrition and issues related to rights of women and girls, the most notable achievements of the program are:

- Involvement and empowerment of youth in addressing vital community needs while advancing their own economic well-being.
- Empowerment of the communities in improving the foods security status through locally controlled and managed food production and storage.
- Building awareness of gender-based discrimination and the structural and practical barriers to the participation of women and girls in family and community life and possible ways of dealing with these problems.

TABLE II

PROMOTING GENDER RIGHTS AND SUPPORT FOR SCHOOL GIRLS -JAN 21 TO JUNE 2021

ACTIVITY	SCHEDULED	STATUS	COMMENTS
Conduct Training of Trainers (TOT) Workshops for facilitators, staff, and community leaders in Gender Based Violence Prevention.	Jul 2021	Completed	For staff, board, facilitators. By public agencies, police, activists.
Conduct community- based awareness sessions for men and women	Aug 2021- Mar 2022	Ongoing	Village based for women, men, local leaders.
Establish local committees to monitor incidents, promote mediation and provide counselling and advice to victims and perpetrators.	Aug2021- Mar 2022	Ongoing	Supported by staff and Board
Engage local community stakeholders (parents, schools, community leaders to identify girls who are in need and at risk for dropping out of school	June-Aug 2021	Completed	One group did have any girls who qualify. All other had 15 each
Establish transparent selection process and work with stakeholders to select girls for support;	Jul-Aug 2021	Completed	Involved PTA, heads of schools, parents, group members.
Orientation for selected girls and distribution of uniforms, books, and school supplies	Aug 2021	Completed	Expectations, support services reviewed,
Establish peer counseling and mentoring units for teenagers in	Oct 2021- May 2022	Ongoing	Older girls and women teachers
Establish system for monitoring and reporting on progress.	Sep 2021- May 2022	Ongoing	Monitoring of performance
Evaluation and Reporting	May 2022	To be done	

TABLE III

GENDER AWARENESS AND GIRLS' SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM

	LIBERIA	SIERRA LEONE	COMMENTS
Number of Village Based Awareness Sessions	12	12	6 groups from 2021 and 6 from 2020
Average Number of Persons Attending, by Gender /group	37 Men; 59 women	45 Men; 120 Women	Village based sessions
Number of Girls receiving School support	90	75	15 from each participating village-1 group in SL had no girls
Age range of Girls receiving support	12-20	12-18	Older girls dropped out and later re-enrolled

Tables IV and V present a summary of the achievements of the program, by country.

TABLE IV

LIBERIA FOOD SECURITY PRODUCTION BY YOUTH GROUPS

	David-Ta	Kerker-Ta	Kukutonon
Number of Youth	Men: 18 Women: 12	Men:10 Women:20	Men: 14 Women: 16
Area planted (list crops) and Yield	12 Acres-Rice, Cassava, vegetables in mixed cropping system	10 Acres Rice and vegetables, Interplanted	10 Acres Rice, corn, and vegetables interplanted
Quantity harvested or expected	36 Bags rice; 75 Bags cassava, 45 Bags vegetables	33 Bags Rice, 48 bags vegetable	28 Bags Rice; 64 bags vegetables
Use of harvest	Rice-16 Bags stored, and 20 bags distributed. Other products-50% distributed to youth and 50% sold and funds set aside for food emergencies.	Rice-16 Bags stored, and 17 bags distributed. Other products-50% distributed to youth and other 50% sold and funds set aside for food emergencies.	Rice-14 Bags stored, and 14 bags distributed. Other products-50% distributed to youth and other 50% sold and funds set aside for food emergencies.
Status of food storage construction	Completed	Completed	Completed.
Number of Demonstration Home Gardens	8	10	7

TABLE IV**SIERRA LEONE FOOD SECURITY PRODUCTION BY YOUTH GROUPS**

	Ataya Base	Kakamathor	Sorbeh
Number of Youth	12 Men 18 Women	10 Men 10 Women	12 Men 18 Women
Area planted (list crops) and Yield	4 acres of rice; 3 acres vegetable, cassava and potato	4 acres rice; 4 acres tomatoes, cassava, sweet potato (leaves)	4 acres rice; 3 acres cassava and vegetables
Quantity harvested or expected	500Kg rice; 30 bags cassava tubers;	500 Kg rice; 40 bags cassava tubers; quantity vegetables	470 Kg rice; 45 bags cassava; various amounts of vegetables
Use of harvest	Rice-50% sold and funds saved for use in emergency; 50% distributed to youth participants; 50% of other crops distributed youth; 50% sold and funds saved use in emergency	Rice-50% stored for emergency or seed bank and 50% distributed to youth participants; 50% of crops distributed youth and 50% sold and funds saved for food emergency.	Rice-50% stored for emergency or seed bank and 50% distributed to youth; 50% of other crops distributed to youth and 50% sold and funds saved for food emergency
Status of food storage construction	Not completed. Walls collapsed during heavy rain and wind event	Interior completed and in use, exterior not finished due to lack of sand – due to high water levels in rivers	Completed.
Number of Home Gardens Established	6	6	6

CHALLENGES AND HOW THEY WERE MANAGED

- As previously reported, the most significant challenge experienced at the beginning of the program was that of not being able to meet the demand for participation of the program in the communities. Due to the travel restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 control measures, many youths residing in urban areas returned to their villages and were in search of activities to occupy their time. This created an increase in demand compared to pre-pandemic times. In response, Staff decided to increase the number of participants to the extent possible within the financial and human resource constraints. This situation is expected to persist if the COVID-19 restrictions remain in place but is not expected to be a long-term challenge.
- Unpredictable weather in terms of rainfall patterns (frequency, duration, and intensity), driven by climate change, was a major disrupter of farming and related activities. This exacerbated the immediate food insecurity situation due to delayed harvesting activities. Not much could be done with respect to adaptation and mitigation for 2021. The excessive rainfall also caused delays in the construction of the storage facilities in Sierra Leone where two of the three units were not completed within the established time frame. This challenge is being addressed through flexibility in scheduling of activities and careful consideration of location of buildings such as storage facilities and adding resilient crops to the farming mix. In reality, not much can be done to change the rainfall pattern, in the short term, to favor rain fed agriculture as practiced in Liberia and Sierra Leone or any other country. Certainly, nothing can be done to adapt to or mitigate the impacts as far as 2021 is concerned. However, in planning the program for 2022, the following will be done:
 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 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.
 4. Institute adaptation and mitigation policies and practices to address the issue of climate change and its impacts.
- The deterioration of economic condition due to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the macro-economic policies of the governments resulted in inflationary pressures and increases in prices and transportation of building materials for stores and travel costs for staff and

facilitators. This resulted in increases of 18 – 30% in building materials, compared to the budgeted amounts. To meet this challenge the staff and groups 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 stores, with 75% partial payment. This was only available where a group member, staff or board would guarantee payment.
2. Future sales of current year's harvest. Some of the 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. This was very difficult given that most members live below the poverty level.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The most important lesson learned is that the groups and youths are eager to engage in farming. It is widely believed that the youth were eager to migrate to the cities and towns in search of employment. Given the opportunity and support to earn livelihoods through farming, most youth will remain in their rural communities rather than move to cities. At the village level youth are eager for opportunities to deliberate and engage in decision making, which have been usually denied them by tradition.
- Local communities have little or no control over the major factors that affect their food security, namely climate and macro-economic conditions. The unpredictability in weather is expected to continue in the coming years. However, rural people are resilient and will devise strategies to mitigate unfavorable conditions to improve food security in their communities.
- 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. This was necessary due to increased costs because of inflation and supply chain issues.
- 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 tables and earlier sections of this report indicate that the established goals were accomplished, for the most part, although there were weather related delays for some activities. These will be completed in the first two months of 2022. 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.
- Active 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 establishing 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 reduce dropout rates.

STORIES

ALL I WANT TO DO IS TO GO TO SCHOOL

My name is Sama Conteh, and I am a student of 18 years old and all I want to do is to go to school and learn. I live in the Village of Kakamathor in the Tonkolili District of Sierra Leone and attend Junior Secondary School. I am now in grade JSS2 and hope to go on to Senior Secondary School next year and then to the University. I want to become a teacher or a nurse.

I am the oldest of seven children with three brothers and three sisters. My father passed away in 2015, leaving my mother to take care of us by herself and it is very hard for her and for all of us. There was no money for school fees, uniforms, books, and other things I needed, so I was forced to drop out of school and missed a whole year of attendance.

I am now back in school because of the support I received from the Village to Village and the West Africa Initiative Program. I received school supplies, encouragement, and advice.



Sama Conteh



Girls of Rimdin Group, Sierra Leone with School Supplies



Girls of Ronetta Group, Sierra Leone with School Supplies.

YOUTH KUU BUILDS GRAIN STORAGE AND COMMUNITY

In Liberia, a KUU is a group of people who take turns in working together on each other’s farms or other projects requiring physical labor such as clearing and preparing land, building homes and working on community projects. The youth of the Tappita Farmers Group have organized a Kuu to build the food storage facility in this community. “We are members of Tappita and we

organized a Kuu to work on each other individual farms, but now we are doing the same to build the store house”, stated Mulbah Kollie, a youth member who is part of the Youth Agriculture Program as he worked on the roof of the store. “While we are working, many members of the community come out to help even though they are not part of the KUU”.

Daniel Flomo, the Kuu leader further explains: “Our staple food for daily consumption is rice, but we earn money from growing and selling vegetables and the store will help us to grow more rice now that we have a place to keep it. We will have more to eat even in the hungry season”



Member of Tappita Group KUU working on Food Storage Facility.