

The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and Partners launch the Economic Stabilization and Rapid Recovery Seed Intervention, a Post Ebola Initiative for Liberian Farmers

As Vice President Joseph N. Boakai calls for farmers to begin showing appreciations to the donors by engaging in committed farming activities, while the MOA provides training to the benefiting farmers on the new technologies.

By Elvis H. Sirleaf



Liberia's Vice President Joseph Boakai Presents the first bags of certified seeds to Farmers at the Launch of the Economic Stabilization and Rapid Recovery Seed Program in Bong County

Liberia's Vice President Ambassador Joseph N. Boakai has stressed the need for Liberian farmers to begin showing appreciation to donors by engaging in committed farming activities that will help alleviate the food insecurity situation in Liberia. Ambassador Boakai said while development partners were making strenuous efforts to see Liberia improve in several key areas, as evident by the numerous forms of support and aids that come into the country, it was the responsibility of the beneficiaries to deliver on what is expected of them. He said farmers should not always call for help from people, but engage in activities that will multiply the seeds given them to ensure the availability of more seeds for subsequent planting seasons.

Speaking when he officially launched the Economic Stabilization and Rapid Recovery Seed Intervention in Gbarnga, Bong County on Friday April 17, 2015, the Liberian Vice President called on the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) to go beyond just providing seeds to ensuring that the benefiting farmers are knowledgeable of the improved and certified seeds they are receiving.

Ambassador Boakai said there are several smallholder farmers that are trying on their own, but the MOA will need to develop more forms of training and other programs that work best in the interest of improving production, as well as ensuring follow up by extension agents.

He stressed the need to include Micro Loans in some of the agricultural programs, something he believes will greatly empower farmers and improve farming activities and production in Liberia. “Empowering our own people will go a long way as foreign aids will not always be around. Donors and supporters will have to go elsewhere to others that have bigger needs”, he said.

Ambassador Boakai who himself is a farmer thanked the World Bank, ECOWAS and other development partners for ensuring that the seeds were delivered on time, as timeliness is a major concern in agriculture. He said the seeds will bridge the gap created in the agricultural sector by the outbreak of the Ebola Virus in 2014.

The Liberian farmer also stressed the importance of the kinds of seeds that are brought into the country. “We might be bringing in seeds that will compete with what we have here and destroy them. The foundation seeds we are receiving we are receiving should be properly managed so we can have a reliable sources of seed production, ensuring that they are unadulterated and are proper seeds for planting”. He pointed out.



Liberia's Vice President Joseph

In remarks, the Senior Country Economist at the World Bank Monrovia office Timothy Bulman said the success story should be the raising of productivity of Liberian farmers to ensure that they can compete with the best in the world. He said before the Ebola outbreak, some key challenges existed in the agricultural sector. But it was now the challenge of the MOA and extension workers to work together and along with farmers to bring the best technologies and techniques to the farmers and raise their productivity to measure up to global competitors.



Timothy Bulman

World Bank Senior Country Economist

According to the World Bank official, the seeds are part of a chain of solutions to see farmers do better. The sharing of seeds from other WAAPP participating countries under ECOWAS also promotes regional transfer of technologies. The arrival of the certified and foundation seeds from across the region demonstrated what the regional project [WAAPP] has been trying to achieve; which is to make it easier to transfer technologies among West African countries. He also disclosed that the World Bank is supporting recovery projects through the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP) as well as direct financial contributions of a million dollars grant to the Ebola Fund.

Mr. Bulman congratulated the government of Liberia for passing into law and printing into hand bill the ECOWAS protocols on seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, something he said has reduced the legal barrels on movement of these items.

He said reducing the cost on transportation by fixing the roads, helping farmers will operate as productively and efficiently as possible, and lowering the cost of production so that they can get a better price for their labor are examples of how the World Bank is supporting farmers in rural Liberia.



Agriculture Committee Chair at the House of Representatives Hon. Fofi Bimba

For his part, the Agriculture Committee Chairman at the Liberian House of Representatives Hon. Fofi Bimba called on the government of Liberia to create agricultural villages around the country to take what he called “the angry people to work and make them more productive to society”. Commenting on a recent incident in Paynesville City, Montserrado County that saw a police station being burned down by angry bike riders protesting the alleged killing of a colleague by a police officer, Representative Bimba said the incident could have been avoided if government had a program that incorporated people into vast agriculture activities somewhere in a remote county. He named to provision of attractive packages as stimulus such a plan.

Noting that this is an idea also shared by the Liberian Vice President, he said now was the time to engage our donors and partners to support us in creating farming villages in the various counties. He also stressed the importance of seeds to agricultural transformation and its distribution. “Maintaining the seeds will require a good and functional research and development drive, as well as a strong and functional multiplication program which will best be implemented on farm trials by the farmers themselves. He also called on the MOA to use the cooperatives available in the counties for the distribution of these seeds that have been made available.

The Lofa County Representative said he believes the Ministry of Agriculture is already on the right path of implementing the Post Ebola Economic Revitalization Program with the existence of several key projects of the Ministry’s Program Management Unit that are in the various counties. He called on the MOA to be the monitor and evaluator, while the farmers be the major players.

The Assistant Minister for Expenditure at the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) who represented his office emphasized the involvement of the Liberian government in bringing the certified and foundation seeds into the country. He disclosed that a portion of the seeds was bought by the government of Liberia, despite all the challenges the Ebola outbreak delivered. Minister Alieu Faud Nyei thanked Africa Rice Center and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for facilitating the smooth transfer of the seeds to Liberia. He further admonished the partners, especially the World Bank to fast track its support in this intervention, to ensure that all of the seeds by the sector are actualized in a timely manner.



Hon. Alieu F. Nyei
Assistant Minister for Expenditure,
Ministry of Finance and Development

Minister Nyei noted a concern of the government was how to get the seeds to the end users in time. According to him, if the seeds didn’t get to the farmers in time for the planting season, the entire exercise will be a waste. “The MOA has to look for an efficient way to implement this, so that our efforts will not go in vain”, he said.



Dr. Ernest Asiedu of CORAF/WECARD

Dr. Ernest Asiedu who represented the regional coordinating body of WAAPP Projects CORAF/WECARD expressed his organization’s appreciation for the level of cooperation received from various ECOWAS countries and governments.

Dr. Asiedu recounted the several hours of planning and preparation it took to get to what he called the “end line of launching the seeds”. “ECOWAS has asked that we host a formal program of this kind in every country that we deliver these seeds, I am so happy that Liberia has set a good example”, he said.

Also speaking at the launching program in Bong County was the head of the Farmers Union Network (FUN) who called on Liberians to begin to see agriculture as a business. “Graduating from shovels and hoes farming to machines is a way to go”, she said. Representative Josephine George-Francis named the creation of loan schemes, good road networks among other things as important parts of the chain that we should create if we want eat and export Liberian produce.

The Lawmaker congratulated the government for ensuring that an act to make the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) an autonomous agency was followed through. According to her, we can talk about and get all we need, but if we do not have an independent research institute, we are wasting our time as it is very vital to agriculture. She said restoring CARI to get the relevant actors including scientists in the soonest possible time will greatly improve things and avoid farmers going to internet and other sources for solutions to difficulties faced on their farms.



**Representative Josephine George-Francis
Head, Farmers Union Network (FUN)**



Group Picture of Vice President Joseph N. Boakai Dignitaries and other participants at the Launching Program

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak posed huge social, economic and political challenges on the country's development pathway especially farmers in the rural areas where the epidemic was high. This situation became more complicated as a result of government instituted regulations to combat the disease. The outbreak also disrupted rural rice farming activity in Liberia, cause a significant declining trend in Inland



Partial view of the rice stored at the LPMC warehouse

valley swamp cultivation due to the fear of catching fever as being one of the obvious symptoms of Ebola virus and caused the disappearance of extension experts from the farming communities. Transportation of agricultural Inputs and implements were also affected as it was on a standstill as a result of the restrictions on movement. The Outbreak in Liberia forced the government in the containment effort of the disease to impose restrictive measures on travelling within, the country. The borders with neighbouring countries were also closed as a result of the outbreak.

The EVD created hunger amongst Liberians and farmers in all parts of the country. Due to this hunger, seeds distributed to farmers were consumed thus creating a huge gap in seeds availability for farmers for the next planting season. This gave rise to the strong need for intervention in the agricultural sector to prevent drastic decline in the gains made by the West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP) project in strengthening smallholder farmers through various interventions of the World Bank, donor partners and the government.



Vice President Boakai Inspects the Seeds

It was against this backdrop that the World Bank as one of its many Ebola response support to the agriculture sector, supported the provision of planting seeds to ensure the availability of seeds in the coming years. Burkina Faso send 250 Metric tons of certified rice seeds, the Republic of Guinea which was greatly affected by the Ebola Virus send 231 Metric tons of certified rice seeds and Mali send 79 Metric tons of Maize. The republic of Niger send in 100 metric tons of Cowpea, the Federal

Republic of Nigeria send 60 Metric tons of Certified seeds and the Republic of Togo supplied 40 Metric tons of Foundation Seeds.

Those benefiting from the distribution of the seeds include WAAPP Farmers Based Organizations (FBOs) that are currently being supported by the project in the 8 project counties, Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that are leading Innovation Platforms in the various counties as well as other FBOs supported under other Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) Program Management Unit (PMU). Excluding the WAAPP, there are five other projects of the PMU with which the WAAPP has created synergies to ensure complementarity instead of duplication or activities. These projects go beyond WAAPP project counties and have their own client base. Distribution of seeds through these projects will ensure that farmers across the country will have access to improved technologies distributed under the WAAPP.

Individual medium and large scale Farmers that are not members of any FBO and have been engaged in rice production for at least two years will also benefit along with Universities and Community Colleges with agriculture departments.