

THE WORLD BANK IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT MISSION (ISM) SATISFIED WITH ACHIEVEMENTS MADE BY WAAPP LIBERIA PROJECT, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF THE EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE OUTBREAK

Ministry of Agriculture Praised on its Coordination Efforts...

By Elvis H. Sirleaf



L-R: WAAPP Liberia Coordinator J. Cyrus Saygbe, Sr., MRU Coordinator Kenyeh Barley, World Bank Regional TTL Dr. Abdoulaye Toure, World Bank Co TTL Dr. Abimbola A. Adubi, CORAF Consultant Dr. Lucas Okapa and World Bank Consultant Lovetta Gleekia-Kelulah

A World Bank Implementation Support Mission (ISM) to Liberia says it is very satisfied with the level of achievements and gains made by West Africa Agricultural Productivity Program (WAAPP) Liberia Project, even in the midst of combatting the deadly Ebola Virus Disease that broke out in 2014 in the region. The Delegation headed by the World Bank Regional Task Team Leader (TTL) Dr. Abdoulaye Toure spend a week in Liberia beginning April 27, 2015, evaluating the level of work the project, which works with the Ministry of Agriculture, has done so far.

Dr. Toure said the Bank was greatly impressed with the work that had been carried out, especially in the rural parts of the county. “The picture of Liberia out there is very different. It is one that shows people still dying in the streets as a result of the Ebola Disease and no one wants to come here”, He said.



L-R: Deputy Minister, MOA Sizi Subah, Agriculture Minister Florence Chenoweth, World Bank Co TTL Dr. Abimbola A. Adubi and CORAF/WECARD Consultant Dr. Lucas Okapa

The World Bank Executive noted that though a lot more work will be required of the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and projects like WAAPP that come to create opportunities for smallholder farmers and eventually help the food insecurity issue the country

is faced with, the current effort being put together by the MOA and its development partners, as channeled through the WAAPP project has to be appreciated. He said even while people were fighting Ebola, the ministry and partners remained committed to providing farming implements when it brought in over 1000 Metric tons of foundation and certified rice seeds, as well as maize and cowpea for Liberian farmers. This, he said, was a move to fill in the gap created when farmers and extension workers abandoned their fields during the peak of the Ebola outbreak.

Speaking at the beginning of the Mission during a courtesy call to the Minister of Agriculture Dr. Florence Chenoweth at her Gardnersville office, the Co Task Team Leader Dr. Abimbola Adubi said, this Year’s mission demanded the presence of the Regional Task Team Leader, as he needed to see first-hand what was actually being done in country compared to what was being reported. He said the mission intent was also to spend time reviewing the process of creating a viable extension system, and how the seeds brought into the country will get to the farmers to begin what he called “a standardized multiplication system”, something the Bank believes will ensure there are sufficient seeds to cover the county, and subsequently support other countries, including those that are supporting our present efforts. This will include the creation of a Seed Board that will certify what is being grown in Liberia.

Dr. Adubi also named a road map to making the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) located in Bong County, a Regional Research Center of Excellence and the absorbing of students presently on WAAPP scholarship in various African universities as discussion for the Mission’s Visit. He then disclosed that the

Bank, through WAAPP Liberia, is committing to paying salaries for the 37 returning students for a year minimum, if the government can create the working environment.

In response, Agriculture Minister Dr. Florence Chenoweth thanked the visiting delegation for braving the storm to come to Liberia, as well as caution them to carefully tour the fields with high respect for the measures that have been put in place to combat the Ebola Virus. She then thanked ECOWAS, Africa Rice Center and CORAF for the coordination Liberia enjoyed during the seeds transfer.

Dr. Chenoweth said there was a huge need for the seeds importation as the Ebola outbreak greatly affected farming activities in Liberia, and most of the seeds that were distributed to farmers were consumed during the outbreak. Also, a very large cassava multiplication field supported by WAAPP was burned down in an unexplained manner, causing great losses and a huge decline in cassava cuttings production.



**Agriculture Minister
Dr. Florence A. Chenoweth**

The Liberian Agriculture Scientist lauded the creation of the seed board that will conduct certification, but called on the creators to make it more viable. On the issue of absorbing the returning students, Dr. Chenoweth said that was a key activity for the MOA, as it currently lacks the adequate capacities to move its planned activities. “The Problem with implementing this may be creating the space as the MOA is binding by the Civil Service mandate that keeps staff on the job. Removing people to put in new people who have come back, even though with new and improved knowledge and skills, is a bit complicated”, she said. She also noted that retirees cannot leave their jobs as the government has not settled their benefits. As a result, they have to stay on a occupy spaces that could be filled by these young scientists that are coming back home. “Government is trying to deal with this gently, as any forceful, massive change will be a recipe for disaster”, she said.

The Agriculture minister, flanked by several Deputy and Assistant Ministers, said she was glad as many of the young scientists who returned earlier have done well with their studies, and have remained committed to coming home and working in Liberia even if it required taking up assignments in rural parts of the Country.

She called on development partners to join her dream to take CARI back to when it used to be internationally recognized. She said Research and Extension should now put emphasis on making and improving CARI and not just studying.



**Japanese Grant Coordinator for MRU
Kanyeh Barley**

The Coordinator of the Japanese Grant for Mano River Countries Madam Kanyeh Barley disclosed that she has been heading a team from her organization that was in the country touring WAAPP interventions in the South Eastern part of Liberia prior to the coming of the rest of the ISM mission members.

She said her team was impressed with the level of work, even though she could clearly see the impact cause by the Ebola Virus Disease on farming activities.

Madam Barley said though a lot of the seeds giving to farmers for planting were consumed, some tried as much as possible to preserve some seeds that they were now using to begin planting.

The MRU coordinator however noted that the arrival of seeds from other West African countries was timely and called on the Ministry of Agriculture to speed up the distribution process to compliment efforts already being exerted by struggling farmers.

She also called on the MOA to begin considering a move of disaggregating the data collected on rice and cassava. This, she said will help her organization better understand what is actually happening in the rice sector, as the Japanese Grant is for support to increase rice production in Mano River Union countries which include Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

CORAF/WECARD which is the regional coordinating body of the WAAPP projects was represented by Dr. Lucas Okapa who disclosed he joined the ISM to Liberia representing his organization, and will be keen on the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities of the project. Dr. Okapa, a retired employee of the World Bank and now a Consultant of CORAF/WECARD was one of the crafters of the WAAPP Liberia project in 2009, then he served as Co Task Tem Leader for the WAAPP Nigeria project.



**CORAF/WECARD Consultant
Dr. Lucas Okapa**

The CORAF/WECARD consultant noted that Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is very important in the WAAPP implementation as it shows how much progress is being made, how much needs to be made or what needs to be adjusted. “And in any project implementation, you need to answer those questions to be successful”, he said.



World Bank Co TTL Dr. Abimbola A. Adubi & Regional Task Team Leader Abdoulaye Toure with Farmers’ Children and the Newly Harvested Cassava

Visiting one of the Innovation Platforms in Senjeh District, Bomi County, Dr. Abdoulaye Toure echoed his impression at the sight of the massive cassava multiplication sites that the team toured.

He said there were huge production activities being carried out under the WAAPP interventions that needed to be talked about in all sectors of the country. According to Dr. Toure, this will dispel the notion that donor money sent to the country for agriculture was not being properly managed.

Lifting the tubers from a freshly harvested cassava, Dr. Toure questioned the farmers on their own impression of the new technologies that had been introduced to them. The farmers’ response was no surprised as the new cassava cuttings and method of planting introduced was yielding 3 to 4 times more than the traditional cassava previously planted by Liberian farmers.

Dr. Toure who himself tasted the finished product of processed Gari packaged by a local processing center said, the Platform will have to look into having a leadership structure that is functional and holds regular meetings, as well as work on creating a strong and viable extension system as the visit revealed that is one of the weaknesses in the Liberian agricultural sector.

He also encourage the IP and project to work towards identifying a sustainable Funding Mechanism for the Platform, all this he said are lessons learned from other countries.



Asst. Supt. Development
Ernest Davis

The Assistant Superintendent for Development in Bomi County who formed part of the tour Hon. Ernest Davis after welcoming the team to his county said he has followed the WAAPP activities in Bomi County since its inception, and there has been a wonderful relationship with the WAAPP team on ground, as well as central office.

WAAPP is being implemented through an international agriculture organization Welthungerhilfe (WHH) (Formerly German Agro) in Bomi County.

In a formal presentation of activities and achievements, as well as challenges, the Team Leader on the WAAPP Project William Marshall said, working with its local partner Human Development Foundation (HDF), WHH has been engaged in building the capacity of farmers and organizations as well as the relevant actors along the cassava value chain, improving their knowledge, skills and competence in the new technology of cassava production and processing. “WHH has also contributed to the impact of training and information dissemination of cassava base production system and value chain development, as well as the establishment of Innovation Platforms in three districts in the county” Marshall said.

The Co Task Team Leader who is based in country revealed that WHH has been doing exceptionally well with their implementation. Dr. Amimbola Adubi said not only is it the county leading the process in creating and strengthening a functional Platform among the cassava counties, it has incorporated a local processing group called Youth for Positive Change (YPC), the producers of the famous Bomi Gari into platform activities.

Dr. Adubi said unlike other implementing partners who are taking the multiplication of rice and cassava under the WAAPP project as business where they can come and make money for themselves, WHH was making the Bomi County Interventions its own. “This is something that should be lauded, and hopefully, other partners who are lingering behind can take up the Bomi County practice”, he said.



Welthungerhife Team Leader William Marshall Making the Presentation

The ISM mission also included visits to offices of implementing and development partners working along the WAAPP project. One of such visits took the team to the head office of OXFAM, one of the implementers of WAAPP interventions in the South East of Liberia. There, Dr. Abimbola Adubi briefed the OXFAM team on the ISM visit and asked for updates from field activities, including challenges faced so that the team can find a way forward.



The Meeting Held at OXFAM’s Office in Congo Town, Monrovia - Liberia

According to the Monitoring and Evaluation officer of OXFAM, the engagement with WAAPP Liberia was based on the establishment of functional Innovation Platforms within each project county where Oxfam is implementing on behalf of

WAAPP. Mr. Samuel Komoulu said this included the construction of 20 improved rice kitchens, and the provision of rice mills for those kitchens. He said of the seven of the 20 kitchens have been fully completed with machines installed. “The contract also includes the establishment of 4 demonstration plots in two counties, namely; Grand Gedeh and Rivergee”, he said. He also disclosed that one of the plots is fully completed, while two are about 70%. The other one, he said, is completely undone in Rivergee County.

According to Mr. Komoulu, three platforms have been set up in each of the counties and farmers have been trained though those platforms on the new methods of farming the platform promotes. Samuel said OXFAM was now looking into how best the support mechanism among all actors within the platform can be properly coordinated and enhanced. He also named the construction of dams to help distribute water to the various demonstration plots and the bringing together of farmers under schemes that will strengthen production and provide avenue to access loans as well as creating market for produce as parts OXFAM has infused in the platform formation.

Another of such visit took the team to the central office of the Food and Enterprise Development (FED) of USAID in Monrovia. FED has worked with the Ministry of Agriculture since in came into Liberia after the civil war ended.

Africa Rice Center (Africa Rice), the organization leading the multiplication of rice under the WAAPP Project along with the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI), made separate presentations through their representatives. Africa Rice head of Rice Sector Development in Liberia Dr. Innousa Akintayo who is also charged with the responsibility of multiplying 40 metric tons of foundations seeds that have come into the country under the Ebola Rapid Response Seeds Transfer said he is presently working with the departments of extension and technical services at the MOA to multiply these seeds and produce more certified seeds.

He said he will be working with other organizations like USAID/FED who have the required land space prepared for multiplication.

The Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) which is also multiplying rice and cassava cuttings in Bong County, Central Liberia made two separate presentations on both value chains at the Monrovia office of the World Bank.

The Mission also visited the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning in Monrovia and held talks with acting minister Dr. James Kollie, briefing him on all the Mission had gathered on its visit. Dr. Abimbola Adubi and Dr. Abdoulaye Toure named capacity building as a critical part that needed attention. They said the support the project has been providing the Research Institute in Bong County needed to add other elements. The World Bank Executives disclosed that Liberia was not initially selected as one of the countries with a strong research institute, but with the pace at which the project is picking up activities, especially with the forms of support given to CARI, getting there is only a matter of time. The Task Team Leaders again acknowledged that the extension system of Liberia was very weak, and hoped that with the coming of students that have been trained abroad, a more rebuts research and extension system can be put in place.



Acting MFDP Minister, Dr. James Kollie and World Bank Regional Task Team Leader Abdoulaye Toure at the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning in Monrovia

Acting Minister of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) Dr. James Kollie in response said; in order for the country to move forward, agriculture will have to be taken more seriously, as it is the factor that is driving the economy of most developed and developing nations today. Minister Kollie said whenever he sees an

agriculture instrument that he believes will bring positive gains, he does everything he can to fast track it. He also noted that agriculture holds the greatest promise for employment, as it is not just the farming, but all the downstream value addition activities that can provide job opportunities.

Dr. Kollie said the government, through its purse (the MFDP) will continue to support agriculture activities whatever way it can, as it is a promising area that will bring sustained development. Speaking to the Maputo Declaration that calls for national governments to spend at least 10% of its annual budget on agriculture, Minister Kollie said this was a bit difficult as there are other sectors like education, defense, health and others that called for certain percentages, and if all those demands are treated as requested, it will put a huge strain on the national government. He however promised that the government is still committed to gradually increasing the annual agriculture budget.

He said the MFDP has put in an account, 2 million dollars to help support farmers after the Ebola Virus disrupted their farming activities. Dr. Kollie said the money is available to the MOA which has begun drawing down when it purchased some of the seeds that came under the special Ebola response for Liberian farmers.

The Mission's visit was concluded with a briefing meeting with the Minister of Agriculture Dr. Florence Chenoweth and a press conference that saw Minister Florence Chenoweth and Dr. Aboulaye Toure respond to questions from local journalists who were present.

The ISM is hosted twice every year to review progress on WAAPP Project activities and make adjustments where need be. This is the 4th ISM since the project was officially launched in November, 2012.



Final Wrap Up Meeting at the Ministry of Agriculture Main Office in Gardnersville, Liberia