

**Sustaining Livelihood Development Outcomes in Liberia:  
An In-Depth Look at Opportunities and Challenges in USAID-  
Funded NGO Implementation**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The US Government is the largest bi-lateral donor to Liberia, evidence of a long and long-fraught legacy of colonization, Cold War interest, and US agricultural policy in foreign affairs. Thus, NGOs funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) represent the vanguard of development in Liberia. However, given the infrastructural and educational scars slowly healing from decades of civil strife and warfare, plus the remoteness of Liberia's rural communities, NGOs operating in Liberia may have limited access to replicable idea transfers and lessons from USAID programs that have found success in similarly difficult country contexts.

This paper leverages comparable in-depth case studies to identify relevant strategies to address gaps in a given NGO's program design and management. Applicable lessons from case studies are further bolstered by theories on fostering rural local institutions and innovation in rural settings. Remedies are considered in light of low-level equilibrium traps that otherwise inhibit an NGO's ability to achieve and scale optimal success for poorest beneficiaries.

The resulting lessons (referenced by number of appearance in the document) are arranged to address four key challenges identified in this author's review of a USAID-funded NGO project's midterm evaluation of impact and operations in Liberia. Lastly, the paper concludes with considerations for implementation that link the recommendation directly to the identified problems. The challenges and recommendations are summarized in brief, below.

### ***Improved coordination and technical capacity among farmers remains tentative.***

- *(R7) Plan for intensified activities relating to improving the governance capacity of farmer cooperatives, by surveying existing coops to identify and replicate good practices.*
- *(R11) Encourage more open knowledge sharing amidst program participants through "learning tour committees" that travel to capture and disseminate farm successes. Ghana's University of Sustainable Development and USAID Liberia's scholarship program "Excellence in Higher Education for Liberian Development" are accessible and relevant academic resources and potential partners.*
- *(R9) Develop a new coordinating body for farmer cooperatives, to enable higher levels of business functions across the broadest range of cooperatives.*
- *(R3) Distribute grant funds to organized groups that demonstrate feasible income-generation plans and readiness, rather than to individuals.*

***While NGO procurement of small-holder cassava crops successfully demonstrates demand for indigenous cassava, poorest farmers remain weakly linked to the value chain.***

- *(R1) Track beneficiaries of supplementary food distribution of US-soy blended commodities into farmer cooperatives.*
- *(R2) Stimulate demand that elevates a diverse range of indigenous fruit/vegetable horticulture, as well as poultry or other protein sources (e.g. fish, snails, legumes, oil seeds such as sesame, or tree crops such as cocoa or cashew).*
- *(R5) Nurture programmatic linkage that connects targeted groups of farmers, in contract management-capable cooperatives, with World Food Program activities in Liberia.*

***Upgrading through Value-added agro-processing is promising, but reliance on US-donated soy threatens sustainability.***

- *(R2) Stimulate demand that elevates a diverse range of indigenous fruit/vegetable horticulture, as well as poultry or other protein sources (e.g. fish, snails, legumes, seed oils such as sesame, or tree crops such as cocoa or cashew).*
- *(R6) Develop and disseminate key messages about dietary diversity to enhance nutrition using locally sourced recipe innovations based on indigenously available food items.*

***Sustainable livelihood development remains elusive for women agro-processors.***

- *(R8) Investigate beneficiaries' perceptions of the sustainability of their activities early on, prior to the closing year of the program.*
- *(R10) Intensify focus on managerial capacity and entrepreneurial mindset, especially among women entrepreneurs and job-holders.*
- *(R4) Strengthen the financial role of Susu clubs, farmer coops, and women's business teams through education for group savings goal-setting and village savings and loan associations.*