



N. Farese, Liberia

GROWING A FUTURE

Liberian Youth Reflect on Agriculture Livelihoods

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the next few decades, agriculture will continue to be the dominant sector of employment and a vital source of labor for most young people in Africa. Harnessing youth's potential to participate meaningfully in their food systems, from production to plate, has the potential to increase their productivity and revenues, as well as ensure the resilience and food security of their households. On the other hand, the general consensus in the research literature on youth perceptions of agricultural production, both in Liberia and across Africa, is that the majority of youth would like to transition out of the sector. Broad sweeping generalizations often highlight that youth are disinterested in agriculture, turned away by the difficulty of the work, social stigmas and the challenges faced in earning a suitable income.

At the same time, 'youth' are not a homogenous group. In Liberia, there has been a gap in research that seeks out youth's own voices to elaborate on their attitudes towards agriculture, their ambitions and the challenges they face. In order to engage youth's potential, the diversity of their aspirations need to be understood better, as do the ways in which household status and access to resources may impact youth's perceptions across the agricultural sector.

In response to the observed opportunities to engage youth in agricultural production and along various value chains, as well as the clear gap in research in Liberia that captures the voices of youth themselves, Mercy Corps undertook a research study in Bong County Liberia in August 2016.

Data were collected over a period of two weeks in 16 diverse sites throughout the county, including both peri-urban communities and rural communities that face challenges due to isolation and lack of infrastructure. A total of 32 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with male and female youth between the ages of 15 and 24 (16 male FGDs, 16 female FGDs), 31 community elders and 9 youth were interviewed individually, as were 8 key informants drawn from representatives of NGOs, local government officials and local agriculture experts.

The study focused on the following areas of inquiry:

- The perceptions, attitudes and aspirations that Liberian youth have towards agricultural livelihoods;
- The constraints and barriers these youth face and, conversely, the opportunities available to them in considering their longer-term engagement in the agricultural sector.
- The ways gender impacts these attitudes, perceptions and differences in access to, and control over resources and decision making among male and female youth;
- The perceptions, aspirations, and challenges faced by rural and, at times, isolated youth in relation to agricultural livelihoods; and
- The differences between the aspirations and perceptions of youth themselves, with regards to agriculture, and the perceptions of and support offered by their elders, policy makers and development agencies.

The overarching goal of the study was to gain a better understanding of the roles youth play, or could potentially play, in the agricultural development of Liberia with the primary purpose being to provide concrete recommendations for various stakeholders engaging youth in the sector.

Major Findings

Perceptions of Youth Opportunities in Agriculture: Youth's perceptions and aspirations around agriculture are diverse, both across communities and in each distinct community in Bong County. In general, however, youth expressed pride in the contribution that their work provided and felt that agriculture offered a positive status in their communities and among their peers. Even those that lamented difficulty of the work and lack of financial returns highlighted the dignity of working the land and producing food. The positive outlook and importance of agriculture was framed not only as a function of income but also a factor in averting hunger, as many consume a portion of the food they produce. Youth, elders and key informants also stated that agriculture represents both a realistic opportunity for climbing out of poverty, and is, in fact, *'one of the surest ways of getting rich.'* Youth recognize that agricultural production affords opportunities beyond survival and can point them towards a path of success in improving their futures.

Perspectives on Success: Youth and elders made clear distinctions between the potential for success offered by annual crops (peppers, bitterball, rice and cassava) versus that of longer term tree crops (palm, rubber, cocoa). Production of annual crops is perceived primarily as a means of subsistence for many farmers and a common endeavor, which people may have respect for but recognize has limited potential. Youth and elders noted successes in vegetable farming in their communities but seem to consider that potential with these crops beyond subsistence level, is limited and only possible through involvement in other areas of the value chain – transport, processing and input supply. The greatest potential for success in agricultural production is considered to be in tree crop farming.

For many youth, especially those currently at the subsistence level and focused primarily on rice and annual vegetables, the goal is to leverage agriculture as a springboard for making other investments, whether this be in education or in productive assets to establish income generating activities and small businesses (stores, motorcycles, trading). For these youth, their primary hope in agriculture is to earn enough income to help them expand into other livelihoods opportunities.

Major Barriers and Constraints to Engaging Youth in Agriculture: Youth in Liberia face numerous barriers and constraints to engaging in agricultural livelihoods. Some of these are factors that are outside of their control and impact their capacity or willingness to engage. Other barriers originate from the youth themselves and are due to their own attitudes and perceptions including: youth's relationship to status; their traditions and various ambitions with regards to education and other careers; or their perception of agricultural work as 'drudgery,' labor intensive and risky.

Education Barriers: The lack of options to continue schooling in rural Bong County is significant and the continuation of education was the most frequently expressed aspiration of both male and female youth in this study, with no notable difference by gender or among age cohorts. This creates a situation in rural areas in which youth who desire to advance their education beyond what is available locally are forced to leave their village for a time.

Lack of Infrastructure: Youth and key informants emphasized that lack of roads, transportation, storage facilities, and challenging market conditions increase the risk of expanding agricultural enterprises and present a formidable barrier to success.

Land Access and Tenure: Youth mentioned three primary paths to obtaining land for cultivation: inheritance, renting or purchase. For both male and female youth, the primary path to accessing land is by leasing the

land through an agreement with the community or a landowner, which many youth said is easy. However, Leases are often short-terms and leasing conditions remain restricted to producing annual crops with limited potential for increasing revenues. The aspiration of producing tree crops seems out of reach for many due to restrictions placed on use by the landowners, which prohibit longer-term planning strategies.

Both male and female youth recognized the distinct disadvantage women face with respect to long-term land tenure given local inheritance norms which prioritize males. Female youth also mentioned that they do not make decisions on their own regarding how land is used in their family, thus limiting the possibility to diversify crops and buffer against shocks. Male youth, on the other hand, are more likely to be able to inherit land and may have more agency over land use and planning as they are expected to hold this land in the future.

'Quick Money Syndrome': Many youth prefer 'quick-money' and feel farming is too slow in bringing benefits in comparison to other work such as gold mining or commercial bike riding. Earning money daily adds to social status, the ability to partake in social functions, and there is a genuine need for consistent income to address their food security. Youth are faced with the challenge of choosing between investing in their land with delayed returns or seeking other work that can provide 'quick money' for immediate daily needs.

Protection: While relatively few protection risks were mentioned, girls consistently mentioned the risks of being beaten or raped. Female youth who supplement their farm work by cooking and fetching water for male youth near gold mining areas are at increased risk. Sexual and Gender Based violence is a well-documented, overarching concern in Liberia, making protection mainstreaming essential of any youth programming. This is especially important for programs aiming to open up economic opportunities along the value chain which increase girl's mobility, and thus, their risk.

Youth participate extensively in and receive labor and social benefits from communal work systems.

The vast majority of youth in communities visited during the study participate in a **kuu**: an informal, self-organized, social organization that farms cooperatively on the lands of its members and their families, and in some cases, sells their collective labor to farmers outside the group. Kuu are typically organized by sex, age and physical capacity. Males are more likely to be involved in clearing bushes, fencing and other dangerous or strength-demanding work while female youth weed, plant rice and seedlings, harvest crops and perform duties in kuu similar to what girls typically perform in households, including cooking and fetching water. The kuu system has multiple benefits for youth ranging from improved labor productivity to social benefits. Youth also report that agricultural work through the kuu system enhances unity and promotes social cohesion within the community as they help each other on farms, and share the food and capital that the kuu earns. The system encourages them to socialize while working and facilitates knowledge sharing around agriculture and other topics.



Ed Brooks, Liberia

Summary of Recommendations

Target Agriculture Interventions to Youth's Specific Asset and Capacity Profiles: Youth are not a homogenous cohort and generalizing solutions across the youth demographic may provide ineffective solutions as well as lead to missed opportunities. Programs must be designed with diverse offerings that can engage youth with various degrees of technical skill, differing access to assets and finances and different aspirations with regards to agricultural engagement and their futures. Special attention should be paid to identifying strategies whereby youth who are engaged in subsistence agriculture can improve their productivity. Equally important is the identification of entry points along various value chains where agencies can facilitate successful youth to invest into agriculture.

Mainstream Education and Skill Development Throughout Youth Agricultural Programs: Education and skill development are the highest priorities for youth in Bong County. Agricultural programs will be both more attractive and beneficial for youth if opportunities for skill development are incorporated and opportunities for agricultural education are offered outside the formal educational system. Skill development must focus on a diversity of topics, such as technical, business and personal skills. Appropriate and up-to-date agricultural production techniques and technologies must be taught and disseminated in a way that encourage youth to discover, test, apply and innovate. Involving youth in interactive, participatory mapping of food systems, markets and market trends will train them to better understand high return opportunities, how markets function, and related risks. Sensitization on gender roles should be embedded within all training exercises, and empowerment of young women should be prioritized to build their confidence to dream, and make livelihoods decisions that will allow them to achieve beyond what they think is possible.

Improve Accessibility of Land for Youth in General and for Girls in Particular: Socio-cultural norms that determine land inheritance and make land access for women difficult may be difficult to challenge. At the same time, land access through lease was identified as a viable option for both male and female youth, even while these agreements often come with challenging restrictions. There are opportunities to facilitate improved contracting arrangements between youth and landowners to make more land available for both male and female youth, reduce risks and increase lease duration. This facilitation can include leasing community land, which can be re-generated through appropriate technologies.

Promoting Integrated and Efficient Farming Systems: Annual crops, which can produce lower but quicker profits, can be strategically integrated with longer-term perennial tree crops and livestock, allowing youth to stagger income streams while providing for their immediate income needs. The promotion of these systems will only work with youth who have long-term access to land, thus requiring programs to address gender and age barriers to land use. Programs should also consider integrating livestock into farms given the existing market gap and need for relatively limited land size, especially for poultry.

Leverage and Reinforce Kuu Networks Both Economically and Socially: Agricultural programs should leverage local structures involving youth, such as the Liberian kuu system, and the social capital they hold. It is equally important that programs avoid disturbing these structures by offering financial incentives, which may draw youth away from kuu participation, and thus potentially destroy access to social and financial capital, and safety nets. Kuu groups may be empowered to advocate for policy changes or community investments in education and infrastructure, and could be supported to organize themselves into more formalized cooperatives with broader reach and responsibilities.

Improve Infrastructure: Stakeholders should work to advocate for and invest in infrastructure development that would remove transportation, storage and market barriers, thus improving returns on youth's labor and capital investments in agriculture.

Recognize the Importance of Year-Round 'Supplementary Work': Youth have needs for year-round income. To improve the prospect of agriculture, it may be important to help youth build, manage and strengthen their 'portfolios' of work by mapping income streams during various times of the year. Supporting this approach rather than promoting a singular focus on agriculture can stabilize youth's income while simultaneously encouraging them to remain in agriculture.

Identify and Mitigate Protection Risks for Young Women: Livelihoods programs which expands women's and girls' opportunities may also expand their mobility and relationships both within their community and beyond. It is important to work with girls to identify risks that might arise from changes in relationships and mobility, as well as identify potential solutions.



INTRODUCTION

Agriculture will continue to be the dominant sector of employment for most young people in rural Africa over the next few decades as well as a vital source of labor in local food systems. Already, most young Africans work on farms, with 89 percent of rural young people employed by their families or self-employed.¹ Harnessing youth's potential to participate meaningfully in these food systems, from production to plate, can increase productivity and revenues, ensure the resilience and food security of their households as well as improve national productivity and progress more broadly. Young people bring energy and innovation into the workforce. When their willingness to contribute is matched with opportunity, they can have a transformative impact on economic growth and social development.²



“The numbers of young people in many developing countries today are at unprecedented highs, in both absolute and proportionate terms. This potentially gives rise to a demographic dividend, an opportunity for rapid growth and development brought about by a bulge in a nation’s working age population.”

— Vargas-Lundius R. and Suttie D. Youth: investing in young rural people for sustainable and equitable development. IFAD. 2014

Young African farmers can and will play an important role in ensuring their food security – however, they face many challenges. Young people on farms are poorly educated—just over 30 percent have completed primary school. When compared to adults, youth are more often employed under informal and casual contracts. They earn less, work more hours, and have weaker social dialogue.³ They are often struggling with underemployment during the slack season⁴, and thus, must rely on seasonal migration within their own country or abroad to cope.

Since 2001, Mercy Corps has been working with youth in Liberia to build livelihoods opportunities. Work on the ground and numerous agricultural and livelihoods assessments have confirmed that if youth are to play a meaningful role in their household economies as well as support the development of community and national markets, more needs to be done to seek their perspectives and engage them in the agricultural sector. At the same time, the general consensus in the research literature on agriculture in Liberia is that the majority of youth would like to transition out of the sector due to being either disinterested in agriculture, the difficulty of the work, social stigmas, or the challenges faced in earning a suitable income. While these sentiments have indeed been observed, youth are not a homogenous group. The failure to meet youth needs in agricultural development is, in part, due to gaps in understanding the complexity and diversity of youth's individual aspirations as well as the impact household status and resources may have on youth perceptions and aspirations in the sector.

¹ World Bank survey of 10 African countries.

² Younger household heads who are engaged in farming tend to derive a higher income from their agricultural activities than older household heads, suggesting that adapted agricultural training and services targeting rural youth can be highly effective in raising agricultural productivity (VAN DER GEEST, K., *Rural youth employment in developing countries: a global view*, FAO, 2010)

³ FAO and ILO, *Guidance on how to address rural employment and decent work concerns in FAO country activities*, 2011

⁴ Reportedly, underemployment is more prevalent among youth than adults and is more prevalent in rural than urban areas (WORLD BANK, *Youth and Employment in Africa: the potential, the problem, the promise*, 2009).

› *"Only 3% of Liberian youth express any interest in farming, the average age of farmers is now over 55 and urban migration continues unabated." (Liberia Youth Fragility Assessment, 2009, USAID)*

Over the past three years, Mercy Corps' [PROSPECTS](#) program has learned much about the livelihoods, engagement in civic, social and market systems and the barriers Liberia's youth face. While youth are motivated to make a positive impact in their lives and in their communities, there is a segment of the youth population that do not believe they are primarily responsible for their well-being. Many youth believe that parents or government are responsible for ensuring their success. This demonstrates the need to confront the psycho-social roots of youth dependency and promote youth ownership over their livelihoods. Youth also lack confidence in market systems and feel disenfranchised by an inability to engage in the labor market, noting that employers tend to hire family members or friends. Youth confidence in the market system needs to be rebuilt to ensure that the

skills young people have can be adequately utilized. Despite these challenges, PROSPECTS has seen that youth are motivated to improve their livelihoods and living conditions when receiving targeted support that aligns with their vision for their future. While PROSPECTS work is primarily in the peri-urban/urban context, these findings hold significant implications for working with youth in agricultural livelihoods.

There are, however, clear gaps in research and program-based learning in Liberia to capture the voices of rural agriculturally engaged youth and there is a need for better understanding of the roles youth play, or could potentially play, in the agricultural development of their communities and their country. In response to program experience, observed opportunities to engage youth in agricultural livelihoods and the need to take a youth-centered approach to this work, Mercy Corps undertook this research study in Bong County⁵⁶⁷⁸ in August 2016, with primary purpose being to provide concrete recommendations for various stakeholders engaging youth in the sector.



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⁵ Bong country, located the north-central portion of Liberia, is the third most populous county in Liberia with a population of 333,481 (Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services [LISGIS], 2011)

⁶ 18% of the county's population are youth between the age of 15-24, of whom 54% female and 46% male. (Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services [LISGIS], 2011)

⁷ A food security, agriculture and livelihoods assessment undertaken by Mercy Corps in Bong county in 2016 found a number of major shocks and stresses which hinder food security and agricultural productivity including: lack of roads, poor soil quality, lack of agricultural inputs and training, climate change, unwanted pregnancies and gender based violence, and threats of lawlessness⁷. (Mercy Corps. *Food Security, Agriculture and Livelihoods in Liberia: A Qualitative Assessment in Rivercess, Grand Bassa and Bong Counties*. 2016.)

⁸ WFP's 2015 Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) showed that Bong had the third highest number of food insecure people in the country by county. *World Food Programme (WFP). Emergency Food Security Assessment: Liberia. (2015).*

METHODOLOGY

Study Objective

The overarching goal of this study is to gain a better understanding of the role that youth (ages 15-25) play, or could potentially play, in the agricultural development of Liberia. Specific objectives are to:

- Gain a better understanding of the perceptions, attitudes and aspirations that Liberian youth have towards agricultural livelihoods;
- Understand the constraints and barriers these youth face and, conversely, the opportunities available to them in considering their longer-term engagement in the agricultural sector. Both endogenous factors – those which youth themselves can influence and overcome – and exogenous factors – those structural factors which are generally outside of youth’s control –will be identified;
- Understand how gender impacts these attitudes, perceptions and differences in access to, and control over resources and decision making among male and female youth;
- Understand the distinct perceptions, aspirations, and challenges faced by rural and, at times, isolated youth in relation to agricultural livelihoods;
- Understand the relationships between the aspirations and perceptions of youth themselves, with regards to agriculture and the perceptions of and support offered by their elders, policy makers and development agencies.

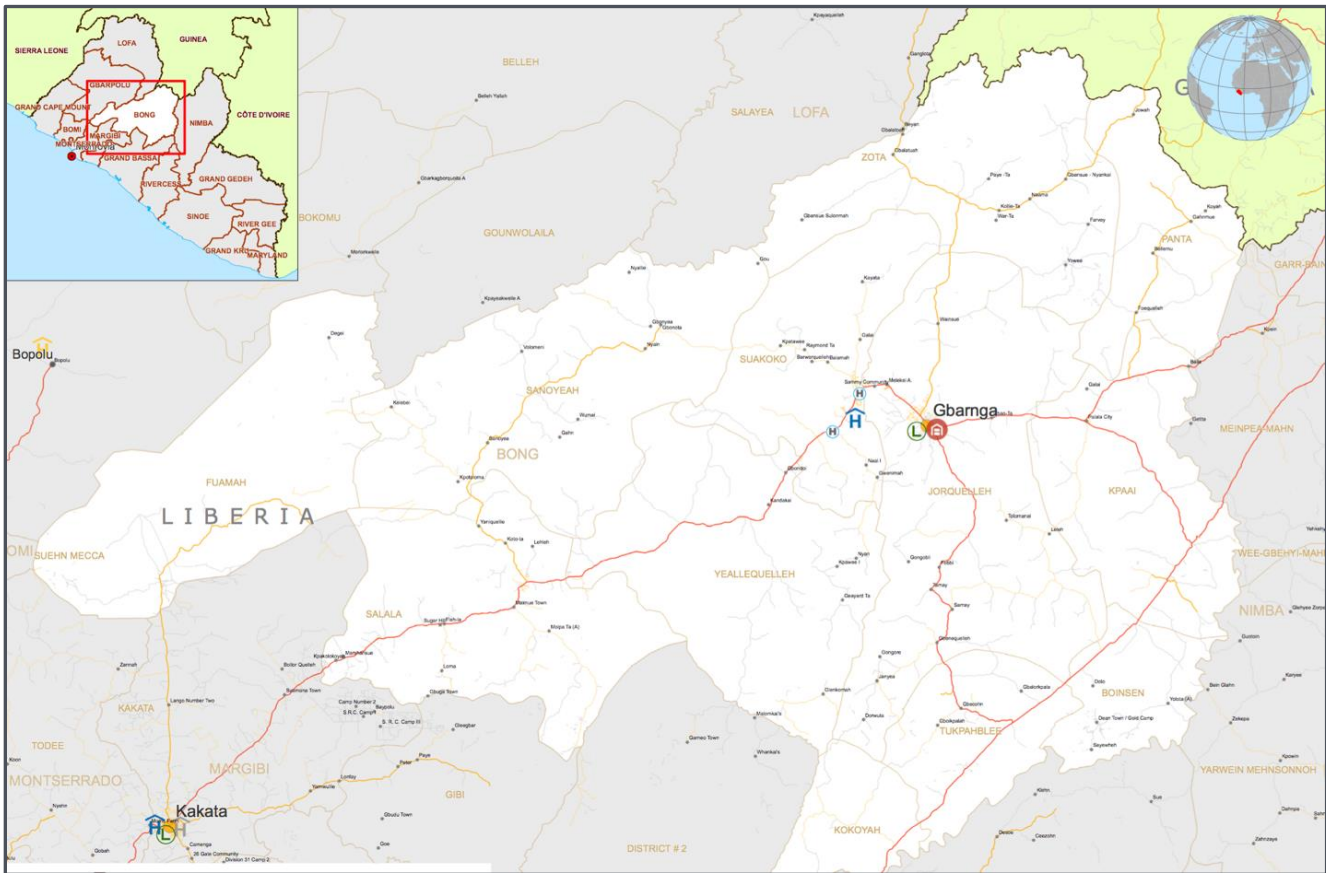
While the research focuses primarily on aspects of on-farm production - the majority of youth’s knowledge and experience in agriculture is in this area - all aspects of agricultural livelihoods along typical value chains in the study area were explored to better understand youth’s relation to agricultural opportunities, which may arise beyond their family farms.

Study Population

To address the above objectives, the study population was defined as male and female youth from 15-24 years of age living in rural and peri-urban centers of Bong County. Bong County was selected as the focus of the study given it is one of the most important counties in Liberia for agricultural production, with extensive crop and livestock contributions and great potential for further development in the sector. The county is also home to communities with a range of levels of access to services. Some communities are close to Monrovia and the educational resources of Cuttington University, while others may only be reached on bad roads that become difficult to impassable during the rainy season. Furthermore, the choice of Bong County builds on Mercy Corps institutional capacity given the agency has an office in Gbarnga where it has invested in improving on youth employment and empowerment.

This age range of 15-24 was selected based on the desire to have enough specificity within findings to meaningfully inform future program design. In Liberia, youth are defined as those between the age of 15 and 35, while standard international definitions often refer to youth as between 15-24 years. These definitions encompass wide age ranges with varying life-stages, perceptions and experiences. In the Liberian context, this includes youth who grew up both pre-war and post-war; a 15 year-old boy is quite different than a 33 year old woman. It is thus difficult to make broad policies and statements on such a large, heterogeneous group. Given the nature of the research questions, the focus on perceptions and attitudes, and the desire to

make actionable recommendations to inform programmatic strategies, the research team selected the age range to reflect a cohort of youth emerging into more adult roles within agriculture.



Sampling

Prior to the fieldwork, 16 field sites were purposively selected to capture experiences of both rural and peri-urban youth. Data was collected both in more accessible or 'connected' sites as well as those sites which were considered by Mercy Corps staff to be isolated, or less connected to roads, markets and services, in order to capture distinct vulnerabilities of rural-isolated youth (See Annex 1). Sites were selected to maximize heterogeneity and diverse perspectives within the range of youth experiences in various contexts and their extremes in Bong County. In selecting youth for the focus group discussions (FGDs), enumerators were instructed to seek out participation and contributions of male and female youth in different life periods within the identified age ranges, including those still in school/out of school, without children/with children and not married/married so as to try to eliminate bias by excluding certain youth. Community elders were identified through discussions with youth and leaders while in the community and were selected for interviews based on their experience working with youth either as parents or in their roles in education, community leadership or agriculture.

Data Collection Tools and Process

Data was collected in the field during the first three weeks of August 2016 by four female and four male enumerators, divided into two independently working teams. Four data collection tools were utilized during the study, including a Focus Group Discussion Guide, an Elder Interview Guide, a Youth Semi-Structured Interview Guide and a Key Informant Interview Guide. Enumerators were trained on the use of these tools and the recruitment of study participants over the course of two days, including one day of practice and field-testing.

Once in the field, each team of enumerators was responsible for conducting two focus group discussions, one with male and one with female youth, as well as two semi-structured interviews (SSI) with community elders each day. While the definition of youth used in this study was age 15-24, FGDs were conducted with age ranges of 15-19 and 20-24 in order to encourage participation of younger youth and capture distinct experiences of each age group within this wide range. Enumerators alternated between these two youth cohorts on a day-by-day basis (day 1 - ages 15-19; day 2 - ages 20-24; etc). Finally, youth FGD participants were asked to identify youth in their communities who are successful in agriculture. Enumerators conducted a minimum of two semi-structured interviews (SSIs) with the successful youth over the course of the fieldwork, resulting in 8 youth interviews. In observation of local customs, consent for participation was sought from the chief or elders as well as from actual participants.

Finally, researchers conducted seven key informant interviews (KIIs) in Monrovia and Gbarnga. These individuals were selected based on their experience working in agriculture, working with youth and their unique insights into the study's areas of inquiry.

Data Collection Summary	Team 1 Male	Team 1 Female	Team 2 male	Team 2 Female
Totals	8 Youth FGDs 8 Elders SSIs 2 Youth SSIs	8 Youth FGDs 8 Elders SSIs 2 Youth SSIs	8 Youth FGDs 8 Elders SSIs 2 Youth SSIs	8 Youth FGDs 7 Elders SSIs 2 Youth SSIs
Total All	32 FGDs with Youth: 16 Male FGDs with a total of 156 male participants 16 Female FGDs with a total of 163 female participants 31 SSIs with Community Elders 9 SSIs Youth Success Stories or Sector Stories			

Data Management and Analysis

Responses to all focus group and interviews were recorded during sessions in the field. At the end of each day, focus group discussions and community interviews were reviewed and discussed by enumerators to verify data and further elaborate on the responses. Finally, enumerators consolidated the data and recopied responses into data templates. At the end of the data collection process, final data templates were typed into Microsoft Word and provided to the researchers for coding and analysis. Coding was done systematically through screening data according to pre-established codes during the design phase based on the study objectives as well as the emergent themes that arose during the data analysis process.

Study Challenges and Limitations

Although efforts were made to reduce bias in site and participants selection, a number of limitations were faced during the study:

- Ideally time and resources would have allowed for conducting FGDs with each youth age cohorts in all sites visited. However,,travel time to and from remote field sites and the need to control data quality by ensuring daily review and write up of FGDs and interviews meant enumerators could only conduct one FGD per community. Thus, enumerators alternated daily between the two age cohorts (ex. Day 1, Ages 15-19; Day 2, Ages 20-24);
- Certain youth may have inadvertently been underrepresented: for example, any youth who had already left the village, either for schooling, or for livelihoods activities.

Youth who were not currently involved in agriculture may have potentially been excluded as contacts in sites were told beforehand that the research pertained to agriculture. While the contacts were not told to exclude such youth, it is possible that youth who are less involved in agriculture and/or kuu systems (see findings) were not approached or self-excluded themselves.

DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

Perceptions of Youth Opportunities in Agriculture

Perceptions and aspirations around agriculture among the youth in this study are diverse. There was no consensus among youth that they either reject agriculture and want to leave it behind or that they would like to stay in agriculture and improve their skills. In most cases, groups of youth in a village expressed multiple, and often mixed, feelings towards agriculture.

In general, youth felt that agriculture offered a positive status in their communities and among their peers. They expressed pride in the contribution that their work makes to their lives and even to their country. Most youth, even those that lamented difficulty of the work and lack of returns, highlighted the dignity of working the land and producing food.



Rose Hemmer-Vitti, Liberia


“Farmers control the bellies of everyone including presidents... with this power, working in agriculture/farming gives you not just money but also knowing that some of the most powerful people in society are consumers of your products gives extra joy.... ‘Farmers are the ones who provide food for the world. There is a local belief that all farmers will go to Heaven.’”

— Female FGD, Tokpaipolu

“When farmers here go on strike and stop supplying their produce to the local market, the whole community would suffer from food shortage. So people definitely respect farming here.”

— Male FGD, Shankpalla

Elders also consistently expressed a positive outlook on agricultural livelihoods. Most stated that agriculture was highly respected in their community: ‘Everyone does it’; ‘It is the way that people take care of themselves’; ‘Why should people look down on this - it is highly respectable work.’ Elders, for the most part, reported that they encourage their children to participate in agriculture and this was confirmed by youth themselves.



“The girls stated that parents encourage them to farm because it is a way of preparing them for marriage. One girl narrated that her mother would say to her ‘good husbands look out for girls who know how to farm well, so start your own farm this year.’”

— Enumerator Report from Female FGD, Gbamekollie


This willingness of youth and encouragement of elders to engage in production arises, at least in part, due to the perception that despite the challenges, agriculture still represents the best, if not only, opportunity to earn an income and provide food for their families. Many respondents inferred that they are simply not in the position to reject this work. Not only are there few options in rural areas but the importance of agriculture is not only a function of income but also a factor in hunger as many consume a portion of the food they produce – production consumption is valued if not essential.

Youth also spoke of extensive challenges throughout the value chain. Agricultural production work was referred to as dirty; the hard physical labor makes one older and sick; the hard labor is often not compensated, or the compensation comes late; the challenge of lacking skills and inputs; and the risk of failure due to weather. Other challenges related more to gaps within the value chain, such as the lack of infrastructure and difficulty to connect with profitable markets: youth mentioned the spoiling of food one cannot sell in markets because there are no buyers and the inability to transport the products to where buyers are; unpredictable prices which often result in losses; and the poverty, debt and uncertainty farmers and their families face. These challenges create clear barriers towards engaging in the sector and substantiate youth’s reluctance to invest time and efforts.

Success


There are also those who recognize that agricultural production affords opportunities beyond survival and can point them towards a path of success in improving their futures. Youth, elders and key informants related that agriculture represents both a realistic opportunity for climbing out of poverty, and is, in fact, *‘one of the surest ways of getting rich.’*

Youth and elders make distinctions in the potential for success offered by annual crops (peppers, bitterball, cassava and rice) vs that of longer term tree crops (palm, rubber, and cocoa). Production of annual crops is seen primarily as a means of subsistence for many farmers and a common endeavor which people may have respect for but recognize has limited potential. Youth and elders noted successes in vegetable farming in their communities but seem to consider that potential with these crops beyond subsistence level is primarily possible through getting involved in other areas of the value chain – transport, processing and input supply. Potential for greater success in agricultural production is recognized to be in tree crop farming.



“Youth view tree crop farming (cultivation of rubber, cocoa trees, oil palm, etc.) positively because owners of tree crops are rich. On the other hand, they also see farmers of rice, cassava and vegetables as poor people because of their vulnerable appearance in the community. They usually run out of food stock annually and go looking for loans or beg around the community.”

— John Pewee, district leader/elder in Bencoma village




“Tree crop farming is considered as the leading money making sector in agriculture. This is particularly true when scale is considered in tree crop farming. But small scale rice and vegetable farmers are looked down upon because they are always looking poor and dirty.”

— David Tuimamea, youth leader in Fokorlleh village


Youth and elders alike face specific barriers to expanding into large scale tree crop farming. First and foremost, without agency and power to determine how land is used, it is not usually possible to invest in tree farming as land leases are restrictive and planting trees is oftentimes not allowed. Even when trees are allowed, there are barriers related to fast-money or quick-money ‘syndrome – youth are more interested in crops that will result in quicker harvests and income generation. Also, livelihoods focused around tree crops may be uncertain as markets change – while rubber used to be a lucrative investment, rubber prices are currently down and thus it has fallen out of favor, whereas palm is seen to have more potential at the moment. Cocoa is seen to have potential as well, though people mentioned there were no buyers in the country at the moment and that cocoa had to be transported to Guinea.

Numerous examples of success in farming were mentioned, some citing youth who leveraged their success to diversify their productive assets out of agriculture while others invested their profits in larger scale production including tree crops or developing other opportunities in agricultural value chains to add value to their products.



“James Flomo, (currently) a 36 years old man, first started by cultivating peanuts and other vegetables. He later went into planting sugar cane. The sale of his produce has led to him reinvesting his money in a sugar cane factory where he processes sugar canes into cane juice, a local alcoholic beverage in Liberia. His annual income was estimated to be around USD \$9000 in 2015, two times that of top level middle incomers in Liberia. All of this has attracted more respect for James Flomo.”

— Male FGD, Garmue



“At 25 years old Guoguo, a 9th grade student, was advised by his wife to drop out of school in favor of getting involved in gardening (producing bitter ball and pepper). He yielded to her advice and soon became the highest producer of pepper and bitter ball for the following three years. When Guoguo and his family generated more money, they bought farm land on which they planted rubber. Furthermore, he built a shop and opened a big business. He also bought a car and even moved his family to Miamu, a large city. Though Guoguo did not complete high school, he currently earns more money in farming and business than some of those who are college graduates. He even contracts people to work on his farm. As we speak, he now has people employed working on his rubber farm.”

— Male FGD, Tokpaipolu

Success in agriculture is not only seen as a scaling up and expansion of agricultural livelihoods. For many, especially those currently at the subsistence level and focused primarily on rice and annual vegetables, the goal is to leverage agriculture as a springboard for making other investments, whether this be in education or in assets to establish income generating activities and small businesses (stores, motorcycles, trading). Their primary hope in agriculture is to earn enough income to help them expand into other livelihood opportunities.



“Agriculture can help young people buy other things such as a car or motorcycle... One youth in the community named Ballah has been successful in agriculture. He plants cocoa and plantain, and was able to buy a motorcycle and build a shop in his town.”

— James Sackie, Elder in Shankpala village

While it is not unanimous that people are excited to expand their agricultural activities, it is notable that this ambition was shared by many elders and youth. Some express the need to scale their current production, while others want to plant tree crops. They also recognize their vulnerability to price shocks and the necessity to diversify agricultural production and livelihood portfolios to protect their incomes. Some also expressed a desire to hire workers to alleviate their labor burden and to put future investments and efforts in capturing more profit along the value chain whether this be in processing (cassava, palm) or obtaining assets that allow them to be involved in transport and input supply chains.



“Moses Togbah started with planting oil palm and bought 2 rice mills following harvests and sale of the palm products. From his investment, he has built a mansion and sent his 4 children to school and he is now a senior student at the University of Liberia.”

— James Kerkulah, Elder in Shankpala village

Supplementary Work

Youth in the study consistently reported needing to supplement their agricultural work with other activities to generate sufficient income throughout the year. The work varies by location and their proximity to rivers, gold mines and markets. Some youth, especially girls, are restricted by their household duties and focus their additional income generating activities close to their family – other youth, both male and female, may travel further for a period of time. This finding is reinforced by those of Mercy Corps’ youth livelihoods program in Liberia, which found that over 30% of youth are reliant on more than one type of income source. Within the massively informal labor market, youth are forced to seek a diverse array of income sources to survive.⁹

⁹ To find out more about Prospects Liberia and mixed livelihoods visit <https://prospectsliberia.com/2016/01/07/mixed-livelihoods-and-complex-livelihoods-in-liberia/>

During the rainy season, male youth living close to the St. Paul and St. John rivers may be involved in small scale fishing as well as transporting people and goods across the rivers by canoe. Male youth may also be involved in hunting frogs or snails in the forest and selling them for profit. Other work done almost exclusively by male youth include labor in construction, digging latrines and water holes and loading and unloading trucks with dry goods or building materials. Both male and female youth earn money from selling dry goods (slippers, vita/ Maggie cube, toothpaste, clothes). These goods are either bought outright from Guinea or other local markets and sold in their communities, or taken on loan for a set price and sold in various markets at a slight mark up. Finally, in some villages youth also report working in gold mines, especially during the dry season, with men doing more physically challenging work and women supporting the workers by cooking and fetching water.



Rose Hemmer-Vitti, Liberia

“A lot of youth make money from the gold mine. We dig in the dirt to look for gold or dive in the river, collect the sand from the river bottom and bring it on shore to look for minerals (diamond, gold, etc.).”

— Male FGD, Nyalenta

While the amount of income generated by these activities varies depending on the type of work, multiple youth mentioned that the amount earned from these activities is minimal compared to that earned from agriculture. Thus, the discussions seem to indicate that this additional work represents efforts to stabilize personal income and household economies rather than opportunities to transition to more lucrative livelihoods. These findings only superficially reflect the work youth engage in to supplement agricultural activities and do not do justice to the breadth of current knowledge on youth livelihoods more broadly- in-depth analysis on this topic can be found in Mercy Corps’ *Advancing Youth Project Labor Market Assessment*¹⁰ for Liberia.

Major Barriers and Constraints to Engaging Youth in Agriculture

Constraints and barriers to engaging youth in agricultural livelihoods, whether in production or along the value chain, can be grouped into two broad categories: **exogenous factors**: factors that are outside of their control and impact their capacity or willingness to engage in agriculture; and **endogenous factors**: factors that originate from the youth themselves, largely focused on youth’s own attitudes and perceptions (Okunola, 2013)¹¹. While youth’s own perceptions cannot be entirely isolated from the socio-cultural system

¹⁰ Mercy Corps, EDC and YMCA Liberia. *Advancing Youth Project: Market Labor Assessment*. 2013. http://idd.edc.org/sites/idd.edc.org/files/Advancing_Youth_Project_-_Labor_Market_Assessment_Report.pdf

¹¹ Okunola, A. *Towards Sustainable Youth Engagement with African Agriculture: Challenges and Strategies*. African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific - AFSAAP 36th Annual Conference – Perth – Australia – 26-28 November 2013 Conference Proceedings. (2014)

they evolve in, these two distinctions are useful in that they can indicate leverage points for programing to address the barriers. For example, this can be through appropriate modalities targeted to behavior change and developing agency of individuals, working on relations within households and communities, or addressing broader structural issues whether these be in infrastructure or policy.

Elders, and indeed many youth, consistently stated that the challenges faced by both youth and elders in the agriculture sector are the same. This may be true with regards to certain challenges such as land fertility, labor, access to technology and inputs and broader structural issues related to markets, transport infrastructure and storage constraints. However, youth, as a function of their age and, to some extent, their gender, also face specific issues in household and community relations, which impact their capacity to utilize productive assets (land, capital) to initiate and expand agricultural activity. Because youth are moving through a period of life where they are taking on more responsibility for themselves and making more decisions about their future, they are also confronted with numerous pressures and competing options, which many elders have either already faced or indeed given up on – whether to start a family, to continue their education or try to change their lives in ways their parents were not able to.

ENDOGENOUS & EXOGENEOUS FACTORS

***Endogenous forces** - These constraints center on youth's perceptions and attitudes, though, at times, are shaped by policy structures, cultural norms and external conditions. These factors focus on personal agency and community and household relations that impact youth's own world-view and how various social (peer groups and elders) and educational networks (formal schooling and media) help shape their relationship to agriculture. These social and educational networks help influence whether youth are interested (or disinterested), confident (or doubtful) and positive (or negative) towards the sector. In Liberia, these endogenous factors discussed in the previous section, include youth's relationship to status, their traditions and their education and careers. The perception of agricultural work as 'drudgery,' labor intensive and risky, by youth, their peers and some elders may influence youth to move out of the sector as well.*

***Exogenous, external forces outside of youth's control** - These constraints (the primary focus on the section below) often arise from formal or informal structural factors involving infrastructure and include: land access and tenure, education barriers, infrastructure gaps and lack of skills and inputs to succeed in agribusiness opportunities. For example, if schooling for rural youth is largely focused on learning knowledge and skills unrelated to agriculture and business, youth will not be prepared with the skills and information needed for working in agricultural livelihoods beyond production. Additionally, cultural or policy issues which define youth's agency over land use and tenure may prohibit them from designing a farm systems that mitigates risk to an acceptable degree for youth to feel secure in this sector.*

STATEMENTS FROM ELDERS ON YOUTH AND POTENTIAL IN AGRICULTURE

'I believe that farming will continue because there are no job opportunities in other areas for young people. However, most see it as a suffering career. In general youth have a negative picture of agriculture because most of them are used to seeing poor subsistence farmers, so young people are likely to associate farming with poverty and backwardness.'

(Mr. Harris Williams, Teacher/Elder, Salala)

'Farming is respected here because 80% of the people in this town are involved in farming. However, when one compares it to other sectors such as trade, building construction, or teaching, farmers are at the lower end of the order because of their usually poor and filthy appearance.' (Mr. Harris Williams, Teacher/Elder, Salala)

'It depends, if you are into rice or cassava farming, you are looked down upon because it is usually associated with poor, dirty people. But if you are a large-scale rubber, cocoa or oil palm farmer, then you are likely to attract more respect and popularity from the people because then you also become an employer.' (James Kerkulah, Farmer/Elder in Shankpalai village)

'She encourages her children to do agriculture because she feels it would be able to generate money for their school fees. However, she only encourages them to use it as a way of generating their school fees but she doesn't think it should be their ultimate career.'

(Enumerator report from interview with Ms. Yamah Sackie, Community Leader in Palala village)

'He encourages his children not to be farmers forever because he wants them to get 'civilized' (Prince Kolliegboe, Lead Farmer, Garmu village)



N. Farese, Liberia

Education Barriers: The lack of schools offering opportunities to continue education in rural areas often makes it necessary for youth to leave one’s village if they desire to advance their education beyond what is available locally. The lack of options to continue schooling in rural Bong County is significant as the continuation of education was the most frequently expressed aspiration of both male and female youth in this study, with no notable difference among the two age cohorts. This creates a situation in rural areas in which nearly every youth wants to leave their village for a time. The age at which youth might leave to seek education opportunities varies depending on the extent of opportunities available in their village as well as the education trajectory of each individual - Liberia is characterized by extremely late enrollment in schools and one can easily find teens still attending primary school. While there are numerous factors that pull youth towards towns and cities, many girls in the study stated that if formal education were available in their village, they would not want to look elsewhere, emphasizing that it is this lack of educational resources that is driving them out of their villages. Some of these youths will return and others will seek other opportunities. The education needs of youth should be taken into consideration in designing and targeting multi-year agriculture programs in order to ensure there are accommodations for (and not exclusions of) youth who transition in and out of communities as they seek to fulfill their educational goals.

Land Access and Tenure: There are three primary processes by which youth can obtain land for cultivation: through inheritance, renting or purchase. Purchase, while an option in some villages, is not commonly considered among youth in this study given the limitations posed by cost and availability. For both male and female youth, the primary path to accessing land is by leasing the land through an agreement with the community or a landowner. Except in a few communities (Salala for example), where land scarcity was reported due to control by village chiefs, population pressures and sales to large companies, especially for rubber farms, youth said it would be very easy for them to find land to farm through such a lease. One key informant confirmed that *‘land is very accessible and that if someone says it is not, they are lying.’* He mentioned that villages have much land around them and that youth who want to farm can be given land to utilize. While only anecdotal, this insight reflects the responses from youth concerning the availability of and access to land.



“There is nothing that can prevent a law-abiding person from getting land to farm they said. Once you have a good character, there is nothing that can stop you from getting land to farm”

— Female FGD, Yartanlah




“It is very easy for a person with good character to have a land to farm with in this community, even if you are a stranger. The only way a person is denied land to farm is when you are not a law abiding person... you have to have a good character...be it a male or a female.”

— Female FGD, Duta


As noted above, access to land through a lease seems to be deeply connected to ‘character’ and reputation in the community. Character is in some ways analogous to credit score – if youth are perceived to be honest, hardworking and able to follow agreements, they will be trusted and land can be given to them. ‘Bad character’ is linked closely to the relationship between youth and their families and the greater community,

reflected in comments such as: ‘Youth who don’t respect his parents’; ‘He also throws insults at them’; ‘He also beat his wife if he is married’; ‘He doesn’t take advice from the elder regarding marriage or manhood activities’; ‘He is mean. He doesn’t offer back his family who give him the land.’



“Bad character such as fighting, stealing or insulting other people would prevent one from getting land. If you are not law abiding in the community, it is not easy to get a farmland.”

— Male FGD, Nyalenta




“Youth with bad behaviors i.e. dishonesty, disrespectfulness, etc. could be banned from getting land for farming. Furthermore, youth are denied when they have a history of failing to live up to agreements such as types of crops to be cultivated (long term vs short term).”

— Male FGD, Garmue

The physical and mental capacity of youth also impacts whether they will be given land by their community, can lease this land or even be given land by their family.

While land is theoretically accessible, there are constraints arising from the conditions of a lease that may deter youth from taking on such agreements. Youth mention high rental fees, or the need to share garden products with the landowner, which make it difficult to succeed. Most importantly, all youth emphasized limitations on use, which prohibit taking longer-term planning strategies and planting the tree crops that are often regarded as having better economic potential. Though youth may be able to access short-term leases, they often remain restricted to producing rice, cassava and vegetables.

In addition to leasing land, youth may also be given land to tend by their families, especially in the form of inheritance after the passing of elders or passing on land holdings to children when they have families of their own. Both male and female youth recognized the distinct disadvantage women face with respect to long-term land tenure and possession of land. Many stated that it is not possible for girls to own land as most elders prepare their sons to inherit family lands rather than their girls.



“If a youth cannot tend the land and make it productive (cannot plant crops on all the land he was previously given the year before), no one, even family, will want to give him more land. The record follows him and he may lastly leave the community to settle in another community where he is not well known. If someone does not complete his farm, elders perceive him to be lazy. He is believed to be someone who destroys and wastes the land.”

— Male FGD, Tarsah

Girls emphasized that in the local Kpelleh culture, they are expected to get married, after which time they join their husband’s family who will hopefully have land for production. Boys, on the other hand, rely on their own family’s assets and future land inheritance to provide for their family as the woman will not bring land with her – patrilineal land inheritance in traditional Liberian culture. Males are also preferred for inheritance and land transfers as elders often believe that boys are better positioned than girls to defend the land in case of conflict.

It is also important to note that these barriers to land tenure are a function of age as well. In families with multiple male children, it is usually the first boy child in the family who enjoys the right to inherit land. These leasing and inheritance practices limit the options of many male and most female youth to



“Girls are not suited for that kind of agriculture (tree crops) because they can’t inherit land in Bencoma Town.”

— John Pewee, District Leader/Elder, Bencoma Village

agricultural production focused on vegetables. As noted previously, youth perceive a limited potential for financial returns through growing these annual crops and are more likely to associate this work with ‘drudgery’ and something done out of necessity rather than as a realistic path to lift themselves out of poverty. Youth had little knowledge of annual crops, which could be grown and sold for better returns outside of opportunities to scale production. The aspiration of producing tree crops seems out of reach for many due to obstacles mentioned above, such as the restrictions placed on use by the landowners and challenges to ownership and long-term agency of land use for females in particular.

‘Quick Money Syndrome’: Youth and key-informants both highlighted ‘quick money syndrome’ as a barrier to youth investing in agricultural production. They report that many youth feel farming is too slow in bringing benefits in comparison to other work such as gold mining or commercial bike riding which, while perhaps less lucrative over time, ensures that youth have money in their pockets daily. While it is true that earning money daily adds to social status and the ability to partake in social functions, there is also a genuine need for consistent income to address their food security. Because this is especially important during the growing season before the harvest, youth may be faced with questions as to where to place their energy – do they tend the land during times when agricultural labor is needed to ensure a harvest or do they seek other work that can provide ‘quick money’ for immediate daily needs?

Lack of Infrastructure: According to Jeremiah Wilson, Program Coordinator of the Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY), young people have a passion for agriculture and the barrier to agriculture for youth and the lack of development has nothing to do with passion and everything to do with ‘means.’ According to him, the lack of structural support in terms of education policy, and infrastructure (road and transport systems, storage) makes it nearly impossible to succeed. He went as far as to question how one could expect or responsibly encourage youth to take on agriculture in a context where roads and storage are insufficient and markets do not function efficiently without price manipulations. Anthony F Tolokelen, head of the Monrovia based NGO Humanity Liberia, remarked that *‘if (you) were there during the harvest season you would cry to see all the food that rots and goes wasted because it cannot be sold and preserved, especially in this humid environment.’* Wasted produce disheartens youth who have worked hard for their harvest – this waste is, at least in part, due to failures in infrastructure. This is especially true for short shelf life products such as cassava and vegetables.

Youth Social and Labor Benefits in Kuu Systems

The vast majority of youth in communities visited during the study, with the exception of Totota and Salala which are both peri-urban communities, participate in a kuu. The kuu is an informal, self-organized, social organization that farms cooperatively on the lands of the various members and their families, and in some cases, sells their collective labor to farmers outside the group. Members participate in all stages of agricultural production from preparing the land to planting and harvest. Both male and female youth participate in the kuu system equally and operations are similar, though male kuu groups take on work, which is considered more physically demanding or dangerous such as clearing the brush, felling trees and

fencing land. Females may face specific challenges within the kuu during pregnancy with kuu in different villages dealing with this situation in different ways – at times reducing their workloads and in others, refusing their participation in the labor as well as benefits of the group. While variations exist between villages, in general kuu groups are organized by sex, exclusively male or female, and among youth of similar ages and capacities which are organized specific to the local population’s needs (for ex. 10-15, 16-20, 21-30). There is not a specific threshold age when young people begin participating in this system, but they typically join when they physically capable of handling the work demands. No upper age limit was mentioned for kuu participants but it can be inferred from conversations that participants leave when the costs of working with the kuu outweigh the benefits – for example, when one’s labor productivity can be utilized elsewhere to obtain better financial returns or if one achieves a certain level of scale that demands more attention or success that enables them to buy their labor.

Kuu have their own distinct rules and structure wherein youth play both membership and leadership roles to govern the various functions of the group. Everyone in the group is involved in the decision making process, agree to laws before they pass within the kuu and governance roles are chosen by election or appointment that meets a consensus.




“We have different roles to play in the kuu; some of us are part of the leadership, some serve as advisers, some are cooks, some are water servants and some are singers.”

— Female FGD, Garmu

The governance roles often include the following positions and duties:

Position	Role/Duties
President	The head or founder of the kuu
Vice President	Sits next to the president, they both work together
Secretary	Records all the happenings in the kuu and tracks all financial records
Treasurer	Responsible for keeping and managing all money and items collected by the kuu
Soldier/Police	Mobilizes members for work, makes sure that the work is properly done, imposes penalties on any member for misconduct and ensures that everyone is treated fairly in the kuu.
Advisor	Often the most senior member who, along with the president and vice president, mediates conflicts in the kuu if they arise

The rules in kuu's are quite developed, as evident in the description of kuu roles by male youth in Yartanla. The kuu system has multiple benefits for youth ranging from improved labor productivity to social benefits. Working as a group helps to speed up work both on one's individual farm and in the community. While the amount of work done within a kuu may be the same or even increased in some cases compared to what one would do if working alone, youth express that when an individual is working alone, he or she is at liberty to take breaks, put responsibilities off and be lazy in completing tasks. However, in the kuu group there are consequences for not arriving on time or performing well. One is more motivated to do a good job working on someone else's farm knowing that they will also receive the same benefits of group participation and effort on their farm. Additional benefits, including generating income or additional food resources, come when kuu groups sell their collective labor to farm owners in their community. Youth also report that agricultural work through the kuu system enhances unity and promotes social cohesion in their town because peers work together on each other's farms and even share food resources and capital that the kuu earns. The system encourages them to socialize while working and facilitates knowledge sharing around agriculture and other topics important to them.



“The Police is the most powerful person even though lower than the president... the Police leads the kuu on the farm as early as 8:00 AM. Anyone going later than the appointed time is late and must pay a late fee of fifty Liberian dollars¹² or above based on the degree of lateness. The Police also... inspects the quality of work done by each person. (They) impose a fine on those who do ugly brushing or work. He forwards the name of violators to the Secretary to collect the fines after three days.”

— Male FGD, Yartanla

Programs that engage youth in agriculture should incorporate in their design an understanding of how the kuu systems are organized and utilized in each specific community. This will enable the program to leverage these structures and the social capital they hold and avoid disturbing these structures by offering incentives which may draw youth away from participation. Merely participating in agricultural offerings cannot replace the social benefits and capital gained through kuu participation. It is important to note that communities vary in the existence and strength of these structures as well as the age ranges of kuu cohorts. In order to ensure programs leverage and do not undermine these local structures, design and targeting should take local kuu structures, roles and age-ranges into consideration rather than developing parallel structures or targeting pre-defined age-ranges.

As noted in an internal assessment prepared for Mercy Corps' programming in Liberia, the kuu may present good opportunities for introducing technologies into a community. As some kuu earn money and even organize their own Susu groups, these two structures may also be leveraged to develop VSLAs or other mechanisms through which cooperative investments can be made towards technology or other inputs that could ease production difficulties, add-value to products and overcome other barriers youth face in agriculture. Findings from the communities of Totota and Salala suggest that programmatic approaches which seek to leverage kuu systems may need to be modified for peri-urban areas where the kuu system is not as important or may even be non-existent.

¹² Equivalent to 0.5 USD at the time of the study



N. Farese, Liberia

Gender

Sexual/ Gendered Division of Labor: In general, women and men are both able to participate in most areas of production and at various points along the value chain. However, in production, male youth are more likely to be involved in cutting the bush down, fencing in lands and other work that is either considered to be dangerous or demand strength. Female youth are expected to take on duties for kuu groups similar to what girls take on in households, including fetching water and cooking. While male and female youth contribute to different processes in agricultural production, both play a part in key aspects of both rice and vegetable production, important agricultural products in Bong County.

Typical Duties in Agricultural Production

Male Youth	* Cut Brush Down	* Cut trees down	* Burn the farm
	* Establish farm	* Build fences	
	* Build kitchens	* Harvest oil palms	
Female Youth	* Weed grass	* Plow fields	
	* Plant rice / seedlings	* Harvest crops	
	* Give water to boys in the kuu	* Cook for the kuu.	

Along the value chains, the only areas which respondents consistently stated were for more suited for men were transport and processing. Previous Mercy Corps assessments have noted that men are largely responsible for processing palm oil while women process rice and cassava. A deeper understanding of how gender factors into processing would be helpful as women expressed their capacity and desire for involvement in commercial processing opportunities and technologies.

Control of Productive Assets: As noted above in the section dealing with land access, female youth face distinct challenges obtaining land that could be utilized for perennial tree crops and/or be adapted to a longer-term design plan. Female youth often mentioned that they do not make decisions on their own regarding how land is used in their family. One girl from Yartanla said that this is because they are ‘considered to be visitors’ because they will eventually be taken by their husband’s family. Male youth, who are more likely to be able to inherit land, may have more agency over land use and planning as they are expected to hold this land in the future. Given the economic potential for tree crops and benefits of diversifying farm systems to incorporate both annuals and perennials, girls are at a distinct disadvantage. This distinction also makes it more difficult for girl youth to diversify production and buffer against various climate and market risks. That being said, there is not only a gender component to control over productive assets in the household but age and birth order also factor in to decision making and land allocation and inheritance – male youth who are not the first born may face similar barriers to land access and inheritance as women.



One boy summed it up by saying that tradition favors the first boy child over the rest of his siblings. This makes it tough for others who are not privileged to be the first boy of the family and they are left at the mercy of the first boy child.

— Enumerator report from Male FGD, Foequelleh




“Young men don’t make decision on how land is used. The reason is that our fathers have the final saying on land matters. Our traditions don’t allow us to make a decision on land issues. It is a disrespect to do so.”

— Male FGD, Totota

Protection: While relatively few protection risks were mentioned specifically related to any given type of work, girls consistently mentioned that it is difficult to be a girl because of men overpowering them to beat or rape them. Female youth who supplement their farm work by cooking and fetching water for male youth near gold mining areas are at increased risk. Sexual and Gender Based violence is a well-documented, overarching concern in Liberia, making protection mainstreaming essential of any youth programming. This is especially important for programs aiming to open up economic opportunities along the value chain which increase girl’s mobility further from their communities and families. Further analysis on links between protection risks and livelihoods is recommended.

Secret Societies and Witchcraft

While we are unsure how significant these issues would be in engaging youth in agriculture, both youth and elders mentioned the fear of witchcraft and the influence of secret societies multiple times throughout the research, as did key informants. The intricacies of ‘societies’ of the Poro (men) and Sande (women) are difficult to unravel given the level of secrecy and, at times, fear around discussing them.



“In our community if you are not a member of the Poro Secret Society, you could be denied land inheritance by your parents.”

— Male FGD, Bencoma


While these societies were not a specific focus of this study, youth did spontaneously discuss them in relation to a number of topics. For example, some youth mentioned fear of forceful initiation into secret societies by elders as a reason for their wanting to leave their village. In the past, youth in some societies were initiated over long periods of time in the bush –

sometimes for months, other times for years. Currently initiation practices seem to be shorter and more common during the dry season during a lull in agricultural activity, though male youth in one village expressed the importance of the community making sure Poro Society initiation periods to not fall into critical farming dates in the future. Thus, it is still possible that certain cohorts of youth may be missed in one off interventions in isolated communities due to these initiations. The most commonly expressed connection between the ‘societies’ and agriculture youth discussed was the influence that membership or non-membership could have on land tenure and agency over land use.

According to youth in in one village, a boy would have to be initiated into men’s Poro secret society culture before they are allowed to discuss about land use because boys are taught how to responsibly deal with land conflict and general land management in the Poro Society. Also, as noted above, acquiring land to farm is not difficult but depends on the character of the youth and their standing in the community. This standing could be linked to membership in these societies in some communities as youth expressed that both males and females who are not members of the secret society could be prevented from getting land for farming.


While secret societies may have less influence on agricultural programs broadly and may be limited to very rural and isolated communities, the fear of witchcraft was more explicit and widespread, with both youth and elders in the data collection sites as well as key informants in Monrovia and program staff citing its influence over their lives. Fear of witchcraft was spontaneously mentioned in the majority of FGDs with male youth and seems to have the potential to drive youth’s decision making around livelihoods and whether or not to stay in their communities. Their influence on youth behavior and choices is likely less significant in major towns and peri-urban areas, in rural-isolated communities the influence may be stronger.

Youth primarily discussed witchcraft in relationship to their considerations of whether to stay in their village or leave and with regards to the perils of being successful and facing the jealousy of others.



“Also, jealousy comes from older people who have not succeeded in life and may affect a boy to an extent that he might be bewitched. Sometimes it is just the fear of being bewitched that scare youth from investing in the soil. Elders have better coping mechanisms to witchcraft than youth.”

— James Kerkulah, Farmer/Elder in Shankpalai Village



“Successful youth are sometimes a target for witchcraft plagued with death or chronic sicknesses because of their showing off attitude. Older people, who are considered perpetrators of witchcraft, go after potentially successful youth because they often question or criticize the legacy of older generation as they begin to taste success.”


— John Pewee, District Leader/Elder in Bencoma village

One informant in Monrovia recounted that his parents do not allow him to return to their native village to visit family for fear that someone will cause them harm leading to sickness and/or death through witchcraft. This belief is significant enough that people who are successful in their own village may chose to leave or those who become educated in Monrovia and find success, may not return to invest in their land or village. Statements expressing this sentiment were frequent throughout the FGDs with youth citing occasions where youth have lost their lives to witchcraft and stating their fears of being bewitched and losing their lives or contracting a debilitating illness if they stay in their village.

In discussing their future plans, one youth mentioned that his older brother, who was prospering, had died from a strange illness which he attributed to witchcraft. He feared that he would be the next in line if he remains in his community.

While the activities of Poro and Sande societies may be a relatively low risk to programs and potentially even inaccessible as a leverage point due to influencing youth due to the secrecy surrounding them, they are nonetheless important to be aware of if blanket targeting of youth is important to program strategies. The


extent to which fear of witchcraft may impact decision making in Bong County is difficult to assess but the frequency of responses indicates that certain youth may in fact chose to leave their village or chose not to return if they or their family has experienced a recent tragedy they trace back to witchcraft.



“They claimed that there is enough evidence of mysterious deaths of promising young people in Garmu to suggest that promising young people face potential dangers if they stay in Garmu.”

— Enumerator report from Male FGD, Garmu

It is not expected that the ‘societies’ and the fear of witchcraft represent a significant barrier towards agricultural activity and youth development. They are, however, both prevalent in rural areas and are worthy of more understanding with regards to whether or not this will influence youth engagement in any given program site.



“Bad people hunt youths when they are successful. They would bewitch them to the extent that some become crippled or even die of diseases.”

— Male FGD, Tarsah

Youth Suggestions for Assistance in Agriculture

At the conclusion of focus group discussions and during individual interviews, youth were asked for their ideas regarding the types of development they and their community needed to improve agriculture as a viable livelihood strategy. Interestingly, many suggestions were expressed as needs from the government rather than from the private sector or NGOs. There was little consistent difference between the suggestions

of male and female youth, with the exception of suggestions from girls to work on land tenure issues to make it easier for girls to inherit and own land.

Training and Education: Youth mentioned the need for training across the entire spectrum of agriculture – from improving their knowledge and skills on farming techniques to providing skills needed to plan, start and run successful businesses, to skills in marketing and transport. Multiple youth called on the government to build agricultural training centers to formalize these trainings and make them consistently available as a more formal offering.

Youth also mentioned the need for scholarships to further their formal education. While scholarships in agricultural faculties are available, the number is limited and some people report that they are not truly accessible to all people and certain ‘connections’ are necessary to obtain them.

Direct Support of Inputs: In addition to knowledge, youth also express the need for in-kind support in the form of agricultural inputs such as farming tools and building supplies including: seeds for lowland and upland rice farming, seedlings of palm, cocoa and rubber, ‘chemicals to increase production,’ improved varieties of chicken for poultry raising and machines for processing.

Increase Loan Access: Youth recommended that the government and NGOs consider setting up a loan opportunity for aspiring youth farmers that will help them overcome barriers to production and bridge the challenge faced around access to credits and capital. For seeds and inputs in particular, youth express that their access to these can vary depending on changing prices and currency exchange rates and that loan services could help them buy fertilizers, inputs and seeds in order to increase production.

Market Support: Youth framed market needs in a number of ways. These expressed needs arise from the fear that, even if they were to produce more, it would be hard for them to find customers to purchase their production at a fair price and in a time-frame and transport scenario that would not lead to spoiling and significant damages. Specifically, they called on the government to ‘*establish customers for the market,*’ and to ‘*create a better market so that farmers are encouraged to put in more time and produce more.*’ Multiple youth and key informants also mentioned that markets in Monrovia are controlled by informal trader networks and a ‘Lebanese mafia’ in ways that make it difficult to sell one’s goods for a reasonable price, if at all, even though there may be enough demand for the product. An evidence of this phenomenon is the absence of local products, even perishable, in Monrovia markets, whereas most agricultural products are imported from India, Morocco and Lebanon.



“We want other people, including the government, to help us with scholarship to go to school and learn more about agriculture, especially those young people who are already farming and wanting to stay in agriculture.”

— Male FGD, Tarsah

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Target Agriculture Interventions to Youth’s Specific Asset and Capacity Profiles: Youth are not a homogenous cohort and generalizing solutions across the youth demographic may provide ineffective solutions as well as lead to missed opportunities. In any one community, youth interviewed expressed a range of opinions towards agriculture and their desires to engage. Youth also have varied capacities and assets at their disposal and, thus, organizations need a variety of offerings to respond to the diversity of youth conditions.



N. Farese, Liberia

“Martha grows vegetables and beans on a 7 acre plot of land given to her by parents to squat on until she could get married. Following 3 successive years of prosperous harvests, she has generated enough money to be able to purchase 40 acres of farmland where she’s currently planting rubber, making Martha the first none-married girl in Panta District to potentially own a rubber farm which is a rare landmark achievement for someone of her gender and age.”

— Female FGD, Foequellah

This study identified three ‘stages’ of youth relationships to agriculture. While these are not necessarily fixed stages of linear progression, they do represent the most frequently mentioned drivers for youth engagement in production.

Subsistence and Survival: Many youth and elders alike view work in agriculture as a necessity rather than one option among many. Agriculture is valued both for the opportunity to earn cash and also in order to produce food for their family. Many youth are primarily working on family lands with kuu groups and have no option but to work the land. They are operating at the level of subsistence and survival, do not see this as a viable future and are interested in moving up or moving out. After attaining a certain level of success and building their capital/resources, they will likely chose to further their education and/or to invest these earnings in one of the following ways:

Investing Out: When discussing youth who are successful in agriculture with elders and youth in the community, these successes were often marked by youth’s ability to invest in non-agricultural assets and diversify their off-farm livelihoods. For some youth in the ‘subsistence and survival stage’, their first goal after initial success may be to open more opportunities for ‘quick money’ – for example, a motorbike they can use to transport people and goods. Depending on their assessment of risk and opportunity, youth may seek to save their resources and ‘invest-out’ into activities that provide more frequent access to cash but with less labor. Thus, while many youth at the subsistence and survival stage will participate in agriculture out of necessity, organizations working with these youth should also plan to identify and support youth looking to invest-out, helping them identify ways to invest in non-farm livelihoods activities. Youth may find opportunities to diversify their income while also benefitting the agriculture markets through the transport of people and products for example, or the sale of mobile phone and SIM cards.

Investing In: Examples were also provided where youth built on their initial success in vegetable farming to invest in larger enterprises, diversify their production (including tree crops), and add value to their products through processing technologies and access to high-end markets. These youth who are successful and remain in the community may be useful as model farmers for other young people or, potentially, as positive deviants by NGOs looking to transfer skills and behaviors that lead to success. A specific focus should be placed on finding successful women farmers to demonstrate that large investments and a successful career in agriculture is also possible for women.

Scale and Success: Finally, a number of youth we spoke to recognize that agriculture is one of the most profitable sectors in the country whereby wealth can be generated. Youth who leave agricultural production for work in offices, in the government, or with NGOs have reduced their burden of physical labor and obtained a steadier income with less risk. However, once youth have saved sufficient resources, there is an economic incentive to invest back in agriculture at scale. Thus, there is an opportunity to reach out to youth who, though currently working in and successful in other sectors, may have the ability to invest in agriculture at a scale that will benefit not only their own households but the country as a whole. These youth represent the next generation of agricultural entrepreneurs with the potential to create jobs and improve food security and nutrition at local to national levels and will need a different caliber of business support and training than those youth who are still in a subsistence model.

Mainstream Education and Skill Development Throughout Youth Agricultural Programs: Given education and skill development is arguably the number one priority of youth in Bong County, agricultural programs will be both more attractive to, and more beneficial for youth if opportunities for skill development are incorporated. Young people who are working should not have to choose between developing themselves or their work. It is important to identify opportunities to promote earning, learning and saving opportunities and structure them to ensure they are available for youth who are working.

Increasing access to education can take several forms depending on youth's aspirations, their family and financial situations, and the availability of both formal and informal education sources. First and foremost, all programs should provide opportunities to youth to go back to school and complete their formal education where feasible. Programs should expect that youth may be more committed to their formal education than fulfilling obligations of program enrollment and participation. This means that multi-year agriculture programs need to include accommodations for (and not exclusions of) youth who transition in and out of communities as they seek to fulfill their educational goals.

Additionally, programs should look into expanding educational offerings outside the formal educational system. Such opportunities may include: agricultural focused technical and vocational education and training (TVET); informal agricultural education through extension models that involve young peer to peer transfer of knowledge; and both developing and facilitating connections to short courses at Cuttington University. Technical skills can be further expanded through adapted extension services to rural youth, which are currently rare to non-existent. Youth farmer field schools can engage youth in profitable activities while providing gender-sensitive space for discussions and decision-making; creating a schedule adapted to youth' needs; engaging a mix of young role models and experienced elders as motivators; and creating a network for future business ideas and entrepreneurship (see section regarding kuus below).

Youth are more likely to be engaged and empowered if they can interact and exchange ideas with other youths. Simultaneously, youth studying in universities need to develop hands on skills and apply what they are learning in the field. Creating urban-rural linkages through university practicums which place students in

peer to peer extension roles can build practical skills for university students while providing rural youth with more up-to-date extension support. This should be coupled with adult mentorship of youth to encourage transfer of both traditional farming knowledge as well as local knowledge of business and markets. This approach will be even more effective when young women can be taught by other young or adult women so that they can understand that the barriers they face are not unique to them and that they can be overcome.

Skill development for youth must focus on a diversity of topics, such as technical, business and personal. Appropriate and up-to-date agricultural production techniques and technologies must be disseminated in a way that encourage youth to discover, test, apply and innovate. This requires not only involving youth in interactive, participatory mapping of food systems, markets and market trends so they better understand high return opportunities, how markets function and related risks, but also build their financial literacy, including participatory household and business budget management. Financial literacy and business skills are equally important for pulling youth out of the subsistence farming model of their parents that they reject, and for addressing the 'quick money syndrome'. Developing youth's analytical skills will allow them to make informed decisions about what market to enter, how to manage their budget, save and invest, and how to plan for their future. Finally, as youth are at a crossroads in their life and need to make decisions about their future, improving soft skills such as communication, leadership, and self-esteem is critical and should be embedded within training curricula. Sensitization on gender roles should be embedded within all training exercises, such as focusing on young women who often lack the confidence to make decisions and dream beyond what they know.



Rose Hemmer-Vitti, Liberia

The current deficiency in access to information provides an opportunity to link young people to information technology. These technology platforms could fill the need for networking with business peers, as well as fast and reliable information, distinguishing their methods from those of elders currently conducting their farming activities.

Promoting Integrated and Efficient Farming Systems: Annual crops, which can produce lower but quicker profits, can be strategically integrated with longer-term perennial tree crops and livestock, allowing youth to stagger income streams while providing for their immediate income needs. Integrated systems have numerous benefits including increased diversity in the farming system, thus buffering against climate and market shocks, and increased returns on investment over the long term. However, the promotion of these systems will only work with youth who have long-term access to land, thus requiring programs to address gender and age barriers to land use (see below). While barriers to land use for female youth may seem unsurmountable, successful, positive deviant, female youth may be sought out and leveraged to help shift perceptions of who may and may not engage in tree-crops or more complex agroforestry systems. Programs should also consider integrating livestock into farms given the existing market gap and need for relatively limited land space, especially for poultry.

Improve Accessibility of Land for Youth in General and for Girls in Particular: While socio-cultural norms which determine inheritance may be difficult to challenge, land access through lease was identified as a viable option for both male and female youth. Focusing efforts on facilitating improved contracting arrangements between youth and landowners may make more land available, reduce risks and increase lease duration. It is important to help landowners and community leaders better understand the mutual benefits related to improving contract conditions. If youth succeed, they will be inspired to continue to work the land, thus increasing productivity and ensuring long-term revenues for landowners. Additionally, a community that facilitates land holdings for youth will benefit as these youth bring additional assets back to the community (motorbikes, trucks, phones) and are more likely to develop local business activity. This facilitation can include leasing community land, even if it may be considered unusable, which can be re-generated through appropriate techniques and technologies – being drainage or irrigation, land use rotation, etc..

Leverage and Reinforce Kuu Networks Both Economically and Socially: Programs that engage youth in agriculture should incorporate in their design an understanding of how the youth groups or local structures involving youth are organized and utilized in each specific community, such as the Liberian kuu system. It is important that programs avoid disturbing these structures by offering financial incentives which may draw youth away from kuu participation, and thus potentially destroying social and financial capital benefits. Instead, working with kuu's may enable programs to leverage these structures and the social capital they hold for multiple objectives. For instance, empowering kuu groups could help advocate for policy changes in education and infrastructure, as well as help them become more formalized cooperatives with broader reach and responsibilities. These opportunities may include providing business incubator services, investing in infrastructure, or developing trade hubs where youth can purchase inputs in bulk, store products, obtain extension services and connect with buyers/aggregators. When a kuu earns money and maintains its own susu group, it could be assisted to become a more formal financial service provider for its members. It could also be leveraged to make cooperative investments in technologies or other inputs that could ease production difficulties, add value to local production and provide solutions to the varied barriers youth face in agriculture.

Improving Infrastructure: Where infrastructure constraints exist, programs should carefully consider the risks these barriers pose, and the potential beneficial impacts infrastructure improvement would have on the

labor and capital investments of youth. NGOs may work to advocate for infrastructure development as well as prepare community organizations (including kuu groups) to advocate for these needs or undertake affordable infrastructure projects themselves. Supporting entrepreneurship opportunities linked to infrastructure will allow the development of agriculture markets. Such examples include leveraging solar technology solutions to improve storage or processing opportunities, or investing in small-scale, innovative solutions to address post-harvest losses.

Recognize the Importance of Year-Round 'Supplementary Work': Youth have needs for year-round income. To improve the prospect of agriculture, it may be important to help youth build, manage and strengthen their 'portfolios' of work by mapping income streams during various times of the year. Supporting this approach rather than promoting a singular focus on agriculture can stabilize youth's income while simultaneously encouraging them to remain in agriculture. Portfolios can include a mix of on- or non-farm activities, depending on the skills; the ability to invest; access to land and other productive assets; and freedom of movement. For example, young women may focus on a diversifying their agriculture portfolio in ways that are suited to their limited mobility and willingness to move away from their village. Young men with access to large plots of land may focus on diversified production and those with limited access to land may focus on agricultural labor and off-farm small businesses such as transport. **As such, programs should tailor their approach to the specific needs of the various groups.** Supporting diversification of incomes through complementary work will enable youth to build additional resilience to potential shocks and thus be more comfortable with risk taking in the agricultural sector.

Identify and Mitigate Protection Risks for Young Women: Protection risks for girls and women in Liberia are well established and multiple protection issues were identified in the study. Any livelihoods program which expands women's and girls' opportunities may also expand their mobility and relationships both within their community and beyond. It is important to work with girls to identify risks that might arise from changes in relationships and mobility, as well as to identify potential solutions.



Rose Hemmer-Vitti, Liberia

ANNEX 1: Criteria for Community Selection for Primary Data Collection

The research attempted to reach two categories of communities, rural and peri-urban, in order to capture a balanced picture of youth in agriculture. Under the rural category, we have zoomed in a bit further to differentiate between levels of isolation/connection to services of communities. We have what we term as 'semi isolated/connected' communities which are relatively a bit better off in terms of access and services. We also have what we call 'extremely isolated/unconnected' communities, which refers to communities that are relatively worst off in terms of connection and access to different services.

Out of a total of 16 communities, the research team purposively selected six peri-urban communities, five 'semi-isolated/connected' communities and five 'extremely isolated/unconnected' communities. In addition to being rural or peri-urban, community selection criteria will also take into consideration youth involvement in at least one of the following agricultural value chains in the target communities: oil palm, rice, cassava (and other tubers), horticulture/vegetables, sugar cane, maize, etc. The idea is for the research to encompass a diversity of communities and youth experiences around different agriculture based livelihoods that are typically representative of Bong County and indeed Liberia.

For the peri-urban category community selection, we will also consider youth involvement in agriculture based income generation activities such as transport of agricultural produce, agricultural trade, etc. The presence of agricultural training institutes or agricultural vocational programs will also be considered.

Working Definition of an isolated/unconnected community:

- ❖ *Sometimes not in GSM network coverage*
- ❖ *Not on the main road*
- ❖ *Lacking basic social services such as school, clinic, etc.*
- ❖ *Far from any market in the area*
- ❖ *Sometimes located on the peripheral of the district/clan*
- ❖ *Sometimes car doesn't reach there, except by foot*

ANNEX 2: Selected Communities and Initial Plan

No.	Name of Community	District	Category (urban/peri-urban)	Team & Day	Justification
1.	Duta	Kpai	Rural, Semi-isolated/ connected Community	Team 1 Day 1	No GSM about 6 minutes away from the main road (Palala).
2.	Palala	Kpai	Peri-urban	Team 2 Day 1	Has stores and shops with other facilities. Serves as an aggregation point for agricultural produces (market available)
3.	Tarsah	Kpai	Rural, Extremely Isolated/ Unconnected Community	Team 1 Day 2	Is situated at the periphery of the District and doesn't have a market. Nearest market is at least 1 hr. away by walking. No GSM; Is a small community.
4.	Forquelleh	Panta	Peri-urban	Team 2 Day 2	Connected by road; Serves as an aggregation point for agricultural produces (market); has a youth group that received training and startup agro-grant to do agribusiness. Is a fairly big town.
5.	Nyantala	Panta	Rural, Extremely Isolated/ Unconnected Community	Team 1 Day 3	
6.	Garmue	Panta	Rural, Semi-isolated/ connected Community	Team 2 Day 3	Is densely populated with a small community market. Has basic GSM signal at times.
7.	Naama	Zota	Rural, Semi-isolated/ connected Community	Team 1 Day 4	Is situated at a strategic intersection connecting markets. But no GSM, nearest market is around 2 hours on car.
8.	Shankpallai	Zota	Rural, Extremely Isolated/ Unconnected Community	Team 2 Day 4	No GSM; located on the periphery of the District off the main road; nearest market is at least 2.3 hrs. by walking; located at least 30 KM from the main
9.	Totota	Salala	Peri-urban	Team 1 Day 5	Well-connected; Serves as an aggregation point for agricultural produces (market); is host to an agricultural training school

10.	Belefina	Zota	Peri-urban	Team 2 Day 5	
11.	Gbarnga Nyeleta	Sanoyea	Rural, Extremely Isolated/ Unconnected Community	Team 1 Day 6	No GSM; located off the main road; plays host to a small zonal market; located at least 1 hr. from the main road (walking)
12.	Gbarmokollieta	Sanoyea	Rural, Semi-isolated/ connected Community	Team 2 Day 6	No GSM; located on the periphery of the District off the main road; nearest market is at least 2.3 hrs. by walking; located at least 30 KM from the main road.
13.	Tokpailu	Salala	Rural, Extremely Isolated/ Unconnected Community	Team 1 Day 7	No GSM; located off the main road; plays host to a small zonal market; located at least 1 hr. from the main road (walking)
14.	Bencoma	Salala	Rural, Semi-isolated/ connected Community	Team 2 Day 7	No GSM; located on the periphery of the District off the main road; nearest market is at least 1.7 hrs. by walking; located at least 75 KM from the main road
15.	Sanoyea	Sanoyea	Peri-urban	Team 1 Day 8	Serves as an aggregation point for agricultural produces (market); is host to an agricultural training school
16.	Salala	Salala	Peri-urban	Team 2 Day 8	

Annex 3: Final Summary of FGD Data Collection by Age and Gender

Date	Community Name	Team Name	Age Group Interviewed			
			Team 1	Team 1	Team 2 Male	Team 2
			Male	Female		Female
08/05/16 – Fri.	Duta	Team 1	15 - 19	15 - 19		
	Palala	Team 2			20 - 24	15 - 19
08/06/16 – Sat.	Tarsa	Team 1	20 - 24	20 - 24		
	Forquelleh	Team 2			15 – 19	20 - 24
08/08/16 – Mon.	Yartanla	Team 1	15 - 19	15 - 19		
	Garmue	Team 2			15 - 19	15 - 19
08/09/16 – Tues.	Naama	Team 1	20 - 24	20 - 24		
	Shankpala	Team 2			20 - 24	20 - 24
08/11/16 – Thurs.	Totota	Team 1	15 - 19	15 - 19		
	Belefina	Team 2			15 - 19	15 - 19
08/12/16 – Fri.	Tokpaipolu	Team 1	20 - 24	20 - 24		
	Bencoma	Team 2			15 - 19	20 - 24
08/15/16 – Mon.	Gbarnga -Nyaylayta	Team 1	15 - 19	15 - 19		
	Gbarmokollieta	Team 2			15 - 19	20 - 24
08/17/16 – Wed.	Sanoyea	Team 1	20 - 24	20 - 24		
	Salala	Team 2			20 - 24	20 - 24

Total Number of Male FGDs 15-19 years of age - 9

Total Number of Male FGDs 20-24 years of age – 7

Total Number of Male FGD participants = 156

Total Number of Female FGDs 15-19 years of age - 7

Total Number of Female FGDs 20-24 years of age - 9

Total Number of Female FGD participants = 163

Annex 4 Focus Group Discussion Guide for Female Youth ¹³

1. Youth Aspirations Baseline

- a. Can each of you tell us what your dreams are, how you are planning to improve your lives, and how you plan to make money to support your families?

Free-listing of Aspirations – List responses in complete sentences and follow up with details on the reasons for these dreams/desires/plans

- b. Do you, and young people in your area plan to stay in this town, near your family, or do many young people want to leave to seek opportunities elsewhere? *(leading question, obtain details by following up with group and individuals regarding how they feel)*
- c. If youth plan to leave, what are the main reasons that youth want to leave here and move to a larger town?
- d. Are there other reasons, besides making money, that make young people to want to leave for the larger town/city? If so, what are these reasons – list and discuss. *(Initially, do not lead them to answer – if no one answers, perhaps give some example for reasons)*
- e. If you could make money here in your village would you want to stay or leave - why?
- f. Who do young people see as good examples for their lives? Who do they go to for help with problems or for advice?

2. Youth Perceptions of Farming, Agriculture and Economic Engagement

- a. What comes to your mind when you think of a farmer?
- b. Do young people see work in agriculture/farming as a good way to spend time and earn money or as a bad use of time and way to earn money? *If good, why? If bad why? Please get deep conversation on why they perceive this as positive or negative.*
- c. What do you like about agricultural work?
- d. What don't you like about agriculture work?
- e. Does anyone currently make money from farming or other agricultural activities, like buying & selling of agricultural products? *What kinds of agricultural activities do you work in? Remind them here of the entire value chain, the pictures you shared. Tell stories*
- f. Besides your work in agriculture, what other activities do you do to make money for you and your families? *Try to capture the breadth of income generating activities young people in the group are involved in - Tell stories.*
- g. How many of you feel like you want to leave farming in the future? *Record general consensus of group*

¹³ While this tool is specific to the FGDs with female youth, it is representative of the scope of questions used throughout the study. The male FGD was the same, except for slight changes to some questions to address the group by their sex as well as to a few questions specific to males and remove a few that were specific to females. The elder and KII questionnaires, while utilizing different question due to the different nature of SSIs vs FGDs, cover the same themes.

What are the main reasons you would not want work in farming/land cultivation?

If you plan to leave farming, are you planning to work in another agriculture job (*remember the cards? Processing, transport etc?*) or are you planning to leave agriculture work? Where would you want to work and in what kind of job? *Describe their plans in depth*

Probe –For those who want to leave farming and agricultural activities, possibly migrate – what is the real, core reason you want to leave this work and or this place?

Is it because of money – or other reasons? Desire for infrastructure; education; status; city life? Electricity? General Development? Issues regarding Status? Connectivity? Need for ‘portfolio’ of activities not available in rural areas?

h. Is there anything- any change in the situation - that would make you want stay and continue farming or other agricultural work?

Socio-Cultural Influence

- a. How is farming/gardening seen in this community? Is it something to be proud of, ashamed of, neither? it respected, looked down upon? Why?
- b. Does your family encourage you to continue farming or seek other work in the agricultural area? What sorts or encouragement or discouragement do they communicate to you?

3. Commonly cited challenges and barriers

- a. If youth in your community wanted to get land, how would most youth acquire land (Given by family, Inheritance, Purchase, Renting, etc?) Is this different for males and females?
- b. Would it be easy for you to get land for farming or gardening? Why or why not?
- c. What are the major things that prevent you and other young people from getting land for farming or gardening? Are these different for Male and Female youth?

Education, Skill Building and Extension Services

- a. How do young people learn about agriculture in your community? Can you tell a story of how you learned to farm?
- b. What type of other education opportunities exist (formal or informal) to prepare youth for a job in agriculture? Is this education appropriate? Easily accessible? (*If no additional information move to next question*)
- c. Do any of you purchase agricultural inputs, such as fertilizers, pesticides and seeds? If so, what types do you purchase? Are they easily accessible? What do you think of the prices? (*probe for whether they feel they can easily access these inputs and whether they are affordable or too expensive*)
- d. If no, why do you not purchase them? (*probe for reason; is it not their responsibility or do they not have physical access or do they find them unaffordable*)

Youth involvement in community organizations?

- a. Are youth involved in **the Kuu’s**, farmer groups etc? At what age are youth becoming involved?
- b. What roles do youth play in the Kuu? Do you feel part of the conversations and decision making processes? Do young people have any leadership roles in these community structures?

- c. Are there any other community organizations or groups supporting youth in agriculture? What are they and how are youth involved in these structures?

Probe: If youth feel outside of the process, discuss whether they would like to be more involved and what makes it challenging for them to do so – what would need to change for it to be more inclusive?

4. Gender and Age Specific Issues

- a. What roles do female youth have in family farming activities? Why do young women have these roles? Are they better at it than young men?
- b. How are these different than from the roles young men are expected to do? Why do the young men do these roles?
- c. What do you like about being a girl? Are there any ways that being a girl is more difficult?

Are there any ways that being a girl is easier or better than being a guy?

- d. *At what age or in what circumstances:*

Below: Probe for details - if girls say they cannot do any of the below – ask, why not? What are the constraints they face? Is it because of their age? Their status as a female? Certain cultural norms? Are these different from male youth?

- i. Are young women and girls able to make decisions regarding how land is used? If so, what decisions? At what age can they make some of these decisions?
 - ii. Are young women and girls able to make decisions on what to grow or what inputs to buy? If so, what decisions? At what age can they do this?
 - iii. Are young women and girls able to keep their own money they earn in agricultural activities? At what age can they do this? Are there any other conditions involved?
- e. How does having children or ‘big-belly’ change the way female youth change participate in agriculture when they - or does everything continue as it was before? If there are changes, what kind of things change in a girl’s agricultural work and potential after becoming pregnant? (*Relationship to family, relationship to Kuu*)

Probe for stories and specific examples. Try to capture scenario before pregnancy/marriage? After Pregnancy/Marriage? What was your/her agricultural life like before becoming pregnant? What is it like now?

5. Perceptions along Value Chain

As we mentioned in the beginning of the discussion - When we talk about agricultural livelihoods, often the focus is on the act of farming, cultivating land and harvesting crops. At the same time, there are many other aspects to the larger agricultural system that people work in.

Using probes to trigger and discuss different work along the value chain, discuss for each picture:

Farming Cultivation	Employed Commercial Farm: Day Labor	Selling in Market	Transport /Trading	Processing	Own Business	Selling inputs – seeds, fertilizer, tools, technology
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- a. What kind of opportunities do you have for your future in the agricultural system beyond farming?
Freelisting to understand initial self-reported insight into opportunities along the value chain
- b. Discuss the following with all pictures above laid out and actively referencing them and probing for reflection on the various ag-activities
 - i. How are you currently involved in any of these areas of agriculture?
 - ii. Of these types of work, which have higher status in your community than others? What is seen most positively? What is seen in a negative way? Why?
 - iii. Could you see yourselves working in any of these jobs? If not, why not?
 - iv. What are the biggest reasons why you would not want to look for jobs in some of these other areas of agriculture work?
 - v. What are the difficulties you might face in trying to do these various kinds of work?
 - vi. Are any of these jobs perceived as dangerous for you? What kind of risks could you face doing this work?
 - vii. Which of these agricultural activities do you and your peers think offer the **MOST** opportunity for you?
 - viii. If you can do any of these types of agricultural work, what would you do and why? Which agricultural products, and which activities - ***Discuss in depth.***
 - ix. Is there a difference in jobs that male and female youth can do in this larger agriculture system? What are the differences and why?
 - x. Are there any other issues women face that make it especially challenging for you to develop any of these agricultural livelihoods that males do not face?

6. Success Stories, Examples?

- a. Do you know anyone, any girls, who have been really successful in working in agriculture? Tell me about her.
- b. Can you describe their success? (Find out if they are currently in the area and if possible, follow up with SSI)
- c. What are some of the things that help make someone successful in agriculture? (*Probe: Personal characteristics, skills, and traits, as well as help from other people? Access to money, credit, land, inputs?*)

7. Wrap Up - Conclusions

- a. What kinds of suggestions do you have for supporting youth in your community who wish to have a future in farming or broader agricultural work?

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