

**U.S. Agency for International Development
Office of Food for Peace**

Country-Specific Information: Liberia

**Fiscal Year 2016 Development Food Assistance
Program: Liberia Community Development Project**

Improving food and nutrition security and economic well-being in vulnerable
communities in Liberia

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U.S. Agency for International Development
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Fiscal Year 2016 Request for Applications
Development Food Assistance Program

Liberia Community Development Project

I. Summary:

The U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Office of Food for Peace (FFP) intends to award up one cooperative agreement to improve food and nutrition security and economic well-being in vulnerable communities in three target counties in Liberia. Subject to availability, the anticipated funding for this Liberia Community Development Project over five years is expected to total approximately \$66 million. This FFP project is expected to be funded with Feed the Future Community Development Funds (CDF), with no importation of Title II food commodities. Monetization is not authorized. Food is available in-country, and FFP seeks to assist Liberia to transition from dependency on food aid and to address underlying issues surrounding access to and utilization of food. As referenced in the accompanying Request for Assistance (RFA), the Liberia Community Resilience Project will be implemented utilizing the “Refine and Implement” model.

The three target counties include two counties—Bong and Grand Bassa—that are also designated as focus counties in the USAID/Liberia Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS) and in the Feed the Future zone of influence. The third county, River Cess, is contiguous to them, which may allow for programmatic linkages. A successful applicant will define an innovative and holistic approach to an integrated food security and nutrition improvement project that includes an in-depth understanding of local systems; builds on existing strengths in communities, local government, and private sector institutions for sustainability; and links with other activities in the target counties that seek to reduce extreme poverty and improve education, improve health status, and strengthen family planning and livelihoods.

II. Country/Region Background

Prior to the outbreak of Ebola in 2014, the Government of Liberia (GOL), with assistance from development partners, had stabilized the political situation and put economy back on track after devastating civil strife ended in 2003. However, even in a context of stability, when Ebola struck 63.8 percent of the population of Liberia had incomes below the poverty line, 47.9 percent lived in extreme poverty, 32.0 percent of children were stunted and 1 percent were underweight.^{1,2,3,4} Liberia’s Human Development Index value for 2014 was 0.43, placing it at 177

¹ World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/liberia>

² United Nations, WB, EU, ADB, Multi-partner Support to the Development of a National Ebola Recovery Strategy in Liberia – Mission Report, 2/2015

³ Demographic and Health Survey, GoL, August 2014.

out of 187 countries and territories.⁵ The economic effects of the Ebola crisis have made the situation of extremely poor vulnerable households much worse.⁶ Of those working in the private sector, by the end of December 2014, 60 percent of women and 40 percent of men had ceased to work.⁷ Even now, according to a mid-2015 assessment, food insecurity affects up to 16.0 percent of the population.⁸

Important transitions will take place during the next two years. First, the UNMIL security forces, in country since September 2003, will be drawn down, with the expectation that the GOL will fully assume its complete security responsibilities no later than 30 June 2016. Following this, presidential elections are scheduled for October 2017 and will usher in a new President for a six-year term, following twelve years under President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

Although USAID/Liberia has begun the process of planning for a new Country Development Cooperation Strategy (CDCS), its 2013-2017 goal of “Strengthened Liberian Institutions Positioned to Drive Inclusive Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction” remains vitally relevant. The proposed FFP project will contribute to all four of the CDCS Development Objectives:

- DO-1: More effective, accountable, and inclusive governance
- DO-2: Sustained, market-driven economic growth to reduce poverty
- DO-3: Improved health status of Liberians
- DO-4: Better educated Liberians

Potential awardees should refer to the Food Security Desk Review for Liberia for additional background on the unique food security, health, nutrition and shocks in Liberia; the Bellmon Estimation Studies for Title II (BEST) Project, and USAID update to same, for commodity availability and market analysis; the FEWS NET Liberia-specific assessments, and the Bureau for Food Security (BFS) learning platform, Agrilinks. The USAID/Liberia CDCS and other resources and fact sheets are available on USAID/Liberia’s website. Additionally, applicants should refer to FFP’s technical reference chapters. County Development Agendas covering the 2008-2012 period, prepared as a complement to the national Poverty Reduction Strategy for 2008-2011, can also serve as a resource. More recently, the Government of Liberia (GOL) has also put in place its Agenda for Transformation 2012-2017 (AfT), which sets forth precise goals and objectives that Liberia will achieve in order to become a more prosperous and inclusive society.

III. Geographic Targeting and Project Participants

Based on analysis of key indicators of food security; nutritional and health status; unemployment; educational, water and sanitation deficiencies; and other considerations, three contiguous counties have been chosen as the geographic focus for the project.

⁴ National Social Protection Strategy and Policy, GoL, August 2013, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR291/FR291.pdf>

⁵ UNDP, 2015 Human Development Statistical Table, <http://report.hdr.undp.org/>

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁷ World Bank, The Economic Impact of Ebola on Sub-Saharan Africa: Updated estimates for 2015, January 20, 2015

⁸ Liberia Food Security Cluster, “Liberia Food Security Assessment Report of June 2015”

Bong was one of the counties most affected by the 14 years of the Liberian civil war. It suffered extensive damage to infrastructure and basic social services, mass displacements, massive loss of life, and egregious human rights abuses, especially against women and girls. The county provided the majority of child soldiers. Private property was looted or destroyed, and there is still a high unemployment rate. Its institutions include the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI), Phebe Hospital and School of Nursing, and Cuttington University College. All of Liberia's 16 ethnicities live here, but the Kpelle are the largest tribal group.

Grand Bassa was one of the three original counties in the Republic of Liberia. The two major tribes are Bassa and Kpelle, followed by the Kru. During the civil war, mining, rubber plantations, logging and milling companies were vandalized, looted, and abandoned, and much of the destruction has yet to be reversed. Infrastructure suffered extensive damage, especially the port in Buchanan (nation's 2nd largest) and the railroad from there to the mines in Nimba County. The industrial side of the port has been rehabilitated and the railroad between Buchanan and Nimba has been reinstalled. Many communities in both urban and rural areas still lack access to health, education, water and electricity, making it difficult for returnees and inhabitants to prosper. Many villages are inaccessible during the rainy season due to deteriorated roads, inundation and erosion. Traditional culture remains strong; the Poro and Sande societies play a major role in the education and initiation of boys and girls. Land disputes over tenure and ownership proliferate, and the unmet expectations of youth could trigger significant social unrest, not only in the county, but across Liberia.

River Cess County is one of Liberia's least developed and most isolated places. Most households were displaced during the civil war. It has few roads and little basic services infrastructure. Acute and chronic malnutrition rates are alarmingly high. The wealth of natural resources has not benefitted the citizens as a whole, but rather created inequalities and resentment. Bassa-speaking people are in the majority (78 percent), plus Kru (18 percent, mostly fishers), Kpelle and Grebo. The traditional societies (Poro, Sande, Bodeo, Neegee and Kpayah) are important. Customary law infringes on women's and girls' rights, including property rights.

Assistance to communities in these three counties will be integrated across sectors, with other parts of the USAID/Liberia portfolio, and with the GOL, private sector, and other donor initiatives and activities. Interventions should be socially and ethnically inclusive, sensitive to conflict dynamics, and focused on sustainably improving food and nutrition security and economic well-being at the household and community levels.

Potential partners are expected to identify and include the most vulnerable communities in these counties as the focus of their project, increased resilience and sustainable improvements in food and nutrition security and economic well-being may well depend on linkages established with better off households and communities. If specific communities within a district are excluded from the design, applicants should justify that decision. Potential partners are encouraged to carefully consider these potential linkages when developing their theories of change and defining their project participants.

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection is in the process of establishing a national registry of the most vulnerable households living in extreme poverty. If this social protection registry becomes available for the FFP target counties during project implementation, applicants should consider ways to facilitate the enrollment of eligible project participants and to forge linkages between the registry and FFP project activities to ensure the greatest benefit to vulnerable households.

Project Participants: The vulnerable communities and households to be served by the Liberia Community Development Program face a variety of food security challenges. They will be more likely than other Liberians to be income, asset, land, and/or labor poor, and less likely to have regular access to key services (e.g. health and family planning, education, agriculture/aquaculture extension). Some portion of these households may simply not have the resources or capacities necessary to invest in change. At the same time, increased resilience and sustainable improvements in their food and nutrition security and economic well-being may depend on linkages that can be established with better off households and communities. While importation of Title II commodities is not anticipated for this program, applicants are encouraged to identify other resource transfer modalities to enable vulnerable households to smooth consumption, adopt healthier nutritional practices, and take advantage of opportunities leading to sustainable linkages to services, markets, and employment. These modalities could include any combination of local procurement, cash, vouchers, “smart subsidies” or asset transfers. Understanding the role of resource transfers as time-bound, and using them creatively and appropriately as a means to enable communities and households to make strategic and transformational choices for themselves, will minimize the possibility of dependence or short-lived impact.

IV. Project Purpose and Development Approach:

The purpose of this project is to sustainably improve food and nutrition security and economic well-being in vulnerable communities in the three Liberian counties of Bong, Grand Bassa and River Cess. At this critical time in Liberia’s history, communities in the three target counties have the opportunity to contribute to the continuation of peace and security by demonstrating that household level improvements in food and nutrition security and economic well-being can be achieved visibly, equitably, and sustainably across ethnic and gender lines and within both traditional and modern systems. This project will address identified drivers of food insecurity in the target counties: economic inequality, low agricultural production and productivity, poor health and nutrition, low levels of literacy and training, poor governance, and limited infrastructure.

The successful applicant will define a holistic Theory of Change (ToC) to strengthen economic opportunities and improve access to higher quality basic services, through communities and local institutions to ensure sustainability. The following operational principles will underpin program design and implementation:

- **Promote social cohesion:** The Liberian civil war resulted in massive displacement and distrust between ethnicities and within communities. Ebola may have exacerbated this dynamic, and lack of trust continues to run deep and is evidenced by the unequal

allocation of resources or, at times, the exclusion of individuals or communities from empowerment opportunities. FFP partners will be expected to examine the extent to which communities' leadership and other structures are equitable and inclusive (e.g. by gender, ethnicity, religion, age and other relevant social and economic variables). These findings should be taken into consideration in designing and implementing activities promoting community participation, consultations with stakeholders, and any conditionality applied to the provision of resources, to ensure that all segments of the community are benefitting and contributing to activity implementation, as appropriate to their vulnerability and needs.

- **Focus on gender:** Liberian women make up the majority of smallholder producers and are heavily engaged in petty trading—two of the three livelihoods hardest hit by Ebola. Women also fulfill daily household chores and are the main care-givers in the family. Young women face a different set of challenges, as do young men. Young women enter into sexual relations early, often with older men, and often as a means of survival. Most bear children at a young age. Many young men, even those with training, are hard-pressed to find work. FFP encourages approaches that not only address gaps in literacy, information, resources and opportunities limiting achievements of women and men of different ages, but ones which also begin to improve the gender equity between women and men for the long-term—the key to more resilient, sustainable, food-secure communities.
- **Support youth (age 10-29)⁹ as agents of change:** Implementers will be expected to consider the existing structure of youth networks (age-specific groups related to the bush schools, athletic teams, village, school, and/or rural-urban connections) and leadership among youth, in order to determine how to build on these structures to broaden and deepen the roles that youth play in providing community leadership, generating income, and contributing to food and nutrition security and economic well-being in their communities more generally.
- **Employ market-based approaches:** A thorough understanding of current market demand for goods and services is critical to the success of interventions that aim to spur economic growth or access to quality service delivery in a sustainable manner. Best practices suggest that successful design and implementation entail an understanding of how the private and public sector actors in the relevant market systems can themselves provide the solutions to demand- or supply-side constraints, with donor-funded projects acting solely as short-term catalysts for longer term change.

V. Integrated Management of the Overall Project

Improving food and nutrition security in Liberia is a complex challenge that requires a shared vision for collective impact among multiple stakeholders whose individual efforts are well coordinated and strategically aligned. Integration will underpin the sustainability and scalability of project activities and impacts, and will take place at two levels—first, within the project itself,

⁹ USAID Policy “Youth in Development: Realizing the Demographic Opportunity,” October 2012, p. 4

and second, between the project and other relevant activities at the county, district and community level. A successful applicant will propose a clear approach, which will be subject to further refinement during the first year, to multi-sector coordination both within the project and with other USAID partners, other donors, local for profit and non-profit organizations and GOL implementers.

Within the project itself, it will be important for the prime FFP implementer to manage all sub-contractors and sub-grantees in a way that maintains the integrated nature of assistance to communities, Districts and Counties, and fosters the sharing of lessons learned. The Chief of Party will need sufficient delegated authority from the home office to enforce this team approach on the ground. FFP will look to the implementer to propose a management plan that ensures this, and that provides for periodic and regular engagement with community leadership, religious leaders, business leaders, other sources of local influence, and local government.

Within the context of USAID's country strategy, the FFP project is an integral component of USAID/Liberia's CDCS and is complementary to the Mission's Development Objectives for economic growth, education, health, and governance. Planning by the FFP partners should be coordinated across activities to identify opportunities for collective impact by layering, sequencing, and integrating efforts both within the project and between the project and other initiatives. Sustainability requires taking into account linkages between the roles of communities, local government officials, markets, enterprises, farming systems and value chains, and relevant governmental ministries. At the National and County levels, USAID/Liberia will facilitate coordination and integration across activities, particularly as it is currently focused on integration within three theme areas: nutrition, youth, and job creation.

FFP nutrition activities should be coordinated and integrated with the USAID economic growth, health, governance and education activities, where appropriate. To the extent possible, this should entail joint work-planning and joint field monitoring. Several other opportunities for linkage and/or partnership exist as well, particularly in infrastructure, agriculture, health, governance and with the private sector.

Partnerships and opportunities for linkage between FFP and other Mission development partners will differ between Bong and Grand Bassa counties, which are targeted for portfolio integration in the Mission's CDCS, and River Cess, where there will be fewer USAID linkage opportunities. In the latter, other donor investments may offer opportunities for coordination and collaboration. (See <https://www.usaid.gov/liberia> for information on USAID/Liberia's current activities.)

Applicants are strongly encouraged to consider linkages from both an immediate impact and a long-term sustainability point of view—leveraging another donor's investment may be an example of the former and facilitating public-private partnership, is an example of the latter.

VI. Collaborating, Learning and Adapting

A successful applicant will propose a defined system, as part of an adaptive management approach, for learning and semi-annual dissemination events with other implementers working

in the same counties. These integration and coordination events may be convened jointly with the USAID/Liberia FFP Officer, Program Officer, and Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) Advisor. FFP will expect its partner to play an active role in these events, and to take every opportunity to share lessons learned and effective ways to work in a holistic, multi-sectoral way to improve nutrition and livelihoods, including for youth, at the community and household levels. These learning events will provide opportunities to ensure collaboration across the USAID portfolio and with the GoL and other donors, assess progress, identify constraints, and determine potential course corrections or opportunities to leverage additional impact.

The FFP partner should reach out to other implementers at the District and community level, to joint work planning, share learning and ensure coordination with District government and community leaders. Applicants are strongly encouraged to provide continuous monitoring of a sample of households and communities, the development of feedback loops, and implementation of a learning agenda shared with other USAID implementers, the GoL, and other funders. Applicants are encouraged to extrapolate from other experience and learning, to propose innovative concepts and/or use of technologies, as long as proposed pilot activities are supported by real-time monitoring and learning.

Additionally, the partner will be strongly encouraged to facilitate processes that bring actors together, by providing opportunities for engagement, information and organizational development, conflict mitigation and resolution, and technical support. For example, an understanding of power dynamics and prevailing incentives and interests is a pre-condition to identifying which approaches will influence the behaviors of different actors, and therefore how to improve transparency and accountability. The partner will be strongly encouraged to use a political economy-informed analysis to guide decisions on chosen activities, and to tailor interventions and advocacy approaches to suit the circumstances. This will also help frame who the critical actors are, whose voice is excluded, which organizations will be supported, and to choose Districts and communities.

With high rates of illiteracy in the three target counties, radio provides an effective communication medium (although radios may be more often owned and controlled by men). Multiple local languages will need to be used for specific kinds of messages, because multiple local languages and different forms of Liberian Vernacular English are spoken in Bong, Grand Bassa and River Cess. Though connectivity is still limited or absent in many rural areas, cell phones can be used for some polls and surveys, and for call-in projects with community radio stations. The FFP implementer should survey language use and the availability of modes for information collection and dissemination, by age, gender, ethnicity and geographic area, and plan for the best modes of communication to interact with the intended participants.

VII. Project Priorities: Context, Challenges and Opportunities

A. Community Level governance Structures Strengthened

Objective:

Governance structures at community and district levels in Liberia need strengthening in order to respond and advocate more effectively for people's needs. This requires a shift from a 'top-down' culture of national and county management of funds and service initiatives to one that actively strengthens communities' roles in oversight and planning. In order to increase trust in public institutions, as well as within communities themselves, more needs to be done to create inclusive governance and meaningful oversight roles for communities. Strengthening connections between communities and the District and County layers of government, as well as between traditional and formal structures, is needed to ensure effective responses to citizen demands.

It should be noted that during the Ebola crisis community members and local organizations, generally on their own and without government direction, served to connect victims with services thereby ensuring the containment of the disease.¹⁰ Expanding on the work that communities have already been doing, ensuring that they have active voices in the development and implementation of food security interventions, and providing them with the tools needed to oversee activities will ensure sustainability and inclusivity in decision-making, so that all voices in a community are heard.

All FFP interventions should seek to sustainably strengthen community-level responses to chronic food and nutrition security issues. FFP activities should complement existing and future governance, decentralization, civil society strengthening, capacity building, and peacebuilding programming. Parallel structures should not be established, but rather existing structures at all levels—from household level to county level—should be strengthened as appropriate. The FFP partner(s) will be expected to contribute to the building of local government capacity for responsibilities that will devolve to them through the GoL's decentralization initiatives, especially the planning and targeting of services to the most vulnerable and impoverished communities and households.

Context:

Liberia has limited local governance authority and capacity, and the inequality between urban and rural counties has been a core grievance and a key factor contributing to conflict in Liberia. Since its establishment in 1847, Liberia has been highly centralized. According to the National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance, this has limited participation in government service delivery, led to unequal development between Monrovia and the rest of Liberia, and contributed to the need for greater accountability and transparency. As a result, the Government of Liberia has developed a thorough institutional framework for decentralization with a 10-year timeline to devolve political, fiscal, and administrative authority to locally-elected officials in order to deliver services more effectively, equitably, and transparently.

Progress remains slow, however, and initial attempts to bring government closer to the people have not generally been sustained, including cases where funding did not transfer from the central to the regional/local offices effectively leaving them incapable of functioning. Existing local government structures lack the capacity for this transfer of authority and increase in roles and responsibilities. Sector ministries which currently control funding and implementation of service delivery in counties have been reluctant to delegate authority to their own county

¹⁰ International Alert, *Surviving Ebola*, 2015: http://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Liberia_SurvivingEbola_EN_2015.pdf

offices. Most decisions continue to be made in Monrovia and limited mechanisms exist for public participation in decision-making, monitoring and accountability. To address these concerns, the GoL recently established new County Service Centers as one-stop shops to ensure that major documentation services are accessible to rural residents.

Negative perceptions still abound surrounding the performance and trustworthiness of the government, and Liberia remains very fragile — ranked 21 of 178 countries on the Fragile States Index for 2015.¹¹ Major issues related to corruption, lack of skilled civil servants, lack of financial resources, and inequalities remain a stumbling block to progress. To combat these challenges, the GOL is expected to work to implement the decentralization aspects of its 2012-2016 Agenda for Transformation, Liberia's medium term Economic Growth and Development Strategy.

Weak authority and decision-making throughout subnational government translates into minimal participation and accountability for service delivery in the counties. This situation has led to perceptions of corruption and inequality. Ambitious County Development Agendas (CDAs), previously prepared for the 2008-2012 period as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy, provided an inclusive process for engaging citizens in county-level consultations to identify priorities and develop five-year plans. However, the CDA period ended in 2012, and no official reporting was made detailing progress or achievements. The establishment of County Treasuries and the planned deployment of Regional Development Officers is expected to support improved capacity for county-level planning and budgeting, but it will require strong coordination at central and local levels. Currently, the only budget allocations provided at the sub-national level are the County Development Funds and Social Development Funds.

Challenges:

Lack of effective coordination and accountability around food and nutrition

security: While food security and nutrition coordinating bodies exist at the national level (e.g. The National Nutrition Coordination Committee and Food Security and Nutrition Technical Committee), both lack the resources and capacity to effectively coordinate activities. At the county and sub-county or decentralized level, governance of issues related to food security and nutrition is nearly non-existent and county technical teams remain isolated from one another.

Lack of visible progress: Liberians are frustrated with the slow progress of development, and primarily blame government officials who are often suspected of focusing on their own consolidation of power and wealth rather than on the wellbeing of their fellow countrymen. Pre-war legacies of elitism, corruption, and inequality persist, and many Liberians feel a strong sense of alienation and mistrust. Given the centralized nature of the government, individual citizens do not have opportunities or access to influence decision-making above the most basic community level.

Lack of awareness of- and advocacy for- improved services: Community groups such as women's groups, community elders, community leadership forums, and CHCs do not often advocate for quality health services for women and children as community priorities. Groups

¹¹ <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org>

do exist but are often dysfunctional, with limited capacity to identify needs, develop and execute plans. Poor coordination among nutrition and food security stakeholders and lack of integrated management of information limits the ability of donors, implementing partners and the GOL to achieve nutrition goals.

Opportunities:

FFP's community-based mandate offers a platform for increased dialogue and engagement between communities and local authorities, as well as a means to increase the voice of community members. This may provide awardees an opportunity, in coordination with existing governance activities, to introduce or strengthen the application of social accountability principles and processes that increase government transparency, articulate and increase the influence of citizens' demand for both public and private services, and improve the quality of those services by partnering with public and private sector institutions.

Decentralization strategies and capacity building efforts: Through direct interventions or partnerships with other activities (GOL, USAID, other donor-, or village-led) within communities, partners will find a wide variety of opportunities to strengthen governance in order to improve multi-sector service delivery, encourage local government-community partnership and engagement, and build the capacity of local communities to influence local development planning. Connections, where possible, to decentralization strategies and activities are highly encouraged—particularly reinforcing USAID/Liberia's support to UNDP' Liberia Decentralization Support Project and USAID's Local Empowerment for Government Inclusion and Transparency projects.

Existing sub-national institutions: Greater convergence of nutrition-sensitive and nutrition-specific interventions can be achieved sustainably by working with existing county and sub-county structures, such as multi-sector nutrition coordination teams or committees, or multi-sector food and nutrition security structures. Strengthening these types of groups will help to ensure that all interventions are reaching the intended participants, and that project activities are adjusted where necessary to improve nutritional and food security outcomes.

The potential of community groups: Given the recent success of community health actors in the fight against Ebola, a “bottom up” approach can reinvigorate CHCs, Health Facility Development Committees and other groups to address common food security challenges. Often communities already have in place leadership and governance structures, both formal and traditional, that can serve as the building blocks for interventions; several examples exist of positive deviant communities who have been able to enact major changes, including construction of WASH and health facilities with their own resources. Partners are strongly encouraged to assist community groups (including local civil society groups) identify opportunities to engage productively with district and county government—including in the development of district and county development plans and budgets. FFP partners should link with other civil society strengthening programs, whenever possible, including USAID/Liberia's Liberia Accountability and Voice Initiative.

B. Nutrition, Maternal-Child Health, and WASH

Objective

To accelerate progress in improving nutrition outcomes in the target counties, a multi-sector approach to reinforce community systems and create positive social and behavioral change is needed to address both the direct and indirect causes of poor nutrition. This approach aligns with both USAID's and the Liberia Mission's nutrition strategies. The USAID Multi-Sector Nutrition Strategy (2014-2025) emphasizes scaling up effective, integrated nutrition-specific and -sensitive interventions, and systems, while the USAID Liberia Multi-Sector Nutrition Strategy (June, 2014), aims to address both direct and indirect factors, incorporating best practices and lessons learned in health, agriculture, WASH and education.

Successful activities will support existing structures and foster linkages to improve nutrition-specific (maternal, infant and child nutrition) and nutrition-sensitive¹² (including WASH and family planning) community services, along with local capacity strengthening to sustain ongoing improvements. Partners will emphasize the scale-up and integration of sound strategies and lessons learned in maternal and child health, family planning, WASH, youth and gender programming, along with strategic support to the GOL to improve planning and coordination of nutrition-related activities.

Context:

Suboptimal maternal, infant and young child nutrition practices and access to quality health services and water and sanitation remain major obstacles to accelerating improvements in nutritional status. Poor outcomes are due to many factors including lack of access to diverse foods throughout the year, women's illiteracy, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, high rates of child illness, and high rates of pregnancy, especially among young women age 15 to 19. Although many mothers understand the importance of breastfeeding and provision of colostrum, proper feeding and care of children during illness (or an initiation ritual) have not improved greatly over the last decade. Practices like "peppering" (giving children a solution of pepper juice) and force feeding are especially pronounced in Grand Bassa and River Cess. (Qualitative Study of IYCF Practices in Liberia, UNICEF (2010)).¹³ Given the high prevalence of child illness, especially malaria and diarrhea, proper feeding during illness is critical to reducing chronic malnutrition. Consumption of animal source foods, already limited for children and pregnant women due to cultural norms, has likely decreased further with the ban on bushmeat and increased prices for fish (Personal Communication, October, 2015) following the recent Ebola outbreaks across the country. Finally, maternal mortality and morbidity, which is associated with child-bearing that is too early, too often or too late in a women's life, diminish the capacity of women to help their families access enough food to meet nutritional needs.

High fertility contributes to food insecurity at the household level through a variety of pathways: (1) having more mouths to feed, (2) more time and energy burden on women when there are more children to care for, and (3) in the longer term, increased demographic pressures on land availability. Facilitating access to contraception can improve a woman's ability to manage changes in food availability, access, and utilization to ensure her family has adequate and nutritious food. The Liberia Food Security Framework provides an analysis of the family

¹² Please see Agriculture and Livelihoods opportunities section III for further considerations on nutrition-sensitive agriculture and livelihoods.

¹³ The Carter Center is studying the use of secret spaces for community rituals, and can be a source for additional information on feeding practices during rites for infants and children.

planning context in the country.¹⁴ Of particular note is the virtually universal knowledge of family planning methods and their use among those sexually active, the continuing high unmet need for contraception, as well as the continuing desire of Liberian men and women—whether young, old, rich, poor, educated or not—to want large families. Equally significant is the early age at first sex, which according to key informants is associated with cultural beliefs, and the prevalence of early marriage and transactional, or commercial sex, which is often considered a way for a young girl to secure a living.

A country-level analysis of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) access in Liberia, as well as an overview of WASH activities under previous USAID/FFP projects, can be found in the Liberia Food Security Framework¹⁵. Despite significant donor investment in post-war Liberia, water and in particular sanitation access levels remain exceedingly low and are likely constraining safe hygiene behaviors and practice— e.g. only 5 percent of rural Liberians have access to improved sanitation, 71 percent practice open defecation, and 32 percent rely on unimproved surface water for drinking¹⁶. The impacts of poor WASH behaviors and access on nutrition, health, and economic impact in Liberia have been documented. Each year, 3,000 Liberians, including 1,800 children, die from diarrheal diseases, and an estimated USD17.5 million (2 percent of its GDP) is lost to associated healthcare costs and productivity losses (WSP, 2012¹⁷).

Consistent with other development indicators, WASH access levels within the three target counties are also significantly lower than the national average. Strikingly, the population per functional, in-use waterpoint is 730, 727, and 504 in Bong, Grand Bassa, and River Cess respectively, resulting in access levels of 32 percent, 33 percent, and 36 percent, respectively (versus the GoL standard of 250 persons/water point)^{18,6}. In the absence of county-level basic sanitation data, the coverage of community-led total sanitation (CLTS) demand-driven sanitation campaigns can be used as a proxy: 5 (of 12) districts in Bong, 2 (of 8) districts in Grand Bassa, and 0 (of 8) districts in River Cess have ongoing CLTS programs. Symptomatic of this WASH profile, all three counties also rank in the top five (of 15 counties) for prevalence of diarrhea in children (< 5 years old) and for rates of stunting.

At present, few non-USAID actors support long term programs targeting chronic undernutrition in the three counties, besides current investments in Reproductive, Maternal Newborn Child Health (RMNCH) by USAID through Fixed Amount Reimbursement Agreements (FARAs) in all three counties and the Partnership for Advancing Community-based Services (PACS) activity in Bong and Grand Bassa. There have been relatively few recent investments in health and nutrition to date by USAID in River Cess, although other partners have been active including Last Mile Health, Partners in Health and UNICEF, especially during the Ebola outbreak.

Challenges:

¹⁴ USAID, FANTA/FHI360 (2015). Liberia Food Security Framework for 2015

¹⁵ USAID, FANTA/FHI360 (2015). Liberia Food Security Framework for 2015.

¹⁶ Government of Liberia/LISGIS & WHO/JMP (2014). Liberia demographic health survey (DHS) for 2013.

¹⁷ Water & Sanitation Program (2012). Economic impacts of poor sanitation in Africa—Liberia.

¹⁸ Government of Liberia/MoPW/LISGIS (2011). Liberia Waterpoint Atlas (31 Aug 2011).

Various donors, including USAID have made substantial investments in recent years to support the MoH Essential Package of Health Services (EPHS). Health staff salaries and support to other health systems and community service delivery remain highly dependent on donors, including USAID and UNICEF. The impact of Ebola has also led to attrition of health workers either due to death or resignation. Community health is currently in transition, with a new phase of, better trained, supervised, and remunerated community health workers being put in place. The current system of community health volunteers, including trained traditional midwives, will eventually transition to focus their activities on health promotion and behavior change activities. The future of how this new system will work is yet to be determined.

While Liberia has had a National Nutrition Plan in place since 2008, the national nutrition division and the hiring of county level nutritionists is a fairly recent phenomenon. Nutrition services within the health system have focused on integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM). The MoH has just begun to address prevention of chronic malnutrition, beyond growth monitoring at facilities, with the adoption of a MoH package of services for Essential Nutrition Actions (ENA). Social and behavior change communication (SBCC) activities are limited largely to one-way information provision. Although nutrition supervisors are in place at the county level, multi-sectoral coordination of nutrition (including health, agriculture, WASH and other actors) activities is nearly non-existent.

On WASH challenges, water access in rural areas is largely supplied via shallow, lined wells fitted with Afridev pumps (standardized, GoL-endorsed model), which represent a cost-effective model in much of the country (approx. \$3,700 for new well construction⁴). Notably however, the significant temporal variability of rainfall drastically reduces yields from shallow wells, particularly hand dug systems, during the dry months (November through April¹⁹). Poor access to improved drinking water is compounded by poor design and construction quality of wells, and low oversight by implementing groups in adhering to well design guidelines and best practices²⁰. A coarse analysis of hydro-geologic profiles and manual drilling feasibility within the country is available²¹; with evidence of bedrock limiting the potential of shallow well drilling in Bong. On water quality, the availability of, and demand for household water treatment products is very limited outside of a few NGO-driven campaigns. This has implications for the quality of drinking water, particularly during the dry season, when wells dry up and families resort to surface water, as well as during the farming season, when water access is often guaranteed by unimproved, open wells in fields.

Opportunities:

Capitalize on the recent success of community health engagement and leadership in the fight against Ebola by further strengthening the link between communities and health services through Community Health Committees and Community Health Development Committees. Community leadership forums could be particularly useful in this effort. Partners should explore means to strengthen technical and managerial aspects of nutrition within the MoH Essential Package of Health Services, with improved linkages to communities, outreach

¹⁹ Government of Liberia/WASH Liberia (2013). WASH Sector Performance Report for 2013.

²⁰ Government of Liberia/MoPW & UNICEF (2010). The guidelines for water and sanitation services in Liberia.

²¹ Government of Liberia/UNICEF (no date). Feasibility study for manual drilling mapping of favorable zones.

services and facilities. Partners should also explore the feasibility of aligning and/or integrating their nutrition interventions with efforts to increase community capacities to identify and respond effectively to future Ebola outbreaks.

Further develop and strengthen social behavior change communications (SBCC) approaches and strategies guided by formative research for key behaviors will be paramount to improving nutritional outcomes. Best practices in SBCC should be utilized, including successful approaches to address the Ebola epidemic and reduced care seeking, as well as past nutrition SBCC efforts. These approaches include community mobilization, advocacy with decision makers and influential people, and the use of multiple channels of communication. Capacity strengthening for communication actors is also needed to improve the quality of SBCC, including health communications personnel at the county, district, clinic and community levels, in order to enact the MoH National Health Promotion Policy and Health Communication Strategy (still in draft). Beyond the health system, agriculture extension agents and other nutrition-sensitive service providers can be incorporated into SBCC capacity strengthening. SBCC related to family planning (FP) can also be integrated into nutrition programming and with specific target groups (e.g. youth groups) to reach girls, boys, and gatekeepers with appropriately targeted FP information on services.

Promote existing infant and young child foods [such as bony dust (whole dried fish), sesame seeds, eddoes, plantains, etc.] commonly consumed in Liberia, complemented by other nutrient-dense foods that can be easily grown or purchased. The nutritional and medicinal importance of indigenous food plants such as those gathered as “wild foods” should be investigated, as they may be relevant to maintaining good health, preventing ill health, or promoting healing. The use of these foods as condiments, or for medicinal uses for various age groups or conditions (such as for women during lactation) should be researched and incorporated into an overall plan for building on indigenous nutritional opportunities.²²

Leverage and expand upon USAID’s and other donors’ investments: USAID is present in Grand Bassa and Bong through the FED and PACS activities, the Maternal and Child Survival project, and through civil society and community radio activities, working in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, WASH, and maternal and child health and family planning at both the community and health facility levels. Extending support, where appropriate, to other efforts by USAID and other donors will be critical for improved access to quality RMNCH services, including addressing unmet need for family planning and spacing of births, especially among youth; capitalizing on high utilization of antenatal care services to improve nutrition and use of other services during pregnancy; and extending the Essential Package of Health services (EPHS) at the community level, including integrated management of acute malnutrition (IMAM) and community case management of childhood illnesses, in collaboration with USAID and other partners. If USAID is supporting psych-social screening services in the FFP target counties,

²² Christine S. Kabuye and Grace W. Ngugi, “Nutritional and Medicinal Importance of Indigenous Food Plants,” in *The Potential of Indigenous Wild Foods: Workshop Proceedings, 22–26 January 2001*. Funding provided by: USAID/OFDA. Implementation provided by: CRS/Southern Sudan. Proceedings compiled and edited by Catherine Kenyatta (c.kenyatta@cgiar.org) and Amiee Henderson (ahenderson@afr-sd.org), USAID contractors, April 2001, pp. 57-60.

partners should consider whether there is a need for FFP facilitation at a community level that could increase access to these services.

Support family planning efforts: The Government of Liberia has prioritized family planning and has established policies and programs to extend services to communities. In order to improve availability and access to contraception, applicants should consider ways to facilitate linkages with existing services by coordinating with GoL Ministry of Health, other donors and the USAID PACS and MCSP projects. The FANTA 2015 “Desk Review of Programs Integrating Family Planning with Food Security and Nutrition” highlights promising practices for integrating family planning and food security initiatives.²³ Applicants should also consider ways to increase understanding of the factors that contribute to early age at first sex, early childbirth and the desire for large families.

Build on/learn from existing WASH interventions: Despite the ongoing presence of WASH partners, a significant space exists for WASH interventions that are impactful and sustainable. Partners are strongly encouraged to build upon the successes and contextual best practice established by ongoing WASH partnerships in Liberia, particularly in the context of WASH gains realized during the EVD crisis and recovery, and to support community ownership of WASH infrastructure and planning. Where relevant, partners should complement ongoing WASH activities, such as the Oxfam-led Liberia WASH consortium; USAID-funded PACS, LMWP, and FARA programs; AfDB-funded NRWASHP program; DfID/UNICEF SWA program; Irish Aid’s WASH programming; and GoL and USAID-funded WASH in Schools²⁴ efforts. As best practice in communities with high rates of diarrhea, partners are expected to execute formative research to assess likely routes of fecal-oral disease transmission and diarrhea, and to use rapid assessment to target WASH interventions. Potential opportunities include county-level GoL (MoPW & MoH) coordination on WASH development priorities and geographic targeting, contributing to GoL data management platforms for WASH, and fostering community-level interventions on financial transparency. Partners are expected to find creative ways to build upon gains made during the EVD crisis, particularly in the areas of handwashing/hygiene messaging, capacity strengthening of county-level environmental health technicians (EHTs), and deliberate WASH-nutrition linkages at health care facilities and educational settings.

Support targeted, community-driven and managed water hardware interventions, particularly in Bong and Grand Bassa, where communities demonstrate a strong sense of ownership and knowledge of water systems, as well as a willingness to pay for access and basic maintenance (e.g. of hand pumps). The identification and expansion of successful models, as well as other ways of strengthening community ownership, maintenance, and governance of water systems should be explored (e.g. expansion of pump spare parts supply chains, engagement of existing pump mechanics on other equipment-related livelihood activities). In communities serviced with basic drinking water supply, there is often still significant space to improve service quality, management, and sustainability of the water supply system. As with many rural water supply activities, operations and maintenance in Liberia are critical, and often the cause of long-term failure and low sustainability. FFP partners are expected to be cognizant of this, and be

²³ USAID, FANTA/FHI360 (2015). Desk Review of Programs Integrating Family Planning with Food Security and Nutrition.

²⁴ Government of Liberia (2015). Technical Report: WASH in Schools.

diligent in their efforts to assure operations and maintenance of any infrastructure. For any hardware construction, assurance of construction quality and year-round access will be emphasized by FFP, and water quality should not be assumed to be optimal, even in the case of properly installed shallow wells (e.g. consider impacts of unlined latrines on groundwater quality). To the extent possible, partners should support the GoL goal of country-wide open defecation-free (ODF) status by 2025, and to foster and scale up the GoL-led Community-Led Total Sanitation Plus (CLTS+) model.^{25,26,27} Limitations to the CLTS+ model for overall hygiene and nutrition may require exploration during the refinement year.

C. Agriculture and Livelihoods

Objective:

FFP wishes to support interventions that facilitate the strengthening and diversification of agricultural livelihood opportunities as a means of smoothing household consumption and increasing more stable incomes of vulnerable households in the three target counties. These project interventions should enable households and communities to add value to crops, market those products more efficiently, and invest in remunerative livelihoods that support a stronger agricultural sector (e.g. transportation, information, finance).

Context:

Liberia has immense potential for greater diversity within, and increased productivity of its agricultural sector owing to its relatively fertile soils, abundant arable land and enviable rainfall. However, many constraints limit growth of the sector, including low human capital, poor infrastructure (especially roads), low availability of and access to inputs and finance, lack of active public or private extension services, a weak policy environment to support private sector investments in the sector, and a lack of trust among market actors to engage in activities like bulk purchasing and marketing.

Rice is Liberia's most important food crop and is central to the country's food security and political stability, but it currently offers very limited potential for economic growth under the current national policy environment.²⁸ Rice milling is predominately done by hand using traditional methods or by small-scale mechanized mills; there is only one industrial rice mill in this country of nearly 4 million people whose main staple is rice. Liberia has the lowest rice yields in West Africa. Average rice yields in Liberia over 2011-13 totaled 1.1 MT per ha, compared to 1.8 MT per ha in Sierra Leone, 3 MT per ha in Ghana, and 3.6 MT per ha in Côte d'Ivoire.²⁹ Marketability of local rice is constrained by more competitively priced imported rice available country-wide in all local markets. Cassava is widely grown but there are limited post-harvest options and, owing to its perishability and weight, there are short marketing chains and little room for increasing profitability. In addition to very low agricultural productivity, pre- and

²⁵ Government of Liberia/NTCU (2012). Guidelines for Community-led Total Sanitation Implementation in Liberia.

²⁶ Government of Liberia/MoH (2014). National Guidelines for Hygiene Promotion.

²⁷ Global Communities (2015). Global Communities' Approach to CLTS.

²⁸ EAT, "Liberia Market Study for Selected Agricultural Products," 2015.

²⁹ USAID, BEST using data from FAOSTAT, July 2014.

post-harvest losses are very high, averaging about 40 percent.³⁰ Limited post-harvest opportunities are especially constraining to the economic viability of growing vegetables, fruit, meat and poultry, as well as fisheries, all of which are critical to improving availability of nutrient-dense foods and diversifying diets. Although nearly 70 percent of the population is engaged in agriculture, as a result of poor sector performance, the country relies heavily on food imports to meet the domestic requirements for rice (its main staple), vegetables, meat and pulses.

National fisheries have three sub-components: coastal marine fisheries, involving industrial and artisanal activities; inland river and lake fisheries, which are primitive and mainly artisanal percent; and aquaculture, which consists of subsistence fish farming of tilapia. Aquaculture could provide a higher quality product to the local markets, especially in non-coastal counties and regions that are isolated due to poor infrastructure; currently most coastal marine fish is frozen by industrial companies and transported, which often results in quality reduction due to poor handling.³¹

Within agriculture and fisheries, there is scope for increasing incomes through value addition and increased volumes and efficiencies in marketing. Though purchasing power is limited, Liberian households are largely dependent on the market to meet their food needs. A 2010 survey found that 65 percent of food crop producing households depend on the market for some food; the percent of households dependent on the market reached 100 percent for those whose livelihoods depended on remittances (CFSNS, 2013). Greater attention is required to ensure equitable intra-household allocation of a more diverse set of foods for priority groups such as young children, adolescent girls, pregnant women and lactating mothers. Many of the foods demanded by Liberian consumers can be locally produced if cost efficiencies can be improved and other barriers to increasing incentives to produce and market are lowered or removed, for example, through bulk marketing and improved feeder roads.

Challenges:

An insecure land tenure policy environment: Insecure land tenure is not conducive to investment in long term improvements to agricultural land such as fertilizing, brushing, stump removal, drainage, irrigation management, and tree crop production. While these issues affect all smallholders, female farmers are less likely to have secure access to land, and thus less likely to invest in agriculture and expand beyond the subsistence level. According to recent studies, land disputes accounted for 90 percent of controversies in the courts.³² Many of these cases involve disputes over home ownership following the civil war, with rural land disputes more commonly being settled at the local level. It is often challenging for youth to find a viable and sustainable place in the agricultural sector, as access to farm land within the family is often limited and it is even more difficult to access land that is outside of the family's holdings.

Limited public or private sector agricultural extension services: MoA capacity is extremely constrained, and insufficient demand limits private sector engagement. As a result,

³⁰ MOA/FAO, "The State of Food and Nutrition Security in Liberia," 2010.

³¹ <http://www.fao.org/fi/oldsite/FCP/en/LBR/profile.htm>

³² EAT, "Agribusiness Commercial, Legal and Institutional Reform Assessment in Liberia," 2015.

there is little effective communication about improved technologies and agricultural practices, and/or promotion of the production and consumption nutrient-dense or diverse foods. NGOs provide some project-based extension, but this is typically not sustainable after the end of the projects. The prevalence of high illiteracy rates among women poses a significant challenge to reaching female farmers with conventional extension methods or ICT technologies such as text messaging.

Limited use of agricultural inputs: During stakeholder interviews done as part of CSI field research, virtually all community members, including both men and women, repeatedly expressed an inability to afford inputs such as tools, improved seeds, fertilizer or pest management technologies. Further analysis is required to determine actual constraints to, and opportunities for, strengthening supply and demand for agricultural inputs.

Maintaining and improving soil fertility: The repeated growth of non- leguminous crops such as rice and cassava and the use of slash-and-burn cultivation practices exacerbate declining soil fertility. While some legumes such as groundnuts, beans and pulses are grown by smallholders, these are on a relatively small scale. Backyard and small scale vegetable production is currently done by most households, but with a minimal amount of appropriate soil management practices and other improved technologies resulting in very low productivity.

Climate change: Liberia's agriculture is increasingly experiencing the impacts of climate change, including lower yields and higher degrees of vulnerability and uncertainty caused by reduced soil moisture, changes in rainfall patterns, increased flooding, and increased salinity. Over the medium to long term rising sea-levels will increase coastal flooding, beach erosion, and salinity in soil and fresh water aquifers. Partners are encouraged to consider county-specific hazards as they develop their theories of change.

Opportunities:

Ongoing efforts to improve land tenure: The Liberia Mission is supporting land governance activities, and the Carter Center in Liberia is working with traditional leaders in Bong to support alternative dispute resolution for land conflicts. Partners are encouraged to explore opportunities to link to and possibly facilitate the expansion of these activities in communities participating in their proposed FFP program.

Physical accessibility to end-markets, especially relative proximity to the major markets in Monrovia, represents a tremendous opportunity for those communities with access to trunk and feeder roads.

Existing diversification of production at the household level: Many households are already producing a variety of vegetables and beans/pulses in backyard gardens and include them in their diets when possible. Small surpluses are typically used to supplement household income. Improved back yard and small scale commercial vegetable production practices will allow for significant opportunities, especially for women, to improve variety, quantity and quality of vegetables produced. A high demand exists for vegetables, which are especially

profitable during the dry season, and fruit.³³ Increasing the productivity of existing crops could potentially lead to improvements in both dietary diversity and household incomes, as well as increase willingness to explore other crops and/or income-generation opportunities.

Existing consumer demand for legumes such as groundnuts, beans and pulses as well as other crops such as sesame: These crops are beneficial to improving soil health by providing nitrogen in the case of legumes and a rotation/diversification benefit in all cases, as well as offering better options for improving diets. Previous work to screen and disseminate promising legume varieties conducted by N2Africa (Putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder farmers in Africa) and others can be used as a guide for further scaling up of legumes cultivation in Liberia.³⁴ Strengthening private sector and post-harvest processing and marketing opportunities would lead to opportunities for the development of a pluralistic extension system that would greatly extend extension's reach to rural households with the private sector working with producers, while linked to the public sector for coordination, training and support. Post-harvest storage construction, where needed, could be an area for youth employment.

Existing consumer demand for fresh and processed fish: Liberians exhibit a strong preference for fish in local diets, the use of ground smoked fish as a condiment, and as the primary source for protein for children. There are a significant number of ponds from the pre-war era which could be reconditioned and other lowland sites which can be converted to fish ponds. Also, coastal counties such as River Cess and Grand Bassa offer excellent ocean fisheries opportunities in addition to aquaculture. There are also opportunities for providing fish food include using livestock waste, soy or cassava products or byproducts as well as rice bran or maize. In addition to providing an income-producing addition or alternative to rice production, increased consumption of fish could lead to nutritional gains in the household. Also, the fisheries value chains would offer opportunities for employment such as fingerling and fish food suppliers, growers, cold storage and processors.

Increasing labor costs make mechanization a more viable option and opens up opportunities to the private sector to provide equipment and services both for sale and lease. There is a high potential to introduce climate-smart irrigation options to produce vegetables crops during the dry season.

Youth engagement in agriculture: Significant opportunities exist for youth, both on and off farm, and youth may be more likely to explore new technologies and/or try new business models. Areas to explore include (but are not limited to) private input supply as part of hub-and-spoke models for sales of seeds, fertilizer and other inputs, as well as private sector para-veterinary services. Opportunities may also exist to build upon the success of activities implemented by FED to support youth entrepreneurs. Also, custom services for on-farm functions such as tillage, harvesting and haulage, offer great potential opportunities for youth to leverage mechanization to grow the private sector. Youth's engagement in agriculture may also serve to reinforce nutrition-sensitive messaging around diet and healthy families.

³³ EAT (2015) Liberia Market Study for Selected Agricultural Products.

³⁴ N2Africa, "Howard G. Buffett Foundation Interim Report," June 2012.

National and international demand for sustainable tree crops including cocoa, coffee, and oil palm present opportunities for Liberian farmers to diversify beyond rubber plantations. Rubber prices have been falling, but cocoa and oil palm market opportunities are attractive. Smallholder cocoa production was quite successful before the civil war, which devastated both the export market and the subsistence-oriented sector.³⁵ For farmers with secure access to land, tree crop production can offer significant opportunities for cash income and has the added benefit of improving natural resource management by reducing slash and burn agriculture and increasing the carbon stock. Activities should be done in close collaboration with other USG programs, such as SHOPS II and USDA's LIFE project.

Climate-smart agriculture approaches will help to prepare small holders for challenges that climate change will continue to present. This may include soil and water conservation practices such as drip irrigation, water and soil retention structures; planting new varieties adapted to local conditions and constraints; the increased use of organic fertilizer and judicious use of inorganic fertilizer; as well as improved post-harvest handling and marketing to reduce waste.

Innovative partnerships around small-scale local procurement, especially around school gardens or other community-level production schemes: As part of the Ebola emergency response, WFP procured rice from FTF rice value chain actors, and home-grown school feeding has been piloted in Liberia. Opportunities may also exist for youth engagement through programs such as Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) which would incorporate income opportunities with nutrition messaging and improved agricultural production practices. Messaging on natural resource management and climate change could also be incorporated into this type of community-centered approach.

D. Human Capacity and Livelihoods

Objective:

In order for investments in sectors central to improving food security in Liberia (e.g., agriculture, WASH) to be scaled-up and sustainable, critical constraints in human, financial and physical capital must be addressed. Nearly two-thirds of Liberians depend on agriculture for their livelihood, with about half of all households engaging in food crop production and more than one-third engaging in petty trading (often of agricultural products), as either part of or their main livelihood strategy.³⁶ Therefore, strengthening the capacity of actors through relevant skills training, and building and reinforcing key support functions for the agricultural sector in particular – credit, roads and transportation, and information – can have a positive impact on a large number of Liberia's poorest households. Beyond the agricultural sector, there may be innovative or especially promising opportunities to drive poverty reduction in target communities through a focus on skills training in other livelihoods. For these reasons, with a special but not exclusive emphasis on strengthening agricultural sector livelihoods, FFP wishes to support strategic investments in literacy and numeracy, business development services for

³⁵ USAID, "Evaluation of Liberia Sustainable Tree Crops program," 2011.

³⁶ WFP, Liberia Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (2013)

micro- and small-enterprises, other relevant job skills training and placement, expansion of credit access among vulnerable rural households, and repair and rehabilitation of feeder roads.

Context:

More than two-thirds of Liberians work in the informal sector.³⁷ Of those rural Liberians working in 2010, the vast majority (87.1 percent) was “vulnerably employed” with insecure income streams—a category that includes those who were either working for themselves, or unpaid within their own household.³⁸ Youth, young adults and women are most often in this group and thus face significant challenges in making a daily living on a regular basis. Surveys and discussions with key informants suggest that lack of opportunity is a key reason for this underemployment. In two of the three counties, low and vulnerable incomes are exacerbated by dependency ratios higher than the national average (1.43 in River Cess and 1.41 in Bong, against a national average of 1.37).³⁹

Due to the lack of serviceable infrastructure, building and/or rebuilding the country’s infrastructure is a priority of the GoL, with an emphasis on road networks and electrification. To that end, international and multilateral donors have invested in the Liberian Reconstruction Trust Fund (LRTF⁴⁰) as well as the National Transport Master Plan⁴¹. In support of this strategy, multilateral donors, such as the World Bank and the EU, are currently supporting rehabilitation of primary (“trunk”) and secondary roads, as well as bridges^{42,43,44}. USAID/Liberia is supporting repair and rehabilitation of more than 1,000 km of feeder roads, largely linked with the geography of USAID/Feed the Future’s value chain programming (i.e. Bong, Nimba, and Lofa counties), with the goal of improving market access for value chain producers. Partners should also be aware of commitments from Mineral Development Agencies (Concessionaires) to primary road rehabilitation in mining regions⁴⁵.

As a result of Liberia’s lengthy civil war, an entire generation of young adults was never educated. Illiteracy and innumeracy play a role in the difficulty of achieving a secure livelihood, let alone one with opportunities for continued growth. Rural literacy rates are particularly low among youth and young adults. More than six out of 10 (65.7 percent) of rural youth aged 15-24 are illiterate; four out of 10 (40.7 percent) of rural young adults 25-35 are illiterate.⁴⁶ Being unable to read or write has major impact on the ability to make a living, blocking a person from

³⁷ GoL, Agenda for Transformation: Steps Toward Liberia RISING 2030 (2013).

³⁸ LISGIS, Report on the Liberia Labor Force Survey 2010 (2011).

³⁹ GoL, Bong County Development Agenda 2008-2012 (2007); GoL, Grand Bassa County Development Agenda 2008-2012 (2007); GoL, River Cess County Development Agenda 2008-2012 (2007).

⁴⁰ World Bank: Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund. Available at:

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,contentMDK:23294198~pagePK:146736~piPK:146830~theSitePK:258644,00.html>

⁴¹ GoL (2012). The National Transport Master Plan of Liberia 2012-2017. Available at: http://mot.gov.lr/doc/Cap_0.pdf

⁴² WB: Liberia- Fourth Highway Project (Trunk roads connecting Monrovia to central & SE Liberia)

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/1978/05/726971/liberia-fourth-highway-project>

⁴³ EU: road linking Gbarnga to Guinea border through Nimba: <http://constructionreviewonline.com/2015/09/european-union-funded-roads-in-liberia-set-to-open/>

⁴⁴ AfDB: Liberia Infrastructure and Inclusive Growth: http://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Project-and-Operations/Liberia_-_Infrastructure_and_Inclusive_Growth_-_Full_Report.pdf

⁴⁵ GoL (2012). The National Transport Master Plan of Liberia 2012-2017. Available at: http://mot.gov.lr/doc/Cap_0.pdf

⁴⁶ LISGIS, MoHSW, NACP, and ICF International. 2014. Liberia Demographic and Health Survey 2013, (2014).

applying for many jobs (e.g. a chauffeur needs to take a written driver's test) and limiting the ability to succeed at others (e.g. basic numeracy is a key skill for a petty trader to get ahead). The proportion of women who cannot read is high (51.8 percent cannot read at all) even though women overwhelmingly dominate trade in Liberia's staple foods in local markets across the country. As discussed in FANTA's desk review,⁴⁷ illiteracy is an important practical impediment to effective skills transfer and messaging. As a result, many projects have found that they must incorporate literary and numeracy skills training into their activities in order to achieve positive impacts.

In the years since the war, many initiatives have focused on building vocational skills among the young but fewer have successfully linked trainees to jobs. Vocation training graduates are the most likely to be unemployed according to a 2014 survey⁴⁸, and 50 percent are out of work. With 75 percent of the population under 35 years of age, such high and persistent unemployment, especially among frustrated youth and ex-combatants, risks undermining efforts to strengthen social cohesion and stability.

In the agriculture sector, increasing effective participation in markets may require both "push" strategies (e.g. literacy, numeracy, value addition, and business development skills), and "pull strategies" (e.g. facilitating market linkages and employment generation in supporting functions that enable expansion such as transportation, finance and information). For individuals who have previously received relevant training, there is scope to emphasize next-level job skills, as well as job placement and apprenticeships after completing vocational training.

Whatever the sector, intervention design must start from an understanding of what livelihoods are sustainably profitable, desired by and appropriate for various target groups, which will require research on market demand and production costs, as well as engaging with potential participants to ascertain their desires and aspirations.

Challenges:

Access to Transport Infrastructure: As underscored in the Food Security Desk Review⁴⁹, negligible access to infrastructure, including transportation, continues to obstruct the livelihoods and economic opportunities of Liberians, particularly in rural areas. Conversely, the presence of other donors, as well as relative community wealth, appears correlated with proximity to primary (trunk) roads. Higher levels of poverty and malnutrition are likely present in more remote communities/districts with the lowest access to markets, health care, education, etc. Road networks, particularly in rural areas, often become impassible during the rainy season (June – October), contributing to reduced economic productivity and exacerbating lean season malnutrition.

⁴⁷ Murphy, Emmet; Erikson, Kali; and Tubman, Macon. *USAID Office of Food for Peace Food Security Desk Review for Liberia, 2016–2020*. Washington, DC: FHI 360/FANTA (2016).

⁴⁸ Sara Elder and Koko Siaka Koné. *Work4Youth publication series No.8. Labour market transitions of young women and men in sub-Saharan Africa*; International Labour Office, Youth Employment Programme, Employment Policy Department. Geneva: ILO, 2014.

⁴⁹USAID, FANTA/FHI 360 (2015). *Liberia Food Security Desk Review for 2015*.

Access to credit is severely limited for all but the largest industrial actors. Despite the importance of the agricultural sector to the economic well-being of most Liberian households, and the recent emergence of Afriland First Bank, access to formal credit within agriculture is rare, with most households forced to rely on informal and scarce community-level credit. Liberian banks and financial institutions view youth as high-risk, making it difficult for young people to access credit. Youth mirror that perception, saying they do not understand financial institutions and consider them inaccessible. The economic downturn following the Ebola epidemic has put further strain on the system which is critical to allowing Liberians to invest in the micro-enterprises that most households engage in. Many indigenous rotating savings groups were de-capitalized as a result of economic stresses during the Ebola epidemic.

Lack of trust: In order for market systems to function more effectively, various market actors need to have incentives to work together in a mutually beneficial manner, and trust is generally a key feature of a successful business relationship. As discussed in Section III, a lack of trust appears to impede agricultural producers and traders from joining forces to engage in bulk marketing. Trust, or lack thereof, may be an important constraint in other sectors. Therefore, efforts to develop and strengthen access to credit via community-led savings groups or collective economic activity such as bulk marketing, for example, must find innovative ways to deal with trust issues which keep Liberians from joining together to market their products.

Opportunities:

There are a numerous projects working on basic literacy, numeracy and business skills training across the country, including some in one or more of the three target counties. In some communities, NGOs and donors have previously supported vocational training for a variety of skills that may be relevant both in and outside of the agricultural sector. Thus, despite generally low levels of literacy and numeracy, there is a basis on which to build enhanced vocational skills relevant for a variety of livelihoods and a range of different target groups. Awareness of and coordination with these and other investments, including messaging disseminated via radio, will be crucial to ensure FFP's investment is avoiding duplication, filling gaps where appropriate, and properly leveraging prior successes. Particularly for skills training, partners will need to ensure complementarity in terms of approach and target groups, and curriculum alignment, as appropriate.

Major USAID interventions within Bong and Grand Bassa focus on strengthening and enhancing livelihood opportunities through improvements in life skills and agricultural production/productivity, for example USAID's Advancing Youth Project (AYP), led by the Education office, has been working to address the youth employment issue by providing out of school youth aged 13-35 with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. The project offers literacy, numeracy, life skills and work readiness training along with work-based learning opportunities, forming local alliances of youth-and work-related organizations, and developing private-public partnerships. Feed the Future FED and any follow-on, Smallholder Oil Palm Support Activity (SHOPS II), expansion of finance through Investing in Business Expansion (IBEX), and business development services such as USAID-supported Building Markets' Sustainable Marketplace Initiative Liberia (SMI-L) could provide additional opportunities for linkages.

Government of Liberia support: The GOL is active in increasing youth employment, including through ongoing support of the nation's premier vocational college, the highly selective post-secondary Booker Washington Institute (BWI). BWI continues to play an important role in training youth in agriculture and other trade skills such as carpentry and welding. In addition, with financing through the World Bank Africa Catalytic Growth Fund for the Youth, Employment, Skills Project (YES), the GOL intends to increase income-generating opportunities for youth, expand community-based public works, and pilot business skills training. The project, which runs through June 2016, targets 9,000 Liberians across the country's 15 counties.⁵⁰

Traditional local systems: A study of the role of male and female bush schools is currently taking place in all 15 counties managed by the Council of Chiefs and funded by the Carter Center. This will establish data that can be used by Government and partners for possible interventions. FFP partners should use any learning that comes out of this study to emphasize the positive aspects of training and behavior change which could be promoted by these traditional structures. The Carter Center could be a useful source of information on traditional local systems, because it is also working with chiefs in Bong, and on using traditional justice to resolve community conflicts in Bong and Grand Bassa. Additionally, USAID's new Access to Justice Program (A2J) may be an additional resource.

Informal financial services: While access to finance is an important constraint, there is substantial experience with informal finance including indigenous rotating savings groups (*susus*). Savings and credit groups have varying terms, degrees of transparency and accountability and therefore trust in these financial instruments. FFP partners in Liberia have shown that Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), which address some of the important short-comings of *susus*, have proven popular and successful in a variety of Liberian community contexts. Among more vulnerable households and communities within the three counties, there is likely to be additional demand for training and support for community-led savings groups such as VSLAs.

Investments in infrastructure: Despite this significant, ongoing investment by USAID and others, FFP partners should anticipate significant need, and demand for, road and bridge repair by communities, particularly in remote areas and agriculture production zones. Existing and planned feeder road repairs may not reach the more remote and/or vulnerable districts within counties. Note however, that FFP partners should first explore opportunities to support and coordinate with existing and planned road repair initiatives to leverage resources and utilize established best practices (e.g. GIZ 'Transport sector capacity development'⁵¹; MCC establishment of five regional maintenance centers⁵²).

FFP investments in this area will prioritize efficient, durable, and quality construction. Given the large number of other technical partners and firms currently working on road repair in Liberia, programmatic challenges or delays associated with low technical capacity or availability of

⁵⁰ World Bank project agreement and status reports, accessible via <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P121686/lr-youth-employment-skills-project?lang=en>

⁵¹ GIZ: Transport sector capacity development (Legal, institutional and HR capacities in the transport sector are improved): <https://www.giz.de/en/worldwide/20010.html>

⁵² MCC (2015): MCC-Liberia Compact. Available: www.mcc.gov/where-we-work/program/liberia-compact

qualified partners is not anticipated. Road repair investments could be done through a number of modalities—whether through direct contracts, cash for assets, or through community mobilization. With any modality or methodology employed, partners are expected to strongly consider the incentive structures and sustainability of long-term road maintenance and repair. Geographic targeting and prioritization of any planned road repair should be done in concert with county-level government and other partners.

As noted within the Context section, relative distance from primary roads may serve as a proxy indicator for vulnerability and malnutrition. Health centers (and CHVs) may have good working knowledge of local road networks and the most pressing transportation challenges (i.e. communities with greatest need for road/bridge repair; communities with lowest access during rainy season). Of note, youth engagement in surveying, maintenance and/or road repair represents a potential opportunity to provide a viable skill set or livelihood in a country with limited non-farm employment opportunities.

VIII. Key Personnel

FFP has designated a Local Systems Expert with Liberia-specific expertise as a key personnel position, and the CV for that staff member is a required part of the application. This position should be filled by an anthropologist, sociologist, economist, or political scientist with Liberia expertise. This position will be focused on researching local systems relevant to this project (patron-client relationships in agriculture and marketing, ethnic differences in gender and MCH feeding practices, community structures, and ways that communities interact with district and county governments, etc.). This person should; be in place for the refinement period during year one to ensure that incentive structures are adequately accounted for in the design of interventions, as well as for the execution of the year one assessments, the entire implementation process, and to assist with the collection of learning during implementation and the adaptation of the assistance approaches during implementation.

IX. Sustainability Planning

FFP encourages the identification and promotion of self-financing and self-transferring models that will continue to spread under their own momentum both during and after the project because they have strengthened or changed the system in which they operate. In the context of Liberia, where significant challenges exist to the efficient functioning of public and private sector systems of service delivery, it will be particularly important to identify those actors and institutions, including local change agents, that offer the best opportunity for sustainable improvements and change. This includes supporting the legitimacy and accountability of government institutions, and strengthening existing community, private sector, and public sector pathways for product and service delivery.

A key objective of FFP investments in Liberia is ensuring that the Liberian government and other local partners and stakeholders take ownership of their development processes and sustain project results. Applicants are reminded that baseline and final evaluations are population-based, reflecting the expectation that impacts extend well beyond direct participants' households. Participatory development, where communities are empowered to

take ownership, should be an important aspect of all proposed interventions and a guiding principle over the duration of the proposed project. Elements to consider may include: community and government ownership and engagement, capacity building of local stakeholders, and clear plans for the management of collective assets. While FFP applicants must focus on improving access to opportunities, knowledge, and assets for the vulnerable and extreme poor, this will only be achieved by strengthening and facilitating relationships and building trust between the individuals, groups, and institutions upon which the sustainability of that access depends. Lessons that have emerged from an ex-post review of previous FFP projects identified understanding motivations, and developing capacity, resources and linkages, as critical to achieving sustainability.⁵³ Applicants are expected to test their ToC and supporting project design against these factors.

X. Monitoring and Evaluation

FFP partner's regular monitoring will be complemented with annual portfolio/progress reviews carried out jointly with FFP and the USAID/Liberia Mission. These reviews will serve as the FFP annual work plan helping to validate process, identify opportunities to scale up successful interventions, and/or make course corrections if an activity is failing. An interim independent external evaluation in year four will be used to determine whether the project is meeting or exceeding its targets, and whether a multi-year extension could reasonably be expected to expand exceptional impacts, should resources be available to support it. Alternatively, the evaluation findings and recommendations may support ending the project at the end of year 5 as initially planned.

⁵³ FFP study is forthcoming.

Acronym List

AfDB	African Development Bank
AfT	Liberia Government's Agenda for Transformation
AgCLIR	Agribusiness Commercial Legal and Institutional Reform
ANC	Antenatal Care
ASA/WISHH	American Soybean Association's World Initiative for Soy in Human Health
AYP	Advancing Youth Project
BEST	Bellmon Estimation Studies for Title II
BWI	Booker Washington Institute in Liberia
CARI	Liberia's Central Agricultural Research Institute
CDA	County Development Agenda
CDCS	Country Development Cooperation Strategy
CDF	Community development Funds (USAID funding code)
CFSNLiberia	Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (June 2013)
CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
CHC	Community Health Committee
CHDC	Community Health Development Committee
CHV	Community Health Volunteer
CLTS	Community-Led Total Sanitation
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSA	Climate-Smart Agriculture
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DFAPs	Development Food Assistance Projects
DfID	Department for International Development (UK)
DRG	Democracy, Rights and Governance
EAT	Enabling Agricultural Trade (USAID activity)

EHT	Environmental Health Technician
ENA	Essential Nutrition Actions
EU	European Union
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FANTA	Food and Nutrition Technical Assistance Project (USAID activity)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization (UN)
FAOSTAT	FAO Statistics Division
FARA	Fixed Amount Reimbursement Agreement
FED	Food and Enterprise Development (USAID activity)
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning System Network (USAID activity)
FFP	USAID Office of Food for Peace
FHI 360	Family Health International 360
FP	Family Planning
FtF	USAID's Feed the Future Initiative
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIZ	German "Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit"
GoL	Government of Liberia
HA	Hectare
HH	Household
IBEX	Investing for Business Expansion (USAID activity)
ICF	Professional Services and Technology Firm
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labor Organization
IMAM	Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition
IYCF	Infant and Young Child feeding
JMP	Joint Monitoring Program

LAUNCH	Liberia Agricultural Upgrading, Nutrition and Child Health (USAID/FFP activity)
LDHS	Liberia Demographic Health Survey
LISGIS	Liberian Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services
LMWP	Liberia Municipal Water Program
LRTF	Liberia Reconstruction Trust Fund
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MCH	Maternal and Child Health
MoA	Liberia's Ministry of Agriculture
MoGCSP	Liberia's Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection
MoH	Liberia's current name for the Ministry of Health
MoHSW	Liberia's former name for the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare
MoPW	Liberia's Ministry of Public Works
MT	Metric Ton
N2Africa	Putting nitrogen fixation to work for smallholder farmers in Africa
NACP	North American Carbon Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRWASHP	African Development Bank's Water and Sanitation for Health Program
ODF	Open Defecation-Free
OFDA	USAID Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
OIC	Opportunities Industrialization Corporation
PACS	Partnerships for Advancing Community-based Services
POU	Point of Use (for water treatment)
RFA	Request for Application
RMNCH	Reproductive, Maternal Newborn Child Health
SBCC	Social Behavior Change Communications
SHOPS II	Smallholder Oil Palm Support Program II (USAID activity)
SMI-L	Sustainable Marketplace Initiative-Liberia

SWA	Sanitation and Water for All
TTM	Trained Traditional Midwives
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	U.S. dollar
VSLAs	Village Savings and Loan Associations
WASH	Water and Sanitation for Health
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization
YES	Youth Employment Skills Project (funded by World Bank)

Annex A

Liberia CDF Budget Requirements

In addition to the budget requirements specified in the FY16 RFA, there are Community Development Fund (CDF) requirements that must be followed by applicants for Liberia.

Keep in mind: All budgets must be in MS Excel format with all formulae/calculations visible and unlocked.

Paperwork to be submitted

- A summary of the budget must be submitted using Standard Form 424 (Application for Federal Assistance) and 424A (Budget Information – Non-Construction Programs) which can be downloaded from the grants.gov website at www.grants.gov. The Standard Form 424B (Assurances – Non-Construction Programs) must also be signed and submitted.
- Applicants must submit a copy of their Certificate of Compliance if the organization's systems have been certified by the USAID/Washington's Office of Acquisition and Assistance.
- Certifications and Representations must be provided with the cost application.
- Applicants that have never received a cooperative agreement, grant or contract from the U.S. Government are required to submit a copy of their accounting manual. If a copy has already been submitted to the U.S. Government, the applicant must advise which Federal Office has a copy and provide a point of contact with contact information (e.g., phone number). Alternatively, applicants may file a self-certificate of compliance with USAID standards. This certificate template is available from the USAID point of contact listed in this RFA upon request.

Budget narrative specifics

- The budget narrative should discuss cost components that make up the overall cost of the item being described with the unit cost and number of proposed units clearly identified for all line items.
- The applicant's proposed budget should provide estimates of the program based upon the total estimated amount for the agreement. Applicants are required to minimize their administrative and support costs for managing the project to maximize the funds available for project activities.
- The cost application must include the breakdown to the furthest extent possible of all costs associated with the program according to costs of, if applicable, headquarters, regional and/or country offices.

Costs associated with salaries, travel, equipment, etc.

- The name, annual salary, and expected level of effort of each person charged to the project must be indicated. The same information must be provided for consultants as for regular personnel.
- Allowances must be broken down by specific type and by person, and must be in accordance with the applicant's policies and USAID regulations.
- Travel, per diem, and other transportation expenses must be detailed in the budget to include number of international trips, expected itineraries, number of per diem days and per diem rates.
- Specify all equipment to be purchased and the expected geographic source. Include specific details of the proposed equipment, such as brand, model, size, etc.
- Direct costs such as supplies, communication costs, photocopying, visas, passports and other general costs, as appropriate, must be separate cost line items.
- Indirect costs, such as fringe benefits use the NICRA as evidence of rate approval. If the fringe benefit rate has not been approved, the applicant must propose a rate and explain in detail how the rate was determined.

Sub-grant and subcontractors need the same financial plan details as the applicant

Financial plans for all proposed sub-grants and subcontracts must have the same format and level of detail as those of the applicant. Following the applicant's detailed budget breakdown, detailed budget breakdowns for each sub-awardee/sub-contractors must be presented. Sub-awardee/sub-contractor budgets must not be intermingled. The first page must be a summary budget, following the same budget format and line items as are set forth above for the full term of the sub-award/sub-contract. Provide detailed budget notes which explain how the "subs" proposed budget was reviewed and how a determination was made that it is fair and reasonable.

Are you part of a consortium?

If the applicant is a consortium, the cost application must include documents that reflect the legal relationship among the parties. The documents should include a full discussion of the relationship among the applicants, including the identity of the applicant that the U.S. Government will treat for purposes of administration of any cooperative agreement; identity of the applicant that will have accounting responsibility; how the applicant proposes to allocate effort under any cooperative agreement; and the express agreement of the principals of the applicant organization to be held jointly and severally liable for the acts of omissions of the other.

Note that applications are submitted at the risk of the applicant, and all preparation and submission costs are at the applicant's expense.