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**“ACCELERATING PROGRESS TOWARD THE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF  
WOMEN”  
ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT  
REPORTING PERIOD: 1 JANUARY – 31 DECEMBER 2016**

<p align="center"><b>Programme Title &amp; Project Number</b></p>	<p align="center"><b>Country, Locality(s), Priority Area(s) / Strategic Results</b></p> <p><i>Liberia, West Africa</i></p> <p>The strategic result is to secure rural women’s livelihoods and rights in the context of sustainable development and the SDGs.</p> <p>Since the start of implementation, the joint programme has reached a total of about 4,500 direct beneficiaries (4,025 women/475 men) and around 18,000 indirect beneficiaries (16,475 women/1,525 men)</p> <p>In 2016, the joint programme reached over 2,500 direct beneficiaries (2,300 women/200 men) and around 10,000 indirect beneficiaries (7,650 women/ 2,350 men)</p>
<p align="center"><b>Participating Organization(s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>FAO, IFAD, UNWOMEN, WFP</li> </ul>	<p align="center"><b>Implementing Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministry of Gender Children, and Social Protection;</li> <li>Ministry of Agriculture;</li> <li>National Rural Women’s Structure;</li> <li>Association of Women in Cross Border Trade</li> <li>Liberia Marketing Association</li> <li>EduCARE Liberia;</li> <li>THINK Liberia;</li> <li>Farmers Assistance Programme; and</li> <li>Agro Machinery Manufacturing Company</li> </ul>
<p align="center"><b>Programme/Project Cost (US\$)</b></p> <p>Total approved budget as per project document: \$ 1,988,256</p> <p>MPTF Contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>UN Women Liberia</i> \$ 1,277,794</li> <li><i>WFP Liberia</i> \$ 444,508</li> <li><i>FAO Liberia</i> \$ 265,954</li> </ul> <p>Agency Contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>UN Women Liberia – Training supplies; and</i> \$ 28,347</li> <li><i>UN Women Liberia –Graduation of women beneficiaries from classes</i> \$ 15,000</li> </ul>	<p align="center"><b>Programme Duration</b></p> <p>Overall Duration 5 YEARS</p> <p>Start Date <i>(15 10 2012)</i></p>
<p>Government Contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>None</i></li> </ul> <p>Other Contributions (donors)</p> <p><i>As lead UN agency, Sweden has committed provided funds for</i></p>	<p>Original End Date <i>(14 10 2017)</i></p>

<sup>1</sup> The MPTF Office Project Reference Number are as follows: ETHIOPIA: 00092000; GUATEMALA: 00092001; KYRGYZSTAN: 00092002; LIBERIA: 00092003; NEPAL: 00092004; NIGER: 00092005; RWANDA: 00092006

activities linked to RWEE under UN Women contributions. Specific amount for utilization January – December 2017 is \$337,585

**TOTAL:** \$ 2,031,603

**Programme Assessment/Review/Mid-Term Eval.**

Assessment/Review - if applicable *please attach*

Yes  No Date: *dd.mm.yyyy*

Mid-Term Evaluation Report – *if applicable please attach*

Yes  No Date: *dd.mm.yyyy*

**Report Submitted By**

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## **List of Acronyms**

AfT	-	Agenda for Transformation
AWICBT	-	Association of Women in Cross Border Trade
BDS	-	Business Development Skills
CACs	-	County Agriculture Coordinators
CGRs	-	Community Grain Reserves
DAOs	-	District Agriculture Officers
FAO	-	Food Agriculture Organization
FSN	-	Food Security and Nutrition
GCCs	-	Gender County Coordinators
GRB	-	Gender Responsive Budgeting
GRP	-	Gender Responsive Planning
MoA	-	Ministry of Agriculture
MoGCSP	-	Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection
MOU	-	Memorandum of Understanding
NRWS	-	Nation Rural Women Structure
PBSO	-	Peace Building Support Office
RWEE	-	Rural Women Economic Empowerment
SAA	-	Standard Administrative Arrangement
SGBV	-	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SLA	-	Savings and Loan Associations
SRH	-	Sexual and Reproductive Health
UNCT	-	United Nations Country Team
UNDAF	-	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UN Women	-	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
VSLA	-	Village Savings and Loan Associations
WFP	-	World Food Programme

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This 2016 Consolidated Annual Progress Report under the Joint Programme, “*Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women*” in the Republic of Liberia covers the period from 1 January to 31 December 2016. This report is in fulfillment of the reporting requirements set out in the Standard Administrative Arrangement (SAA) concluded with the Donors. In line with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by Participating UN Organizations, the Annual Progress Report is consolidated based on information, data and financial statements submitted by the lead UN agency, UN Women, and participating U.N. agencies, namely WFP and FAO. It is neither an evaluation of the Joint Programme nor an assessment of the performance of the Lead and Participating Organizations. The report provides the Steering Committee with a comprehensive overview of achievements and challenges associated with the Joint Programme, enabling it to make strategic decisions and take corrective measures, where applicable.

In the first two quarters of 2016, the *Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women* reached approximately 2,475 women from 10 active women farming groups (100 members per group). These ten (10) farming groups, four (4) in River Gee, three (3) in Sinoe, and three (3) in Maryland Counties are all engaged in nutrition-sensitive agriculture. These groups were mobilized and trained in Village Savings and Loan methodology and community-managed microfinance and are actively involved in access to credit through their respective VSLAs. In addition, 10 women associations now have access to credit and money lending and are now borrowing very actively in targeted communities. Income generating activities of group members are diversified with the inclusion of small medium businesses.

FAO provided cash transfer to ten (10) women associations for investing in agriculture, with each group receiving a total of US\$ 1,000.00 as a conditional cash transfer. This exercise was conducted in close collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture and Gender, and women farmers are investing in farming activities for increased production in support of improving food security at local level.

About 1,978 farmers (approximately 1,778 women and 200 men) from 10 farming groups received access to critical inputs for agricultural production such as tools, high quality seeds and machineries. These included mixed vegetable seeds including insecticide for pest control, protective gears for farming, cutlasses, hoes, and shovels, etc. In addition, these women farmers were involved in the rehabilitation of lowland (one acre per group), planting vegetable with upland (two acres per group) rehabilitated and planted with cassava. At most 0.4ha of lowland per group was rehabilitated and planted in assorted vegetables; and 0.8ha of upland per group was cultivated and planted with cassava. Beneficiary groups are now able to identify and select suitable sites for vegetable and cassava production. In addition, farming group members are practicing and adapting improved agricultural production techniques including line sowing, field layout, compost making as well as local insecticide preparation among others. Hence there has been an increase in the yields of vegetables and cassava, leading to increase in income of rural women groups from sale of surplus harvest.

Approximately 1,167 women have increased knowledge on awareness around land tenure and land use rights to promote women’s equal access to and ownership of land for agricultural production. This has been achieved because of strengthened awareness raising around land rights through the administration of literacy and business skills classes (training modules on land rights are embedded into the literacy and business skills training curricula) conducted in targeted communities including through regular town hall meetings with community leaders on land rights and ownership. Community peace huts and VSLAs are also being used as channels for disseminating information to local communities on women land rights. In RWEE communities, there is now better understanding amongst men in terms of women’s right to land ownership for agriculture and other purposes. Recent assessment has shown that at least 2 in every 5 rural women in targeted communities own land either as an individual or jointly with a spouse. Additionally, women-headed households’ expenditures on food, medicines, school fees and other basic

commodities have increased; women-headed households' consumption has also improved from 1 meal to 2 meals daily.

Over 1,350 rural women farmers from 10 farming groups were linked to WFP's P4P programme and are benefitting from the purchasing of local staple food commodities and from training and capacity development activities for farmers and farmers' organizations. In addition, roughly over 1,865 rural women farmers are utilizing the 3 RWEE-funded Community Grain Reserves (CGRs) along with their drying floors, toilets and hand pumps; 90 MT locally procured rice was made available and planted since May 2016; post-harvest equipment for the 3 CGRs were secured and delivered to the CGRs with capacity building on the use and maintenance of machineries and equipment completed for all 3 communities where the 3 CGRs were constructed. Machineries and equipment include cassava and rice processing machines, grinders, rice winnowers, motorized rice thresher, water tanks, and generators amongst others. A total of 75 women leaders active in 10 farming groups received the trainings; these women now have increased understanding of the use and management of CGRs including the operation and management of machineries; in addition, there is increased recognition of the WFP-established CGRs that are operating at the district and community levels.

A '*Lessons Learnt Workshop*' on established Community Grain Reserves (CGRs) was held in July 2016, and it included prospective beneficiary groups from RWEE targeted counties (Bassa, Margibi, Sinoe, Maryland, & River-Gee) and non-RWEE communities (Nimba, Lofa, & Grand Gedeh) who attended and participated in the workshop. Participants from the RWEE counties have gained a better idea of the operations and management of CGRs and have returned to their respective RWEE CGR communities to begin operation and managing the grain reserves most effectively, considering best practices shared by other women from the non-RWEE communities. The purpose of the workshop was to ensure that other women who manage other non-RWEE CGRs share their experiences based on challenges, best practices and the way forward with women leaders from the RWEE GR communities to consider and strategize on being better. A total of 40 rural women (25 RWEE beneficiaries and 15 non-RWEE beneficiaries) attended the workshop.

Approximately 3,250 women from over 45 communities in 6 of Liberia's 15 counties have increased knowledge in business management and practice including literacy and numeracy skills because of their access to literacy and business skills classes in targeted communities in Maryland, Sinoe, River Gee, Margibi, Grand Bassa and Montserrado Counties. These women are better understanding their businesses and are generating increased income. Women can now spell their names on bank deposit and withdrawal slips; thus, they have increased self-confidence and respect; and over 1,412 women reached have active bank accounts and are no longer saving their personal and business money at home. These women are accessing financial services (i.e. credit/loan) from the banks they are registered with. Special skills acquired by these women include developing business plans, budgeting, stock taking, business hygiene, separating business money from personal money, etc. Eighty (80) local facilitators (i.e. 61 females; 19 males) at community level don't just have increased knowledge on facilitating literacy and numeracy classes including business skills training for semi-literate and illiterate women but also skills in teaching women about their rights and giving them knowledge on gender and HIV/AIDS. These 61 RWEE-trained community based female facilitators are now employed in the formal sector as civil servants, teaching high schools in rural communities.

About 1,250 new women beneficiaries at the community level continue to access financial services through 50 active Savings and Loan Associations (25 members per VSLA). Women entrepreneurs and women farmers are expanding their respective income-generating activities supported through VSLAs. About 906 of the 1,250 new women targeted in 2016 now have active bank accounts with EcoBANK and GnBank. Successful agricultural VSLAs (*Village Savings and Loan Associations based on investments in agricultural produce like rice, cassava, and vegetables considering value-addition: farina, rice flower, processed pepper, etc.*) are in the process of undergoing transformation with the aim of transitioning into cooperatives for increased productivity and recognition. Rural women at the community level are reporting that they are gaining increased respect from their spouses and, in some

cases, less conflict in their relationship with their husbands / partners; and women have increased social capital and feel more respected in the community. They have increased self-esteem and confidence.

5 national and county women leaders from the National Rural Women Structure (NRWS) and 5 county women leaders from the Association of Women in Cross Border Trade (AWICBT) have increased understanding of the constitutional review and decentralization processes. These women are actively participating in national dialogues across all levels for ensuring that the new constitution of Liberia is fully engendered and that women equally benefit as men at the end. This also includes for rural women's participation in government's decentralization of its public services at the county, district and community levels and rural women advocacy for increased participation in decision making in this regard. Additionally, rural women leaders are fully and actively engaged with the ongoing electoral processes as in preparations (i.e. voters' registration participation, participation in the mobilization of rural women to support rural women candidates for public offices, participation in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation in the case of pre-election or post-election violence) for the 2017 national and presidential elections with special focus on rural women's right to vote, get elected to public offices, etc. There is also strengthened partnerships with the National Rural Women Structure in Liberia and its supporters, namely the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, and the Ministry of International Affairs amongst others.

There is strengthened partnerships with the NRWS and the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, and the Ministry of International Affairs amongst others around promoting advocacy work on achieving rural women economic empowerment. The NRWS along with the AWICBT played a key role during initial consultations that eventually led to the signing of partnership agreement between UN Women and OXFAM on the Women's Economic Empowerment & WaSH Joint Initiative at country level. This also includes the UN Women and Coca Cola Liberia partnership agreement in support of women entrepreneurs under the "Be Your Own Boss" initiative, linked to RWEE. Rural women and leaders remained engaged in the ongoing reform processes (i.e. constitutional review process, decentralization) including voters' registration for the upcoming 2017 national and presidential elections

Around 1,250 women and girls have increased knowledge on SRH, and cases of teenage and unwanted pregnancy have noticeably decreased in targeted communities. Prior to the intervention in targeted communities, at least 2 - 3 cases of teenage pregnancies were reported at the community level every two months. Now, at least 0 - 1 case is reported after every two months. This is based on one of several assessment missions conducted by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection in targeted communities. It has also been reported that the retention rate in local schools with some rural adolescent girls have improved to a considerable extent. In strengthening synergies, the ongoing JP on Adolescent Girls has conducted several assessments missions in RWEE targeted counties in partnership with UN Women, UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA and UNESCO in this regard. Additionally, over 2,250 women entrepreneurs and women farmers have increased knowledge on SGBV prevention and response and are monitoring and reporting cases of SGBV at the community level for access to justice in 40 targeted communities. In addition, about 567 women are transferring knowledge on SGBV awareness, prevention and response to other women and men during regular town hall meetings, SLA meetings, and during farming activities, etc.

Six (6) County Agriculture Coordinators, six (6) District Agriculture Officers and 57 community leaders (48 women and 9 men) from 10 women farming groups in 10 rural communities have increased understanding of gender, women's rights, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, climate resilient agriculture, and the roles rural women play in agriculture. Also, there is now increased advocacy work (being pushed by MoA) with the Liberian legislature aimed at getting the endorsement of national government for the implementation of the National Food Security Strategy in Liberia

The NRWS in partnership with the Ministry of Gender and in collaboration with UN Women is advocating for the passage of the Land Rights Bill that is currently under review at the Liberian

Legislature. The Land Rights Bill is in favor of women's rights to own and inherit land. By advocating for the passage of the bill, rural women leaders are stepping up efforts for ensuring that women farmers have access to land and land ownership for agricultural production amongst others. Hence, the passage will eventually result into a law on land rights that is gender-sensitive/responsive. The joint programme, led by UN Women, played a key role in ensuring that the voice of the rural women through the NRWS is heard and acknowledged within the national level policy reforms such as the Constitutional reform, the Land reform, and Decentralization process. Community dialogues (i.e. focus group discussions, key informant interviews, etc.) were held with women and men leaders with regards to their perception on gender equality and women's empowerment in over 68 districts across Liberia's 15 counties during the period January – February 2016. In addition, series of awareness raising events were conducted alongside these community dialogues to create a sense of awareness around women's right to participate in decision making processes for their own socio-economic empowerment at the county, district, and community levels.

Overall, the joint programme has reached over 4,500 beneficiaries (4,025 women and 475 men) for accessing social and economic empowerment interventions and services since the inception of the joint programme in Liberia. Through forming and strengthening synergies with ongoing joint programmes and stand-alone projects, the joint programme will increase this overall number before the end of 2017 or early 2018, reaching about 1,000 additional women beneficiaries in the most vulnerable and neglected communities targeted by RWEE.

The Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTF Office) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) serves as the Administrative Agent of the Joint Programme. The MPTF Office receives, administers and manages contributions from the Donors, and disburses these funds to the Participating UN Organizations in accordance with the decisions of the Steering Committee. UN Women serves as the lead agency for the Joint Programme in Liberia, coordinating and managing its overall implementation, monitoring and evaluation, with WFP and FAO serving as participating U.N. agencies.

This report is presented in two parts. Part I is the Annual Narrative Progress Report, and Part II is the Annual Consolidated Financial Progress Report. Part I is presented in several sections. Section I is the Executive Summary; Section II provides a purpose of the Joint Programme; and Section III presents an overview of results. The report also highlights implementation and monitoring arrangements; provides an overview of the achievement of the Joint Programme and the challenges, highlights other assessments and/or evaluations, explains programmatic revisions including coordination mechanisms, and gives an overview of the financial resources mobilized and used.

This report covers not only those achievements of the Joint Programme that have been made through the pass-through portion of funding but through other funding commitments with UN Women (lead agency) at country level. As lead UN agency, UN Women allocated US\$ 21,787.75 in training supplies for the literacy, business skills and VSLA programmes and US\$ 15,000 in graduation costs for women that graduated from literacy and business skills classes in the targeted communities, bringing the total contribution to US\$ 36,787.75.

## **II. Purpose**

The *Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE)* provides significant and strategic support to the Government of Liberia in furtherance of its political reforms and socio-economic development efforts to achieve the following outcomes: (1) Improved food and nutrition security, (2) Increased income to sustain livelihoods, (3) Enhanced participation and leadership in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programmes, and (4) Improved gender-responsive policy environments for economic empowerment.

The JP RWEE Country Team remains highly involved in the implementation of the joint programme activities at country level and remains actively engaged with all processes aimed at ensuring a successful delivery of results.

At the country level, the joint programme considers the ten strategic global outputs under its programming framework at country level, and these include:

1. **Output 1.1:** Rural women have increased access to and control over resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security;
2. **Output 1.2:** Rural women have greater capacity to enhance and control local food security reserves and their production;
3. **Output 2.1:** Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products;
4. **Output 3.1:** Rural women, including young women have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to take an active part in local governance systems;
5. **Output 3.2:** Rural women have greater organisational capacities to form, sustain and participate into POs, cooperatives and unions;
6. **Output 3.3:** Rural women, including young women, have increased capacity to engage in and influence relevant policy forums at national and regional levels;
7. **Output 3.4:** Rural women, including young women, have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment;
8. **Output 4.1:** Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets;
9. **Output 4.2:** Greater availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women; and
10. **Output 4.3:** An enabling environment is promoted to reflect rural women's priorities in regional and global policy processes.

In the Liberian context, these global RWEE outputs are linked to the following key areas under the RWEE Liberia programming with the Government of Liberia (Ministry of Gender Children, and Social Protection and Ministry of Agriculture) and the UNCT in close collaboration and consultation with Civil Society (National Rural Women Structure, Association of Women in Cross Border Trade, Liberia Marketing Association, EduCARE Liberia, Touching Humanity in Need of Kindness, Farmers Assistance Programme, and Agro Machinery Manufacturing Company) and the private sector (Coca Cola Liberia and Cellcom GSM).

- Organizational capacity of the National Rural Women's Structure enhanced to represent the needs and concerns of rural women across Liberia, particularly the most vulnerable
- Women's access to land, agricultural inputs and assets, innovative technologies and extension services improved
- Capacity of women's cooperatives supported and strengthened to improve their access to markets opportunities, such as the Purchase for Progress programme
- Rural women's access to sustainable financial services improved to support their engagement in economic activities through the Savings and Loan Association (SLA) methodology/and or approach (women are grouped into an association of minimum 25 persons or maximum 30 persons and trained on how to save money as a social group with a low interest rate payback on loans taken by members of the group, it has a constitution, and leaders are elected through a democratic process. It also serves a platform for women to dialogue not only on issues of financial security but on other social issues affecting women at the community level). VSLAs have been known to move women out of object poverty and to create opportunities for women to significantly improve their livelihoods

- Vocational, entrepreneurial and marketing skills among women enhanced and transformed from subsistence/informal to formal and sustainable business, and women and girls are more informed and knowledgeable through increased literacy and access to appropriate learning and information
- Rural women's leadership and participation in local governance, particularly in the constitutional reform process strengthened
- Gender mainstreamed into existing sector policies, national plans and at local government level
- Local level gender responsive planning and budgeting strengthened, in line with implementation of Liberia's Decentralization Policy
- Capacity of civil society to network and advocate for rural women's economic empowerment strengthened
- Rural women and girls have increased access to Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) education and services including knowledge on SGBV prevention and response

In line with the United Nations core principles and strategies for Multi-Partner Trust Funds and Joint Programmes, the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP RWEE):

- Supports gender equality and rural women's economic empowerment priorities that are identified and led by the Government of Liberia through its Agenda for Transformation (AfT) – the country's poverty reduction strategy;
- Involves all relevant stakeholders including Liberia's National Rural Women Structure, Liberia Marketing Association, Women in Peace Huts, the Association of Women in Cross Border Trade, multiple Government Ministries, international donors, and participating UN Organizations in the planning and decision-making process, led by the Joint Programme National Steering Committee, co-chaired by the Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Protection and the U.N. Resident Coordinator;
- Builds on ongoing and existing Government frameworks and strategies including the Agenda for Transformation (AfT), Liberia's Vision 2030, the National Gender Policy (NGP), the Agriculture Policy, the Trade Policy, and Liberia's Economic Stabilization and Recovery Plan (ESRP) - support to the Ebola recovery process;
- Strengthens financial support effectiveness through coordination and harmonization of cross-cutting gender interventions under the oversight of one Steering Committee; and
- Ensures that the funding, operations and implementation modalities provide for full transparency and accountability, involving an active National Steering Committee and including the submission of reports to that committee and other relevant stakeholders (i.e. Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, etc.)

### III. Results

#### **RWEE Global ProDoc:**

**Outcome 1:** *Rural women have improved food and nutrition security*

**Output 1.1:** *Rural women have increased access to and control over resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security*

- Assessment missions have shown that women-headed households' expenditures on food, medicines, school fees and other basic commodities have increased by an average of around US\$ 25.00 (LD\$ 2,625) per household; women-headed households' consumption has also improved from 1 meal to 2 meals daily
- Approximately 2,475 women from 10 women farming groups (100 members per group) have the required skills to engage in nutrition-sensitive agriculture

- Rural women from seventeen (17) small farming groups in five targeted counties were provided with basic nutrition education along with information materials
- 1,978 women from 10 farming groups in the 5 targeted rural counties received access to critical inputs for agricultural production such as tools, high quality seeds and machineries. These included mixed vegetable seeds including insecticide for pest control, protective gears for farming, cutlasses, hoes, and shovels, etc.
- Over 10 ha cultivated with assorted local vegetables (hot pepper, bitter balls, okra, maize, etc.) in Maryland, River Gee and Sinoe counties, with approximately 20 hectares utilized for lowland rice production.

**Output 1.2:** *Rural women have greater capacity to enhance and control local food security reserves*

- Over 1,865 rural women farmers are utilizing the 3 RWEE-funded CGRs along with their drying floors, toilets and hand pumps; 90 MT locally procured rice seeds were made available and planted in May 2016 and harvested in December 2016; post-harvest equipment for the 3 CGRs were secured and delivered to the CGRs
- Capacity building trainings were rolled out for 75 women leaders active in 10 farming groups; these women now have increased understanding of the use and management of CGRs including the operation and management of machineries; in addition, there is increased recognition of the WFP-established CGRs that are operating at the district and community levels. This has been achieved as a result of a U.N. and Government of Liberia (Ministries of Agriculture and Gender) joint assessment mission that was undertaken in the targeted communities where the CGRs are established in March 2016. These CGRs are functional, and WFP continues to provide ongoing support to the farming groups that are using the CGRs
- Seventy-five (75) women leaders active in ten (10) farming groups under JP RWEE in Grand Bassa, Margibi, Sinoe, Maryland, and River-Gee Counties benefitted from a ‘Lessons Learnt Workshop’ on established CGRs. These RWEE farming groups have increased knowledge on best practices with regards to the operations and management of the CGRs at the community level
- Around 1,978 rural women skills in crop production have been strengthened through workshops, on sight technical guidance and through the rollout of literacy and numeracy skills classes for rural women in targeted the communities

**Outcome 2:** Rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods

**Output 2.1** Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products

- 1,350 rural women farmers from 10 farming groups were linked to WFP’s P4P programme and are benefitting from the purchasing of local staple food commodities for training and capacity development activities for farmers and farmers’ organizations
- Agro processors (3 power tillers, 3 threshers, rice mills, and 3 cassava graters) for value addition have been sourced, procured and delivered to beneficiaries in the three counties. These machineries and/or equipment are in use at the community level for increased food production
- Approximately 1,250 women beneficiaries at the community level are accessing financial services through 50 Savings and Loan Associations (25 members per VSLA). Women entrepreneurs and women farmers are expanding their respective income-generating activities in support of improved livelihoods through VSLAs; in addition, about 906 of the approximately 1,250 women reached in 2016 now have active bank accounts with EcoBANK and GnBank and are no longer saving their personal and business money at home
- Additionally, ten (10) women groups (300 households) in Maryland (3), River Gee (4) and Sinoe (3) counties now have access to credit through VSLA activities and conditional cash

transfer; women support to household expenditures in these 10 communities have improved as they are now engaged in various income-generating activities (petty trading, sales of agricultural products-vegetables (hot pepper, bitter balls, egg plants, pumpkins, eddoes, potatoes, etc.) to support family members

- Nearly 15 successful VSLAs are in the process of undergoing transformation with the aim of transitioning into cooperatives for increased productivity and recognition
- About 906 women targeted in 2016 now have active bank accounts with EcoBANK and GnBank. Assessment missions have observed that women are increasing their savings and investment (e.g. social insurance, purchase of land, building houses, etc.), and there are increased contributions from women to the household both in economic terms (e.g. pay children's school fees and healthcare costs, etc.) and social terms (e.g. supporting their children to learn, etc.)
- Nearly 3,250 women now have increased knowledge in business management and practice including literacy and numeracy skills. These women are better understanding their businesses and are generating increased income. Women can now spell their names on bank deposit and withdrawal slips; thus, they have increased self-confidence and respect; over 1,412 of these women now have active bank accounts and are no longer saving their money at home. These women are also accessing financial services (i.e. credit/loan) from the banks they are registered with. There is increase in stability of women's businesses and an increase in revenue and profits and in some cases, up-scaling of businesses to higher-value products. A simple NEXT LEVEL post evaluation survey was administered in 5 targeted communities (through random sampling)

**Output 2.2:** Rural women have increased access to decent wage employment opportunities.

- 80 local facilitators (i.e. 61 females; 19 males) teaching literacy and business skills classes at the community level have increased knowledge on facilitating literacy and numeracy skills classes including business skills classes for semi-literate and illiterate women; these eighty (80) local facilitators (i.e. 61 females; 19 males) at community level don't just have increased knowledge on facilitating literacy and numeracy skills classes including business skills classes for semi-literate and illiterate women but also skills in teaching women on their rights and giving them knowledge on Gender and HIV/AIDS. These RWEE-trained community-based male and female facilitators are now employed in the formal sector as civil servants, teaching government funded high schools in rural communities

**Outcome 3:** Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes

**Output 3.1** Rural women, including young women have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to participate in local governance.

- Rural women at the community level are reporting that they are gaining increased respect from their husbands/ partners and, in some cases, less conflict in their relationship with their husbands / partners. Field missions have observed women's increased motivation to study and learn further (e.g. a few women have returned to school), increased access to services and information (e.g. ability to sign name, open bank account, read road signs and simple posters and leaflets), increased social capital and feeling more respected in the community, and increased self-esteem and confidence because of being able to read and write, do simple calculation and/or earn income for themselves
- 9 rural women leaders targeted by RWEE have expressed their desire to run for public offices (i.e. county superintendents, district commissions, paramount chiefs, and representatives). These women are actively mobilizing their fellow rural women at the community level to support their upcoming campaigns in the hope that they will get elected

**Output 3.2** Rural women have greater organizational capacities to form, sustain and participate into POs, cooperatives and unions

**Output 3.3:** Rural women, including young women, have increased capacity to engage in and influence relevant policy forums at national and regional levels

- 5 national and county women leaders from the National Rural Women Structure (NRWS) and 5 county women leaders from the Association of Women in Cross Border Trade (AWICBT) have increased understanding of the constitutional review and decentralization processes. These women are actively participating in national dialogues across all levels for ensuring that the new constitution of Liberia is fully engendered and that women equally benefit as men at the end. This also includes for rural women's participation in government's decentralization of its public services at the county, district and community levels and rural women advocacy for increased participation in decision making in this regard. Additionally, rural women leaders are fully and actively engaged with the ongoing electoral processes as in preparations (i.e. voters' registration participation, participation in the mobilization of rural women to support rural women candidates for public offices, participation in peacebuilding and conflict mitigation in the case of pre-election or post-election violence) for the 2017 national and presidential elections with special focus on rural women's right to vote, get elected to public offices, etc. There is also strengthened partnerships with the National Rural Women Structure in Liberia and its supporters, namely the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, and the Ministry of International Affairs amongst others
- There continues to be increased capacity of the NRWS to represent the needs and concerns of rural women and girls across Liberia, particularly the most vulnerable. There has also been an increased profile and voice of rural women through this structure including improved social cohesion that is in line with national priorities in the Agenda for Transformation (AfT) and the UNDAF 2013 – 2017 (i.e. women's decision making, political participation, land rights, etc.) The leadership of the structure is leading discussions at country level on women's decision-making, political participation, and women's empowerment and working to ensure that the joint programme meets its objectives. Rural women representatives from the NRWS were invited by UN Women to participate in dialogues that led to the hosting of a National Women's Conference in July 2016. Rural women were given the opportunity to voice their concerns as it relates to socio-economic empowerment, decision-making, the 2017 national and presidential elections, etc.

**Output 3.4:** Rural women, including young women, have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment

- Approximately 1,167 women have increased awareness around land tenure and land use rights to promote women's equal access to and ownership of land for agricultural production
- The joint programme, led by UN Women, played a key role in ensuring that the voice of the rural women through the NRWS is heard and acknowledged within the national level policy reforms such as the Constitutional reform, the Land reform, and Decentralization process. Community dialogues (i.e. focus group discussions, key informant interviews, etc.) were held with women and men leaders with regards to their perception on gender equality and women's empowerment in over 68 districts across Liberia's 15 counties during the period January – February 2016. In addition, series of awareness raising events were conducted alongside these community dialogues to create a sense of awareness around women's right to participate in decision making processes for their own socio-economic empowerment at the county, district, and community levels
- Field missions have observed that about 1,250 women and girls have increased knowledge on SRH; and that records from local village clinics shows that 75% of adolescent girls and young women reached are accessing SRH services at community clinics. Cases of teenage

and unwanted pregnancy have also noticeably decreased in targeted communities. Thus, the retention rate in local schools with some adolescent girls have improved to a considerable extent. This was achieved through the rollout of the literacy and numeracy skills classes in targeted communities; There has been a significant decrease in teenage pregnancies in 17 rural communities under RWEE because of increased awareness around SRH education and services. Prior to the intervention in those communities, at least 2 - 3 cases of teenage pregnancies were reported at the community level every two months. Now, at least 0 - 1 case is reported after every two months. Three field missions to assess change at community level were conducted from 31st March, 2016 – 18th April, 2016 and from 3rd August 2016 – 27th August 2016 including 11th November 2016 – 30th November 2017 in collaboration with the Government and the United Nations including other local partners. The joint programme has built synergies with the U.N. & Government of Liberia Joint Programme on Accelerating Efforts to Advance the Rights of Adolescent Girls (JP AG). This joint programme has also complemented and continues to complement RWEE's engagement with work on SRH at the community level

- Approximately 2,250 women entrepreneurs and women farmers have increased knowledge on SGBV prevention and response and are monitoring and reporting cases of SGBV at the community level for access to justice in 40 targeted communities. In addition, about 567 women are transferring knowledge on SGBV awareness, prevention and response to other women and men during regular town hall meetings, SLA meetings, and during farming activities, etc. From September 1 through December 31, 2016, 3 cases of domestic violence were reported through community peace huts in targeted communities and the victims were proved access to justice, with perpetrators persecuted and sentenced to jail. Women have increased understanding of their human rights and what to do when GBV is committed.

**Outcome 4:** A more gender responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women

**Output 4.1:** Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural employment policies, laws and budgets

- The National Rural Women Structure in partnership with the Ministry of Gender and in collaboration with UN Women is advocating for the passage of the Land Rights Bill that is currently under review at the Liberian Legislature. The Land Rights Bill is in favor of women's rights to own and inherit land. By advocating for the passage of the bill, rural women leaders are stepping up efforts for ensuring that women farmers have access to land and land ownership for agricultural production amongst others. Hence, the passage will eventually result into a law on land rights that is gender-sensitive/responsive. The joint programme, led by UN Women, played a key role in ensuring that the voice of the rural women through the NRWS is heard and acknowledged within the national level policy reforms such as the Constitutional reform, the Land reform, and Decentralization process. Community dialogues (i.e. focus group discussions, key informant interviews, etc.) were held with women and men leaders with regards to their perception on gender equality and women's empowerment in over 68 districts across Liberia's 15 counties during the period January – February 2016. In addition, series of awareness raising events were conducted alongside these community dialogues to create a sense of awareness around women's right to participate in decision making processes for their own socio-economic empowerment at the county, district, and community levels
- There is strengthened partnerships with the National Rural Women Structure in Liberia and its supporters, namely the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection, WFP, FAO, and the Ministry of International Affairs amongst others. This is practically around promoting advocacy work on achieving women's economic empowerment in post Ebola Liberia

- The leadership of the NRWS conducted a nation-wide tour to mobilize women under smaller community networks in support of gender equality and women's empowerment through UN Women's support. Thus, a national database of potential rural women that can be targeted with different interventions in support of women's social and economic empowerment is available to the public and development partners for programming purposes. The joint programme is currently using this database for the identification and selection of RWEE beneficiaries at district and community levels in close collaboration and consultation with the Government of Liberia (through the Ministries of Gender, Agriculture, and Commerce) and Civil Society
- Six (6) County Agriculture Coordinators (5 old and 1 new), five (5) District Agriculture Officers, five (5) Gender County Coordinators, and 57 community leaders from 10 women farming groups in 10 rural communities have increased understanding of gender, women's rights, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, women and climate resilient agriculture, and the roles rural women play in agriculture. The leaders of community farming groups are now ensuring equal participation of both women and men in decision-making processes with regards to agricultural production. For examples, both women and men are accessing the Community Grain Reserves and utilizing machineries and equipment for increased production at local level. County coordinators are also ensuring that their implementation plans and strategies at local level are engendered for ensuring that both women and men receive equal share of development effects. Women leaders are being invited by the Ministry of Agriculture (through workshops and meetings) to planning sessions and budget development including budget hearings at the county level. Both women and men engaged in agriculture in 10 new rural communities are equally benefitting from the planning and budgeting that County Agriculture Coordinators are ensuring
- There is now increased advocacy work (being pushed by MoA) with the Liberian legislature aimed at getting the endorsement of national government for the implementation of the National Food Security Strategy in Liberia. With the strategy, gender is mainstreamed within the context of food security and nutrition. The strategy is aimed at ensuring that all Liberians have reliable access to the food they need and can utilize that food to live active and healthy lives. As such, ensuring food security and good nutrition is not a policy choice of government that it can decide to accept or reject, but a right of the citizens of Liberia which the government is obligated to respect, promote, and protect

**Output 4.2:** Greater availability of tools and data to track progress in the economic empowerment of rural women

- Pre and post evaluation survey questionnaires for the literacy, business and VSLA training programmes were developed in close collaboration with the Government through the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and Civil Society represented by the implementing partners, namely EduCARE, THINK and NRWS
- Monitoring tools (i.e. classroom observation checklists, key informant interview questionnaires, core indicator surveys, focus group discussion guides, M&E framework, etc.) were developed and are being used throughout implementation of the joint programme
- A simple NEXT LEVEL post evaluation survey was administered in 5 targeted communities (through random sampling) and a report drafted, tracking progress achieved

**Output 4.3:** An enabling environment is promoted to reflect rural women's priorities in regional and global policy processes

- The joint programme funded the development of a concept note for a Mano River Union (MRU) Conference on Women in Cross-Border Trade to be held in Monrovia, Liberia by end of 2017. The objective of the conference is to foster inter-regional collaboration on women in cross-border trade within Mano River Union, leading to tangible recommendations for regional actions on gender and trade. Expected accomplishments include i.) strengthened

government accountability to women in cross-border trade; ii.) increased women's understanding of border procedures, their rights and responsibilities; iii.) enhanced women's involvement in regional policies and processes; iv.) increased capacity on mainstreaming gender into trade and border management; and v.) identified key entry points for a proposed MRU Action Plan on Gender and Trade for 2017/2021.

## **Delays in Implementation, Challenges, Lessons Learned & Best Practices:**

### ***Delays in Implementation:***

Due to heavy rains and bad roads in the southeast of Liberia, the delivery of farming inputs, and training supplies including the delivery of different trainings (i.e. literacy and numeracy skills, business development skills, SLA trainings, etc.) to women were significantly delayed by over 6 weeks in the early parts of 2016.

### ***Challenges:***

Monitoring the implementation of activities at the community level in certain parts of Liberia targeted by RWEE is a serious challenge, as some roads are entirely cut off due to heavy rains and flooding. In addition, the National Rural Women Structure has been involved with spot checking on project communities, but this was even hampered by the lack of available resources to support the NRW Structure in engaging rural communities. However, as the NRWS is a decentralized structure, the county leaders had worked with the district leaders to organize spot checks on project communities, specifically for Maryland, Sinoe and River Gee Counties. In addition, the WFP and FAO regional offices in those counties supported assessment missions to project communities in collaboration with the NRWS at county level and that of the Agriculture and Gender County Coordinators. Both county coordinators from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Gender also supported similar ventures.

RWEE is continuing its engagement with rural women on their land rights and participation in decision-making processes at all levels, especially in the case of women's participation in the management and use of natural resources and the environment for social and economic empowerment although the Land Rights Bill is yet to be passed and that some traditional male leaders, at the community level, are rejecting the idea of women ownership of land which they consider a taboo.

The process of rolling out capacity trainings with women farmers in the management and utilization of the storage facilities including how to operate machines and equipment was also delayed due to unfavorable weather condition, especially the rainy season during which implementation activities become very difficult because of the hard to reach nature of the communities of intervention.

Measures will now be taken to plan activities during the dry season, at which time the roads will be dried and passable. Equally so, CGRs or other facilities are now being strategically placed to serve a catchment population comprising several women groups within a given locality, and of course with common needs.

Another unexpected challenge had been some project communities fear of Ebola reoccurrence. This was basically observed during adult literacy and business skills classes during joint missions, as women were grouped together in classes which made some of them afraid, as this was one way of easily getting EVD infected during the EVD outbreak in Liberia. To ease the situation, RWEE provided drinking and wash buckets with detergents and soap for every class held in the project communities. Basically, Ebola awareness, prevention and response lectures including lectures on WASH were provided alongside literacy and business skills classes.

As political processes, particularly for the Liberian elections gradually stepped up in late 2016, RWEE interventions became politicized in several communities as some leaders (expected to run for public

offices during the 2017 national and presidential elections) communicated with some beneficiaries that they were the one who made it possible for projects to reach their communities. In addition, the change in political appointments have presented the JP with some challenges, as new political appointees are not familiar with the JP's activities and are not clearly communicating to other development partners on the programme's impact at the community level.

Through working with community facilitators, RWEE conducted several awareness raising activities with local communities and their leaders at the county level to explain about the programme and what it meant for rural women. As the electoral processes unfold, the JP will continue to support such initiative in the project communities to deter persons who are capitalizing on the benefits of the JP for their own political gain, especially during the campaign period.

### ***Lessons Learned:***

Because the JP RWEE National Coordinator ensures that the National Technical Advisory Committee addresses implementation challenges, promotes coordination and identifies lessons learned across the various activities and outputs on a regular basis, this has resulted in increased transparency and accountability with programming. Lessons are shared with the Joint Programme Steering Committee, as well as with other Liberia Joint Programmes, namely the Joint Programme on Human Security, the Joint Programme on Adolescent Girls and the new Joint Programme on Land.

By ensuring the participation of the two key government ministries (MoA and MoGCSP), Civil Society and the UNCT, represented by WFP, FAO, UN Women and the RC's office, joint monitoring missions has improved national ownership of the JP.

The lessons from the Joint Programme's management, coordination mechanisms, and joint monitoring approaches provided inputs and important lessons learned for the UN and the Liberian Government as they jointly develop new joint programmes in support of strengthening Liberia's development efforts. In particular, the strategies and lessons learned from the approaches to economic empowerment of rural women comprise the majority of the economic interventions for women in the new upcoming Human Security Joint Programme with UNIDO, UNDP, WFP, FAO and UN Women. The Joint Programme provided a structure for enhanced collaboration, particularly by WFP, FAO and UN Women including the RC's Office on women's economic empowerment and the lessons learned are carried forward by UNIDO, UNDP, WFP, FAO and UN Women under the new human Security joint initiative.

The more successful activities were also those where programme management and leadership were strong including regular monitoring, support to implementing partners and timely decisions to adjust the strategy in response to implementation challenges. For example, the JP National Coordinator, Central Bank of Liberia and implementing partners identified problems with the initial approach to expand access to finance through microfinance institutions (MFIs), and thus, a decision was taken to expand the SLA approach instead, which has proven very successful. Several key stakeholders (i.e. NRWS, MoA, EduCARE, THINK, etc.) have said that the leadership, commitment and continuity provided by the RWEE National Coordinator based at UN Women including other dedicated project focal points based at WFP and FAO have been one of the key reasons why the programme has had some key successes in some areas.

There has also been the importance of flexibility with the joint programme to be able to successfully deliver the results required. For example, the implementing partners (EduCARE, THINK) and the RWEE National Coordinator worked hard to develop and refine the Next Level programme in response to feedback from women beneficiaries. Thus, the curricula for the NEXT LEVEL programme are now widely seen to represent best practice, a cost-effective system of childcare has been installed and the programme recruits market women as facilitators alongside trainers, which is important for relevance and sustainability.

### ***Best Practices:***

Overall, the greatest impacts have been achieved for women where several *interventions have been carefully sequenced to target the same groups of women i.e. following up Business Development Skills training with SLA trainings; following up literacy and numeracy skills trainings with Business Development Skills trainings and then with SLA trainings.*

Increased national ownership of the joint programme is being achieved through working closely with local government in the implementation of project activities (i.e. Ministry of Education with the Literacy programme, Ministry of Commerce and Industry with the Business skills programme, the Micro Finance Unit at the Central Bank of Liberia with the access to finance programme through VSLAs including the Ministry of Agriculture with nutrition-sensitive and climate resilient agriculture for rural women farmers, etc.). Hence, RWEE continues to work towards ensuring increased national ownership of the programme. It is also important to note here that educating the women on the basics of Food Security and Nutrition further stands to pay a great dividend for behavioral change among rural women.

The Joint Programme has worked and continues to work closely with Civil Society and local implementing partners, both to ensure community ownership and overall sustainability beyond the Joint Programme's implementation. The National Rural Women's Structure remains active at all levels of implementation under the joint programme. In addition, the AWICBT and Women in Peace Huts have also play a crucial role in ensuring that the JP delivers on its expected results by supporting spot-checking of RWEE activities being implemented in targeted communities.

Joint field missions remain critical to supporting the Delivering as One (DaO) ideology; hence, the joint programme led three joint assessment missions to mobilize and recruit women and later to assess change at community level from 31st March, 2016 – 18th April, 2016 and from 3rd August 2016 – 27th August 2016 including 11th November 2016 – 30th November 2017 in collaboration with Government and the United Nations including other local partners. The first mission had focused on the mobilization, identification and selection of women beneficiaries in close collaboration with the NRWS, AWICBT Women in Peace Huts, and other community based grass-root structures for access to RWEE's intervention.

Men's continued involvement with the joint programme has played a major part in fostering increased ownership of the programme. From the inception of the joint programme and up to present, men have remained engaged throughout implementation, as this is strategic to ensuring a successful implementation and the delivery of effective results. Work with men continues to include dialogues and consultations with men during community entry, the HeForShe Campaign awareness raising in RWEE communities, use of local male facilitators to support the facilitation of trainings at the community level, and the linking of other programming areas (i.e. men as male champions on ending violence against women – Joint Programme on Human Security) in the RWEE-supported communities amongst others.

The Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women at country level is ensuring work at two strategic levels:

- ***Policy level*** - with a focus on implementation of commitments in the National Gender Policy (NGP) and the engendered National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (NFSNS) through supporting development of government's capacities to coordinate the delivery of the National Gender Policy and the Food Security and Nutrition Strategy; and
- ***Community level*** - with a focus on the delivery of a comprehensive women's empowerment programme, employing a more comprehensive approach to directly empower women economically, socially and politically.

At the policy level, one key priority area has been engaging in more strategic gender mainstreaming work. Rather than abstract work to "*mainstream gender*". As it stands, RWEE is currently engaged with

existing opportunities (e.g. Constitutional reform, land reform, decentralization) and will work to influence the different reform processes through working simultaneously with relevant line ministries and government bodies, parliamentarians and civil society networks and organisations.

At a community-level, the JP is focusing on ensuring joint delivery of a comprehensive, sequenced 'package' of core interventions to support women's economic and social empowerment - through a combination of direct implementation and on-the-ground coordination with other community-level programming. These include:

- Access to finance for women and adolescent girls through further expansions of the SLA approach and working with the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) and others on access to finance for agriculture;
- Business development and management skills;
- Social safety nets / social protection for vulnerable women and girls;
- Agricultural development – women's access to land, credit, agricultural inputs and services;
- Social norm change – engaging men and boys and community leaders and building the capacity of grassroots women's leaders and organizations to challenge and change attitudes and behavior towards women, their value, roles and responsibilities; and
- Literacy training for rural women and adolescent girls, especially the most vulnerable.

RWEE continues to focus on two key target groups both at community level: a.) the poorest, most vulnerable and excluded women, who rarely benefit from economic empowerment programmes, and b.) entrepreneurial women with the potential to grow their businesses further and contribute to economic revitalization and growth in their communities.

Throughout the implementation period of the joint programme, the RWEE Liberia Country Programme scaled up its combined adult literacy and numeracy + Business development skills + Savings and Loan Associations (SLA) approach in 2016 and will now focus on an exit strategy (Sustainability Plan) that will revolve around women's access to credit for increased sustainability of the programme at community level once RWEE phases out in late 2017.

### **Qualitative assessment:**

Overall, the Joint Programme on Rural Women Economic Empowerment has provided and continues to provide significant results for the achievement of the Government of Liberia's commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially for Goals 1, 2 & 5 within its Agenda for Transformation (AfT), the Economic stabilization and Recovery Plan (ESRP) and Liberia's Vision 2030. The programme's achievements have also made significant contributions to the following results within the current UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF 2013 - 2017) for Liberia:

#### **1. UN Pillar II: Sustainable Economic Transformation**

- *Outcome 2.1: Natural Resource and Food Security: Improved sustainable natural resource utilization and food security.*

#### **2. UN Pillar III: Human Development Outcome**

- *Outcome 3.1: Health and Nutrition: The population has increased access to and utilization of equitable, affordable, and quality health and nutrition services.*
- *Outcome 3.2: Education: School-aged girls and boys and youth have increased access to quality inclusive*
- *ECD, Basic, Post-Basic and Alternative basic Education, especially in counties with education indicators below the national average.*
- *Outcome 3.3: Social Welfare: Social welfare systems and services are improved and utilized, especially by the most vulnerable groups and individuals.*

- **Outcome 3.4: Social Protection: Vulnerable households and groups benefit from appropriate social protection services and systems.**

Partnership was strengthened with the National Rural Women Structure in Liberia and the Liberia Marketing Association through their collaboration and active participation with the NEXT LEVEL programme that introduced adult literacy and business skills classes for rural women and women entrepreneurs respectively. In addition, partnership was also strengthened with the Ministry of Agriculture through the provision of technical assistance in gender responsive planning and budgeting including for work around nutrition-sensitive and climate resilient agriculture with rural women farmers. For the Ministry of Gender, partnership was strengthened also through technical assistance to the revision of Liberia’s National Gender Policy and through support to its county offices for monitoring and supervision of some RWEE project activities at county and district levels.

Through community dialogues in the 15 counties, partnership was established with the Ministry of International Affairs. The focus of the Community Dialogue process was to make community members aware about the challenges of participating in local government through a participatory, accountable and inclusive approach (equitable participation of women and men) across all sectors in all of Liberia’s 15 counties. RWEE supported the dialogues with the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the RWEE project communities.

Partnership with Coca Cola Liberia in support of women entrepreneurs under the “*Be Your Own Boss*” initiative is linked to RWEE NEXT LEVEL programme with focuses on providing adult literacy and numeracy skills trainings to community women and business development skills trainings to women entrepreneurs.

As RWEE has formed synergies with ongoing joint programmes, namely the Joint Programme on Human Security and the Joint Programme on Adolescent Girls, partnerships were created with UNFPA under the Human Security JP on Sexual and Reproductive Health education and services for rural women and with UNICEF, UNFPA, WHO and UNESCO under the Adolescent Girls JP on empowering the most vulnerable and at-risk adolescent girls and young women with livelihood and life skills, improving health services for adolescent girls and young women, reducing prevalence of harmful traditional practices and violence against adolescent girls and young women, and ensuring adolescent and child friendly communities. These JPs are complementing RWEE’s engagement in targeted communities.

At the community level, there is:

- Improved social capital / participation in community life;
- Improved skills, especially in literacy and numeracy, has given rural women greater respect in their communities and improved their ability to participate:

*“The teaching that was here I am satisfied with it because I did not know how to spell my name, but now I can write my name. When we go to workshop I can sign my name. When they give me book, I can be writing what I learn here. I can tell them I did adult literacy; and they tell me, yes old ma come”* - Woman recipient of literacy training + SLA, age 38, Siahn, Grand Bassa County, UN Women JP RWEE beneficiary, (May 2016)

- Social skills of women in trade have improved, especially when dealing with customers
- Increased role in decision-making;
- New skills and contributions have women to play a greater role in decision-making in their households; and
- Increased self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem.

There are numerous examples of individual women who participated in trainings under JP RWEE who have spoken proudly during focus group discussions of how their own confidence levels and feeling of self-worth has improved because of trainings they have received.

- Because of new skills and economic contributions, some women unlike others have reported that their relationships with their husbands / partners have improved significantly:

*“My husband can respect me now than before”* - JP RWEE beneficiary

*“Before when my husband is talking, I never use to talk; but now I can talk”* - JP RWEE beneficiary

**ii.) Indicator Based Performance Assessment:**

	<b><u>Achieved</u> Indicator Targets</b>	<b>Reasons for Variance with Planned Target (if any)</b>	<b>Source of Verification</b>
<b>Outcome 1 Improved food and nutrition security</b>			
<b>Indicator:</b> # of women who completed capacity building trainings for ensuring improved FSN <b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Planned Target:</b> 2,500 [2016]	Approximately 2,475 rural women from ten (10) rural women farming groups have the required skills to engage in improved agricultural practices.	Due to heavy rains, the mobilization and selection of participants were challenging. Target was however met.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> <li>3. Participants' attendance logs from training workshops available</li> </ol>
<b>Output 1.1 Rural women have increased access to and control over resources, assets and services critical for their food and nutrition security</b>			
	Approximately 2,475 women from 10 women farming groups (100 members per group) have the required skills to engage in nutrition-sensitive agriculture	The target of 10 farming groups was met	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> <li>3. Participants' attendance logs from training workshops available</li> </ol>
	1,978 women from 10 farming groups in the 5 targeted rural counties received access to critical inputs for agricultural production such as tools, high quality seeds and machineries. These included mixed vegetable seeds including insecticide for pest control, protective gears for farming, cutlasses, hoes, and shovels, etc.	The target of 10 farming groups was met.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> </ol>
<b>Output 1.2 Rural women have greater capacity to enhance and control local food security reserves and their production</b>			

<p><b>Indicator 1.1.1:</b> # of rural farmers who are accessing and using the Community Grain Reserves (CGRs) including drying floors, toilets and hand pumps in 3 rural communities  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 2,000 women and men farmers [2016]</p>	<p>1,865 rural women farmers are utilizing the 3 CGRs along with their drying floors, toilets and hand pumps; 90 MT locally procured rice was made available and planted since May 2016; post-harvest equipment for the 3 CGRs were secured and delivered to the CGRs. Capacity building trainings are currently being rolled out for users of the warehouses in warehouse operation and management</p>	<p>There have been cases of women involved with the CGRs leaving and seeking employment at the concession companies as daily hires. This has led to a drop in the number of women accessing and utilizing the CGRs.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> <li>3. Sign-in logs at the 3 CGRs available</li> </ol>
<p><b>Indicator 1.2.2:</b> # of women farming groups that are linked to WFP's P4P programme  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 2,000 women [2016]</p>	<p>1,350 rural women farmers from 10 farming groups were linked to WFP's P4P programme and are benefitting from the purchasing of local staple food commodities for training and capacity development activities for farmers and farmers' organizations</p>	<p>Due to the rainy season and bad roads, the planned target was not fully met. The remaining number of women will be reached by end of March 2017.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> </ol>
<p><b>Outcome 2 Rural women have increased income to secure their livelihoods.</b></p>			
<p><b>Indicator:</b> # of women that have increased income to secure their livelihood  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 3,000 women [2016]</p>	<p>Approximately 3,250 women have the required skills to better manage their investments for increased income to secure their livelihood</p>	<p>Due to heavy rains, the mobilization and recruitment of new beneficiaries were challenging. The target was over achieved by 250 additional women.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> <li>3. Trainees' attendance logs available</li> <li>4. SLAs meeting attendance and financial rosters available</li> </ol>
<p><b>Output 2.1 Rural women have enhanced entrepreneurship skills and value chains to access markets for their products</b></p>			
	<p>3,250 women have increased knowledge in business management and practice including literacy and numeracy skills. These women are better understanding their</p>	<p>Due to heavy rains, the mobilization and recruitment of new beneficiaries were challenging. Target was however overachieved by 250 additional women</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> <li>3. Trainees' attendance logs</li> </ol>

<b>Planned Target:</b> 3,000 women	businesses and are generating increased income. 1,412 of the 3,250 women reached have active bank accounts. These women are accessing financial services (i.e. credit/loan) from the banks they are registered with; and 80 local facilitators at community level have increased knowledge on facilitating literacy and numeracy skills classes including business skills classes for semi-literate and illiterate women.		available
<b>Indicator 2.1.2:</b> # of women beneficiaries formed into new VSLAs for access to finance/credit <b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Planned Target:</b> 2,000 women [2016]	1,250 beneficiaries at the community level are accessing financial services through 50 Village Savings and Loan Associations (25 members per VSLA).. About 906 of the approximately 1,250 women targeted in 2016 now have bank active bank accounts with EcoBANK and GnBank	Due to heavy rains, the mobilization and recruitment of new beneficiaries were challenging. However, the remaining 750 women are expected to be reached by the end of March 2017, making it a total of 2,000 – the planned target for 2016.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>2. Implementing partners reports available</li> <li>3. SLAs meeting attendance and financial roster available</li> </ol>
<b>Outcome 3: Rural women have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities and in rural institutions, and in shaping laws, policies and programmes.</b>			
<b>Indicator:</b> # of women leaders who are demonstrating enhanced leadership and participation skills <b>Baseline:</b> 0 <b>Planned Target:</b> 40 women leaders [2016]	5 national and county leaders from the NRWS and 5 county leaders from the AWICBT including 30 leaders from VSLA groups have enhanced leadership and participation in their communities	Target met	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reports from capacity building workshops</li> <li>2. Attendance listing of workshops' participants</li> </ol>
Output 3.1 Rural women, including young women have enhanced confidence and leadership skills to participate in local governance			
<b>Indicator 3.1.1:</b> # of rural women leaders that are exhibiting capacity to better organize themselves in terms of	5 national and county leaders from the NRWS and 5 county leaders from the AWICBT including 30	Target was met	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Minutes from dialogues with the National Rural Women Structures and</li> </ol>

<p>participation in decision-making as it relates to governance reform processes  <b>Baseline:</b> 80 leaders [2015]  <b>Planned Target:</b> 15 additional women leaders [2016]</p>	<p>leaders from VSLA groups have increased understanding of the constitutional review and decentralization processes. These leaders are fully and actively engaged with the ongoing reform processes including preparations for the 2017 presidential elections including on issues of rural women's right to vote, etc.</p>		<p>other women-based community structures  2. Attendance listing of dialogues held</p>
<p>Output 3.4: Rural women, including young women have enhanced awareness on their rights in a more supportive community/local environment.</p>			
<p><b>Indicator 3.4.1:</b> # of rural women and girls have increased access to SRH education and services for increased understanding of their reproductive rights and improved family planning at the community level  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 3,000 rural women and girls [2016]</p>	<p>1,250 women and girls have increased knowledge on SRH, and cases of teenage and unwanted pregnancy have noticeably decreased in targeted communities. Prior to the intervention in targeted communities, at least 2 - 3 cases of teenage pregnancies were reported at the community level every two months. Now, at least 0 - 1 case is reported after every two months. Thus, the retention rate in local schools with some adolescent girls have improved to a considerable extent. This was achieved through the rollout of the literacy and numeracy skills training.</p>	<p>Due to the rainy season and bad road condition, the planned target was not met. The remaining 1,750 are expected to be reached by end of March 2016.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Training reports from implementing partners available</li> <li>2. Joint assessment mission reports available</li> <li>3. Trainees' attendance logs available</li> </ol>
<p><b>Outcome 4: A more gender responsive policy environment is secured for the economic empowerment of rural women</b></p>			
<p><b>Indicator:</b> MoA has the capacity to engendered plans and budget for implementation at county level  <b>Baseline:</b> 0  <b>Planned Target:</b> 1 Gender Unit at MoA and 5 CCs in targeted counties</p>	<p>The Ministry of Agriculture has the capacity at county level to ensure local level gender responsive planning and budgeting with county coordinators and other relevant structures</p>	<p>Target achieved</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. MoA report available</li> <li>2. Monitoring reports available</li> <li>3. County Coordinators reports available</li> </ol>
<p>Output 4.1: Policy makers and parliamentarians have enhanced capacities to effectively mainstream gender into land, food, agriculture, nutrition and rural</p>			

employment policies, laws and budgets.

<p><b>Indicator 4.1.1:</b> Six (6) County Agriculture Coordinators (CACs), DACs, and GCCs are practicing improved gender-responsive planning and budgeting <b>Baseline:</b> Five (5) CACs <b>Planned Target:</b> 6 County Agriculture Coordinators (CACs), 5 DAOs, 5 GCCs [2016]</p>	<p>Six (6) County Agriculture Coordinators (5 old and 1 new) and 57 community leaders from 10 women farming groups in 10 rural communities have increased understanding of gender, women’s rights, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, climate resilient agriculture, and the roles rural women play in agriculture.</p>	<p>Target was met. All trainings were conducted with others (i.e. climate resilient agriculture, etc.) scheduled for the last two quarters in 2016.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. MoA reports available</li><li>2. Monitoring reports available</li><li>3. County Agriculture Coordinators monthly reports available</li></ol>
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### iii.) A Specific Story

#### From Grass to Grace – The Story of a Rural Woman



**Name:** Tina Tuonyon

**Age:** 37 Years

**Location:** Greenville, Sinoe County

**Programmes Accessed:** JP RWEE Literacy + Business + VSLA

**Beneficiary Type:** Rural Cross Border Trader

Before JP RWEE, Tina walked 4 to 5 miles three times a week to buy 2 bags of charcoal. She would sell the two bags of coal by retail in small plastic bags at LD\$ 10.00 (about U.S. 0.2 Cents) per plastic bag in Greenville City, Sinoe County. This enabled her to sustain herself and also to send her son to school. Life was very difficult.

Despite her low level of income and being illiterate, Tina was determined to become a rural cross border trader. She used to say, *“I want to travel to Guinea, Ivory Coast and Nigeria to buy goods and sell.”* It was obvious that Tina had the will and potential to become a cross border trader; however, her determination was threatened in the sense that she was illiterate and lacked a clear understanding of effectively managing her business.

When JP RWEE literacy + business programme was launched in Greenville in 2014/2015 with EduCARE Liberia implementing the project, Tina was recruited by the programme to access literacy classes at first and then eventually business classes. Over time, she eventually and successfully completed both the literacy and business classes that were offered. At first, Tina had been taught how to basically read and write and on how to use a calculator. She later started to learn business skills on how to save money and how to separate her business money from her personal money. Other things she had learned included how to keep her business area clean so that she gain more customers, developing her business plan and budgeting.

When Tina completed literacy classes (6-month course) and began attending business classes (4-month course), she saw considerable improvements in her charcoal business. Her business grew, and it was not long before Tina began bringing in 25 to 50 bags of charcoal in a pick-up truck instead of the 2 bags of charcoal she used to bring for sale by transporting them on her head. This time, she did not walk the 4 to 5 miles but instead could afford to charter a local pickup truck to haul the coal to Greenville City where she sold the bags of chair coal by wholesale.

As the coal business expanded, Tina began to save her money with the intent of travelling to the Ivory Coast to buy bags of dried pepper by wholesale for sale in Greenville City. She eventually travelled to the Ivory Coast close to Liberia, bought a considerable amount of dried pepper, and started to sell the bags of dried pepper in Greenville City. Tina’s income grew immensely (from generating about LD\$ 700 a day to LD\$ 1,500 a day), and it was during this time that she also accessed the training in SLA (Savings and Loan Association Methodology) under EduCARE Liberia, JP RWEE implementing partner. She started saving her money and accessing credit from her local Savings and Loan Association of which she is a member.

With the completion of the SLA training, Tina joined the Greenville Rural Women in Cross Border Trade SLA and began to invest into their savings and loan association. As Tina now had access to credit, she expanded her

business and began travelling to other West African countries like Sierra Leone, Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Guinea to buy goods. She is currently still a member of the SLA in Greenville, Sinoe County.

Today, Ms. Tina Tuonyon is an active member of the Rural Women in Cross Border Trade in Sinoe County and currently lives and does business in Greenville City, Sinoe County.

### **Other Assessments or Evaluations**

Two research studies were conducted with co-funding from JP RWEE. One was on a Study on the status of Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), and the other was on the Study on the status of Women in Cross Border Trade. The reports for both studies were drafted and awaiting validation by national government and other stakeholders and partners. UN Women and other UN agencies are expected to use the reports as knowledge products to present to potential donors to fund an access to finance programme for women using the SLA approach and also for the development of a stand-alone women in cross border trade programme.

### **Programmatic Revisions**

No major adjustments were made to the programme. However, provisions were made from the activities under VSLAs and skills trainings to co-fund two research studies at national level, namely the “Study on the status of Women in Cross Border Trade Study” and the “Study on the status of Village Savings and Loan Associations”. UN Women and Gender Ministry Peacebuilding Project also co-funded both studies.

### **Coordination mechanisms**

#### *Programme Planning and Management*

Overall responsibility for strategic leadership and oversight of the Joint Programme lies with the Government, and for this JP specifically, with the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection. The Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Protection and the UN Resident Coordinator (DSRSG/RC) both co-chair the Joint Programme Steering Committee (JPSC) with representatives from key ministries, including Agriculture, Finance and Development Planning, Commerce and Industry, and Education; participating UN agencies; and donor representatives. This body guides the programme on strategic matters, exercising oversight of the programme’s progress and responsibility for the re-allocation of funds within the programme to different outputs, as may be needed. Decisions of the Steering Committee are made through consensus.

UN WOMEN serves as the lead agency and is responsible for overall coordination of the programme, including supporting MoGCSP in its capacity as the lead Ministry. UN WOMEN also supports the Joint Programme Manager and ensures the smooth running of the programme. The day-to-day technical coordination of the overall programme is the responsibility of the Programme Manager, who reports to UN WOMEN (as lead agency).

Output level implementation is planned and coordinated by a Technical Committee comprising focal points from all agencies on the Steering Committee, as well as implementing partners, as deemed necessary. The Joint Programme Manager chairs the Technical Committee.

Individual outputs remain the responsibility of the individual UN organizations as identified in annual work plans. The coordination of components, shared outputs and overall Joint Programme is the responsibility of UN WOMEN as lead agency.

### *Programme Procurement*

The responsibility for procurement of goods and services rests with each individual UN organization and all procurement must follow the appropriate standards and regulations. In the event of procuring services or hiring personnel, selection committees comprise of both UN and Government of Liberia representatives.

### *Programme Monitoring System*

Monitoring occurs throughout the year by individual agencies / participating Ministries, leading to an annual review of the Joint Programme. The monitoring activities and evaluations of the Joint Programme follow UNDAF procedures and form part of the UNDAF M&E plan as aligned to the national AFT M&E plan. As is adopted in other Joint Programmes, participating UN organizations undertake joint field visits when possible, while remaining cognizant of the demands on key government officials. The Programme Manager produces annual reports to the JPSC on progress towards each of the indicators and outputs. Special reviews and assessments are undertaken as required by the JPSC.

The individual project implementing agencies are responsible for data collection and reporting from the activity level. Reports and updates of activity-level implementation are provided at bi-monthly Technical Committee meetings. The Programme Manager has the overall responsibility for M&E reporting to the JPSC, including the overall tracking of key outcomes and output indicators.

The Programme Manager ensures that the Technical Committee addresses implementation challenges, promotes coordination and identifies lessons learned across the various activities and outputs on a regular basis. These lessons are shared with the Joint Programme Steering Committee, as well as with other Liberia Joint Programmes.

Together with the Resident coordinators office, UN Women and participating Agencies initiated the process of review of the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan including the review and possible revision of the indicators which are unclear of for which the data collection is not sustainable (difficult or expensive). The M&E focal points meeting is scheduled for the next quarter in 2016.

## **VI. Resources**

In April 2016, US\$ 700,000 was received from Sweden in support of the joint programme. Under this amount, the following were transferred to UN Women, WFP, and FAO as follows:

UN Women:	US\$ 378,031
WFP:	US\$ 160,934
FAO:	US\$ 161,035

The use of these funds followed the 2015/2016 work plans and budgets, pre-approved by the Government of Liberia and the U.N. through the JP RWEE National Steering Committee in 2015. There has been no additional funding mobilized under RWEE at country level. However, UN Women has contributed some funding to support certain activities as stated in the contributions section.

### *Human Resources:*

Three United Nations staff members (UN Women, WFP, and FAO) have received financial support since the start of 2016 through the 2016 joint programme funding. The joint programme’s implementation is also supported by multiple other programmes, operations, and administrative staff within the participating agencies (although these other personnel are not supported by the RWEE funds but by core funds under UN Women, WFP, and FAO including the Government of Liberia represented by the Ministries of Gender and Agriculture).

JP RWEE-supported staff are:

- National Staff:
  - National Program Manager, UN Women
  - National Program Officer, FAO
  - National Program Officer, WFP
  
- International Staff:
  - None

*Financial Resources:*

<b>Total approved budget: \$ 1,988,256 Norway &amp; Sweden</b>	<b>Budget by Agency</b>	<b>Expenditure by Agency Est.</b>	<b>Balance</b>
MPTF Contribution <sup>2</sup> :			
• UN Women Liberia	\$ 1,277,794	\$ 1,274,603	\$ 3,191
• WFP Liberia	\$ 444,508	\$ 437,654	\$ 6,854
• FAO Liberia	\$ 265,954	\$ 258,989	\$ 6,965

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<sup>2</sup> The MPTF or JP Contribution, refers to the global amount (sum of Norway’s and Sweden’s contributions) transferred to the Participating UN Organizations, which is available on the [MPTF Office GATEWAY](#)

**Pictorial Highlights:**