

Agriculture Sustainability Activity

Enterprise's Outlook Is Strong Following Business Planning & Management Training

PROJECT LOCATION	Liberia
TIMEFRAME	2021-2022
COUNTRY PROJECT	Cassava
HOST	Beyan Business Center

Business planning and management commonly involve strategy development, the state of the market, and creating detailed steps to improve performance in the coming period. These components are crucial to the success of any business, something Beyan Business Center soon realized as they started to grow. Located in Zorzor Town, Lofa County, Beyan Business Center is a legally registered sole proprietorship involved in merchandising agro-inputs to four farmer-based associations with 150 smallholder farmers. Sixty-five percent are rice and cassava farmers with a total farm size of 41.25 hectares.

Pewee Y. Beyan, owner-manager of Beyan Business Center, wanted to grow the business into a large agro-inputs supply-chain business in Lofa County to supply cassava, rice, and vegetable smallholder farmers, but, his vision was restrained by financial challenges. At the time, the average inventory turnover of Beyan Business Center was between 5% to 10%, implying that restocking was strong and the customer base was large; however, the challenge of lack of funds to increase inventory was quite overwhelming. Several attempts by Beyan Business Center to secure a bank line of credit or microloans to increase inventory were futile. Mr. Beyan iterated that he needed USD\$5,000.00 to increase inventory purchases.

Beyan Business Center's inability to access credit or microloans to finance working capital was not due to the lack of agricultural lending institutions or microfinance institutions to incubate agricultural SMEs profitability and growth, but due to their improper record-keeping and reporting system. Their processes were disorganized and disjointed; there was no record-keeping system or business tools to provide information on sales, credit to customers, purchase and forecast of new stocks, and disbursement of petty cash.

In need of a business planning and management training to enhance their ability to access financing for profitability, growth, and sustainability, Beyan Business Center reached out to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), funded Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented Agriculture Sustainability Activity (ASA) for technical assistance. ASA uses the Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) model to provide technical assistance to agriculture organizations through volunteer trainings to increase the availability of domestically produced and processed rice and cassava. During implementation, the Activity shifted to a Remote Paired Volunteer (RPV) model – a local volunteer paired with a U.S.-based volunteer to allow program implementation during COVID-related travel restrictions. The ASA Project engaged local volunteer Sulon Kokolie, a professional accountant



Figure 1. Beyan Business Center training participants listen to ASA volunteer Sulon Kokolie.

from Monrovia, Liberia, and U.S.-based volunteer Dr. Richard Edwards, a business advisor from Texas. Both collaborated to strengthen the capacity and equip the host with practical knowledge on business planning and management.

During the participatory training, Mr. Kokolie visited the enterprise, observed current methods, collaborated with Dr. Edwards, and together they recommended improved practices. Based on their observations during the training, the volunteers recommended the following six recommendations to Beyan Business Center: hire an accountant/bookkeeper to record financial transactions; print the training manual and the financial tools developed during the training and start using them; reorganize the management team to suit the business; purchase a computer and printer for the business entity; reorganize the filling system and record system as taught during the training; and rearrange the shop and properly separate the chemical items from the food commodities.

Mr. Beyan was satisfied with the training and appreciated the support. "I am very happy and proud to receive this capacity building on business planning and management training because it reawakens my passion for the agro-input business and gave me a new sense of direction in managing my agro-input business for success."

Beyan Business Center successfully adopted all six recommendations, most notably recording financial transactions in the appropriate books and creating a record-keeping box. Mr. Beyan also restructured the agro shop; he refurbished the exterior and disaggregated agro-inputs from other merchandise. He also developed and adopted business tools (sales recording journal, inventory purchase recording journal, and petty cash disbursement receipt). Additionally, he opened an account with Zorlayea Rural Finance Institution in Zorzor Town, Zorzor District, Lofa County.

"The most impressive recollection of this assignment was the host's willingness and prompt action to the recommendations. For example, he had no record-keeping system in place when the assignment began. He recognized the importance of such a system and immediately hired a bookkeeper to set up the system and make the appropriate entries. From the system he will then be able to develop profit and loss statements and get a clearer picture of all his enterprise's contributions and manage them based on actual information." stated Dr. Edwards.

The enterprise is still in the process of getting a USD\$5,000.00 loan from Zorlayee Microfinance Institute; however, by adopting the recommendations and improving its record-keeping system, Beyan Business Center is closer to its goal. Mr. Kokolie and Dr. Edward's strong collaboration was imperative to the success of the assignment; they enjoyed working together so much that they participated together in another F2F assignment in Liberia, allowing other hosts to benefit from their expertise.



Figure 2. Mr. Kokoli (right) at the training site.



Figure 3. Mr. Beyan in the store following the training.