

Agriculture Sustainability Activity

Strong Volunteer Collaboration Results in Improved Marketing

PROJECT LOCATION	Liberia
TIMEFRAME	2021-2022
COUNTRY PROJECT	Cassava
HOST	Rural Women and Girls Promoters for Sustainable Development

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) implemented Agriculture Sustainability Activity (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 Paired Remote Volunteer (PRV) model – a local volunteer paired with a U.S.-based volunteer to allow program implementation during COVID-related travel restrictions.

When John Berry, a marketing specialist based in Pennsylvania, was approached to support ASA by providing marketing strategy support to Rural Women and Girls Promoters for Sustainable Development (Rural Women and Girls), he was happy to assist. Having previously completed one in-person and four remote assignments for CRS, Mr. Berry was no stranger to the F2F model. Roger Snorton, a human resource and marketing expert based in Monrovia, Liberia, was identified as Mr. Berry’s counterpart. Mr. Snorton saw ASA as an opportunity to provide technical assistance and support to growing organizations in Liberia. Mr. Berry’s marketing experience coupled with Mr. Snorton’s digital marketing skillset and his understanding of Liberian markets made them the ideal pair to support Rural Women and Girls.

Located in Sanniquelleh, Sanniquelleh Mah District, Nimba County, Rural Women and Girls has 418 members (100 men and 318 women) who are highly involved in cassava production and processing. The organization heavily depends on the local market in Sanniquelleh for selling their super gari; however, their goal is to expand, sell the best product in the county, and eventually export. To be competitive and take advantage of the new market opportunities, the organization must increasingly adapt its farm business to market changes and improve efficiency, profitability, and income; they must create strong market linkages to expand their sales, attract new customers, and increase profits.

In 2020, Rural Women and Girls’ total sales were \$6,000.00; however, following this, they were off the market due to an equipment malfunction and unable to sell super gari to customers. In need of reentering the market and increasing product visibility, they reached out to ASA. ASA encouraged them to fix their machinery before receiving assistance. Once Rural Women and Girls fixed the machinery, ASA was able to provide marketing support. Rural Women and Girls hoped to gain the necessary knowledge and skills to increase and expand their super gari market.

Together, Mr. Snorton and Mr. Berry collaborated to put on a training for 80 cooperative members (40 female, 30 male, and 10 youth) from October 25 – November 5, 2021. The training focused on marketing super gari to increase customers' knowledge of the product and attract new markets. “The host having two full sessions of motivated learners to participate in the training/ education is exemplary. Many more people than typically participate were able



Figure 1. ASA Volunteer Roger Snorton (standing) training participants on marketing strategies.

to hear, participate and interact with their peers as well as professionals,” highlighted Mr. Berry.

At the end of the assignment, the volunteers provided three recommendations to the host: improve packaging materials to attract customers; establish a marketing page, such as on social media, to increase brand awareness; and continue consulting with marketing experts to help capture new markets. Mr. Snorton was pleased with the assignment and noted that “the organization will be well placed if they can market their product correctly.”

Rural Women and Girls’ Executive Director Meilakeh Suah appreciated the training and recommendations, “The training was good; it gives us a clear picture in terms of where and how to do marketing with our end product.”

Following the assignment, the host adopted all three recommendations and took the extra step of contracting a marketing person to ensure their product is ready for market. The ASA team observed that the super gari packaging now has a proper label highlighting the organization, ensuring that the packaging is distinct and distinguishes itself from its competitors. Additionally, the host promotes their product on the radio, through adverts, and on their [Facebook service page](#). Finally, since the assignment, they have had a marketing refresher training.

Moreover, after ASA’s assistance, Rural Women and Girls expanded to three additional markets in Nimba County (Bursunon, Beipa, and Flumpa), the number of customers increased from 430 to 540, and they were able to generate \$3,605.00 in the last quarter of 2021.

The success of this assignment was largely due to the strong collaboration between both volunteers; both continuously worked together to achieve the assignment’s objectives and meet the host’s needs. “Mr. Snorton was a large part of my positive experience on this assignment. He communicated well, offered and accepted critique, and seemed to make a solid connection with participants,” noted Mr. Berry. “This assignment was my first for being very comfortable as a remote volunteer. Part of this was CRS, part was the local volunteer, and a big part was a few live stream videos with the assignment participants. Enthusiasm for the topics, willingness to be vulnerable, and pride in progress were evident to me. This is what keeps me seeking additional volunteer assignments,” said Mr. Berry.

Ultimately, Rural Women and Girls Promoters wants to export their super gari to Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast. Customers in these countries have already tried the products and Rural Women & Girls hopes they can distinctly brand their products for each country. This assignment is a step in the right direction; by increasing their presence in Nimba County, they can hopefully expand to other counties in Liberia and eventually export. As Mr. Berry summarizes below, the host will need to continuously adapt to meet demand, but Rural Women and Girls has the motivation to achieve its goals.

“Many farmers, processors, and cooperatives seek to sell more products. Fewer seek to grow their marketing expertise. Learning is a continuous, life-long process and nothing exemplifies this more than studying effective marketing. The buyer is a moving target with ever-changing demands. Marketing is the only activity of a business that generates revenues. I am encouraged (excited) when a small group of peers gather to learn about, discuss, and develop ideas. This is especially true when the topic is centered on marketing.”



Figure 2. ASA Volunteer Roger Snorton (far right standing) with training participants.

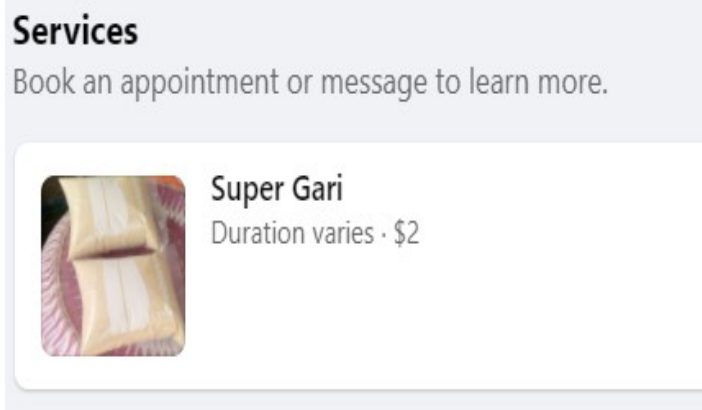


Figure 3. The Rural Women and Girls Promoters for Sustainable Development Facebook Service Page advertising their super gari.