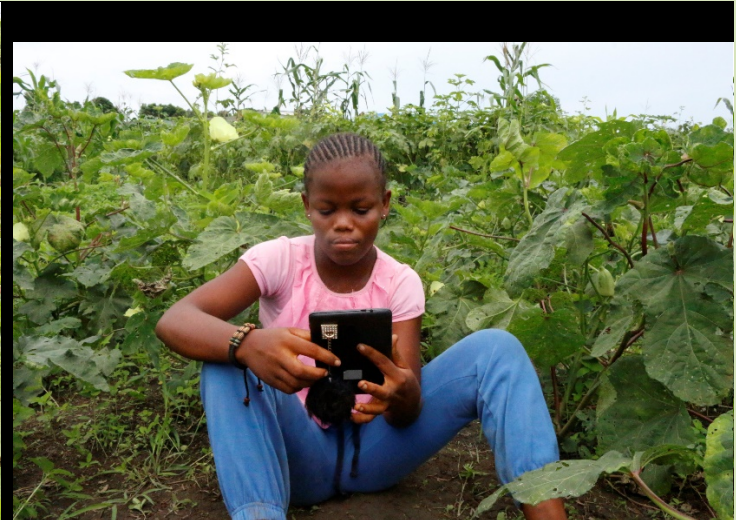


The Role of ICT in Revolutionizing Agricultural Practices in Liberia**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Liberia's economy consists of agriculture (52% GDP), forestry (12% GDP) and concession reliant industrial sectors (12% GDP). Small household and subsistence farming make up the majority of farming in the agricultural sector with 41% of all households in Liberia dependent on food crop production for their livelihoods. Liberia recognizes agriculture as a strategic sector because a vast majority of the population depends on it for their livelihood. It is a significant net contributor to the economy in terms of employment and GDP (52% GDP). Even though agriculture makes up a large percentage of Liberia's economy, the sector is currently plagued with challenges such as the lack of reliable, relevant, and timely information to farmers, the disintegration of markets and exposure to new markets. With such challenge, it is vital that innovative and alternative methods of disseminating information, while also empowering farmers to improve agricultural productivity and sustainability is adapted within the agriculture sector in Liberia.

Information, Communications, and Technology (ICT) as an intervention has begun to revolutionize agriculture practices globally and its impact cannot be ignored. ICT has reformed and modernized agricultural practices by tailoring efforts to connect farmers to markets, provide timely and locality-based information which in turn increases productivity and crop trading. With these benefits, this policy brief highlights the importance of integrating ICT in agriculture practices in Liberia in order to widen access to market for local farmers and strengthen the sector.

ICT and Widening Markets/ Empowering Decisions

There are a few challenges in Liberia when it comes to market access, identifying appropriate distribution channels for marketing of agricultural produce and making informed decisions on agricultural best practices. Often times, farmers lack the ability to access relevant information as it pertains to consumer trends, appropriate platforms and spaces to sell their produce, market prices, precise information to support best practices, and tailored marketing strategies to gain traction in order to attain effective results. By adapting ICT within agricultural practices in Liberia, it provides the potential to bridge the gaps by:

- ☛ widening markets prospect of farmers directly to the consumers
- ☛ enhancing source of revenue

- expanding networks and collaborations
- improving capacity by empowering farmers to make informed decisions when it comes to cultivation and harvesting
- facilitating interaction among geographical and economic regions, and opening up new areas to economic focus

ICT Tools and Strengthened Agriculture Sector

ICT tools utilized in agriculture activities can contribute immensely to the increment of economic growth. With this notion, it is vital that in Liberia, ICT tools are effectively adapted in agriculture activities in order to attain precision, sustainability, and expansion. ICT tools such as radio, social media, WhatsApp, etc. provides a medium for reaching large number of people especially in isolated areas. They cover a wide range of space in no time, creating more platforms for farmers to engage, discuss, and learn from each other while also allowing farmers to map and sequence cropping activities. The emphasis on adapting ICT tools in agriculture in Liberia is well timed, by fostering the use of technology in agriculture, it will help create a more efficient supply chain management, incentivize farmers through better income- thus contributing to the strengthening of the sector.



POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To effectively embrace ICT in agriculture, policy makers need to be aware of how innovative strategies could be combined within the framework of territorial or 'place-based' development. Agriculture and the utilization of ICT is a viable potential to alleviating poverty in Liberia and contributing to the sustained economy; this is possible only if the Government;

- provides high quality content that is relevant to the needs of farmers and the country context

- ☞ ensure that data is available and on platforms and mediums where it can be easily accessible by farmers at anytime
- ☞ Improve the digital access of farmers and enhance their skills
- ☞ Transform Liberia's agriculture sector into digital opportunities to further improve social and economic benefits
- ☞ Evaluate the effectiveness of existing ICT strategies and projects run by local NGO's in the country and identify best practices
- ☞ Improve network and connectivity in Liberia in both urban and rural areas
- ☞ Provide proper ICT mechanizing tools and trainings to agricultural groups to increase productivity, thereby contributing to creation of food stability.
- ☞ Prioritize the establishment of standardized agricultural institutions that will cater to the need of both illiterate and literate interested farmers.
- ☞ Provide scholarships that will allow students who choose to undertake studies in agriculture and ICT to access adequate education in the universities of Liberia.

ABOUT BUILDING BETTER FUTURES

This policy brief draws from ActionAid's Building better futures through ICT and Agriculture for urban youth in Liberia project (BBF), which invests in agriculture-driven social enterprises as a potential source of livelihood and employment for young people. By integrating ICT with marketing and the exchange of agricultural good practices it strengthens networking among young people with a view of transforming livelihoods for young people and increasing economic opportunities for them. This project directly feeds into the national development goal that seeks to reduce youth unemployment, disaster risk reduction and reduce young people's active participation in violence.

This project has not only succeeded in attracting young people to agriculture as a source of employment but is also changing the narrative and reframing youth's perception in engaging in agriculture while addressing pertinent issues affecting the sector. This is clearly evidenced by the project's results after 2 years: the establishment of 5 new social enterprises to produce, process and sell agricultural products, the active functioning of 10 agricultural accountability forums for knowledge sharing and the uptake by young people of sustainable agricultural practices, avoiding expensive chemical inputs, the allotment of land for farming following lobbying local authorities by the social enterprise groups.

One crucial factor of success is that BBF provides a platform and an enabling environment, including by making available appropriate (ICT) tools and resources. It is building young people's capacity in business management support for business start-ups. Young people are taking lead in policy advocacy for increased support to youth-led agricultural social enterprises.