



Farmers from Suakoko Agriculture Development Empowerment Cooperative plant cassava in Suakoko rural area near Gbartala town in Bong County, Liberia. Photo Credit: Patrick Meinhardt.

A Case Study: Integrating Social Cohesion into Agriculture Programming in Liberia

In 2022, CRS Liberia under Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture (ASA) program in Liberia collaborated with the [SCP1: Fostering Just and Cohesive Society](#) on a pilot project integrating social cohesion into agriculture programming. The project aimed to address challenges in Liberia's agricultural sector and improve outcomes.

Land conflicts resulting from war-induced displacement hinder agricultural productivity and lead to disputes within producer groups and communities. Ineffective management, lack of trust between communities along with the government's fragile rule over the populace poses additional obstacles. Gender inequality marginalizes women economically and politically, while youth face marginalization and stigmatization, particularly in relation to land ownership and agricultural work. Further, agricultural producer groups struggle with logistics, processing, and marketing, as local demand often falls short of production.

The project aimed to foster trust, respect, and relying on ASA implementation and Youth for Peace (Y4P) initiatives aimed at engaging and empowering youth in peacebuilding efforts.

By fostering a culture of trust, respect, and cooperation within producer groups and their communities, the project aimed to promote peaceful resolutions to conflicts, enhance agricultural productivity, and expand economic networks.

Implementation

The pilot project employed a multifaceted approach to integrating social cohesion into agriculture programming. The methodology involved a series of activities designed to promote social cohesion and improve agricultural outcomes. The following steps were undertaken:

- **Assessment:** The project team conducted a thorough assessment of the local context, including the dynamics of producer groups, land disputes, gender inequalities, and youth marginalization. This assessment helped identify the specific challenges and entry points for integrating social cohesion.
- **Technical Support:** Producer groups received technical support, including training on social

cohesion, conflict resolution, and effective group management. Producer group leaders were trained in transparent financial transactions, advocating on behalf of their members, and counseling members on non-violent behavior and peaceful conflict resolution.

- **3B/4D Dialogues for improved Social Cohesion:** 3B/4D (Binding, Bonding, Bridging / Discover, Dream, Design and Deliver) dialogues were organized among producer group members.¹ These dialogues provided a platform for open discussions, building understanding, and addressing conflicts. They aimed to develop positive relationships, trust, and cooperation within the groups.
- **Civic Competency, Advocacy, and Reconciliation Training:** Intra-group and inter-group members received training in civic competency, advocacy, and reconciliation. These trainings aimed to enhance participants' conflict resolution skills, resilience, and reconciliation abilities. They also fostered a sense of civic understanding, promoting inter and intra-group reconciliation and the denouncement of violence within kinship communities and identity groups.
- **Connector Activities:** Seed grants were provided for connector activities, which are aimed at promoting unity and trust among group members. These activities included investments in lowland rice and vegetable farming and training and support to enhance women's advocacy skills for constructive engagement with local leaders. These economic pursuits and advocacy initiatives aimed to expand economic networks and reinforce social cohesion.

Findings and Recommendations

The pilot project in Liberia yielded significant findings, highlighting the positive impact of integrating social cohesion into agriculture programming. The project team conducted evaluations to measure the impact of the social cohesion interventions on agricultural outcomes and peaceful resolutions of conflicts. The evaluation included the use of the Hope Scale framework to

assess participants' confidence in the future and their perception of change.

Producer groups receiving social cohesion support **reported increased optimism** and confidence in resolving conflicts peacefully. The interventions **improved relationships and trust within the groups**, fostering a cooperative atmosphere. Participants **demonstrated heightened civic awareness**, advocating against violence and promoting peace. They **identified conflict sources and offered solutions** through constructive dialogue. The pilot project addressed challenges in the agricultural sector, such as land conflicts, ineffective management, gender inequality, youth marginalization, and logistical struggles. In contrast, the control groups, which did not receive the social cohesion interventions, had a more mixed perception of the future. Some expressed uncertainty and negative views, citing factors such as ongoing criminality in the community and lack of proper leadership and opportunities for improvement.

The pilot project yielded a range of findings, but also areas for improvement. Several recommendations were made for future interventions:

- **Support Exchanges:** Continue facilitating exchanges and dialogue among producer groups to promote cooperation and shared learning. Organize regular forums for discussions and experience-sharing.
- **Provide Ongoing Training:** Sustain progress through ongoing training in conflict management, women's leadership, social cohesion, microenterprise business skills, and leadership and management. Enhance participants' ability to manage conflicts, promote gender equality, and strengthen cooperative management.
- **Contextual Adaptation:** Tailor interventions based on thorough assessments of the local context. Ensure relevance, effectiveness, and acceptance within the community.

The integration of social cohesion into agriculture programming in Liberia demonstrated some positive outcomes in addressing the challenges faced by producer groups and their communities. By fostering trust, respect, and cooperation, the pilot project contributed to improved agricultural outcomes and promoted peaceful resolutions of conflicts. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the areas where further development and targeted efforts are needed. The recommendations provided will guide future initiatives, ensuring sustained progress and the positive impact of integrating social cohesion into agriculture programming in Liberia.

¹ CRS' signature approach to building social cohesion, the **3Bs**, progresses iteratively through stages of **binding** (personal healing and self-transformation), **bonding** (intragroup strengthening and consensus building), and **bridging** (inter-group engagement and collaboration), to shape people's lives, at all levels, while also **cultivating healthy relationships within and across families, communities, and societies**. For more info please visit: <https://ics.crs.org/resource/ties-bind-building-social-cohesion-divided-communities>