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# STRENGTHENING NATIONAL CONTROL SYSTEM IN LIBERIA TO ENSURE SAFETY OF FOODS AND IMPROVE TRADE

December 2022

SDGs:



Country: Liberia

Project Code: TCP/LIR/3702

FAO Contribution: USD 348 000

Duration: 1 August 2019 – 31 December 2021

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### Implementing Partners

Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and Ministry of Health.

### Beneficiaries

National Standards Laboratory, Ministry of Commerce; Ministry of Agriculture; National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL); Ministry of Health; and consumers through National Consumer Council, private-sector food and beverage producers/processors, value chain-based associations, and Liberia Manufacturers' Association.

### Country Programming Framework (CPF) Outputs

Strategic Objective 4 (SO4): Enable more inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems.

Outcome 4.2: Agribusinesses and agrifood chains that are more inclusive and efficient are developed and implemented by the public and private sectors.

*CPF (2016-2019)*

Output 1.2: Systems established for effective monitoring and surveillance of food security through FAO-supported initiatives.

*CPF (2020-2023)*

Output 1: Sustainable and resilient food systems for improved food and nutrition security established and enhanced.



### BACKGROUND

Food security and food safety are major challenges for consumers and producers in Liberia, as productivity continues to fall below regional levels, while handling and safety measures are not in place. Microbiological and chemical contamination in food is a major cause of illnesses. Food-borne diseases not only pose significant threats to consumer health, they can also cause serious human suffering and economic damage. In this regard, risk analysis has become an integral part in ensuring food safety.



In addition, the country's food control system was fragmented, with inadequate intersectoral collaboration and coordination among different ministries, particularly agriculture and commerce. There was a lack of clarity with respect to mandates of different competent authorities, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficient use of resources. Against this background, this project was prepared, following a request from the Government of Liberia for support in the development of capacities in the area of food safety and control. The project aimed to provide support and to create an enabling environment in Liberia for food safety and control, by enhancing capacity in Codex Alimentarius, reviewing and amending laws governing food safety and protection to meet regional standards for use, and strengthening the capacities of national personnel and laboratories.

### IMPACT

The project initiated processes that were critical to the operationalization of the food law, thereby contributing to strengthening the foundations of food control systems in Liberia.

As a food safety intervention, the project also contributed to the achievement of multiple SDGs, particularly those related to public health and trade of food products. These included SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 6 (Clean Health and Sanitation), as well as SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption).

### ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS

The project enhanced human and institutional capacities on food handling, safety, and laboratory services in Liberia, in order to strengthen the country's food control systems' foundations. A food safety control system study was successfully conducted, and weaknesses and recommendations were communicated for appropriate actions; a functional coordination mechanism was initiated; and a functional and effective food standard setting and trade system is now in place.

The capacities of three laboratories in Liberia were reviewed, assessed and approved, with the identification of capacity gaps requiring support to perform appropriate and credible analyses of food and food products. This review led to the development of a draft plan, with clear recommendations for a progressive improvement pathway of food testing laboratories, and enhancement of the governance and coordination mechanisms. The findings of the above-mentioned assessment/situation report also provided information on the quality and quantity of equipment and supplies procured for the laboratories.

Over 80 varieties of laboratory equipment and supplies were procured, which were distributed to the three laboratories. Technical training on the use of this high-tech equipment and supplies was also provided.

In terms of capacity development, the project trained (through virtual and in-person modalities) over 50 staff members from government ministries and agencies, laboratories, research and academic institutions. This included training 20 relevant stakeholders from ministries, research institutions, and government agencies on risk analysis, to stimulate the adoption of a risk management framework to drive food control activities. During this workshop, the relevant principles of the Codex Alimentarius were outlined, and participants considered various microbial hazards and the food in which they can occur. On completing the training programme, participants understood the difference between risk ranking and risk prioritization; identified and prioritized hazard -food combinations relevant to their country; and outlined the elements and the information needed to complete a risk profile, among other things.

Key regulatory instruments for the enforcement of the food law of Liberia were identified and developed, leading to the development of regulations, codes covering important food value chains management, and inspection in the country on identified food chains. In this context, the food safety legal expert delivered a three-day workshop with food control managers and other relevant stakeholders, thus improving participants' understanding of the regulatory framework of the food control system and the implementation strategies.

A situation analysis on the understanding and management of Codex Alimentarius work in the country was conducted, in consultation with key stakeholders involved in the food value chains in the country. This led to the development of recommendations on strategies to improve the participation of Liberia in Codex activities, including the creation/structuration of a National Codex Committee (NCC).

### IMPLEMENTATION OF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

Although the implementation of project activities was hindered by the limitations introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, activities were mostly implemented within the required period. Procurement, in particular, was delayed, due to challenges associated with international supply chain management. In addition, the planned activity of reviewing and validating the draft food law of Liberia (Activity 1.1) was revised, as it emerged that the draft law, at the conception of the project, had already been legislated by the time the project's review of the framework began.

Activities were generally implemented within the planned budget; however, given the above-mentioned delays and challenges, a no-cost extension was requested and approved.

In terms of risk management, the project in itself did not pose any direct environmental or social risks. However, with a component on managing and equipping laboratories, considerations were made for the effective use of laboratory-related materials that posed both social and environmental risks, considering their chemical composition. Standard Operating Procedures and relevant protocols acceptable to FAO were therefore observed.

### FOLLOW-UP FOR GOVERNMENT ATTENTION

Awareness of the passage of the food law was increased through the project; therefore, relevant authorities and stakeholders are required to ensure its continuation. In this context, the National Public Health Institute of Liberia (NPHIL) will lead efforts for the issuance of an executive order to restart the transition towards administration of the food law of Liberia. In addition, the road map developed during the project will be implemented in collaboration with actors relevant to the successful application of the food law. Building on work done on the legal framework during the project, and within the context of the food law, this comprises four main activities: i) increased awareness on the existence and contents of the food law; ii) the preparation of enabling mechanisms for the implementation of the food law; iii) the implementation of the food law and other food control mechanisms; and iv) the transition to potentially craft amendments to the food law.

The functional coordination mechanism, which was initiated during the project, is being finalized, and will work to protect the welfare of consumers through the formulation, harmonization, and adoption of safety and quality standards for foods. It includes government, partners, and private actors.

The development of a national food control strategy (food safety policy [Activity 2.2]) was not completed, owing to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, efforts are under way to facilitate the completion of this activity, in collaboration with the Government and partners.

As part of follow-up engagements, trained personnel will pass on the knowledge and skills acquired during the project to others, for wider coverage.

## SUSTAINABILITY

### 1. Capacity development

In terms of the relevant policies and legal framework in place or under development supporting the sustainability of the project outcome, the reviewed food law, as passed, presents great prospects for sustainability of the project gains. With an entire output dedicated to the legal and policy framework, room for institutional sustainability is higher than usual.

With regard to the project being embedded in organizational structures that are likely to survive beyond the project and that are committed to sustainability of results, the nature of this project – which includes standardization and food control – is inherent in the work of the National Standards Laboratory (NSL) of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In addition, the work of the NPHIL, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Agriculture all revolves around the provision and consumption of healthy and safe food; thus, the outputs of the project have a higher probability of being sustained. Greater intragovernmental and intersectoral partnerships emerged from this project. From assessment to training, to equipping laboratories, and developing follow-up initiatives, private, public, non-governmental (civil society, interest group), academic and research, as well as civil society organizations were involved. Key among them are: i) private: Monrovia Breweries Incorporated – beverage producer; Fouani Brothers Corporation – trader/importer and distributor; National Cassava Sector – membership-based value chain-specific association; Liberia Marketing Association – membership-based, petty trading association; Liberia Business Association – micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs)-dominant, membership-based association; Liberia Chamber of Commerce – large enterprise-dominant, membership-based association; Liberia Manufacturers' Association – membership-based, value addition association; ii) public: Liberia Agriculture Commodities Regulatory Authority – regulator of cash crops; Ministry of Agriculture; Ministry of Commerce and Industry; Liberia Maritime Authority; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; National Disaster Management Agency; National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority; National Standards Laboratory; NPHIL; and Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation; iii) research and academia: Central Agricultural Research Institute; Bong County Technical College; and University of Liberia; iv) development partners: FAO, United States Agency for International Development (USAID); World Food Programme (WFP); and World Health Organization (WHO); and v) non-governmental: National Consumer Council of Liberia and Press Union of Liberia.

### 2. Gender equality

The project activities met the needs and priorities of women and men beneficiaries/stakeholders. They served both genders equally, and took no special consideration for male or female consumers of food and food items.

### 3. Human Rights-based Approach (HRBA) – in particular Right to Food and Decent Work

This cross-cutting area was not significantly applicable to the scope of the project, with the exception of to what extent the project contributed to the implementation of the Right to Food Guidelines adopted by FAO in 2004. However, these guidelines mostly concern aspects of food security (availability, access, stability and utilization). As components of “utilization” covers the use of the food the body takes in, the food safety aspect can be accounted for.

### 4. Technological sustainability

The technologies introduced to the laboratories were all appropriate. They are restorable, replenishable, and flexible for local level adaptation.

The project contributed to the validation and enhancement of local knowledge to a certain extent. Non-laboratory-based testing measures used to examine food safety were considered and advised on, especially in decentralized areas where food was handled, processed, sold, and consumed.

The technical capacity of stakeholders was greatly improved to lead interventions that were relevant to enhancing the food safety and control system. Laboratories were equipped and functional, and the legal/regulatory framework was enhanced. This increase in technical capacity was confirmed by the NSL's ability to develop, with limited support from FAO, a proposal for the Codex Trust Fund.



### 5. Economic sustainability

As a result of the increased awareness on the country's food safety challenges, more interest is being generated on the part of the Government, the private sector, and consumers. While the Government endeavours to regularize support to operationalize the recently passed food law, it is already seeking funding, including requesting technical assistance on strengthening aspects of food safety, beginning with the abattoir system.

Services developed by the project include testing of food items/products at government-run laboratories. These services are quite affordable, compared with other emerging contexts.



### DOCUMENTS AND OUTREACH PRODUCTS

- ❑ **FAO.** March 2020. *Assessment on Food Safety Laboratory System in Liberia Report*. Monrovia. 16 pp.
- ❑ **FAO.** November 2021. *Edible Oils Regulations*. Monrovia. 3 pp.
- ❑ **FAO.** November 2021. *Fruit and Vegetables Regulations*. Monrovia. 4 pp.
- ❑ **FAO.** December 2021. *Meat Regulations*. Monrovia. 5 pp.
- ❑ **FAO.** August 2022. *Updated Executive Order Number 105 – Operationalization of the Food Law by Extending its Transitional Period*. Monrovia. 3 pp.

## ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS - LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

<b>Expected Impact</b>	<b>Improved public health and trade of food and food products in Liberia</b>		
<b>Outcome</b>	Foundations of food control systems in Liberia strengthened		
	<b>Indicator</b>	An equipped laboratory in place for product controls (biological & chemical hazards).	
	<b>Baseline</b>	0	
	<b>End Target</b>	1	
	<b>Comments and follow-up action to be taken</b>	<p>In terms of building capacity at laboratories, the project conducted an assessment of the national laboratory system, and procured 80 varieties of equipment and supplies. Technical training on the use of this high-tech equipment and supplies was also provided. A successful food safety control system study was conducted, and weaknesses and recommendations were communicated for appropriate actions; a functional coordination mechanism was initiated; and a functional and effective food standard setting and trade system is now in place. In addition, a road map was developed for a functional institution at all levels.</p> <p>As part of sustainability efforts, the implementing actors (the NSL of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Ministry of Health, and Bong County Technical College) assume responsibility for the use and maintenance of the equipment provided during the project. The project trained (through virtual and in-person modalities) over 50 staff members from government ministries and agencies, laboratories, research and academic institutions. As part of follow-up engagements, trained personnel will pass on the knowledge and skills to others for wider coverage.</p>	
<b>Output 1</b>	The Food Safety Control System in Liberia is reviewed and recommendations for a legislative/regulatory framework that supports an effective food control system fair trade are developed and communicated		
	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
	A food safety control system study report with identified weaknesses and recommendations communicated.	1	Yes
<b>Baseline</b>	0		
<b>Comments</b>	Over 80 varieties of laboratory equipment and supplies were procured and distributed to three laboratories in Montserrado and Bong counties. This equipment comprised reagents, high-technology (high-tech) autoclaves, analytical scales, pH meters, spectrometers, distiller units, ovens, Electric Vortex Shakers, blenders, refrigerators, microbiological stains, and microbial colony counters. Beneficiaries also received a training package for the equipment received.		
<b>Activity 1.1</b>	Review and validate the draft Food Law of Liberia		
	<b>Achieved</b>	Yes	
<b>Activity 1.2</b>	Identify and develop Key regulatory instruments for the enforcement of the food law of Liberia		
	<b>Achieved</b>	Yes	
<b>Activity 1.3</b>	Conduct training workshops with food control managers and food safety officials		
	<b>Achieved</b>	Yes	
	<b>Comments</b>	The food safety legal expert conducted a three-day workshop with food control managers and other relevant stakeholders, improving participants' understanding of the regulatory framework of the food control system and the implementation strategies.	

<b>Output 2</b>	Food control management system and organizational structure reviewed and strengthened, and coordination mechanism established		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	A functional coordination mechanism is in place.	The already existing coordination mechanism reviewed, strengthened and put in place.	Partially
<b>Baseline</b>	A coordination mechanism is in place but needs to be strengthened and legislated.		
<b>Comments</b>	Through the implementation of the project activities, relevant actors from the public and private sectors, research and academia were coordinated. Although a formal coordination mechanism was not strengthened and finalized, or made operational/functional for the implementation of the food law of Liberia, as planned, the actors mapped and included in the implementation of the activity were informed through the analysis of reviewed literature, and updated stakeholders mapping. The coordination mechanism is being finalized, and will work to protect the welfare of consumers through the formulation, harmonization and adoption of safety and quality standards for foods. It includes government, partners and private actors.		
<b>Activity 2.1</b>	Review of food control management system of Liberia and organization structure		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The food control management system of Liberia and organizational structure were reviewed, and the challenges were presented, including budgetary constraints, associated with fully implementing the transitional process of the food law. The project facilitated the finalization of a proposed Executive Order geared towards suspending the transitional component (Chapter 59) of the food law, and appointing a Deputy-General for Food Control at the NPHIL, with the mandate to manage a Food Control Center, leading the process of full transition to a Food Authority.	
<b>Activity 2.2</b>	Development of a national food control strategy (food safety policy)		
	Achieved	No	
	Comments	This activity was not completed during the project, owing to the disruption caused by COVID-19. Efforts are under way to facilitate the delivery of this activity and completion of the output, in collaboration with the Government and partners.	
<b>Activity 2.3</b>	Review the existing laboratories capacity and quality assurance of Liberia		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	With the technical assistance of the international expert, the capacities of three laboratories in Liberia were reviewed, assessed and approved, with the identification of capacity gaps requiring support to perform appropriate and credible analyses of food and food products. This review led to the development of a draft plan, with clear recommendations for a progressive improvement pathway of food testing laboratories, and enhancement of the governance and coordination mechanisms. The findings of the above-mentioned assessment/situation report also provided information on the quality and quantity of equipment and supplies procured for the laboratories.	
<b>Activity 2.4</b>	Conduct training workshops on Risk Analysis		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The international expert led the training of 20 relevant stakeholders from ministries, research institutions, and government agencies on risk analysis, to stimulate the adoption of a risk management framework to drive food control activities. During this workshop, the relevant principles of the Codex Alimentarius were outlined, and participants considered various microbial hazards and the food in which they can occur. They also prioritized hazard-food combinations (HFC) for risk management consideration. The training sequence covered three training courses: i) introduction to risk analysis; ii) risk profiling; and iii) risk ranking/prioritization. On completing the training programme, participants understood the difference between risk ranking and risk prioritization; identified and prioritized hazard-food combinations relevant to their country; outlined the elements and the information needed to complete a risk profile; prepared a process flow diagram relevant to their risk profile; and understood potential risk management options.	

<b>Output 3</b>	Foundations for active participation in international food standard setting processes and trade reinforced		
	Indicators	Target	Achieved
	A functional and effective food standard setting and trade system in place.	1	Yes
<b>Baseline</b>	0		
<b>Comments</b>	The indicator target was fully achieved, as one functional and effective food standard setting and trade system was established.		
<b>Activity 3.1</b>	Conduct a situation analysis on the understanding and the management of Codex Alimentarius work in Liberia		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	The international consultant conducted a situation analysis on the understanding and management of Codex Alimentarius work in the country. The work was done in consultation with key stakeholders involved in the food value chains in the country. The consultation led to the development of recommendations on strategies to improve the participation of Liberia in Codex activities, including the creation/structuration of an NCC.	
<b>Activity 3.2</b>	Conduct a training workshop on Codex Alimentarius		
	Achieved	Yes	
	Comments	Following on from Activity 3.1, the consultant trained 20 Codex Committee members on the understanding of Codex and the importance of Codex on food safety issues and trade of food and food products.	

**Partnerships and Outreach**

For more information, please contact: [Reporting@fao.org](mailto:Reporting@fao.org)

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