

Programme briefing

Improving security, lives and livelihoods by
breaking the cycle of violence

Tumutu and Sinoe Agricultural Training Programmes work with ex-combatants and war affected youth in Liberia by offering intensive vocational training and psychosocial counselling, followed by thorough reintegration support so that individuals are prepared to be productive and peaceful members of their communities.



Following 14 years of civil war which ended in 2003, a generation of war affected youth across Liberia have missed education, socialisation and training opportunities. This situation, combined with a post-conflict unemployment rate estimated to be 85%, means that disaffected ex-combatants and war-affected youth are resorting to illegal resource extraction to gain livelihoods (including rubber, diamonds and gold) and are socially estranged from local communities. While Liberia's security situation is generally stable, rates of violence continue to be high, and tensions in neighbouring countries are growing. Isolated youth are vulnerable to engaging in violence or conflict.

AOAV has established an innovative vocational training and rehabilitation programme model for these groups of ex-combatants and war affected youth who pose a potential threat to national and regional security. Following intensive research into the circumstances of these vulnerable youth, and considering Liberia's strong market demand for locally-produced agriculture, AOA V established a model for residential agricultural training centres that offer youth legal vocational opportunities, and life skills training to reintegrate economically and socially with communities.

AOAV works in close coordination with the Government of Liberia and the UN Peacekeeping Mission (UNMIL) to identify 'hotspot' areas vulnerable to conflict and violence. AOA V proceeds by conducting a comprehensive mapping of potential participants, and offers those who are particularly vulnerable to violence a place on the training course. This opportunity offers participants a viable and attractive legal alternative to illegal livelihood activities.

The project has an immediate and sustained effect on peace and security in Liberia and West Africa by dispersing unsettled and criminal groups of vulnerable youth and ex-combatants and providing them with sustainable livelihood options and psycho-social skills to resettle peacefully into civilian society. The programme also addresses food and livelihood security in accordance with national priorities.



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I feel normal. Before TATP people used to go against me and I used to go against them. I learned how to live in a community peacefully, how to understand yourself and how to speak to people. If there is confusion I go to speak to them.

“[I will be a successful farmer] because of my learning, and because I apply it. I work 6 days a week. As I am on my own I have to focus. If you are not serious you cannot be successful.

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- Otis Lamah Malama, Bomi, TATP Graduate

AOAV: the organisation

AOAV (previously Landmine Action), established in 1992, is a UK-based NGO aiming to reduce the incidence and effects of armed violence by addressing the hardware, instigators and frameworks driving conflict. These objectives are undertaken both in local fora in our operational field programmes and internationally through policy, research and advocacy work in coordination with other organisations and Governments worldwide. AOA V began working Liberia in 2005, to conduct a weapons and ammunition disposal and risk education programme. It opened its first agricultural training site (TATP) in 2007 and the second site (SATP) in 2008.

Training sites and course structure

The first of two AOA training sites is called Tumutu, in Bong County. Tumutu was a functioning Ministry of Agriculture training centre which became disused and overgrown during the civil war. AOA refurbished existing buildings and constructed new facilities to create a professional, residential agricultural training centre capable of housing 400 students and over 40 training staff. The second site is in remote Sinoe County in the southeast of Liberia, and has the capacity to house and train up to 225 participants.

An agriculture-focused training programme was selected in order to help meet the national livelihood and food security objectives of the Government of Liberia while also providing trainees with profitable and legal livelihood skills. Liberia is a fertile nation, but land lies fallow due to a lack of agricultural knowledge and organised post-war Government frameworks. Consequently, much of the produce sold in Liberia is imported from other nations and sold at inflated prices. The high market demand for agricultural produce means that agriculture is a profitable activity.

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I know how to make money and how to change my behaviour. The social counselling changed me.

[Family] can help out with providing food and shelter at the start... we are going to concentrate on vegetable production. Then we will expand our pig farming and finally, in the long-term, we will develop a rubber farm. We are also interested in palm oil production.

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- Sando Morris, Henry Folley, Henry Gbelley, Abraham Gbelley, Gbelley James, Micheal Pissi and Morris Sirleaf Besao, Bomi- Vegetable, Rubber and Pig Farming



Each course consists of: 1) identifying “hotspot” areas in coordination with UNMIL and the Government of Liberia, 2) mapping, registration and selection of trainees, 3) residential course training and 3) reintegration. The residential programme consists of the following programme of study:

- Psycho-social counselling to prepare participants for peaceful reintegration with communities
- Vocational agricultural training in modern techniques. The vocational curriculum was designed by AOA with technical input from MOA. The course is MOA certified and facilitated by MOA staff instructors
- Literacy and numeracy
- Business planning including the marketing of harvested crops

The course involves daily and weekly routines backed by a strict attendance policy. Students must pass written and practical examinations to a training certificate issued jointly by AOA the Government of Liberia upon graduation.

Following the training phase, graduates are reintegrated into the community of their choice with the assistance of AOA field teams who conduct a pre-settlement sensitisation visit to receiving communities. Graduates are encouraged to form co-operative groups to maximise their strengths, resources and support networks. Many graduates choose to return to their childhood communities which most have not seen since the war. Others are assisted to secure jobs in rubber concessions or places at schools and in universities depending on age, education levels and wishes. These graduates may have household gardens to augment their food supply and/or income.

All graduates are provided with reintegration materials tailored to their chosen field of farming. These packages are distributed in multiple visits following evaluation of their progress. This improves their likelihood to succeed and ensures materials are used for their intended use, rather than being sold.

Programme success to date

In general, it appears, through initial monitoring and evaluation results, that graduates are removed from the cycle of violence and that they have been using their training to achieve sufficient agricultural, life and psycho-social skills to reintegrate into communities through legal and peaceful means. The graduate case studies throughout this document result from interviews during monitoring and evaluation visits.



- Augustus Darblah, Wilfred Freeman, Emmanuel Lamah, Jerome Larkpor, Jackson Momah, Folley Wilson and Siaffa Stephen, Vegetable farmers, Malama, Bomi

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We can take part in community meetings freely. One of the group was nearly forced out of the very same community before TATP. We learnt how to talk to people and how to calm them down, conflict resolution and conflict management.

[Learning reintegration skills was] very much useful. Has helped the group to get along and has made peace.

Once I have the skills in my head I can use all my equipment, without the learning I can use nothing.”

“[We will be successful], because of strength and effort. Two of the group walks 1 hour 30 minutes to work every morning.

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The first course at Tumutu consisted of 300 ex-combatants from the Guthrie Rubber plantation and 79 trainees from the local Salala region. 94% of the students successfully graduated from the programme and achieved the training certificate. Throughout the course, the literacy rate among the students rose from 40% to 85% by Ministry of Education standards. Reintegration into communities was successful, with significant support from family members and receiving communities. Many graduates are receiving assistance from their settlement communities including provision of land, meals and other support.

Post-training monitoring and evaluation of 50 graduates from the first course of trainees has produced positive results. Graduates are generally settled and are not engaging in pre-training illegal activities. All 50 graduates report using skills learned at Tumutu, and 83% report agriculture to be their main activity. Only 2% of the graduates report to have less than one meal a day. Graduates do not report to be engaging in violence in communities, and these claims are supported by interviews with community members. None of the graduates report having any interest in participating in conflict in the future.

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Before, we were community B people, now we are community A people.

“We learnt about acception (sic), how you feel about other people. About body language, so even if you don’t speak the same language you can still communicate. We also learnt about reconciliation processes... how to be me, how to calm down.”

“No one is successful if they do not put in the time; if they are not serious.

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-Darlington Holmes and Zolu She,
Vegetable Farmers, Bomi County



Programme sustainability

The long-term plan for the rehabilitated training sites at Tumutu and Sinoe is to transition the control and management over to the Government of Liberia. A professional training site restored to working order will be a valuable tool in the continued long-term development of livelihoods and food security in Liberia.

War:

After 10 years in exile Nancy and her father returned to Liberia in 1999 only to see her father killed and herself brutally gang raped after they were attacked by LURD forces. After her capture LURD armed guards monitored Nancy’s every movement to prevent her from escaping her life as a sex slave. Nancy said that she tolerated the rapes so that one day she might see her mother and children again. Following the ceasefire in 2003 Nancy did not participate in the DDDR process because she did not want to be affiliated with ex-combatants. Nancy found her way to Guthrie and fell in love with Ahmed who she married and they both went together to Tumutu



Nancy Fayia, Gbah Foboi

Tumutu:

At Tumutu Nancy enjoyed animal husbandry and vegetable production classes the most. Despite having no formal education prior to Tumutu, she learnt to read and write during the course.

Post Graduation:

Nancy and her husband separated shortly after leaving Tumutu. She now has a pepper and bitterball garden and in January harvested 3,800 LD. She is using this money to start up a small business to supplement her farming income. Nancy has not found her mother or her children.