

# AGRICULTURAL JOURNALISM TRAINING AND MENTORING FINAL REPORT



## Smallholder Agriculture Transformation & Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P)



Prepared by: LAEJNET  
Monrovia, Liberia  
[agrijourna@gmail.com](mailto:agrijourna@gmail.com)  
<https://laejnet.org>

August 26, 2021

## ***Introduction***

The Smallholder Agriculture Transformation & Agribusiness Revitalization Project (STAR-P) funded by the World Bank initiated an effort in May of this year to improve media education regarding agricultural journalism and reporting.

This led to the awarding of a consultancy contract to provide training for a select number of journalists from nine of the fifteen counties of Liberia; especially regions where the project is being implemented.

This effort led to the development of a customized training manual for agriculture journalists which was followed by the rollout of three days of agricultural journalism training in May 2021 for 27 journalists (**Male 24, Female 3**) selected from broadcast, print, and online news media.

As part of the consultancy, these journalists were provided three months (June -August 2021) of mentoring support to produce high-quality news articles as an outcome of the training effort.

This project was initiated from the background that there exists a knowledge gap coupled with the lack of interest among most Liberian journalists to concentrate their reporting on agriculture development which remains a major contributing factor responsible for the media not giving much attention to this critical sector of the country.

Few journalists venturing to report about the agriculture sector in Liberia are yet to properly transition from conventional journalism practice to a more specialized style of agriculture news coverage due to capacity deficit.

The training and mentoring served as a unique opportunity for these journalists working in print, and online media including community radio broadcasters to attain the requisite agricultural journalism skills and knowledge for better reporting.

This has created the space for journalists to engage with active agriculture radio programming and reporting to directly benefit smallholder farmers in a way that addresses their farming information needs.

As part of the training legacy, there is now a strong network of agriculture journalists. There seems to be growing interest among media professionals to attain similar skill development in agriculture reporting.

This final report details the results and impact of the three-day agricultural journalism training workshop from **May 19-21, 2021** in Ganta, Nimba County, and the outcome of the post-training mentoring including stories production.

### ***Agri-Journalism Manual Development***

The first activity leading to the rollout of the agricultural journalism training was to develop a tailored agricultural training manual was to empower Liberian journalists with the requisite skills and knowledge to promote fact-based, objective, and impactful reporting on agriculture sector development in Liberia.

The manual focused on a general concept of agriculture journalism and reporting, innovative agriculture radio programming that resonates with smallholder farmers in addressing their critical information needs.

Furthermore, the manual was aimed to improve journalists' research and information need assessment skills. It was developed to facilitate three days of training that provided participants with a basic model of agricultural journalism and took them through the following topics during the course of the training.

- F.A.I.R. journalism standards for farmer programs
- Concept of agricultural journalism and communications
- How to interview experts: Best practices for broadcasters and experts
- How to gather regular feedback from your audience on the farmer's program
- VOICE standards to improve your farmer program
- Radio formats and quality of radio production
- How to identify the audience for a farmer radio program
- Developing program on issues of importance to farmers
- How best to serve both women and men farmers
- Researching and writing farmers' stories
- Utilizing social media to tell farmers' stories

### ***Day-One Session***

The first-day session of the agricultural journalism workshop started with an overview of STAR-P and what it intends to achieve in the next four years (2021-2025). The project with a portfolio of 35 million United States dollars is intervening in tree crops, vegetable, and rice value chains.

During this session, participants were told that STAR-P seeks to increase agricultural productivity and commercialization of smallholder farmers through the productive linkage between the farmers and the private agribusiness firms in selected value chains including rice, oil palm, and horticulture crops.

Participants were further enlightened that STAR-P has a total of 35,000 beneficiaries with women and young farmers constitute 30% of the project target beneficiaries as special population. The project has three major components which include:

- Institutional Capacity Building and Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Farmers, State, and non-State Actors
- Enhancing Productivity and Competitiveness
- Project Management, Monitoring & Evaluation, Citizens Engagement and contingency emergency response.

### ***Pre-training evaluation***

The formal opening of the workshop was followed by the administering of pre-training evaluation for all participants. This session was designed to measure the knowledge level of each participant regarding their understanding about agricultural journalism and reporting to serve smallholder farmers information needs.

After the pre-training evaluation, participants were allowed to discuss among themselves and shared individual experiences on reporting the agriculture sector of the Liberia as journalists. This session lasted for half an hour with lots of interesting exchanges among participants.

## ***Training sessions***

The opening formalities of the workshop was followed by series of the training sessions with facilitators from the Liberia Agricultural and Environmental Journalists Network and STAR-P team. The first journalism training session of the workshop highlighted the concept of agricultural journalism and its impact on smallholder farmers in Liberia.

This session led by the agricultural journalism consultant discussed the difference between agricultural communication and agricultural journalism, agricultural journalism as agent of change, challenges facing agricultural journalism among other talking points.

The next session, facilitator introduced participants to the F.A.I.R. journalism standards when it comes to agriculture radio programming. The FAIR journalism standards was developed by Farm Radio International, Canadian based communications for development organization working with rural radio producers across Africa. Participants learned to how to adopt FAIR journalism standards as they engage with reporting and producing radio programs that target smallholder farmers across Liberia.

The afternoon session of day one training provided the opportunity for participants to develop the right skills how to interview experts in the way farmer will absorb information rather than creating the communication gap between farmers and experts. Participants adopted these best practices to make the broadcast of expert information more interesting to smallholder farmers without getting confused with jargons and other technical words.

The last session for day-one training activities allowed participants to learn how to gather regular feedback from their audience as one of the most important things you can do. This session made participants to understand why feedback help tells you if you are achieving your purpose or not. Participants were provided several ways they can gather feedback from their audience.

## ***Day-two training sessions***

Day two of agricultural journalism reporting workshop for 30 Liberian journalists started with lessons learned session. This session was intended to generate feedbacks from the participants about key aspects of the training that actually caught their attention and provided new knowledge to enhance their reporting efforts.

Following this session, the next topic took participants through to understand radio formats and quality of radio production as a farm journalist. In this session, participants learned the importance of radio for educating smallholder farmers, radio production skills and various radio formats available to engage with innovative programming for smallholder farmers. Journalists were also introduced to new radio formats they can adopt at their respective radio stations to serve the information of their listeners.

Following this radio production format training session, the next presentation focused on how to identify the audience for a farmer radio program. During this session, participants formed a group of four. Each group identified 3-4 ways audience can be established for their radio program. Participants also received practical tips on how to identify audience for their farmer radio program utilizing 5 simple approaches.

The third session for day two of the agricultural journalism workshop largely focused on developing program on issues of importance to farmers. In this session, participants learned about three kinds of information that should appear in a farmer program on a regular basis. They are: survival information, current information, and deep-rooted issues information. Understanding the distinction among the three allow a farm journalist to focus on the type of information they may want to include in a farmer radio program based on location, farming practice of your region, crops commonly grown in locality.

The last two sessions for two day focused on photojournalism and reporting writing for impact. Both presentations were led by James Yougie, Visual Communications Officer, MOA and Edward Borloh, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, STAR-P

### ***Day-three training sessions***

In keeping with the training standards, activities for day three of the agricultural journalism workshop started with another lessons learned session. This session allowed participants to provide feedbacks about the training and its methodologies. Participants also shared perspectives on key lessons during the facilitation period and how the skills acquired will be replicated for quality journalism reporting.

The first training session for day-3 started with a lecture on how best to serve both women and men farmers. This presentation provided participants with the requisite on how to conduct audience research for an impacting radio program that benefits both male and female farmers. In this session, participants also learned how to engage with effective radio program that addresses the information need of both women and men farmers.

The second topic covered on day -3 of the workshop was researching and writing farmers stories. During the presentation and lecture, participants learned basic techniques on how to conduct in-depth research, critically evaluate information, and integrate multiple resources into the story; they learned the basics of storytelling, why it is important, and how to connect the news to farmers' realities. Participants also received a refresh course on fact-based, objective, and balanced reporting.

Time was allotted to participants for practice work session on how to develop story ideas farm story. This practical session led each participant to develop at least two ideas that they will pursue after the workshop.

The final session on day-3 of the workshop focused on leveraging social media to tell farmers' stories. In this session, the facilitating team discussed with participants on the emerging new media in the face of internet revolution in Africa. Journalists learned how to use social media to promote farming and agriculture related stories and captivate their audiences with engaging storytelling.

Understand the advantages, and the responsibilities of using social media platforms to promote agriculture news; and expand the traditional media reach to wider audiences that could benefit from factual, objective, and honest reporting.

Post training evaluation was administered to establish the knowledge level of the participants when it comes agricultural journalism and how the skills acquired during the workshop will impact their individual reporting on the agriculture sector of the Liberia.

The next step following the workshop that ran from May 19-21, 2021 was to provide journalists guidance on how to develop their own comprehensive work plan to ensure all participants understand their roles and deliverables to guarantee the successful and timely completion of assignments as part of the post training activities.

Each participant required to produce at least two agriculture news story as an outcome of their participation in the three days training sessions.

### **Agricultural Journalism Workshop M&E Results**

#### ***Description:***

As part of the training plan, pre-test and post-test were conducted at the start and the end of the training. Analysis was performed to measure participants' knowledge gained from the agricultural journalism training in Ganta. The training ran from on May-19- 21. 27 out of 27 participants (Male: 24, Female: 3) completed this 80-point test. 93%, accounts for 25 participants were radio journalists, whereas 2 participants which represents 7% were from the print media. The training participants came from the following counties, Nimba-5, Lofa-5, Bomi-2, G. Cape Monut-2, Grand Gedeh-2, Gbarpolu-1, Margibi-2 Maryland-2, Montserrado-5 and Sinoe-1.

**Pre-test results:**

The training average on the pre-test was 25.8 out of 80 points (32%). A total of 2 out of 27 participants (7.41%) met or exceeded the principle of success for the pre-test. The training scores on this test fell far short of meeting the standard of success for this training.

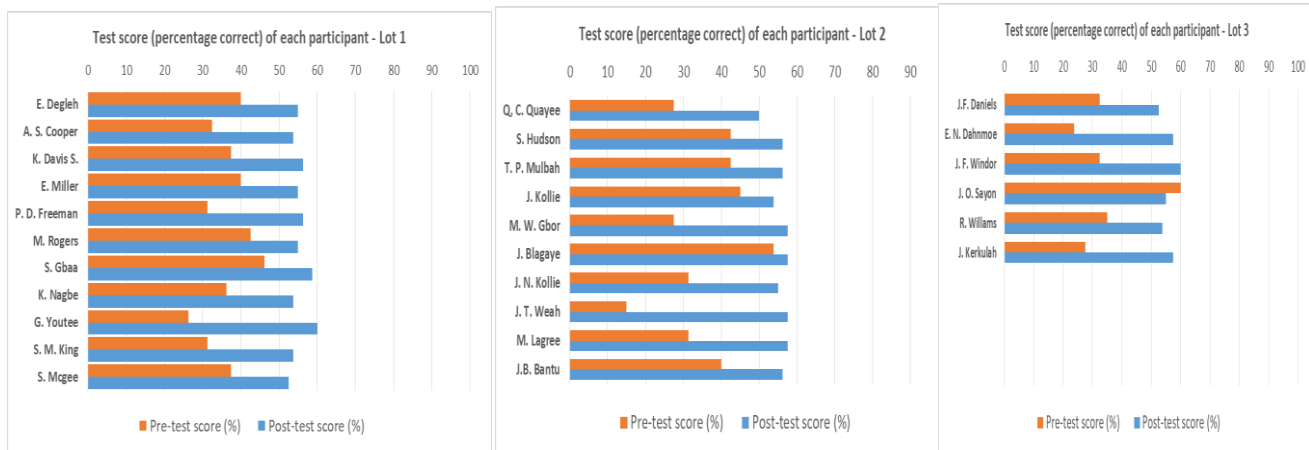
**Post-test results:**

The Training average on the post-test was 40.1 out of 80 points (50%). A total of 27 out of 27 participants (100%) met or exceeded the principle of success for the post-test. The training scores on this test greatly exceeded the criterion of success for this assessment.

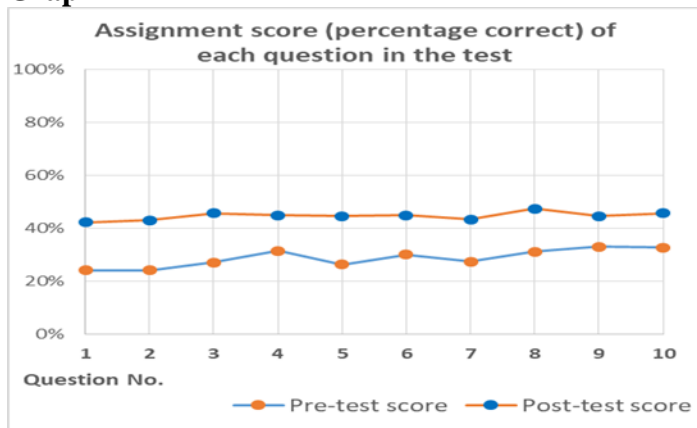
**Change in ability observed:**

The difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was 18%. The test result substantially better on the post-test than they did on the pre-test. There was a great deal of knowledge gained among journalists that participated in the workshop judging from post-training evaluation results of all participants study.

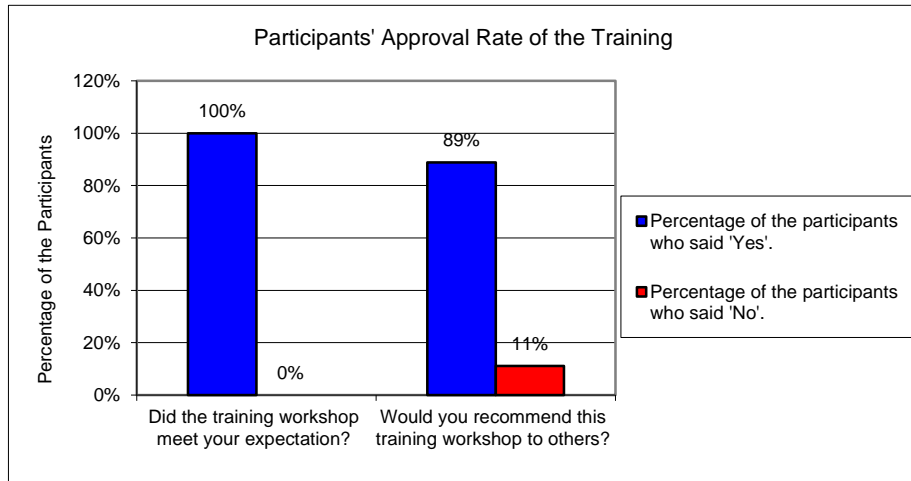
**Graph-1 Participants pre and post training scores**



**Graph-2**



**Graph-3**



**Graph-3** above shows participants rating of the training. 100% of the participants who said 'Yes' the training met their expectations. 89% of the them feel strongly that they would recommend the training to others. Whereas, 11% of them think the opposite.

**Graph-4**



**Graph-4** above displays result of participants satisfaction levels to key questions; 1. The overall quality of the training, 45% of the participants who said they were 'Satisfied' and 52% of the participants said they were 'Very Satisfied'. As to the quality of instructor(s), participants' assessment result shows that 22% were 'Satisfied' and 70% of the participants who said 'Very Satisfied'. As to subject matter knowledge of the instructors, 22% said they were 'Satisfied' and 70% they were 'Very Satisfied'. On the overall quality assessment of the training workshop, the participants said they were Satisfied at 30% and 'Very Satisfied' at 70%. Lastly, on the question of the training information easy to understand? 100% of the participants said 'Yes'.

Over 80% training participants are engaged in radio programs production and reporting at their respective institutions. The combined percentage of 80% came from radio program production bracket range which includes, Directors of Programs, producers, Reporters, Directors of News and Radio. 19% training beneficiaries play a managerial role at their stations but sometimes produce. Below is the chart.

<b>EACH PARTICIPANTS ROLE AT THEIR INSTITUTIONS</b>		
<b>ROLE</b>	<b>NUMBER</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
Administration	1	4%
Director of Radio	1	4%
Head of Finance	1	4%
News Director	2	7%
producer	5	19%
Program Director	5	19%
Reporter	9	33%
Station Manager	3	11%
Total	27	100%

<b>County</b>	<b># of Participant</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Nimba	5	19%
Lofa	5	19%
Bomi	2	7%
G. Cape Monut	2	7%
Gand Gedeh	2	7%
Gbarpolu	1	4%
Margibi	2	7%
Maryland	2	7%
Montserrado	5	19%
Sinoe	1	4%
Total	27	100%

*Quotes from some participants on what was most outstanding about the training for the three days.*

"The topics identified and the way they taught by the trainers were awesome"  
 Judoemue Kollie- Daily Observer

"The topics were very relevant to farm radio program and participants need motivation for a regular farm radio program"

Emmanuel Degleh- Classic FM

"The interactive session and openness of trainers, and a need for continued engagement of the participants"  
 Saywhar Gbaa-Ecowas Radio

" The teaching materials, presented were very rich and rewarding. The trainers also understand the subject and presented the information comprehensively. Lastly the training was very rewarding"

Joseph F. Daniels-



## ***Post-Training Mentoring Support and Story Production***

As a means of measuring the impact of the three days agricultural journalism training when it comes to skills transfer, participants of this specialized reporting effort were enrolled into mentoring session immediately following the training .

An online platform was created to allow the participants share their story ideas with the trainers for feedback . This created a unique learning space where trainers took time to review stories and helped the mentees develop improved local agriculture news story from their respective counties.

The mentoring process enhanced the writing skills of most radio journalists that had limited capacity to write lengthy print or online news articles. Stories produced from the fellowship were published on Liberia Agricultural and Environmental Journalists Network website ( <https://lajnet.com/>) and further shared on its social media platforms for wider audience reach . As an outcome of the post-training mentoring activities, participants produced 19 well written news articles about agriculture development activities across Liberia .

### ***Observation***

There seems to be lots of enthusiasm among Liberian journalists to report on the agriculture sector but will require long term engagement to develop the rightful skills for these media practitioners to impactfully cover the sector . Transitioning from conventional reporting to a more specialized journalistic practice takes time to actually attain the anticipated goal .

There were lots of excitements among the journalists during the training but during the mentoring session , we realized a bit of reluctance with some of the participants failing to either submit story ideas or pursue their suggested stories . Limited internet access in some counties created extreme situation to ensure the full participation of some mentees especially those from the south-east region .

### ***Recommendations***

To ensure STAR-P communications effort is more impactful for the agriculture sector of Liberia, please consider these recommendations .

- STAR-P should continuously engage and collaborate with the media to amplify its activities
- Periodic refresher training be organized for journalists with deep interest for agriculture journalism and reporting
- Modest support provided media practitioners to pursue story ideas on agriculture development
- Special attention should be given community radio stations in the project counties to enhance extension service for smallholder farmers to benefit.

### ***Conclusion***

Institutionalizing agricultural journalism in Liberia could further help strengthen media capacity and empower journalists how to report on agriculture sector development of the country in a more impactful way . Having a team of journalists with specialized skills will certainly promote agriculture and rural development reporting and increase the flow of credible agriculture news and information from across Liberia through web and social media publications.

All these efforts will eventually lead to enhancing the Ministry of Agriculture extension services program across farming communities and increase access to agriculture news and information at the national level.

Currently , capacity gap remains serious challenge due to the limited number of journalists that have acquired specialized training in agricultural journalism apart from the conventional journalism practice. The Ministry Agriculture needs to strengthen partnership with the media especially community radio to boost its agriculture advisory program .