



West Africa Competitiveness Programme

UNIDO WACOMP Success Stories 2018-2025



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The West Africa Competitiveness Programme aims to support a number of selected value chains at the national and regional levels to promote structural transformation and better access to regional and international markets while taking into account social and environmental concerns. The WACOMP consists of one regional component and sixteen national components (15 ECOWAS Member States and Mauritania).

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Bernard Bau



Programme Manager
UNIDO
WACOMP

As WACOMP draws to a close, UNIDO, one of the leading international organizations among WACOMP technical partners, remains committed to supporting the region's continued growth. Together with the International Trade Centre (ITC), we are excited to continue our partnership under the Africa Trade Competitiveness and Market Access (ATCMA) Programme. We are dedicated to further strengthening the region's trade capacities and ensuring that the gains made are sustained in the years to come.

Once again, we thank all those who contributed to the success of WACOMP, and we extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who played a part in bringing this ambitious initiative to fruition.

We hope this newsletter provides you with valuable insights into the outcomes and impacts of the programme, and we wish you an enjoyable and informative read.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bernard Bau".

Bernard Bau
UNIDO WACOMP Programme Manager

Foreword

It is with great pride and gratitude that we present this final edition of the WACOMP Regional Programme Newsletter, marking a significant milestone in our collective journey towards enhancing trade competitiveness and market access across West Africa.

First and foremost, UNIDO extends its deepest appreciation to the European Union for their invaluable funding and support. This contribution has been instrumental in the success of the WACOMP programme and in realizing its goals to foster economic growth and sustainable development in the region. Within this partnership sealed through eight WACOMP projects, one regional and seven country components, UNIDO's technical intervention has unlocked immense potential, enabling West Africa to strengthen its position on the global trade map.

The impacts of this programme are visible on multiple levels – from the producer and consumer

to the institutional. We have seen improvements in production standards, market access, and consumer satisfaction through targeted interventions, driving positive change and fostering greater economic resilience. WACOMP has indeed highlighted the region's vast potential, demonstrating that with the right investments, West Africa can become a powerful player in international trade.

This journey would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of key stakeholders. Our deepest thanks go to the ECOWAS Commission, the private sector across West Africa, national governments, the European Union Delegations in the region, consumer associations, and many other institutions whose partnership and expertise were vital in the success of this regional initiative. The collaborative spirit that characterized this programme has been essential in overcoming challenges and maximizing its impact.



WACQIP

GOING FAR TOGETHER:

How WACQIP drives collaborative efforts towards greater quality and competitiveness in West Africa

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This timeless African proverb encapsulates the philosophy behind the West Africa Competitiveness and Quality Infrastructure Project (WACQIP). In a region where businesses, producers, and industries often face complex challenges in meeting international standards, collaboration is essential for overcoming these obstacles.

Implemented by UNIDO in partnership with ECOWAS, this EU-funded component of the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP)

brings together various stakeholders from the targeted region. Its goal is to improve product quality, harmonize regulations, and ultimately create new opportunities for West Africa's trade and economic growth.

With many businesses overcoming obstacles that once seemed insurmountable, WACQIP's impact can be seen across the region. The stories below exemplify how working together helps businesses break through barriers and unlock new opportunities.



ECOWAS adopts 31 standards prepared by WACQIP/WACOMP in Banjul, Gambia

Breaking Barriers:

Harmonizing standards to bolster regional trade in West Africa

Not long ago, the lack of standardized norms across ECOWAS member states entangled regional trade, undermining the competitiveness of local products. "Our textiles met Malian standards but not those of Nigeria," recalls a Burkinabé manufacturer.

To address this challenge, WACQIP helped develop the ECOWAS Harmonized Standards System (ECOSHAM). The goal was clear: harmonize regional standards to ease trade, improve product competitiveness, and break the way to international markets. Through the framework, 89 regional standards were developed and adopted across key sectors such as cassava, mango, and textiles.

The impact was significant. Strengthened national institutions enforced these standards more effectively, and businesses could suddenly trade more freely within the region. Adopting these standards also led to better consumer protection and environmental sustainability, as reflected by Damtien Tchintchibidja, Vice-President of the ECOWAS Commission: "The harmonization of standards is a crucial step towards regional competitiveness and the free movement of goods."

Today, ECOSHAM continues to reduce trade barriers, allowing local products to thrive in regional and international markets alike.



The 18th meeting of the ECOSHAM Technical Management Committee (TMC) in Banjul, Gambia in 2023

WACQIP

Streamlining Trade: Coordinating technical regulations for improved market integration

After regional markets opened, many West African businesses encountered an unexpected setback. A maze of differing technical requirements across ECOWAS countries stood between them and the neighbouring markets. For one mango processor in Benin, this challenge nearly derailed the expansion plans. "We had clients in Ghana, but every country had its own regulations. Our products were often stuck at borders due to technical barriers," he remembers. What began as a minor inconvenience soon became a serious threat to the growth of his business. And his story was far from unique, as many entrepreneurs across the region grappled with the same issue. The once looming obstacle is now being dismantled, with 15 ECOWAS member states working together to align their standards. Through

its ECOWAS Technical Regulations Harmonization Model (ECOTRHAM) intervention, WACQIP has successfully harmonized 14 key technical regulations across the region. Covering sectors like cassava, textiles, and ICT, this collaboration has done more than break down trade barriers. It has enhanced environmental safety and consumer protection across borders.

As Lassané Kaboré, Director of Industry at ECOWAS, puts it: "Cooperation among ECOWAS countries is essential to ensure common technical requirements and facilitate the free movement of products." Thanks to the unified approach, businesses can now navigate regional markets more easily, paving the way for smoother trade and greater opportunities.



WACQIP experts on the ground to study

Passport For The Local Products: How certification helps regional trade and competition

"Our mango juices are excellent, but foreign buyers doubted their quality," recalls an Ivorian entrepreneur. Comments like this were all too common across West Africa, where local products struggled to gain trust in regional and international markets due to a lack of recognized certification.

For years, West African businesses faced the challenge of competing without an official stamp to prove their products met international standards. This changed in 2023 when WACQIP, supported by the European Union, launched ECOQMARK. The ECOWAS Product Certification Mark now

guarantees compliance of products with global quality, helping businesses like the mango juice entrepreneur overcome scepticism.

Since the launch, 218 companies have expressed interest in obtaining ECOQMARK certification, and 59 laboratories have received accreditation support. This initiative is strengthening consumer confidence and easing trade across the region. As Damtien Tchintchibidja, Vice-President of the ECOWAS Commission, noted, "ECOQMARK heralds a new era for quality infrastructure in ECOWAS. Proving our products meet international standards will boost intra-community trade."



A team from an ECOWAS Quality Award winning company next to the ECOWAS Quality Mark (ECOQMARK)

WACQIP

Better Data for Greater Prosperity: How ECOQUIB helps SMEs connect with investors and QI institutions

Across West Africa, accessing reliable industry data posed a major challenge. For years, investors and policymakers struggled to evaluate small and medium businesses to make informed decisions.

To their relief, recently updated by WACQIP, the first ECOWAS Quality and Industry Database (ECOQUIB) has improved the information landscape in the region. By developing a regional database with verified data of over 1,500 registered SMEs and more than 950 QI institutions, the platform now connects policymakers, researchers, investors, laboratories, national standard bodies (NSBs) and other relevant stakeholders. Improving their decision-making

capacity fosters the entire region's integration within global markets. "Before ECOQUIB, finding certified information on SMEs in the region was a real struggle," said a Dakar-based consultant.

Better connectivity between SMEs and international markets transcends the positive impact on the region's economic growth. As Massandjé Touré-Litse, ECOWAS Commissioner for Economic Affairs and Agriculture, observed, it is about consumers, too: "Mastering quality infrastructure and providing reliable data are essential to protecting consumers and fostering sustainable development."



ECOWAS receiving and validating the ECOQUIB database set up by UNIDO

Conclusion: Towards a unified and prosperous future

Beyond regulatory frameworks and technical initiatives, WACQIP directly impacts entrepreneurs, producers, and consumers across the region. By fostering a more competitive business environment, local products gain credibility and access to larger markets. As the proverb suggests, it is the collaborative effort that

stands behind these successes. Each story represents a step toward a future where quality and competitiveness drive regional economic integration. Through these collective efforts, the region paving the way for a more prosperous and unified future as West Africa goes far, together.



ENVAL, an accredited reference laboratory visited by an ECOWAS-UNIDO delegation

ECOQUIB
ECOWAS QUALITY AND INDUSTRIAL DATABASE

WACQIP

Connecting West Africa To The World: The transformative potential of B2B matchmaking for SMEs



Beneficiary SMEs during West Africa Connect 2022 in Accra, Ghana

For many businesses across West Africa, expanding beyond their local markets feels like a distant dream. Despite the region's abundant trade potential, limited access to regional and international buyers, market information, and networking opportunities often holds them back. However, for some, the *West Africa Connect* B2B matchmaking events have made that dream come true.

Held in 2021 and 2022 as part of the EU-funded West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP), these events brought together hundreds of West African SMEs with regional and international buyers, providing them with a chance to form lasting relationships and unlock new opportunities.

Companies like the Nigerian garment producer *Mac Index Integrated Services* are no longer confined to the limits of their local markets. Bukola Ajani, Director, is one of the many entrepreneurs whose businesses have benefitted from direct B2B meetings. She is now selling her products across borders:

"Thanks to the *West Africa Connect*, our garment products are now in Togo, Ghana, and Burkina Faso. This initiative exposed us to trade opportunities we never knew existed, and our example shows that such events have the potential to connect SMEs to the rest of the world."



Bukola Ajani

Venturing into foreign markets is just one side of the coin; understanding one's own environment is equally important.

For Aliou Traoré, Director of the Malisian *Danaya Commerce Et Service*, the West Africa Connect event in Accra was all about forging local linkages and broadening business horizons:

"This excellent opportunity helped us develop interesting partnerships for our fresh and processed mangoes. Engaging with other companies from the sector also allowed us to learn

about innovations for expanding our business."

Through these events, entrepreneurs like Ajani and Traoré have gained valuable business connections, along with insights into new market trends, innovations, and strategies to grow their businesses further. The impact extends beyond such individual success stories. The initiative has equipped dozens of SMEs across critical value chains like textiles, mango, cassava, and ICT with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in regional and global markets.



Panel discussions during West Africa Connect 2022 in Accra, Ghana

WACQIP



Beneficiary SMEs during West Africa Connect 2022 in Accra, Ghana



Project partners

Expert-led workshops, product showcases, and one-on-one meetings gave many West African SMEs practical tools to enhance their business development, export capabilities, and fair-trade preparations. Moreover, the WACOMP has strengthened the capacities of the regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission and national Trade Promotion Organizations (TPOs). The programme thus empowered local actors to organize future matchmaking events with even greater impact, following its commitment to sustainability.

“West African SMEs have untapped potential. The West Africa Connect events allow them to

demonstrate the quality of their products and services, which can lead to profitable business partnerships and increased export capacities. By connecting regional suppliers with buyers both within and beyond the region, this initiative promotes market access and strengthens linkages with regional and global value chains,” stated Kolawole Sofola, Director for Trade at the ECOWAS Commission.

The results of the initiative attest to his observations. West Africa Connect brought together 479 SMEs and 33 regional and international buyers. Nearly 30 sustainable partnerships sprout from their meetings.

Looking back, from expanded reach through new partnerships to business innovations, West Africa Connect has proven to be a catalyst for growth. By replicating and scaling up these pilot events, West African SMEs can transcend borders.

The partnership between UNIDO and the International Trade Center (ITC) enabled the

successful delivery of West Africa Connect B2B events. By combining the expertise, knowledge, and networks of both organizations, the project partners and beneficiaries have greatly benefited. This flagship initiative serves as a striking example of how partnerships can address key issues related to trade competitiveness and market access in West Africa and beyond.

IMPACT AND ACHIEVEMENTS



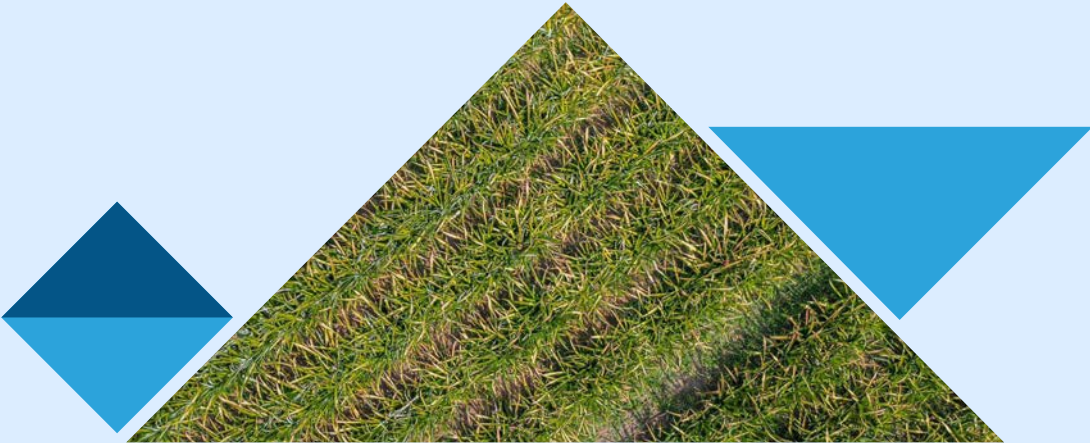
LOCAL
479 West African SMEs participated



REGIONAL
33 regional or international buyers participated



GLOBAL
27+ sustainable partnerships established
20+ commercial transactions secured





Guinea-Bissau



BRINGING LOCAL MANGO PRODUCTS TO LIFE: How WACOMP-GB empowered small businesses and transformed the mango value chain in Guinea-Bissau

"When I started, I never imagined that one day my product would be on the shelves of city stores. All I ever wanted was to secure a better future for my family and showcase the value of what we produce here," reflects Fátima Lopes, the founder and CEO of *Nha Guinendade*.

Like many women entrepreneurs in Guinea-Bissau, Fátima began with a simple business goal—turning local ingredients into quality products that could reach a broader market. Her journey began within the *Mindjer de Carus (Strong Women)* cooperative, where she gained her first experiences in transforming chabeu seeds into cosmetic oils and oils for direct consumption.

It did not take long for her to realize she wanted to carve her own path.

At first, things looked promising. With an initial investment of 2.5 million West African francs and support from regional partners, in 2019, Fátima established *Nha Guinendade*, a small agro-processing centre in Pelundu. However, breaking into the market proved challenging. Challenges included limited production capacity and access to modern equipment to positioning locally made mango products in a market dominated by imports.

That's where WACOMP-GB stepped in.

Empowering small agro-processors for big changes

In 2023, *Nha Guinendade* became one of the beneficiaries of WACOMP-GB's IDEA Programme. Through this UNIDO-developed initiative, which provided financial and technical support to agro-processors, Fátima received semi-industrial kitchen equipment, packaging materials, and specialized training.

The impact was immediate. Equipped with better tools and knowledge, she scaled up her business in no time. By introducing mango flour, dried mango, and innovative blends of local cereals, she diversified her product palette.

"Before, our work was completely manual. The new packaging materials and the tools like the mixer have completely changed how we operate. Now, we can produce more and with better quality."

The improved packaging made her products more appealing to urban consumers, helping them reach premium stores like *Darling*, *Produtos di Terra* and *Santy Comercial* in Bissau.



Fátima Lopes, *Nha Guinendade*

Through initiatives like the IDEA FIN programme, other women entrepreneurs, like Fátima, received up to 5,000 euros to legalize their businesses, purchase equipment, and acquire raw materials. These efforts enabled 15 women-led SMEs to integrate into the mango value chain, creating over 240 jobs for women.

Perhaps most importantly for Fátima, *Nha Guinendade* remained a family business. Her family actively participated in operations, from production to marketing and distribution. This continuity reinforced the long-term impact of Fátima's project in securing jobs and sustaining local entrepreneurship, while serving consumers with better products.

Fátima describes the transformation:

"I have never received support comparable to this. The robust mixer is perfectly suited to our needs. With this tool, our products achieve higher quality, and consumers trust more in what we put on the market."

Strengthening a sector for greater food security

The success of *Nha Guinendade* reflects a broader transformation in Guinea-Bissau's mango value chain, spearheaded by WACOMP.

Based on their needs, similar support was extended to other small enterprises and cooperatives across the country. Like many other farming businesses that struggle with low yields and limited market access, *Récolte Jeune Madrugada Agricole (COJMAGRO)* received technical support and funding to modernize their operations. Subsequently, the company adopted sustainable, pesticide-free farming practices and began producing high-quality local crops. The CEO, Issufo Djaló, noted that expanding their sustainable farming model reduced the country's dependence on imported potatoes and onions. "With the support of WACOMP-GB, we were able to

grow and offer a reliable alternative in the local market. This support was essential to achieve our goals."

Today, *COJMAGRO* supplies local supermarkets and restaurants, contributing to the food security of 550,000 consumers. By 2025, the company is projected to generate 25 million XOF in revenue and create 300 new jobs.

Similarly, Dalanda Só's everyday life changed when she leveraged IDEA FIN support to acquire an industrial oven for drying flour.

"This oven has significantly changed the way I work. I used to sun-dry mangoes and corn for porridge. Due to dust and animals, sometimes the conditions were not hygienic and working during the rainy season was virtually impossible."



Re-launch of On-The-Job Training (OJT) for women agro-processors, associations, and cooperatives in Bissau, Cacheu, Oio, and Bafatá regions



Guinea-Bissau



Boosting production capacity of *Damaia Sarl* business in Bissorã is just one facet of Dalanda's success. She takes pride in being able to share the knowledge that helped her transform her company.

"The knowledge I received does not benefit me only. It also benefits my collaborators. Through my training, they get to use the knowledge to produce food for their families, too."

Expanding opportunities for women while building infrastructure for sustainable growth

Not far from Bissau and Bissorã, in the Bafatá region, Quintazinha Cá is experiencing a similar transformation. As the President of the *Visão de Cabral Cooperative* created by WACOMP-GB, she is at the forefront of a growing movement of women entrepreneurs bringing high-quality, locally processed food to national markets.

the Semi-Industrial Unit for Processing Local Products, a modern facility equipped with solar-powered systems and advanced processing machinery. The unit helps small-scale producers like her reduce post-harvest losses, improve product quality, and increase market competitiveness.



Mango House: Semi-Industrial Processing Unit, opened in Bissau in October 2024

"I feel incredibly motivated, full of hope, and bursting with pride as I launch my new products and see them at the AMAE (Association of Guinean Women in Economic Activity) stands and in supermarkets," Quintazinha shares her enthusiasm.

Thanks to WACOMP-GB, Quintazinha and seven other women agro-processors now have access to

The Cacheu and Bafatá Semi-Industrial Processing Units are part of the new WACOMP-sponsored infrastructure that contributed to the creation of 495 jobs.

By integrating these units into the larger mango value chain, WACOMP-GB ensures that women-led enterprises are contributing to the country's economic growth and food security.



Stamping and packaging of honey, spices, and palm oil; Cacheu Fruit and Vegetable Processing Unit, inaugurated in November 2024

From Pelundu to Bissorã and Bafatá, women entrepreneurs are proving that with the right support, small-scale agro-processing can drive sustainable development in Guinea-Bissau.

And for Fátima, Quintazinha, and Dalanda, this is just the beginning.

"With access to professional equipment and know-how, I am convinced my products will reach the market with superior quality. That makes me dream big!" says Quintazinha, laughing.

A legacy of transformation

As WACOMP-GB comes to a close, its impact remains in the communities it has supported. Beyond mere numbers, what stands out is the resilience and determination of individuals like Fátima Lopes.

"*Nha Guinendade* is more than a business, it is my identity. The support I received was not just financial; it was proof that what we do here has value."



Maria Sambú, from the Azedinha Group Cooperative, using the Manual Crown Bottle Capping Machine from the field laboratory and food processing equipment delivered to 33 Conformity Assessment Bodies and Agents of the Mango Value Chain

With improved infrastructure, access to financing, and enhanced business skills, these entrepreneurs are now well-equipped to sustain their growth beyond the project's timeline. The National Quality Policy and the National Mango Marketing Plan, among the 11 policies developed with the project's support, will assist them on their journey.

From Pelundu to Bissau, from farm to table, Guinea-Bissau's mango value chains has transformed forever. At its core are individuals like Fátima, who exemplify that with the right support, local businesses can truly thrive.



Twenty young entrepreneurs during a training at the agricultural-farm and incubator Agri Lucia Guinea (ALG), in Kindia, Guinea



An onion producer standing at the storage component of the facility where measured and bagged onions are packed



Onion bulbs curing on shelves

Ending Post-Harvest Losses: How WACOMP-GM is transforming The Gambia's horticulture and quality infrastructure

Despite producing 20% of its total onion consumption, a significant portion of Gambian produce never reaches the market. A substantial part is lost long before farmers can earn a profit, primarily due to a critical gap in post-harvest infrastructure: the lack of curing and storage facilities.

For decades, after each harvest, producers would find themselves with a large quantity of onions that they must put on the market immediately. The lack of adequate storage facilities compelled them to sell at reduced prices or risk losing their produce altogether.

This reality persists for many producers across the country. However, for the women of Berefet in the West Coast Region, Nanaba, and Jahuar Mandinka in the Central River Region, the struggle has become a thing of the past.

With funding from the European Union, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization's (UNIDO) West Africa Competitiveness Programme in The Gambia (WACOMP-GM) has constructed three facilities—designated for curing, packaging, and storage—directly offering hope and a new lease of life to 1392 women and 33 men onion growers.



Women of Jahuar Mandinka garden transporting newly harvested onions to the facility for curing and storage

These facilities, first of their kind in the country's four decade-long onion production history, measure 37.7 meter-long and 15.6 meter-wide. Each facility contains two compartments: one for

curing and sorting harvested onions after the field, and another for drying, grading, weighing, packaging, labelling, coding, and storage.



"We used to store our harvested onions in limited spaces in our rooms and under our beds. We did not even have the proper space to cure them; we just harvested and piled them in whatever space we had," said Kumba Jallow of Jahuar Mandinkavillage, whose garden now has a standard curing and storage facility. She underscored that their income has significantly

increased the past season as the facility allowed them to properly cure, sort, store, and sell their onions at their convenience.

Meanwhile, two more facilities are currently being constructed at Nema in Lower River Region and Pakau Njogu in North Bank Region.



President of Jahuar Mandinka Garden, Kumba Jallow in front of shelves curing her onions

Measuring for Managing: Promoting the culture of measurement in onion production

The old business adage says, 'What you can't measure you can't control,' and many Gambian onion farmers can relate to this saying.

Traditional bargaining systems in Gambian markets often rely on pots, buckets, or pans as measures for transactions. This inconsistent and disadvantageous habit has left onion producers at the mercy of middlewomen, reducing their income and competitiveness.

To combat these practices, WACOMP-GM provided weighing machines to 120 community gardens and

organized a series of capacity-building workshops. Farmers learned about the significance of weighing while training on using and maintaining the scales.

In January 2023, a training of trainers equipped 25 engineers from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and metrologists from the Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB) with skills to assemble and repair the scales. Additionally, in June 2023, 120 garden secretaries across five intervention regions learned to operate and maintain the bench weighing scales.



Amie Drammeh weighing her harvested produce at the garden using the WACOMP-GM precision weighing scale

The introduction of these instruments has significantly improved transparency and fairness in onion transactions. Producers can now access accurate production data, including total yield and post-harvest losses, empowering them to negotiate better prices.

Amie Drammeh, vice president of *Medina Serign Mass Garden*, shared how the initiative has

transformed their operations:

"We used to sell our harvests per pot, bucket, or pan without measuring them. This system only favoured the *jënd-ak-jaay* (middle-women). But now, with the equipment and the training we received, we use and maintain the scales effectively. My profits have increased significantly since last season, and I use my earnings to fund my six children's education."



Amie watering her onion beds



The conventional business wisdom continues, 'What you can't control, you can't improve.' This is especially true for the onion farmers who have embraced the new weighing systems.

By accurately measuring their yields, they are not only gaining control over their sales but also enhancing their overall productivity and income.

Training Unsung Heroes: Upskilling a key segment of the agricultural sector for a massive spillover effect

Behind every flourishing farm and every successful harvest are those who work quietly in the background. In The Gambia's agricultural sector, that place belongs to agricultural extension officers. Playing a vital role, these professionals wear many hats. They act as mentors, problem-solvers, and knowledge-bearers, helping farmers adopt better techniques and boost yields. Yet, despite their indispensable role, extension workers face many challenges that limit their ability to make a greater impact. Low remuneration, inadequate in-service training, and a lack of appropriate technology are among many obstacles they face. Because of these challenges, it

these troubles, WACOMP-GM has initiated a series of training programmes for upscaling the competence of agricultural extension workers.

For Assan, everything changed after participating in several such intensive capacity building workshops. By learning about Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP), Post-Harvest Management Practices, and Market Requirements for Onions, Assan discovered new ways to reduce waste, enhance quality, and increase farmers' incomes. The experience, in Assan's view, decidedly changed the way he works, empowering him to spread the knowledge further amongst



Extension worker, Assan Njie, accompanied by the WACOMP-GM staff, demonstrating how to carefully uproot ripe onion bulb

is the farmers—who are the main actors in the agricultural value chain—who ultimately bear the costs.

Assan Njie, 28, an extension officer who supervises five gardens in the Central River Region, is all too familiar with these issues. Like many of his colleagues, for a long time he operated using old methods in post-harvest handling of onions in his jurisdiction. Not anymore, because to mitigate

more than 800, predominantly female farmers.

"The trainings I took boosted the quality of my work. Now I am better equipped with not only the knowledge but also the techniques for working with farmers to share the lessons learned. For instance, the gardens I supervise now properly cure and dry their onions before they store them. They experience fewer post-harvest losses due to WACOMP-GM's capacity-building support," Assan reports.



WACOMP-GM regional training of extension workers to help improve the quality of their work

And he is not alone. More than 100 extension officers across The Gambia have undergone similar training, creating a ripple effect. Their improved knowledge on farming practices strengthened the entire onion value chain.

What has Assan done in the meantime? In June 2024, he was back in the WACOMP-GM programme, with one key difference. This time, he was the trainer. He took over the baton, training the next generation of communicators on the best agronomic practices.



Extension workers Assan Njie and Christiana Therese Ndecky, training traditional communicators on Onion Post-harvest Management at a WACOMP-GM training in Soma, LRR



Bolstering Food Safety by Strengthening Quality Infrastructure: Tackling contamination in The Gambia's markets



EU Representative Lumana Kamashi presenting laboratory equipment to FSQA

It began as a fast-spreading rumour that soon sparked national concern. In June 2022, a viral WhatsApp audio sent shockwaves through The Gambia, alleging that fish vendors at local markets were using harmful insecticides to preserve smoked fish. Initially, the claims were unverified, but as public anxiety grew, the Food Safety and Quality Authority (FSQA) launched an investigation.

Samples from various fish markets were sent to a laboratory in neighbouring Senegal for testing. The results were alarming: traces of *dichlorvos* (commonly known as *sniper*) and four other hazardous insecticides were detected in fish from Bakoteh Fish Market, one of the country's busiest trading hubs. These chemicals pose serious health risks, including heart and respiratory complications.

The revelation highlighted a critical gap in The Gambia's food safety infrastructure: the inability to independently test and regulate food quality. Lacking the local testing facilities authorities struggled to respond quickly, leaving consumers vulnerable to unsafe food practices.

Determined to change the situation, WACOMP-GM stepped in to help strengthen The Gambia's food conformity assessment capacity. Providing equipment and staff training was instrumental in supporting the FSQA to establish a national food testing laboratory, ensuring that they can conduct their assessments in a timely manner and, whenever possible, without relying on foreign facilities.

For FSQA officials, these improvements are already making a difference.

"Thanks to the equipment supplied by WACOMP-GM, we can now conduct our own food testing and make informed decisions on food quality and safety," says Bai Dodou Jallow, Director of Scientific Affairs at FSQA.

But the transformation goes beyond technology.

The project has also standardized food safety procedures, aligning them with international best practices. FSQA staff have undergone extensive training in Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP) protocols, internal monitoring, and laboratory management.



FSQA Food Inspectors taken on a conducted tour of Atlantic Sea Food by UNIDO Quality Infrastructure Expert as part of their training

Jallow emphasized that approaching food safety needs to be systematic and aligned with global standards: "WACOMP-GM is helping us achieve that by building our team's expertise and strengthening our internal monitoring capabilities."

Beyond infrastructure and training, the initiative

has also driven policy changes. In January 2023, with WACOMP-GM's support, FSQA led The Gambia's first-ever National Food Safety Policy. This milestone laid the groundwork for a more effective food safety system, ensuring better consumer protection and improving trade opportunities at regional and international levels.



Participants at the validation workshop of the National Food Safety Policy in January 2023



With a stronger regulatory framework, better-equipped laboratories, and highly trained personnel, The Gambia is taking significant strides towards ensuring safer food for its citizens and increasing confidence in its agricultural exports.

While the fight for food safety is far from over, the interventions from WACOMP-GM have allowed the country to shift from merely reacting to food safety crises to proactively preventing them.

Standards and Beyond: Supporting TGSB to develop, promote, and enforce standards and policies

In The Gambia, horticulture is more than cultivating crops. It is about creating opportunities to lift communities out of poverty. For thousands of women, horticulture provides a vital source of income and economic independence. Yet, despite its potential, the sector struggles to compete in larger markets. Issues such as inconsistent quality, poor post-harvest handling, and non-compliance with market standards prevent farmers from reaching high-value local and international buyers. To bridge this gap, WACOMP-GM have collaborated with The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB) to transform the sector by establishing national standards and strengthening quality control systems.

A major milestone in this effort is the development

of 12 national horticultural standards for onions and allied crops. These standards ensure that Gambian produce meets competitive market requirements and encompass good agricultural practices, handling, storage, labelling, and packaging.

But standards alone are not sufficient. To effect real change, standards must be enforced and tested. That's why WACOMP-GM provided the National Food Testing Laboratory with essential equipment, including thermometers, pH meters, refractometers, and palm oil testers. The project also organized hands-on training for technicians, equipping them with the skills necessary to analyze food quality, conduct inspections, and uphold these new standards.



UNIDO WACOMP-GM trained TGSB Metrologist, Abdoulie F. Njie, calibrating precision weighing scales supplied by the project at a vegetable garden



The WACOMP-GM Project Manager, Bernard Bau, and National Technical Coordinator, Joseph Ndenn, meeting TGSB DG, Papa Secka at his office in Kotu

For professionals like Abdoulie F. Njie, a metrologist at TGSB, these interventions have been a game-changer.

"WACOMP-GM helped me a lot. I cannot overstate how helpful this project was. We owe UNIDO a lot for giving us the knowledge we needed to improve our services."

Beyond equipping individuals, the initiative aims to strengthen institutional frameworks. The upcoming National Laboratory Policy, supported by WACOMP-GM, will create a more efficient and coordinated laboratory system in The Gambia.

"The policy will address issues such as duplications, wastage of resources, competence

issues, and sharing expertise and knowledge," said TGSB Director General, Papa Secka.

By improving standards, enhancing testing capabilities, and building local expertise, WACOMP-GM is laying the foundation for a stronger, more competitive horticulture sector. Farmers and agribusinesses will now have greater access to premium markets, ensuring higher incomes, reduced post-harvest losses, and a more resilient agricultural economy.

With these reforms, in due time, The Gambia's horticultural sector will not merely survive; it will thrive.



TRANSFORMING GHANA'S SMES: How WACOMP-Ghana drives local growth and global reach

In the heart of Ghana, where tradition meets innovation, a significant transformation has been unfolding—one driven by dedicated entrepreneurs, committed farmers, and forward-thinking business leaders. With over 48,849 Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) impacted, including more than 31,000 women-owned businesses, the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP-Ghana) catalyzed change, turning challenges into tangible successes.

Funded by the European Union (EU), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), in partnership with Ghana's Ministry of Trade and Industry (MoTI), established WACOMP-Ghana with a clear objective: to remove barriers to competitiveness, enhance market access, and create sustainable business opportunities. The programme has delivered transformative results, strengthening the position of Ghanaian SMEs in both local and international markets.

From local roots to global reach



Janet Gyimah Kessie

Among those entrepreneurs whose business journey has been reshaped by WACOMP-Ghana is Janet Gyimah Kessie, CEO of *JOSMA Agro Industries*. A few years ago, her cassava processing business was just a modest operation, struggling to meet market demands. Today, thanks to WACOMP's training on quality standards and business development, her

products are not only on Ghanaian shelves but also making their way to international markets.

Through these training programmes, Janet gained vital skills in Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), quality control, and business development. Equipped with new capabilities, she was able to refine her processes, improve the products, and expand business operations. Her success reflects a broader impact on cassava processors in Ghana. In the communities of Mampong and Ejura, cassava farmers who once struggled with post-harvest losses and limited value addition opportunities have now adopted modern processing techniques and quality enhancement strategies. "Before WACOMP, we lacked the technical know-how to optimize cassava processing and meet market requirements," Janet shares. "Now, we not only produce higher-quality products but also reach a much wider customer base."

Today, Janet's cassava-based products are widely distributed across Ghana and have even entered international markets.

"I never imagined my small business would grow to this level," she remarks. "WACOMP provided me with the skills, the knowledge, and most importantly, the confidence to expand."



Christiana Akua Agyei

Just like Janet's company, *Christaa Agricultural Ventures* faced significant challenges in the past. Most prominent were limited market access, an inability to meet international quality standards, and ineffective packaging that hindered product appeal. Despite having high-quality cassava-based products, the business struggled to compete. Lack of product diversification and certification prevented the small firm from entering global markets.

Through WACOMP-Ghana's support, *Christaa Agricultural Ventures* diversified its product offerings, obtained essential quality certifications, and enhanced the packaging, which collectively paved the way towards new markets. By improving labelling, branding, and compliance with regulatory standards, the company gained access to buyers beyond the confines of the region.

"Before WACOMP-Ghana, we struggled to access markets due to poor packaging and no certification. Thanks to the project's training and support, we now have attractive packaging and quality certifications. They make our products competitive both locally and internationally," says Christiana Akua Agyei, CEO of *Christaa Agricultural Ventures*. "The knowledge I have gained in product diversification and quality standards has been invaluable. Now, we see increased demand, higher sales, and greater business growth."

Today, *Christaa Agricultural Ventures* supplies a broader market, with improved profitability and a stronger brand presence in the industry.

Bridging the common gaps in knowledge, quality, and market access

Low competitiveness, stringent quality requirements, and financial constraints. These are just few of the longstanding obstacles the local SMEs face. Since its inception in 2019, WACOMP-Ghana has tackled them systematically.

By introducing Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), quality compliance training, and digital marketing strategies, the programme has helped businesses scale up their operations and become more resilient in a competitive marketplace.

For Ishmael Boafo, CEO of *KOBS Farms*, an agrobusiness company in the Eastern Region, the programme has been instrumental in elevating his business.

"I used to face constant rejections from buyers. The reason? My mangoes didn't meet export standards. Now, with the right certifications and improved farming techniques, I'm shipping premium mangoes to Europe!" he enthusiastically shares.



Ishmael Boafo



Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology receiving the ISO certificate award

Ishmael's journey underscores a broader transformation in Ghana's agricultural and agro-processing sector. While individual enterprises like his have experienced remarkable growth, WACOMP-Ghana's impact extends even further—strengthening the country's overall quality infrastructure.

The vital step in this direction was accrediting key institutions like Ghana Standards Authority (GSA), the Food and Drugs Authority (FDA) Cosmetics

Laboratories, and the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) Food Science and Technology Laboratory for the critical ISO/IEC 17025 certification.

In so doing, the programme has enhanced the country's general ability to meet the up-to-date international standards. Boosting the credibility of locally produced goods allowed more businesses to access regional and global markets confidently.

Creating connections, unlocking opportunities

Markets that once seemed inaccessible are now within reach for many SMEs. To that end, WACOMP-Ghana has facilitated over 500 market linkages. As a result, the local SMEs expanded their presence into 13 new markets. Among them are Spain, Germany, France, Morocco, Egypt, the USA, Kenya, Rwanda, and Namibia, and other African nations.

Furthermore, over 500 SMEs have received financial support exceeding four million Ghanaian cedis. Now they have resources necessary to invest

in advanced equipment, increase production capacity, and drive innovation. Thanks to the programme's emphasis on digital transformation, numerous businesses established an online presence, leveraging e-commerce platforms for broader market reach.

WACOMP-Ghana has proven that with the right support, Ghanaian SMEs can thrive and compete on a global stage. Much is to be done, but the way for future economic growth and innovation is paved.



Installation of drip pipes in a pineapple field to optimize irrigation and avoid wasting water, thereby reducing production costs



REFILA: Putting Guinean pineapple sector back in the game



Watering of pineapple shoots planted on the REFILA-provided biodegradable plastic mulch. This innovative technique reduces production costs by a third and saves the cost of watering for three months

For decades, the pineapple operators in Guinea were left to their own devices. With limited government support, outdated farming methods, and a growing disconnect from international standards, the high-potential industry struggled to compete with its neighbours. Isolated farmers, processors, and exporters operated without coordination or access to crucial markets.

When WACOMP launched the Pineapple Sector Revival Project (REFILA), high expectations were only matched by challenges. Could Guinea claim its

place in the regional and international pineapple trade?

Fast forward to today, and the results speak for themselves. Through structural reforms, capacity building, and stronger market linkages, Guinea's pineapple sector is no longer on the sidelines. Modernized standards, empowered local businesses, and traction-gaining exports prove that a well-coordinated effort can transform an entire industry.

Here's how it all happened.

Institutions-First Approach: Laying the foundations for long-term growth

A stronger regulatory and quality framework was at the heart of the sector's revival. The REFILA project introduced 24 new standards for pineapple and other horticultural products. These ensured that Guinean exports meet global quality, safety, and consumer expectations.

However, quality standards alone were not enough. Guinea also needed institutions to monitor

competitiveness and industrial development. To that end, the project supported creating the National Observatory for Competitiveness (ONCP) and helped develop the first-ever National Industrial Development Policy (PNDIG).

The two institutions work in synergy. While the ONCP monitors the country's economic performance, identifies challenges and

opportunities, and guides public policies to improve competitiveness, the national strategic document steers the country's industrial development.

To ensure sustainable business growth, the project also launched the National Restructuring and Upgrading Programme (PNRMN). The initiative equips MSMEs with technical and financial support to improve their competitiveness.

These foundational changes set the stage for the next big leap: ensuring Guinean pineapples could

be grown efficiently while meeting international market requirements.

In light of the testimonies from beneficiaries, Mamadou Saliou Diaby, Secretary General of the Ministry of Trade, Industry, and SMEs, expressed his satisfaction:

"This project has not only boosted pineapple production but has also strengthened commercialization abroad. The next step is reinforcing the industrialization of our products to add more value to what we produce."

A Unified Front: Connecting Guinean pineapple exporters for wider reach

One of the biggest hurdles facing Guinean pineapple exporters was a lack of coordination. Farmers, processors, and exporters operated in silos, limiting efficiency and market access.

To solve this problem, REFILA joined forces with the Guinean Agency for Export Promotion

(AGUIPEX). Several initiatives ensued.

REFILA first established Interprofession of the Pineapple Sector in Guinea (IFAG), the country's first-ever interprofessional platform dedicated to the pineapple industry.



A female trader came to Coyah to buy pineapples to benefit from more competitive wholesale prices



A group of pineapple traders and producers. Many female producers came to Coyah to harvest pineapple, ready to be sent to local markets



One of the employees of the Guinean brand Fatou & Kadija, processing locally produced pineapples

"An inter-professional organization within the pineapple sector is essential for development," said Mamadou Condé, the Advisor from AGUIPEX, adding that a basis lies in connecting the three main links: production, processing, and marketing.

This collaborative framework helped stakeholders work together to boost production, improve quality, and secure better market opportunities at the local, sub-regional, and international levels.

Alongside IFAG, REFILA introduced another game-changer: the "Export Guide." The foundational document covers every step of the export process, from business registration to shipping logistics. With this comprehensive manual, aspiring Guinean exporters are now better equipped to navigate international trade requirements and successfully market their pineapples abroad.



Packaging REFILA provided to local producers so they can comply with international pineapple export standards

Good Farming and Fair Pricing: Empowering the next generation of agripreneurs

Beyond industry-wide improvements, REFILA also focused on youth empowerment and job creation. Many young Guineans were unemployed, while pineapple farmers struggled to find quality offshoots for replanting.

To tackle both challenges, the project supported two agribusiness centres. *AgribMokatour* in Forécariah and *Agri Lucia* in Kindia became hubs for training and incubating young agricultural entrepreneurs.

Since their inception, 50 young agripreneurs received theoretical and hands-on training in

agricultural entrepreneurship and good farming practices. As a part of the experience, they were also connected with large-scale producers.

The effects were instant: over 100 supply sub-contracts. The agribusiness centres now act as aggregators. Supervising these young farmers ensures their produce is sold at fair prices.

Given that offshoots represent one-third of the total investment in pineapple farming, this initiative has played a critical role in revitalizing production while generating new employment opportunities.



Twenty young agripreneurs during the business training at Agri Lucia Guinea (ALG) in Kindia

Stronger Together: Launching Guinea's pineapple export consortium

Even with improved production and standards, many Guinean pineapple exporters still faced major roadblocks in positioning their products regionally and internationally. They struggled with limited branding, inadequate packaging, and insufficient critical mass for large-scale exports.

"Simply helping producers produce is not enough. The goal is to develop an effective sales strategy," said Moussa Camara, President of the Federation of Pineapple Growers of Lower Guinea (FEPAG-BG). That is why, supported by the International Trade Centre (ITC), REFILA helped local producers participate in international fairs. And to maximise their prospects of accessing new markets, REFILA and the Committee Linking Entrepreneurship Agriculture Development (COLEAD), trained exporters in product quality, international standards, market requirements, sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, and sustainable farming practices.

Since mobilizing the entire sector was needed to tackle this issue systematically, REFILA established CEFAG, the country's first pineapple export consortium. CEFAG unites 11 cooperatives, producers' associations, and exporters, including COPEFL, Burquiah, UGPAM, ALG, and Agrib-Mokatour.

Apart from promoting *La Baronne de Guinée*, Guinea's signature pineapple variety, this strategic alliance will strengthen the country's brand image in global markets. By advocating for better packaging, export-friendly policies, and compliance with international standards, CEFAG gives Guinean exporters a stronger voice at the national and international levels.

"Creating a consortium was a necessity. Revitalizing the pineapple sector isn't just about production. It's about ensuring the entire value chain is well-structured and organized. Together, we can achieve much more," concluded President Camara.

With exporters aligned under a shared vision, Guinea's pineapple industry is no longer just producing. It is competing on the global market.



Fatou Cissoko holding a sample of dried pineapple. She is the founder of Fatou & Kadija, a woman-led processing firm in the pineapple value chain in Guinea and member of an export consortium established by the project

Guinea's Pineapple Renaissance: The road ahead

Guinea's pineapple sector is no longer struggling to keep up. It is back in the game and gaining momentum. Through improved coordination, strengthened business relationships, and strategic export initiatives, the country has repositioned itself as a strong regional and international pineapple trade contender.

The work is far from over. But with the infrastructure in place, cross-connected Guinean farmers, processors, and exporters will continue to expand their market presence and enhance their competitiveness.



A technician of ONCQ (National Office for Quality Control in Guinea) analyzing the quality of pineapple samples for better market access



Women planting offshoots in a pineapple field in Kindia



Demonstration of the correct use of scissors during a cocoa harvest

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: How WACOMP is transforming Sierra Leone's economy

From 2019 to 2024, the West Africa Competitiveness Programme in Sierra Leone (WACOMP-SL) worked to strengthen the country's position in regional and global markets. Focusing on cassava, cocoa, and palm oil value chains, this partnership between the Government of Sierra Leone, the European Union (EU), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization

(UNIDO), and the International Trade Centre (ITC), aimed to boost productivity, improve trade compliance, and drive sustainable economic development.

As the programme concludes, its impact is evident in four transformative areas: quality infrastructure, capacity building, market access, and policy.

Building a Culture of Quality: Launching Sierra Leone's first accredited certification body

"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort," famously said polymath John Ruskin. But building a nationwide culture of quality usually requires more than wits. It demands a concerted commitment and systematic implementation through incremental steps.

Hence, it is unsurprising that WACOMP Sierra Leone's quest for quality had several such

milestones. Most prominent was establishing the country's first internationally accredited certification body. Under the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau (SLSB), for the first time, businesses could obtain globally recognized certifications like ISO 9001 (Quality Management Systems). The proof of quality standards will open doors to international trade and boost consumer confidence.



Internal Auditor Training for ISO 22000 (Food Safety Management System)

No institution alone can adequately strengthen the National Quality Infrastructure (NQI). That is why WACOMP targeted public staff members from public institutions and MSMEs. Through its extensive capacity-building initiatives, over 100 professionals received training in quality management systems and standards. The SMEs implementing ISO standards received additional expert support to better prepare for international audits.

This effort has already borne fruit. The advent of

the first ISO 22000-certified companies in Sierra Leone marked a crucial step toward meeting global market demands.

"WACOMP Sierra Leone has given us an opportunity to obtain ISO certification, which will inspire trust in the quality of our products and services. This technical assistance opened many doors for our company," said Shoheb Panjwani, General Manager of Jolaks Manufacturing Company Limited.

From Training to Tools: Empowering farmers and MSMEs

At the heart of WACOMP's success stands its direct support to farmers and MSMEs. In the cassava, cocoa, and palm oil sectors, over 2,600 farmers underwent specialized training to enhance their productivity and compliance with international standards. While cassava farmers received extensive instruction on Global G.A.P., HACCP, and risk assessment practices, the key achievement

was the training of Sierra Leone's first Global G.A.P.-certified trainer. Mustapha Tucker now provides international-level guidance to local agricultural cooperatives. His expertise is transforming farming practices, reducing reliance on costly foreign consultants, and ensuring that Sierra Leonean farmers can compete on a global scale.



Field training on the correct use of cocoa pruning and harvesting tools by the field support officer



Mustapha Tucker

"Thanks to WACOMP, I have become the first GLOBAL G.A.P.-registered trainer in Sierra Leone and national expert for cassava value chain. Finally, I can create more impact in Sierra Leone and Africa at large," said Mustapha enthusiastically. The new trainer added that he is now able to help cassava growers move away from outdated practices that endanger biodiversity, and adopt internationally recognized smart standards that promote food safety, environmental sustainability, and economic growth.

Cocoa farmers have seen significant benefits, too. Through WACOMP's Farmer Coaching Initiative, 29 tool banks and four centralized nurseries were established in Kenema district, improving post-harvest handling and disease management. Distributing over 1,500 essential tools like pruning saws and harvesting equipment empowers farmers to reduce losses and improve yields. By providing personal protective equipment, hygiene training, and food safety guidelines, WACOMP ensured that sustainability and social responsibility remain at the forefront of the local production techniques.

Introducing school farms as demonstration sites further reinforced good agricultural practices.

"Farmers are grateful to UNIDO and support officers for improving their cocoa farming methods. The female farmers were particularly encouraged seeing a woman on the management team of UNIDO," reports Rachel Cobb, UNIDO's Value Chain Sector Expert.

And the positive effects are already felt. Cooperatives such as *Tegloma* and *Moawoma* have reported improved productivity and compliance with international standards.



A group of cocoa farmers from the Jewahun Tunkia community, Kenema district

Expanding Market Access: Showcasing Sierra Leone's potential to the world

An old adage suggests that 'seeing is believing.' And for Sierra Leonean businesses, stepping onto the global stage proved this right.

Helping MSMEs gain visibility in national and international markets was a major focus of WACOMP. To that end, thanks to ITC, the implementing partner, the programme helped more than 50 MSMEs showcase their products at renowned trade fairs such as Food & Beverage West Africa (FAB) in Nigeria, the Fair of Agriculture and Animal Resources (FIARA) in Senegal, and the Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF) in Egypt. These platforms were more than just exhibitions. They became gateways to new markets.

The results speak for themselves. The companies recorded over 1.6 million United States dollars in local and international sales. Reaching European, North American, and West African markets showed that Sierra Leonean products can hold their own on the world stage, given the right support.

International exposure sparked creativity, too. Cassava processors diversified their offerings to

include value-added products attractive to local and regional markets. "Now we are processing more recipes and offer vegetable and meat pies, sausages, and croquettes," said Rev. Fr. (Dr.) Matthew Jusu Kanneh, CEO of the Women and Youth in Agricultural Development Initiative (WaYADI).

Meanwhile, cocoa and palm oil businesses leveraged improved branding to attract new buyers. The *Moawoma* cocoa cooperative's adoption of centralized nurseries and organic inputs has strengthened its resilience against pests and diseases. Palm oil farmers did not sit idle, either. Their participation in study tours and training sessions has helped them open new export opportunities by obtaining certification under the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil (RSPO).

Much has happened across the sectors and the success was not accidental. WACOMP's tailored training equipped businesses with packaging, branding, and food safety skills. A survey of participating businesses revealed increased production and improved operational efficiency, with 11 companies implementing transformative changes.



Noellen Barber

"Before WACOMP-SL trainings, our production and processing levels were very low, greatly affecting our export quota. After instruction, our company developed a basic oil palm training manual that

included key best management practices such as pruning, pest, and disease management," explained Noellen Barber, CEO of *Nianda Agriculture and Trading Company*.

Strengthening Policies and Institutions: Laying the foundation for long-term growth

Beyond supporting farmers and MSMEs, WACOMP worked to create an environment conducive to long-term growth. A close collaboration with the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) aimed to align national policies with regional trade frameworks, including the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements.

The key breakthrough in this direction was operationalizing the National Notification Authority and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) National Enquiry Point to streamline compliance processes for exporters.

The programme also facilitated robust public-private dialogues (PPDs) to address policy bottlenecks in the cocoa, cassava, and palm oil sectors. To that end, "Making Sierra Leone's Cocoa

Sector Investible and Sustainable" national roundtable brought together 58 stakeholders to discuss strategies for improving sectoral competitiveness. Additionally, WACOMP helped trade support institutions (TSIs) like Sierra Leone's Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) and Sierra Leone Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDA) enhance their capacity to deliver advocacy, market linkages, and export-readiness training, among other services. How useful the exchanges were is best captured by the testimonies of participants. "The financial access workshops have helped me grasp the MSME's challenges more deeply. I will keep using the diagnostic tool with what I've learned during the workshops to further my understanding of their needs, so I can better support them," said Augustine Macarthy, Regional Coordinator for Western Area at SMEDA.



Cocoa producers learning about international quality standards-compliant cocoa-based products

Conclusion: A foundation for the future

As WACOMP Sierra Leone comes to an end, its legacy of empowerment, collaboration, and sustainable growth remains. By addressing systemic challenges, improving quality standards, and fostering market linkages, the programme has set the stage for Sierra Leone's continued integration into global value chains. The country is now better positioned to compete in the global arena, as recognized by its officials.

"The programme has equipped local businesses and institutions with the skills, knowledge, and networks needed to compete in international

markets. Creating this foundation will support Sierra Leone's ongoing economic transformation," asserted Emmanuel Konjoh, Chief Director of the Ministry of Trade and Industry of Sierra Leone.

The achievements demonstrate the transformative power of partnerships and underscore the potential for lasting impact when stakeholders work together toward shared goals.

Though WACOMP ends, the journey continues. This is just the beginning of a new chapter for Sierra Leone's economy.





FROM SURVIVAL TO SUCCESS:

How WACOMP helped rebuild Senegal's MPMEs after crisis

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, no economy was untouched. In Senegal, the blow to micro, small, and medium enterprises (MPMEs) was especially harsh. From disrupted supply chains to plummeting demand, many businesses found themselves on the brink. But where others saw despair, the MPME Resilience and Recovery Program (P2R) saw an opportunity. Launched in 2021 as part of the West Africa

Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP), P2R has supported 274 businesses across Senegal with training, technology, financial guidance, and innovation. Funded by the European Union and implemented by UNIDO, the programme emphasized inclusion—52.5% of its beneficiaries were women, and 27% were youth. Its legacy? A wave of resilience, digital transformation, and sustainable growth rippling across the nation.

Catalyst for Growth: Strengthening skills, tools, and access to finance



The company Diongue Couture, recipients of sewing machines

Before P2R, the selected Senegalese MPMEs often operated with outdated equipment and limited know-how. Few had access to financing or the technical capacity to scale. Their ambitions were constrained not by lack of potential but by lack of support.

That's where P2R came in. Through a series of targeted actions, it delivered tangible results. While 37 businesses were taught the post-COVID critical hygiene best practices, 99 companies learned how to harness digital marketing to reach broader markets and online sales. Over 30 entrepreneurs received tailored coaching to develop bankable business plans, and eight

successfully secured funding between 5 and 200 million FCFA. Equipment grants went even further: 235 businesses received modern equipment, from cold preservation systems to sewing machines and professional hairdressing kits.

These upgrades translated into measurable growth. "Thanks to these trainings, I learned how to better showcase my brand, which significantly increased my sales," said Ms. Aminata Diop, founder of *Amyrel Cosmétiques*. With productivity, financial viability, and visibility improved, these businesses are on a more competitive and sustainable path.



Milk manufacturing company supported by the P2R in Good Hygiene Practices

Local Innovation, Local Impact: The PET Blower revolution in Kolda

In Senegal's southern Kolda region, small juice, honey, and oil producers faced a stubborn barrier: packaging. Transporting plastic bottles from Dakar was expensive and unreliable, with up to 10% lost in transit. The cost was more than lost money—it stifled local industry.

P2R's answer was simple: localize production. In October 2024, a PET bottle blower was installed in Kolda. Capable of producing 800 to 1,000 bottles per hour, this single innovation flipped the script for local producers.



PET bottles blower donated to the Casamance Agricultural Cooperative



Costs dropped. Profit margins increased. Jobs were created. And for the first time, businesses could dream beyond their regional borders. "Before, we had to import packaging, which increased our costs. Now, we can produce locally

and even consider exportation," said Mme Coulibaly Korotimi Diarra, president of the *Casamance Agrofood Cooperative*. The PET blower wasn't just a machine, it was a catalyst for regional economic empowerment.



Demonstration of the PET bottle blower

Going Online: Transforming businesses in the digital age

In the rapidly evolving world of business, visibility is everything. Yet before 2023, many Senegalese MPMEs were invisible online, particularly in rural

areas. A digital divide left countless businesses without the tools or knowledge to compete in digital markets.



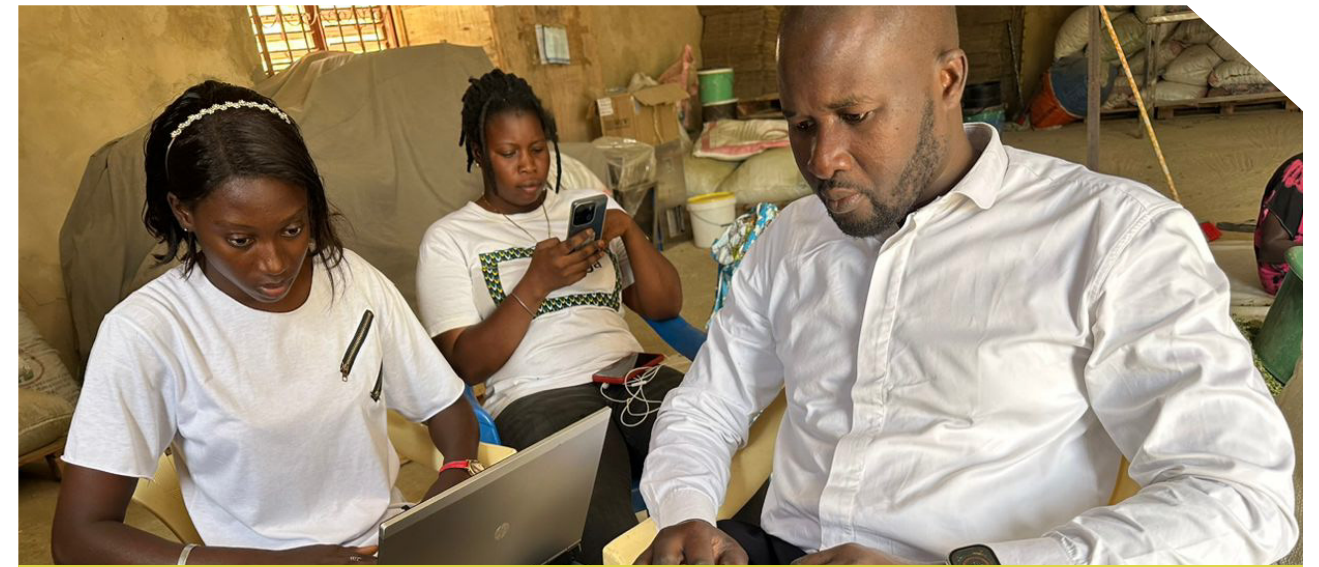
Practical training session in digital marketing

To bridge this gap, P2R organized a series of workshops in Dakar, Thiès, Kaolack, Tamba and Saly Portudal from 2023 to 2024. These sessions taught entrepreneurs how to craft content, optimize for search engines, and manage online campaigns. It was about more than going digital. The initiative was about becoming digitally competitive.

The impact was transformational. Brands like *Sen Saveurs* and *Afro Nature* increased their visibility

and expanded to international markets. Online engagement turned into orders. Social media became a sales pipeline.

"The digitalization allowed us to reach our target audience better and expand our activities internationally," explained Abdoulaye Seck, a digital marketing trainer involved in the programme. Through tech-savviness and storytelling, these businesses found new life in the digital age.



Practical training session in digital marketing

Going Ahead: Smart finance for sustainable growth

Financial mismanagement remains a key cause of business failure, especially for small enterprises. In Senegal, the pandemic exposed deep weaknesses in how MPMEs tracked income, managed expenses, and planned for the future.

P2R addressed this problem head-on. Intensive training sessions covered topics from cash flow planning to cost reduction strategies. The goal was to turn financial chaos into clarity.

The plan worked. Businesses such as *RASIAAT* and *Hôtel Simenti* reported significant improvements in budgeting, cost control, and profitability.

Tools once foreign to them—balance sheets, forecasting models—became part of their daily operations.

"These training sessions equipped businesses with practical tools to anticipate their financial needs better," said expert Hamakaire Ndiaye. Resilience wasn't just about surviving crises—it was about becoming future-ready.



Naxari dereet, a P2R-supported local rice production company

Conclusion: Resilient and redefined

The MPME Resilience and Recovery Program in Senegal is more than a support model—it is a blueprint for rebuilding with purpose. From capacity-building and digitalization to equipment and finance, P2R tackled multiple dimensions of vulnerability with a holistic, human-centered approach. It empowered women. It uplifted youth. It championed innovation and inclusion.

Its true impact, however, lies in the stories of the entrepreneurs who now stand stronger, more confident, and ready to grow. As Senegal and the wider West African region continue to face global uncertainties, P2R stands as a powerful reminder that resilience can be built—and that meaningful change starts with thoughtful, targeted action.

Furthermore, strategic alignment of projects with

government goals is fundamental in ensuring their success. In this sense, P2R perfectly fits into Senegal's long-term development vision, *Vision Sénégal 2050*, as emphasized by Seydina Aboubacar Sadikh Ndiaye, Secretary General of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce of Senegal. It serves as a crucial lever for stimulating inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Aligned with national strategic priorities, this project has strengthened economic competitiveness while fostering the inclusion of nearly 274 MPMEs from Senegal in a systemic transformation process. Therefore, replicating this approach and adapting it to other sectors or regions would amplify its impact and reinforce the foundations of a resilient and sustainable economy.



GIE Handicap Services, a P2R-supported local manufacturer of paper and recycled bags



Visit to a P2R-supported dairy production farm in Northern Senegal



Technicians from ONCQ (National Office for Quality Control in Guinea) testing pineapple samples to determine their compliance to market standards

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