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NEWSLETTER

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WEST AFRICA COMPETITIVENESS PROGRAMME THE GAMBIA



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The West Africa Competitiveness Programme aims to support a number of selected value chains at national and regional level 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).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Awareness Training held for Marketing Federations and Gardens on Marketing	3
Boosting Market Competitiveness: UNIDO-WACOMP Supplies Equipment to 120 Gardens	5
Gambia Validates Food Safety and Quality Policy	7
Agricultural engineers trained on bench weighting scales	10
WACOMP-GM Publishes Rapid Market Analysis Report on Onion and Allied Crops	12
WACOMP-GM Held 3rd Steering Committee Meeting	14
Garden Secretaries Trained on Bench Weighting Scales	16
Launch of the Media Action on Quality Standards	18

FOREWORD

Mr. Bernard Bau UNIDO WACOMP Project Manager

Hello readers,

Here comes the 4th edition of our biannual publication. The publication updates project beneficiaries, stakeholders and the public at large on the latest developments as they unfold in the project.

Funded by the European Union (EU), West Africa Competitiveness Programme – The Gambia (WACOMP-GM) project's objective is to increase competitiveness in The Gambia through enhanced quality compliance along the onion value chain, thereby strengthening the country's competitiveness and enhancing its integration into the regional and international trading systems.

WACOMP in The Gambia is implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and United Purpose (UP).

These are exciting times for us! The past semester has been very successful and, as a project, we have managed to implement a good number of activities that are very important to the realization of the project's output.

In this edition, one of our biggest milestones is our support to The Gambia Government in validating the country's first-ever national



food safety policy. The Policy, developed by the United Nations industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) with funding from the European Union (EU), aims to ensure that food and feed sold or made available in The Gambia, locally produced or imported, or exported from The Gambia are safe and suitable for consumption.

Our recently published Rapid Market Assessment report has revealed that the quality and safety of local onions is below international standards of quality and safety due to pre-mature harvesting, absence of post-harvest curing and drying, absence of sorting, grading, weighing, packaging, labelling and inadequacy of basic tools and materials.

Consequently, the project has supplied garden equipment to 120 gardens in the country. The materials, which include 120 bench weighing scales, 120 portable electric sewing machines, 120 portable onion moisture meters, 120,000 onion leno mesh bags and 200 standard plastic pallets, are geared towards addressing some of these challenges and contribute to the improvement of the quality of onions produced to meet the expectations of both local and international markets.

Other major news highlights of this edition are trainings we have conducted. Key among them are the training of marketing federations on marketing techniques, training of agricultural engineers on the bench weighing scales we have supplied to the gardens and our continued capacity building initiatives for technicians of the country's quality infrastructure institutions. The project continues to smoothly implement its activities, touching the lives of the ordinary Gambians.

Through our various online and community engagements, we have now gotten even closer to the people we are serving and so far, enjoyed their strong commitment and ownership of the project deliverables. During the period under review, we have also sponsored a few sensitization radio talk shows and aired 750 spots on the airwaves. Thank you for the pleasure of your time in reading this interesting edition.

Happy reading!

Mr. Bernard Bau
UNIDO WACOMP Project Manager



Awareness Training Held for Marketing Federations and Gardens on Marketing

A 3-day training on Horticultural Marketing was organized for 20 gardens and marketing federations from the 14th to the 16th March 2023 at Soma, Lower River Region (LRR).

As highlighted by the project's Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) report, marketing remains one of the major challenges onion producers continue to face in The Gambia. Producers of onion and allied crops usually lack formal education and as such have limited knowledge in marketing techniques. They are also unable to tap the potential which digital media presents to link with potential buyers.

The awareness training exposed producers in gardens and regional marketing federations to marketing strategies and also covered how to use social and mainstream media to market their produce.

As part of the training, participants created official communication sites for their gardens and federations. Email accounts, Facebook pages and WhatsApp business accounts were among the marketing tools to further equip participants to boost their sales.



Group exercise: The team from CRR-North creating social media tools

The workshop introduced participants to WACOMP-GM and its key awareness raising messages.

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This training was very helpful for us. We learned a lot in terms of increasing our sales and supporting our regional marketing federations to be more formal and engaging. As a result of this training, each of the regional marketing federations now has an official email address, Facebook page and WhatsApp business accounts

Mr. Christian Lasser, the Project Administrator of UNIDO, who visited The Gambia, said the training forms an important component of the project. He said UNIDO WACOMP-GM is committed to working with gardens and regional marketing federations to continuously develop their capacities and collaborate on initiatives to enhance their competitiveness and increase sales.

In strengthening its collaboration with partner organizations in The Gambia, WACOMP-GM together with the International Trade Center (ITC) provided a platform during the training for the ITC to promote and sensitize the participants on the Jokalante online market system. The software serves as a link amongst all stakeholders along the vegetable value chains – producers, transporters and buyers.



Boosting Market Competitiveness: UNIDO-WACOMP Supplies Equipment to 120 Gardens

The European Union-funded West Africa Competitiveness Programme – The Gambia (WACOMP-GM) of United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) has supplied garden equipment to 120 gardens in the country. The materials are 120 bench weighing scales, 120 portable electric sewing machines, 120 portable onion moisture meters, 120,000 onion leno mesh bags and 200 standard plastic pallets.

In August 2021, WACOMP-GM conducted a Rapid Market Analysis (RMA) on onion and allied crops in The Gambia. The report revealed international standards of quality and safety due to pre-mature harvesting, absence of post-harvest curing and drying, absence of sorting, grading, weighing, packaging, labelling and inadequacy of basic tools and materials.

The new materials supplied are geared towards addressing some of these challenges and contribute to the improvement of the quality of onions produced to meet the expectations of both local and international markets.

Speaking at the start of the country-wide tour to deliver the materials to the respective gardens, Mr. Malamin Drammeh, the National Horticulture Value Chain Expert of WACOMP-GM noted the support will increase performance along the value chains concerning food safety and quality compliance and market access of the onion and allied products.

He urged the beneficiary women running the vegetable gardens to make the appropriate and rational use of the equipment provided, using them for activities to strengthen the

horticulture and allied crops value chains compliance and quality improvement processes. He added that the gardens should ensure the maintenance and proper use of the equipment in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions and best practices.

Karafanding Badjie, President of the Berefet Women's Garden, expressed delight over the reception of the materials.

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"We have been working in this garden for a long time, but we have never received this kind of support. Tools are very important for gardening. The pallets we received and other materials like the weighing scales and onion bags will greatly help in our post-harvest efforts to improve our livelihood," she said.

She said the materials and the follow-up trainings which will be conducted are going to improve their knowledge, skills and boost their income. President Badjie thanked the UNIDO-WACOMP-GM and the European Union for the timely gesture.

Ousman Manneh, the President of the National Marketing Federation (Sosalaso), expressed gratitude and hailed the timeliness of the delivery of the new empty bags and portable electric sewing machine as the marketing federations have just started mobilizing members to gather at collection points for the marketing of their produce to wholesalers.

“

"Access to portable electric sewing machines and new empty bags was a major constraint in the regions. Now that is history," he said.

In February 2023, 19 participants comprising Ministry of Agriculture and private technicians and two from The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB) were trained on the assembling, operation, maintenance and

repairing of the Bench Weighing Scales. These trainees will now work with the beneficiary gardens to assemble the weighing scales and provide step-down training.

Similar training on the use of new measurements, portable onion moisture Meters

and portable electric sewing machines will be organized to strengthen the capacity of the beneficiaries for effective and efficient usage and maintenance of the materials.



Gambia Validates Food Safety and Quality Policy

The Government of The Gambia, through the Food Safety and Quality Authority (FSQA), has validated the National Food Safety Policy on Friday 13th January 2023 at Sunprime Tamala Beach Resort in Kotu.

The Policy developed by the United Nations industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) with funding from the European Union (EU), aims to ensure that food and feed sold or made available in The Gambia, locally produced or imported, or exported from The Gambia are safe and suitable for consumption. It will serve as a reference document in The Gambia that can provide the framework in relation to food safety and quality policy and guidelines development and implementation.



FSQA as an Act of Parliament, came into being in 2011 while operating since 2020, without a national policy document to guide and control its mandate of promoting and evaluating food quality and safety in the Gambia.

The absence of a national policy is viewed to have created a deficiency in their oversight, resulting in the drafting of a national policy document. A cross-section of stakeholders participated in the review and validation of the policy.



Group picture of participants at the validation

Mamudou Bah, Director General of FSQA, underscored the importance of having a policy document that will enhance the work of the Authority.

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“When I joined in 2020 as the director general at food safety and quality authority, part of my challenges were of the lack of guiding documentation. In my new role, , I needed to have a national policy document and I am glad the dream is coming true as we gather to validate this milestone achievement not only for FSQA but for the entire country,” Bah rejoiced.

The Director added that the policy will strengthen the efficiency of FSQA because the domain is diverse and requires harmonization from various institutions in enforcing food safety laws and regulations. The policy, he went on, will also help to maintain a robust monitoring system and empower FSQA to promote inter-institutional collaboration.

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“The next step is to initiate a national strategic plan that will operate parallel to the national food safety policy,” Bah noted.

Representing the European Union (EU), Ms. Lumana Kamashi said the EU is committed to supporting the country in having a more effective food control system.

“Ensuring food safety and quality assurance is a matter of must and not an option,” Ms. Kamashi said.

To attain this, Ms. Kamashi said it requires political, social, legal and national recognition, adding that FSQA Act of 2011 and its structure of operation is a manifestation of political commitment.

The National Communications Expert of United Nations Industrial Development (UNIDO) under the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP), Saikou Suwareh Jabai, hailed the success of the partnership between FSQA and UNIDO-WACCOP. He thanked the EU for their continued support in all the processes that were undertaken to finally develop a food safety and quality document.

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“The establishment of food safety and quality authority is pivotal in ensuring the safety of national food supplies as well as food products for regional and international trade,” he said, noting that the development and validation of the national food safety policy is an essential component of The Gambia’s efforts in attaining an effective food safety and quality system.

The validation of the national food safety policy is supported by UNIDO’s WACOMP project, through funding from the EU.





Group photo of participants

Agricultural Engineers Trained on Bench Weighing Scales

Under Output 1 of WACOMP-GM, the project procured 120 bench weighing scales to be provided to 120 gardens. A training of 19 participants comprising Ministry of Agriculture and private technicians and 2 from The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB) was held on the assembling, operation, maintenance and repairing of the Bench Weighing Scales.

The training, facilitated by Selasi Biantey, an expert engineer representing the equipment supplier, Qinwen, was held from the 31st January to the 2nd February 2023 at Soma, Lower River Region (LRR).

Speaking at the opening ceremony of the training, the WACOMP-GM National Horticulture Value Chain Expert, Malamin Drammeh, said the project is funded by the European Union (EU), and that since inception, the project has been increasing The Gambia's competitiveness through enhanced quality compliance along the onion value chain by improving the performance, growth and contribution to industry, regional trade and exports of onion and other horticulture value chains.

He added that the project is implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and United Purpose (UP) in partnership with the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment (MOTIE) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).

"We procured 120 bench weighing scales which will be distributed to 120 gardens across the country. As a sustainability measure, we deemed it necessary to develop the capacities of these engineers so that they could help the beneficiary gardens in assembling, calibrating and maintenance the scales," he said.

Mr. Drammeh spoke about the rationale of the event and its importance in achieving the overall objectives of the project.

The trainer, Mr. Selasi Biantey thanked WACOMP-GM for purchasing their materials and entrusting them to deliver the training. He noted the high quality of the scales, saying they are durable and user-friendly. He urged the final beneficiaries to use the scales according to the specifications and for their intended purpose.

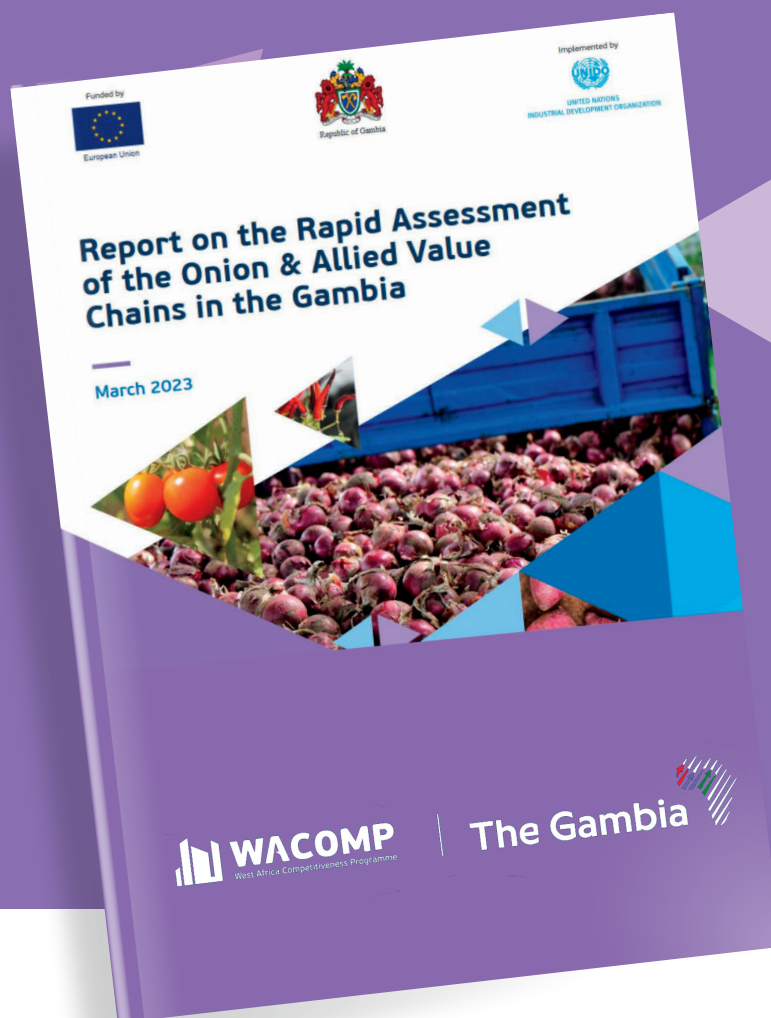
He added: "Weighing scales in gardens are used for a number of reasons - and depending on the application, can have a massive effect on efficiency and profitability. Accurate scales can be used for tracking yields, managing feed and trading produce."

Bakary Njie, a training participant, expressed delight over the provision of the weighing scales in vegetable gardens across the country. He said the knowledge gained will help them to better support the final beneficiaries in assembling, maintaining and repairing the machines.

"We will work with the women gardeners to provide a step-by-step training so that they will be able to operate the scales to measure their produce before sales," he added.

The trainer, Mr. Selasi Biantey, providing guidance on calibration to participants from TGSB





WACOMP-GM Publishes Rapid Market Analysis Report on Onion and Allied Crops

The report, published by West African Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP-GM) of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in June 2023, with funding from the European Union, has revealed The Gambia consumes an estimated seventeen thousand metric tons (17,000 MT) of onions per annum. The report noted that the country imports 12,500MT and produces 4,500MT – 2,000 by Kharaffi Farms and the remaining 2,500MT by farmer cooperatives/SMEs in the country.

The WACOMP-GM project, in its quest to better understand the dynamics of the onion value chain, embarked on a Market Analysis (RMA). The RMA was conducted in August 2021, focusing mainly on the onion value

chain. This was followed by another survey conducted in March 2022 which focused on allied vegetable crops such as tomatoes, chilli peppers and sweet potatoes.

The objectives of the RMA were (1) to conduct a value chain analysis of the onion and horticulture sub-sector in The Gambia to determine areas for quality improvements; and (2) to recommend potential intervention areas to address the quality-related gaps and constraints along the value chain. The findings of the RMA will be of particular interest to traders/middlemen; importers; exporters; and policy makers at the ministries responsible for Trade, Agriculture, Gender, The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB),



The Food Safety and Quality Authority (FSQA), and Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Gambia Women Chamber of Commerce, Producer Associations, Business Associations, MSMEs and other actors along the onion and horticulture VC.

The findings of the RMA have highlighted that onion production is remunerative and can create jobs, generate income, improve nutrition and reduce poverty for impoverished rural women who are members of the farmer cooperatives or SMEs. However, it also revealed that the level of investment in the sub-sector is low and there are many aspects of onion production that need investments.

It further revealed that the SME members have some knowledge on good agricultural practices as it concerns pre-harvest stages but with little knowledge on the post-harvest handling and management of onions.

Furthermore, the RMA revealed that the SMEs do not have access to basic tools, appropriate technologies and storage facilities to maintain high quality onions. The total onion production was estimated at 2,510.72 MT. The bulk of the onions comes from NBR followed by CRR-North. These two regions produce almost 40% of the onion at 1173.96 MT and 838.25 MT, respectively.



WACOMP-GM Project Manager, Bernard Bau, participated from office in UNIDO HQ

Ms. Lumana Kamashi, the Development Cooperation / International Aid Officer of the EU delivering her keynote address

WACOMP-GM Held 3rd Steering Committee Meeting

The West Africa Competitiveness Programme – The Gambia ((WACOMP) held its third (3rd) Project Steering Committee (PSC) meeting on Thursday 8th December 2022 at Sunprime Tamala Beach Resort in Kololi.

Funded by the European Union (EU), the WACOMP project is increasing The Gambia's competitiveness through enhanced quality compliance along the onion value chain by improving the performance, growth and contribution to industry, regional trade and exports of onion and other horticulture value chain.

WACOMP in The Gambia is implemented by the United National Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and United Purpose (UP) in partnership with the Ministry of Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment (MOTIE) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) provides the oversight of the project, and it reviews and approves the project work plan. The PSC also gathers lessons learned, identifies possible challenges and proposes mitigation actions for the project.

The PSC consists of the European Union Delegation in The Gambia, Ministry of Ministry of Trade, Industry, Employment (MOTIE) and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), National Authorizing Officer Support Unit (NAOSU), The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB), Food Safety Quality Authority (FSQA), Sosolaso (Umbrella body of Marketing Federations), Gambia Horticultural Enterprises Ltd and the two implementing agencies. The Committee, which convenes twice per year, is co-chaired by MOTIE and MoA.

“The meeting aims at discussing solutions and providing recommendations as we look forward to achieving the project’s ultimate goal, to induce change in production patterns and to mainstream a culture of quality by strengthening awareness, knowledge, and application of best practices end-to-end along the onion value chain,” said Ms. Lumana Kamashi, the Development Cooperation / International Aid Officer of the European Union Delegation in The Gambia.

She highlighted the achievements of the project, including the strengthening the technical competencies and capacities of quality infrastructure institutions and the development of national standards for onion and its related value chain.

Ms. Kamashi thanked the government counterparts and implementing agencies – UNIDO and UP – for their involvement in the success of the programme.

Mr. Lamin Dampha, the Permanent Secretary of MOTIE, who doubles as the Chairperson of the 3rd meeting, noted the importance of the PSC’s

oversight function, saying it takes stock of the project’s past achievements and challenges and review its upcoming activities for approval.

The Deputy Permanent Secretary of MOA, Mrs. Fatou Jammeh – Touray, said the Ministry of Agriculture is delighted to be associated with the WACOMP-GM project as it is significantly complementing the Government’s food self-sufficiency endeavor.

The implementing agencies of WACOMP in The Gambia, UNIDO and United Purpose, presented their respective annual and inception reports outlining planned activities which were reviewed and approved by the members of the Committee.

The meeting was also attended by WACOMP-GM project staff in The Gambia and the UNIDO Headquarters in Vienna, who participated virtually.



Group photo of participants

Garden Secretaries Trained on Bench Weighting Scales

Held across the 5 intervention regions of the project from the 14th June to the 18th June 2023, the training targeted 120 garden secretaries who were trained on the operation and maintenance of the bench weighting scales.

It could be recalled that WACOMP-GM procured 120 bench weighting scales, 120 portable stitching machines, 120 portable onion moisture meters, 120,000 onion leno mesh bags and 200 standard plastic pallets, and supplied it to 120 gardens in the regions. In January 2023, training of trainers on the bench weighting scales was organized for engineers from the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and metrologists of The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB).

This training of garden secretaries, facilitated by Mr. Abdoulie F. Njie of TGSB,

was meant to develop the capacities of the beneficiaries on the importance of weighing their produce and the know-how on how to operate and maintenance the donated scales for sustainability.

The WACOMP-GM National Horticulture Value Chain Expert, Mr. Malamin Drammeh, said the training is in response to the findings of the Rapid Market Assessment (RMA) on onions which the project conducted in August 2022.

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“The RMA revealed that the culture of weighing is lacking in the gardens. Without standard measurements farmers lose much of their hard-earned produce to middlemen in marketing,” he said.

Mr. Drammeh added that the objective of the training is to bring improvements in the onion value chain by promoting the culture of sorting, grading, weighting, labeling and storage to ensure that the food women produce are safe and compliant with standards.

The trainer, Mr. Abdoulie F. Njie, said the participants were taught in an interactive manner and given the chance to perform some key functions of the scale to better understand what was taught.

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“They learned by experience and have shown keen interest in the subject. I am hopeful that this training and the scales provided will greatly contribute to the WACOMP-GM’s continued strives in developing the horticulture value chain.

Participants Binta Busso and Mariama Fatty of Jokadou Mbana Garden expressed delight over their participation in the training. They thanked the WACOMP project and its donor, the European Union, for training them to be able to effectively use the donated bench weighing scales.



The trainer, Mr. Selasi Biantey, providing guidance on calibration to participants from TGSB

Launch of the Media Action on Quality Standards

Media practitioners in The Gambia have set-up and launched the 'Media Action on Quality and Standards (MAQS)' on the 14th June 2023 at Tamala Beach Resort.

MAQS is network of journalists and social media influencers which is geared towards the promotion of quality news reporting on issues of quality and standards.

The organization was initiated by UNIDO WACOMP-GM as part of the project's efforts in improving the country's quality infrastructure. WACOMP-GM, through this initiative, seeks to promote interest and strengthen the capacities of journalists to effectively report on the sector.

The Communications Expert of UNIDO WACOMP-GM, Mr. Saikou Suwareh Jabai, said issues of quality and standards are hugely underreported in the media.



"And sadly, the few reports on the sector are mainly event-based coverage reports and press release," he said, adding that this is largely due to the media's inadequate capacity on quality and standards, their significance in national development, mandates of conformity assessment institutions, etc.

Mr. Jabai said this weakness has consequently resulted to lack of interest or inability to understand, identify and pursue newsworthy stories on quality and standards.



As part of the official launch of the organization, a 2-day awareness raising was organized for 20 members of MAQS who were sensitized on the importance of quality infrastructure and mandates and activities of the conformity assessment institutions such as Food Safety and Quality Authority (FSQA), The Gambia Standards Bureau (TGSB), Plant Protection Services (PPS) and Weight and Measures Department.

Election of an 8-person executive was conducted where Mr. Kebba A. F. Touray emerged as the President. In his speech after election, he commended UNIDO WACOMP-GM for the initiative and for providing the necessary funding and logistical support to the newly formed organization.



"The awareness raising training we had has enlighten us not only on the standards and quality sector and its players but more importantly, it has showed us that there is a huge gap in news reporting on the sector," President Touray said.

While calling the members of MASQ to remain commitment to the ideals of the organization, he assured of his unflinching leadership in working towards their vision.

PICTORIAL

UNIDO WACOMP-GM Project Manager's visit to the Berefet Garden where the project is constructing an onion curing and storage facility, thanks to the European Union. Similar works ongoing at Nanaba in CRR-South and Jahuar Mandinka in CRR-North.



Meet the UNIDO WACOMP-GM Team

Joseph Ndenn

*National Technical
Coordinator*



Famara Demba

*National Project
Assistant*



Malamin Drammeh

*National Horticulture
Value Chain Expert*

Saikou Suwareh Jabai

*National
Communications &
Visibility Expert*



Modou Lamin Bojang

Senior Driver

Musa Mbenga

*International
Horticulture Value Chain
Expert*



Lalia Jawara

*National Expert for
Testing Laboratories*

Bernard Bau

Project Manager



Christian Lasser

Project Associate

Mathias Schaetz

Senior project assistant



Aline Nassar

*Communications and
Visibility Assistant*

**Adalberto Carvalho
Santos Vieira**

*International Expert in
Quality Infrastructure*



Rajbir Sangwan

*Senior International
Expert in Quality
Infrastructure*



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