

Business Feedback Survey Report_ MSMEs Cohort 1

Livelihood & Employment Creation Programme

Liberia MSMEs Growth Accelerator Programme

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Background and Introduction



iCampus Liberia /Accountability Lab Liberia, and partners; Growth Africa and the Business Start-up Center (international and national Business Development Service providers respectively), along with the national strategic partner, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOC), with financial support from the UNDP's through its Livelihood and Employment Creation Programme supported five successful MSMEs business finalists who were winners of the Liberia MSMEs Growth Accelerator Programme (Growth Accelerator Liberia) Cohort 1 business grant competition. The five winners competed out of a total of 167 applicants from across nine political subdivisions (counties) in Liberia. The Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme (GALP) was created to support existing MSMEs with business training, coaching/mentoring, and finance as a way of catalyzing growth and development for Liberian businesses- strengthening their business operations, providing access to finance to improve marketing, procure major equipment, improve/expand production and processing activities, employ needed skills/talents, improve business services, and increase revenue and profits.

The five successful winners of the GAL Cohort 1, were collectively awarded prize money of up to about \$200,000 United States Dollars, and have since been provided about 75% of the grant funds (that is, the first two out of three installment payments), in support of their proposed and approved business 'growth plans. Each of the businesses had structured their growth plans comprising three milestones with budget support aligned in a 2:1:1 ratio. The businesses have received the first two installment payments mentioned, and have started the implementation of their plans. The Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Team (MEL Team) of iCampus/Accountability Lab Liberia in concert with Rob Group of Strategies (a MEL Consulting Firm on the project) developed and conducted a business implementation feedback survey to measure the extent to which the growth plans of MSMEs Cohort 1 businesses have been implemented, the achievements made, the setbacks and challenges encountered, if any, and the lessons learned as the businesses strive to achieve their short term goals.

Methodology

i. Study Design

A combination of quantitative and qualitative or mixed methods was used in the design of the survey. These methods enabled the collection of quantitative financial information from the businesses, as well as qualitative data that was needed to fully explain the businesses' experience of implementing the grant activities as designed and approved to date. This is intended to help the Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus Liberia fully understand the business implementation processes, achievements, and constraints/challenges which is needed for analysis to determine whether funding is disbursed and being used as planned, and tells the story of the businesses' financial viability and sustainability.

ii. Sampling Techniques

The participants selected to participate in this survey were stratified as a sample from the total 167 businesses that apply to participate in the growth accelerator's program. Therefore, Purposive Sampling was deemed an appropriate technique for this exercise,

because it is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their judgment when choosing members to participate in the survey. The selected businesses were all the finalist businesses that participated in the growth accelerator Cohort 1 and were awarded the prize money. Cohort 1 had a total of 167 businesses that initially applied, and after a rigorous vetting process, 10 semifinalists were selected by an independent panel of judges. These semi-finalists participated in all three of the capacity-building exercises over six months, and the last five finalists were selected after they pitched their growth plans/ideas to another panel of judges who selected them as winners.

iii. Data Collection Tool and Methods

An online survey platform using Google form was identified by Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus' MEL team as the best and most cost-effective data collection tool for the GAL business assessment survey, to collect qualitative and quantitative data that were identified through the sampling method/technique, mentioned above. The Google form created was shared with each of the businesses and linked to the data collection platform, the Google Survey. Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus MEL team used a semi-structured survey questionnaire to collect primary data from the businesses that are recipients of funding support from UNDP and partners. Please refer to Appendix 1 below for the draft survey questionnaires.

iv. Data Management

As already mentioned and agreed by the Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus MEL team, the data storage mechanism was the Google Survey platform that was used. The Google form responses are stored in a worksheet that can only be accessed through a Google account login with a password. The transmission of data uses SSL to encrypt the data during transport. The data is as secure as most other systems which take survey data and store it. After the survey was completed, however, and the reports finalized, the data will be downloaded on an XLS data sheet and stored on the organization's shared Google drive. The datasets are exclusively owned by Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus and the UNDP.

Since the data was collected using the Google survey form, it was directly exported to Microsoft Excel with all the labels defined. The cleaned data were then categorized for analysis using the Google Survey Excel Data Analyzer.

Descriptive Analysis of data that helps describe, show, or summarize data points in a constructive way such that patterns might emerge that fulfill every condition of the data was done. It is one of the most important steps for conducting statistical data analysis. This was the type of analysis that the Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus MEL team used to interpret and describe the results generated from the analysis of the dataset.

Findings (description of results)

The tables and graphs below categorized the data and responses of the businesses per the questions asked, numbered; 1-12

1. Name of the Business Venture, and the date and time of the responses:

No	Name of Business	Date	Time
1	Nimba Ventures	2022/09/15	1:13:38 PM GMT
2	The Lunch Box	2022/09/15	2:15:08 PM GMT
3	Redimeire Chocolate Inc.	2022/09/18	10:53:47 AM GMT
4	Libra Sanitation Inc.	2022/09/19	10:13:28 AM GMT
5	Wungko's Farm	2022/09/20	9:15:18 AM GMT

2. Could you share with us the most significant knowledge gained from the GAL Programme thus far (from Bootcamp to Workshops one-three)?

No	Name of Business	Response
1	Nimba Ventures	The program in itself was very unique and very key to the growth of our business, however, there was more knowledge gained from the process, specifically; monitoring of cash flow in your business and the customer segmentation and product innovation.
2	The Lunch Box	It's been too long can't remember much but I did create a growth plan during the workshops last year
3	Redimeire Chocolate Inc.	Market segmentation and value chain development are the two major things I learned during the program.
4	Libra Sanitation Inc.	My most significant knowledge gained from the program was from Financial Architecture. I learned how to deliver value to customers cost-effectively and profitably.
5	Wungko's Farm	Planning my business growth and improving my marketing plan.

3. Has your venture or business experienced growth since participating in the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme? a. YES b. NO. If your answer is yes, how has your business/venture grown?

No	Name of Business	Response
1	Nimba Ventures	Since the end of the business participation, there has been growth ranging from the expansion of our production center as well as new clients coming for Nimba ventures to do their farm set-up
2	The Lunch Box	We are still in the investment stage, nothing significant has happened yet at this moment. We will realize some growth at the end of this year.
3	Redimeire Chocolate Inc.	Yes, from the program my business has acquired equipment, leading to an increase in production and increase in the purchase of raw products from local farmers. Also, there is an improvement in financial record-keeping since the growth accelerator program.
4	Libra Sanitation Inc.	Yes, we have experienced growth. We now have a Compost Station to start recycling organic waste to produce organic fertilizer.
5	Wungko Farm	Yes we have experience growth in sales.

4. Can you state what your gross sales/revenue has been per month, over the past 3 months (June, July, and August)?

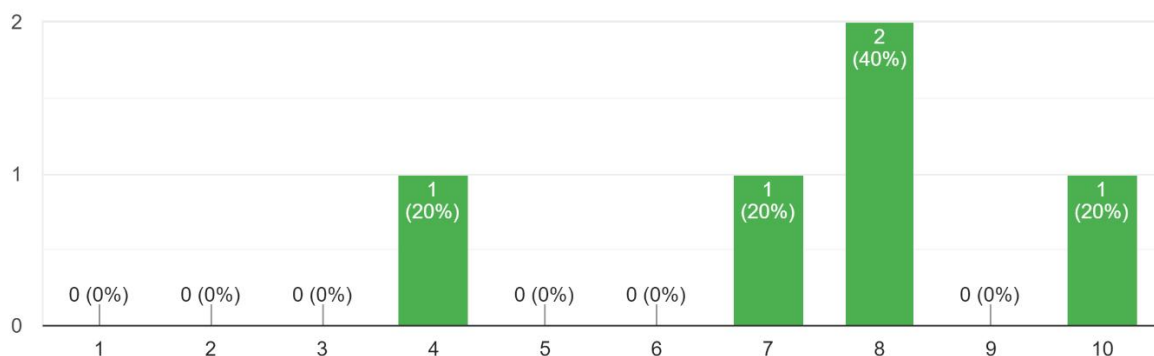
No	Name of Business	Response
1	Nimba Ventures	For the past months, we have been into providing services; setting up farms for our clients, and not selling from our farm because our snails are being transferred to our new facility with huge capacity. However, we intend to make sales in the coming days but for the services, we have been able to raise to 100,000 LD (U\$666.67) over the period.
2	The Lunch Box	Gross sales per month are around 4,000usd
3	Redimeire Chocolate Inc.	Over the past three months, I have realized a total of 1,800 USD in sales. Normally these months are great months for my business. It was still not a great month for sales.
4	Libra Sanitation Inc.	We have not started production yet.
5	Wungko Farm	U\$10,000.00

5. Has the venture/business employed any new personnel (employees) under the growth accelerator grant-funded arrangements? If so, how many, (disaggregated by sex and age, and disability if applicable)?

No	Name of Business	Response
1	Nimba Ventures	We currently have two new employees (both male) as a result of the grant, and once the product transfer to our new facility is completed, we will more people including female and persons with disabilities.
2	The Lunch Box	No
3	Redimeire Chocolate Inc.	Not yet, but in the coming months, we are going to hire a marketing agent, female potentially.
4	Libra Sanitation Inc.	The employment process is ongoing. We need to employ people to work at the Compost Station.
5	Wungko's Farm	Yes, we have employed 13 persons (4 men, 7 women) and contracted 20 other people (11 men, 9 women)(1 disabled)

6. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate you experience in accessing the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme grant funding?

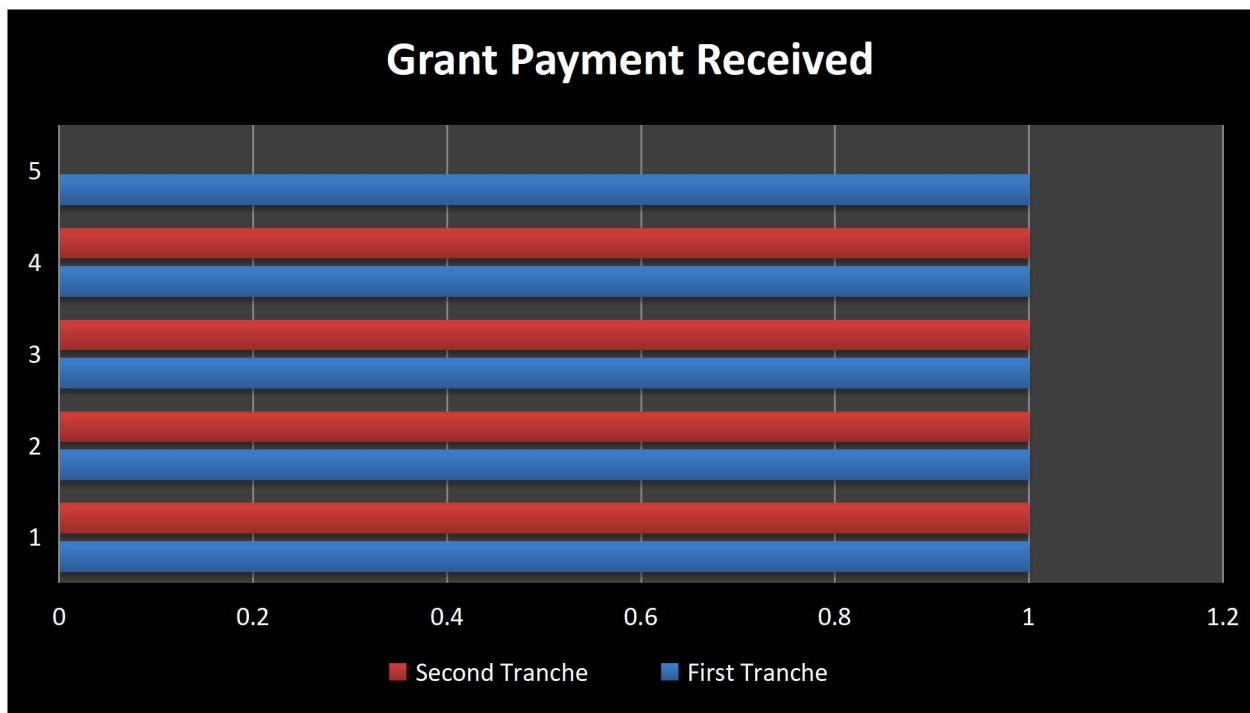
5 responses



7. Prior to the growth accelerator grant until now, Please tell us your experience in accessing grant funding.

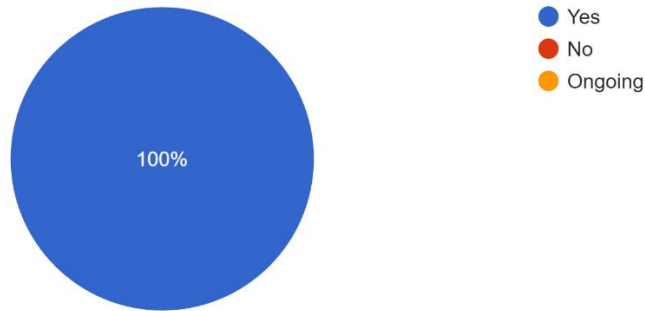
No	Name of Business	Response
1	Nimba Ventures	No, accessing grants has been difficult
2	The Lunch Box	No, this is the first grant I have applied for a grant
3	Redimeire Chocolate Inc.	Before the growth accelerator grant program, I have little idea about dealing with grants. But now I have a bit of basic knowledge of working with grants. Accessing a grant requires a person to have a clear knowledge of their area of operation. The CEO or any top officer should be able to answer questions like, why you chose the area of operation. What are the financial and social impacts, and many more?
4	Libra Sanitation Inc.	It has been difficult because grant funding information has not been well advertised to the public, unlike the Growth Accelerator grant.
5	Wungko's Farm	Never applied for a grant before this.

8. To date, how much grant funding have you received from the Programme? Select all that apply:



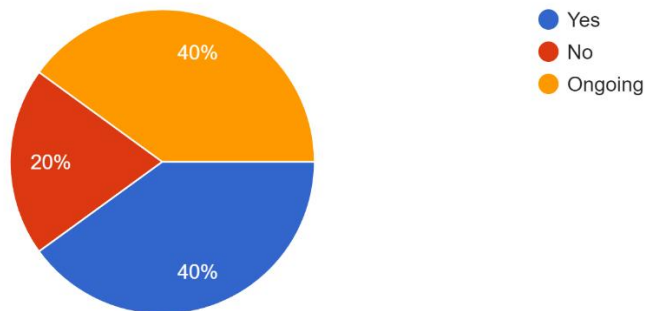
9. Has milestone one been completed?

5 responses



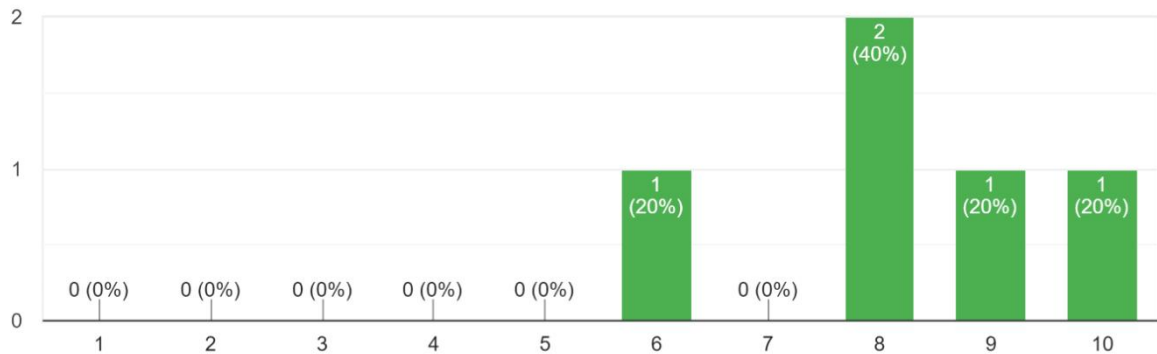
10. Has milestone two been completed?

5 responses



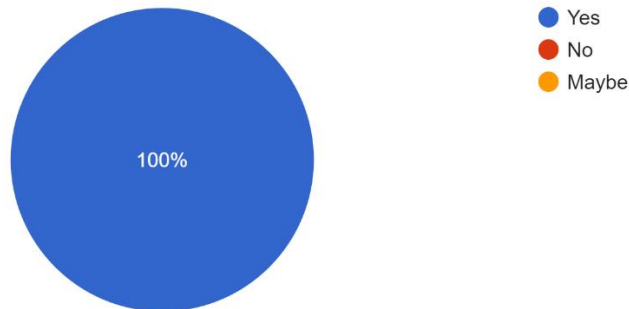
11. To date, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme in terms of achieving its key goal, which is to support...ssistance, mentorship, training, and co-financing?

5 responses



12. Would you recommend the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme to a friend, colleague, or family member?

5 responses



Discussion of Results

All five of the businesses fully participated in the survey, and the responses came in over four working days covering; the 15th-20th of September 2022. Each of the businesses responded to all of the questions asked.

Each of the businesses mentioned that they learned a lot through the project implementation activities, especially during the capacity-building learning events and exchanges over the lifetime of the project. They mentioned the following as the most significant and relevant things they learned for their personal and business growth and development:

- Measuring the business Cash Flow
- Customers Segmentation and Product Innovation
- Development of Business Growth Plans
- Working along the Value Chain, and;
- How to produce quality products in a cost-effective manner

Each of the businesses mentioned that they are experiencing growth, in a good number of ways; acquiring new and needed equipment, increase in production, infrastructure development, needed talent hire, and an increase in sales/revenue and clients. The following points further explain the details:

- To date, two of the five businesses have already hired a total of 15 new employees and 20 contractors, making it a total of 35 (18 males, 17 females) new talent hired. The remaining three businesses commented that their employment processes are ongoing, and will shortly be hiring some new talents to bolster their products and services delivery.
- Four out of the five businesses have raised a total of U\$24,500.00, in revenue/sales, exclusively as a result of the grant funding provided over the period, of June-August, 2022.

- Only one of the businesses (Libra Sanitation) is still in the process of completing the construction of the production site for the composite fertilizers

The businesses have made great progress in terms of the implementation of their growth plans over the past three months since receiving the first two portions of the grant money promised. Generally, about (65%) of the collective growth plan implementation activities of the businesses have been completed. All five of the businesses have successfully received their full first milestone payment which constitutes about half of the grant money and corresponding activities, and have since completed those activities. The businesses have received a total of about 80% of the funds for milestone two activities (which is 25% of the entire growth plan activities). Forty percent (40%) of milestone two activities have already been completed, whilst another 40% of the work is currently ongoing, and only 20% have not started as of the collection of this data. None of the businesses have received milestone 3 funds (which is, the final 25% of the growth plan activities), and therefore have not started milestone three.

In terms of access to the GAL project information, organization, and capacity-building support, the businesses are appreciative and pleased with iCampus/Accountability Lab Liberia's work with them and each of them admitted to recommending them to others for business development support. On average, 74% remarked that the process was easy and accessible with 80% admitting that it was their first time participating in a grant funding opportunity and 82% expressing that they are convinced that the project was able to achieve its goals and objectives.

Detailed Actionable Recommendations

1. Accountability Lab Liberia/iCampus' program team should find the resources to make in-person visits/follow-ups to the businesses to verify or corroborate the **findings** and **discussion of the results** above in the following ways:
 - ❖ To firstly review the business growth plans' implementation timelines to ascertain if they remain realistic and achievable
 - ❖ Using the growth plan milestones tables, physically check and match the achievements in the survey report with the milestones' plans to see if the progress achieved is consistent with the results/findings of this report, including infrastructure developed, equipment purchases, and specific skills that should have been hired in support of the business growth plans' and sustainability
 - ❖ To specifically have the businesses explain the difficulties that they experienced during the application processes for future improvements

6. Appendices

Appendix 6.1: Data Collection Tool

Liberia MSMEs Growth Accelerator Programme Cohort I MEL Follow-up Survey

Cohort I Finalist, thanks for taking up the time to take this Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Follow-up Survey.

1. Please state the name of your venture or business _____
2. Could you share with us the most significant knowledge gained from the Programme thus far (from Bootcamp Workshops one-three)?
 - a. Business Plan Development
 - b. Financial Management
 - c. Leadership
 - d. Sales, Marketing, and Production
 - e. Others: _____
3. Has your venture or business experienced growth since participating in the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme? a. YES b. NO. If your answer is yes, how has your business/venture grown?
4. Can you state what your gross sales/revenue has been per month, over the past 3 months (June, July, and August)?
5. Has the venture/business employed any new personnel (employees) under the growth accelerator grant-funded arrangements? If so, how many, (disaggregated by sex and age, and disability if applicable)?
6. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your experience in accessing the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme grant funding?
7. Prior to the growth accelerator grant until now, Please tell us your experience in accessing grant funding.
8. To date, how much grant funding have you received from the Programme? Select all that apply: a. 1st Tranche b. Second Tranche c. 3rd Tranche
9. Has milestone One been completed? a. YES b. NO c. Ongoing. If yes, please state what has been achieved. If your answer is b or c, please explain why?
10. Has milestone two been completed? a. YES b. NO c. Ongoing
If your answer is b or c, please explain why?
11. To date, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme in terms of achieving its key goal, *which is to support impactful entrepreneurs to scale up their enterprises through access to technical assistance, mentorship, training, and co-financing?*
12. Would you recommend the Growth Accelerator Liberia Programme to a friend, colleague, or family member? a. YES b. NO C. Maybe.



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