

Cooperation Opportunities Between China and Liberia: A Practice-Based Country Study on Education, Scientific Exchange, Agriculture, Digital Capacity and Trade Readiness

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Abstract

This practice-based country study examines how cooperation between China and Liberia can be designed to support Liberian-led, locally validated, low-risk and assessable pilot mechanisms in education and training, scientific exchange, agricultural value chains, trade and export readiness, digital capacity and cultural exchange. It situates the project within the post-2003 development of China-Liberia relations, Liberia's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development 2025-2029, and relevant national sector institutions. The study re-analyses the completion outputs of Country Study Project LAS-2025-001 through a multi-source qualitative and practice-based approach comprising public policy and scholarly literature, Liberia-side contextual inputs, documented China-side industrial visits, non-identifiable project consultations, a completed cultural and arts education dialogue held on 27 May 2026, and institutional working records. The article distinguishes completed activities, ongoing development and proposed pilots and applies two related screens: six design criteria and a separate assessment of strategic relevance to Liberia and implementation readiness. It identifies short non-degree training, a jointly convened China-Liberia Young Scientists Academic Exchange Conference, export-readiness support and low-bandwidth digital learning as relatively feasible early actions. It identifies rice post-harvest management and cassava processing as policy-aligned candidates for further Liberia-side validation rather than pre-approved equipment projects. Liberia already benefited from China's zero-tariff treatment for least developed countries from 1 December 2024, but tariff preferences do not remove product access, quality, traceability, logistics, supply and buyer requirements. The study contributes an operational ownership protocol, an institutional stakeholder map and a phased pilot-governance framework for capacity-constrained bilateral cooperation. Its conclusions remain exploratory and require broader Liberia-side institutional validation and implementation evidence before scale-up.

Keywords

China-Liberia cooperation; country study; South-South cooperation; Liberian ownership; capacity development; agricultural value chains; export readiness; digital education

1. Introduction

China and Liberia share practical cooperation interests in education, agriculture, youth development, trade, public-sector capacity, digital learning, scientific research and cultural exchange. Liberia has a young population and substantial agricultural and human potential, while national policy documents identify continuing constraints in infrastructure, jobs, food security, institutional capacity, value addition and

access to services. China offers experience and resources in vocational education, technology application, local industrial development, digital platforms and international talent exchange. Such experience is useful only when Liberian actors define the problem, the institutional route is lawful and appropriate, and proposed solutions are adapted to local production, market, fiscal and social conditions rather than copied mechanically.

This article converts the outputs of the China-

Liberia Country Study Project into a journal-oriented practice-based country study. It does not present a nationally representative survey, a national investment-feasibility assessment or an intergovernmental agreement. Its central research question is: how can China-Liberia cooperation be structured as a low-risk, mutually beneficial and Liberian-led portfolio of pilot mechanisms in education, science, agriculture, trade, digital capacity and culture? Two subsidiary questions follow: how should proposed pilots be aligned with Liberia's current development and institutional architecture, and how should academic, educational, public-service and commercial responsibilities be separated?

The article makes four contributions. First, it connects opportunity mapping to the historical and current policy context of China-Liberia relations. Second, it treats Liberian ownership as a set of decision rights and validation steps rather than a general principle. Third, it separates strategic relevance to Liberia from implementation readiness, reducing the risk that inexpensive or visible activities are automatically ranked above harder but nationally important interventions. Fourth, it establishes evidence-status, responsibility and conflict-of-interest boundaries for cooperation involving a scientific academy, an open-learning platform, an academic network and a private implementation entity.

The approach remains proportionate to the source materials. Where the project record does not supply complete dates, standardised participant counts, county-level evidence or independent outcome data, the manuscript states the limitation rather than filling the gap. The purpose is to develop a better-governed pathway to pilot testing, not to claim that the proposed activities have already been nationally endorsed or proven effective.

2. Historical and Contemporary Context of China-Liberia Relations

2.1 Diplomatic relations and post-conflict cooperation

China and Liberia established diplomatic relations on 17 February 1977. After interruptions, the two countries resumed diplomatic relations in 2003. Since that resumption, official records describe cooperation across infrastructure, health, education, agriculture, technical assistance, scholarships, short-term training and people-to-people exchange. Chinese official sources, for example, record public buildings, transport and health-related projects, scholarships and training, vocational assistance and agricultural demonstrations. These records establish the breadth of bilateral engagement, but the present article does not independently evaluate the effectiveness or

distributional impact of every earlier project (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Liberia, 2022).

In 2019, Liberia signed a memorandum of understanding on Belt and Road cooperation. The relationship was subsequently elevated to a strategic partnership in 2024, as acknowledged by the Government of Liberia, and the two governments signed a technical bilateral cooperation agreement in March 2025. The latter provides for projects agreed through consultation and was explicitly linked to the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and Liberia's ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Liberia, 2020; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Liberia, 2024, 2025).

2.2 From established cooperation to locally validated pilot mechanisms

The established relationship creates institutional and political space for cooperation, but it does not determine which small projects are locally appropriate. Much of the publicly visible history has centred on infrastructure, assistance, scholarships, training and technical demonstration. The present study proposes a complementary layer: jointly defined knowledge exchange, institutional capacity, value-chain problem solving, export readiness and technology testing. This is not presented as an official change in bilateral policy. It is an analytical proposal for converting broad diplomatic goodwill into bounded projects with clear users, responsible institutions, review points and stop criteria.

The distinction matters because a successful diplomatic relationship can still contain weakly adapted projects. The Kpatawee rice experience in Liberia illustrates that technology transfer can reproduce the institutional and economic weaknesses of the sending model when local production systems, incentives and viability are insufficiently considered (Brautigam, 1993). The article therefore treats historical cooperation as a platform for learning, not as proof that any current equipment, course or trade idea is automatically suitable.

2.3 Liberia's ARREST Agenda and the scope of this study

The ARREST Agenda for Inclusive Development (AAID) 2025-2029 is Liberia's fourth post-conflict national development plan. Official summaries emphasise infrastructure, governance, economic revitalisation, education and health, opportunities for women and youth, local ownership, job creation, export growth, import substitution and food and nutrition security (Executive Mansion, 2025; United Nations in Liberia, 2025). The cooperation areas retained in this article are selected because they intersect with economic transformation, human capital, governance capacity, digital access, food systems and international exchange

Liberian priority area	Study-linked cooperation	Prospective Liberian institutions to consult	Current evidence status	First defensible deliverable
Economic transformation, jobs and value addition	Export readiness; product screening; local processing; small enterprise and youth capacity.	Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MoCI); Liberia Revenue Authority (LRA)/Customs; National Port Authority (NPA); National Investment Commission (NIC); relevant producer and business organisations.	Policy and trade-data basis plus project inputs; no product is approved or commercially committed.	One product-screening dossier and no more than one or two sample-based feasibility tests.
Agriculture and food security	Rice post-harvest management; cassava processing; cooperative and technical capacity; equipment only after value-chain validation.	Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI); Liberia Agriculture Commodity Regulatory Authority (LACRA); county agriculture actors; farmer organisations and cooperatives.	NADP alignment and exploratory project observations; no county or equipment has been selected.	A Liberia-led baseline and one bounded value-chain pilot design with a go/no-go decision.
Human capital and education	GTC short training; digital and language learning; teacher and youth exchange; scientific exchange.	Ministry of Education; National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) where applicable; accredited universities and TVET providers; LAS; AOU and other non-degree providers within lawful scope.	Programme design and one completed cultural dialogue; no national training-needs assessment.	One institution-confirmed needs assessment and a small non-degree pilot with applied assignments.
Governance and public-sector capacity	Targeted project management, digital and communication modules for invited public institutions.	Civil Service Agency (CSA); Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA); Governance Commission (GC); participating ministries and agencies.	Project inputs only; no government-wide training mandate.	A written request or confirmation, a short training-needs assessment and one complementary pilot if approved.
Infrastructure and digital access	Low-bandwidth courses; downloadable resources; digital product information; hybrid scientific exchange.	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications; Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA); service providers; local training institutions and community access partners.	Official coverage and affordability data plus project design; learner-level access not yet measured.	One mobile-first course with a data-access plan and completion/application evidence.
Culture, youth and international exchange	Culture and arts education dialogue; language and intercultural exchange; youth participation.	Liberian National Commission for UNESCO; relevant education and cultural institutions; youth organisations; LAS and AOU.	One completed event on 27 May 2026; follow-up remains proposed.	One follow-up activity with accurate partner wording and a documented output beyond attendance.

Table 1. Alignment of the study with selected Liberian development priorities

and because the project record contains some evidence relevant to them.

The study does not attempt to cover the full AAID. Roads, major energy infrastructure, clinical health services, tourism, mining, large public procurement and national regulatory reform are outside its direct scope. They may be important to Liberia, but the project did not generate adequate evidence or implementation authority to analyse them as pilots. Table 1 therefore records policy alignment without implying government adoption or formal institutional partnership.

3. Conceptual and Scholarly Context

3.1 South-South cooperation, African agency and local ownership

South-South cooperation is often associated with mutual benefit, solidarity and shared development experience, but the literature cautions against assuming that it is automatically horizontal or free of power asymmetries. Its institutional content depends on who defines priorities, controls resources and learns from implementation (Gray & Gills, 2016; Mawdsley,

2019). Research on China-Africa relations likewise shows that African actors can negotiate, broker and redirect cooperation, although their ability to do so varies across institutions and sectors (Mohan & Lampert, 2013). This study therefore defines Liberian ownership through decision rights, not symbolic participation.

3.2 Capacity development and problem-driven implementation

Capacity development is not equivalent to transferring a course or a technical package. It involves individual, organisational and institutional capabilities, incentives, relationships and resources (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010). Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation offers a related logic: begin with locally nominated problems, test context-specific responses, use rapid feedback and revise rather than importing a complete external blueprint (Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2013). These principles support pilots that are inexpensive enough to change, concrete enough to evaluate and bounded enough to avoid premature institutional or commercial commitments.

3.3 Agriculture, trade and digital openness

Research on South-South agricultural cooperation in Africa shows that technical projects are embedded in land systems, markets, local institutions and value chains; developmental value cannot be inferred from the availability of equipment alone (Amanor & Chichava, 2016). Trade research similarly indicates that market preference must be supported by border efficiency, regulation, information, quality and logistics (Hoekman & Shepherd, 2015; Portugal-Perez & Wilson, 2012). In digital education, African OER research identifies infrastructure, affordability, awareness, staff capability, local content and sustainability as recurring constraints, while UNESCO's Recommendation on Open Educational Resources provides an international policy framework for equitable access, capacity building, supportive policy and sustainable OER development (Muganda, Samzug, & Mallinson, 2016; Tlili et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2019). The present framework therefore treats technology, trade and digital learning as institution-building processes rather than stand-alone transactions.

4. Project Context, Budget and Output Status

4.1 Project scope and budget

The underlying project, Country Study Project - Research on Cooperation Opportunities Between China and Liberia (Project No. LAS-2025-001), ran from 6 June 2025 to 30 June 2026. It examined educational exchange, scientific and technological cooperation,

cultural mutual learning, trade, agricultural technology and feasible follow-up actions. The project budget was USD 10,000, self-raised by the joint project leaders. The amount is a project planning budget, not a government grant, procurement approval or audited statement that the full amount was expended. It creates no financial commitment for any follow-up pilot.

4.2 Status terminology

The journal article is derived from, but is not identical to, the project completion report (Zheng & Kolleh, 2026). It reclassifies the material by evidence status, adds country and bilateral context, introduces an analytical framework and separates completed work from future implementation. "Completed" refers only to the named activity or analytical output. "Ongoing institutional development" refers to platform or programme preparation. "Proposed pilot" refers to an action that requires further validation, approval, resourcing and evaluation.

5. Methods, Evidence Base and Liberia-Side Validation

5.1 Multi-source qualitative and practice-based approach

The study used a multi-source qualitative and practice-based approach. First, the authors reviewed official materials on China-Liberia relations, Liberia's national development and agricultural plans, trade, digital

Original task	Documented output under the study	Status	Implementation boundary
Educational exchange, student exchange and joint education	Opportunity analysis covering short visits, online classrooms, language learning, teacher training, GTC and compliant exploration of joint education.	Analytical output completed; delivery proposed or under design.	No degree or joint-school programme is reported as implemented. Any regulated programme requires separate authorisation.
Scientific and technological innovation	Needs mapping, proposed Young Scientists Conference, possible research briefs and scholar matching.	Analytical output completed; mechanisms proposed.	No conference is presented as already held or as an intergovernmental commitment.
Cultural mutual learning	Completed 27 May 2026 international culture and arts education dialogue; follow-up language and intercultural activities proposed.	One documented activity completed; follow-up proposed.	UNESCO listing is described precisely; no UNESCO funding, contract or authorisation is claimed.
Economic and trade cooperation	Zero-tariff and market-access analysis; trade-structure baseline; preliminary product and export-readiness pathways.	Analysis completed; product and market tests proposed.	No product is described as approved for China, commercially viable or subject to a purchase commitment.
Agricultural technology and processing	Opportunity mapping plus policy-aligned rice and cassava value-chain pilot concepts.	Analysis completed; site and intervention selection proposed.	No county, cooperative, machine or supplier is pre-approved by this article.
Feasible recommendations and action plan	Ownership protocol, stakeholder map, dual-axis sequencing, responsibility boundaries, indicators and phased plan.	Completed analytical output.	Indicators are prospective targets, not achieved outcomes.

Table 2. Original tasks, documented outputs and status at revision

access, public-sector training, China's zero-tariff treatment, UNESCO-related activities and relevant institutional mandates, together with peer-reviewed scholarship. Second, David B. Kolleh contributed Liberia-side contextual inputs recorded in project materials. Third, the China-side team organised exploratory industrial visits involving Liberian students and youth representatives in Shijiazhuang and Hengshui in Hebei Province and Dezhou in Shandong Province. Fourth, the team held ordinary project consultations with students, youth representatives, institutions, enterprises, researchers and cooperation partners. Fifth, event records and internal working documents were used to distinguish actual activities from proposed follow-up (Project Team, 2026).

5.2 Analytical procedure

The authors re-analysed the materials in five steps. They mapped evidence to the original project tasks; separated completed activities, ongoing development and proposed pilots; compared project proposals with Liberia's national policies and institutional architecture; screened proposed pilots against six design criteria; and then assessed strategic relevance and implementation readiness separately. The interpretation was discussed by both authors, including the Liberia-side relevance and the limits of each institutional role. This process improves transparency but does not convert the evidence into a representative national dataset.

5.3 Operational protocol for Liberian ownership

For any follow-up pilot, "Liberian-led and locally validated" should mean at least the following: the problem is nominated or formally confirmed by a relevant Liberian institution; target users are jointly identified; a Liberian lead or co-lead is named; the intervention and indicators are co-designed; local partners can access data and feedback; the Liberian lead can pause, reject or redesign an unsuitable activity; and scale-up occurs only after local review of evidence, cost and risk. Where a regulated or public-sector function is involved, the competent authority must be consulted before recruitment or public communication.

These conditions have not yet been completed for every pilot in this article. The priorities therefore represent the joint interpretation of the authors and the existing project evidence. They require broader Liberia-side institutional validation before implementation. A practical next step is a small validation round involving different institution types, including at least relevant public bodies, research or education institutions and intended user or producer representatives. Such validation should be documented without implying national endorsement.

5.4 Scope and geographic limitations

This study has several geographic and evidentiary limitations. The Liberia-side inputs were primarily

Evidence source	Material used	Analytical use	Main limitation
Official policy and institutional sources	Liberian and Chinese diplomatic records; AAID; NADP; trade and digital data; tariff-policy releases; UNESCO and institutional materials.	Establishes policy, bilateral and institutional context.	Official intent or policy availability does not prove local project feasibility or outcome.
Peer-reviewed scholarship	South-South cooperation, African agency, capacity development, China-Africa agriculture and education, trade facilitation and OER research.	Provides conceptual framing and historical cautions.	Most studies concern other cases or earlier periods and are not direct evidence of current Liberian demand.
Liberia-side project inputs	Contextual research and working inputs led by David B. Kolleh on education, youth, institutions, agriculture, digital capacity, science, trade and implementation conditions.	Identifies Liberia-side issues and questions for screening.	Project-specific and institution-oriented; not a national or county-representative consultation.
China-side industrial visits	Exploratory visits involving Liberian students and youth representatives to selected manufacturers and product resources in three Chinese cities.	Generates hypotheses for possible equipment or small-enterprise cooperation.	Archived records lack uniform dates and participant counts; no engineering, lifecycle-cost or market test.
Project consultations	Non-identifiable exchanges with students, youth, educators, enterprises, researchers and partners.	Clarifies interests, constraints and implementation concerns.	Not formal research interviews; no attributable quotations or prevalence claims.
27 May 2026 event records	Invitation, event webpage, programme, live-session materials and post-event report.	Documents one completed cultural and educational exchange activity.	Institutionally prepared record; not evidence of UNESCO funding or of wider programme effectiveness.
Project and platform records	Completion report, AOU and GTC working materials, responsibility notes and proposals.	Supports status classification and pilot design.	Internal sources require disclosure and independent editorial assessment.

Table 3. Evidence sources, analytical use and limitations

institution-oriented and mainly reflected perspectives from Monrovia-based stakeholders and project contacts. They should not be interpreted as nationally or county-level representative evidence. Similarly, China-side industrial visits provided exploratory observations rather than engineering assessments or commercial feasibility studies. Future research should include broader stakeholder engagement, county-level perspectives, baseline data and longitudinal evaluation of pilot outcomes.

6. Policy, Institutional and Sector Context

6.1 Zero-tariff policy and the structure of trade

China granted zero-tariff treatment covering 100 percent of tariff lines to 33 African least developed countries maintaining diplomatic relations with China from 1 December 2024. Liberia was already included in that arrangement. From 1 May 2026, China extended the treatment to the remaining 20 African partner countries not classified as least developed countries, completing coverage of all African countries maintaining diplomatic relations with China. The May 2026 measure should therefore not be described as the date on which Liberia first obtained the benefit (Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council, 2026;

United Nations OHRLLS, 2026).

The policy opportunity must be read against Liberia's trade structure. Liberia-reported WITS data for 2023 show merchandise exports of approximately USD 154 million and imports of approximately USD 2.163 billion. China was Liberia's second-largest recorded import source, supplying approximately USD 362 million or 16.72 percent of imports, but China did not appear among Liberia's five leading export destinations in that dataset. Natural rubber, palm oil and cocoa dominated the leading export products, and raw materials represented 68.13 percent of exports (World Integrated Trade Solution, 2026). This pattern suggests a structurally asymmetric relationship in goods trade and a need to evaluate value addition and export capability rather than simply advertise tariff preference.

Zero tariffs do not guarantee market entry. A defensible export-readiness chain is: producer and processor mapping; supply consistency; product-specific regulatory access; rules of origin; quality and traceability; packaging; logistics; buyer specifications; sample testing; and only then a commercial decision. Each stage requires records and a responsible institution. The Ministry of Commerce and Industry, LRA/Customs, ports, sector regulators, producers and

Domain	Prospective Liberian institutions or actor types	Potential role	Current relationship to this study	Required safeguard
National development alignment	Relevant AAID coordinating authorities and sector ministries.	Confirm alignment, avoid duplication and identify competent public counterparts.	Not treated as formal project partners unless separately documented.	No government endorsement language without written confirmation.
Education and training	Ministry of Education; NCHE where higher education is implicated; accredited universities, community colleges and TVET providers; AOU within its non-degree scope.	Needs validation, learner nomination, curriculum review, quality and referral.	AOU is linked to project development; other actors are prospective.	No degree, accreditation or joint-school claim without approval.
Public-sector capacity	CSA; LIPA; GC; participating ministries and agencies.	Training-needs assessment, nomination, coordination, application follow-up.	Prospective for GTC public-sector modules.	Training must complement existing systems; LIPA/CSA/GC roles should be respected.
Science and research	LAS; universities; CARI; public health, environmental and sector research institutions; Liberian diaspora scholars.	Theme selection, peer review, co-convening and follow-up research.	LAS is project-linked; other institutions require invitation and consent.	Conference participation does not create institutional commitment.
Agriculture and food systems	MoA; CARI; LACRA; county agriculture actors; cooperatives; women and youth producer groups; local buyers and processors.	Baseline, value-chain selection, site choice, technical validation, extension, maintenance and market linkage.	No site or producer group has been selected.	No equipment shipment before local baseline, operator and total-cost review.
Trade and investment	MoCI; LRA/Customs; NPA; NIC; LACRA and relevant inspection or standards bodies; business and producer organisations.	Trade procedure, permits, customs, ports, investment facilitation, commodity oversight and enterprise matching.	Prospective; product screening remains analytical.	Separate regulatory advice from buyer interest and commercial contracts.
Digital capacity	Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications; LTA; network and service providers; local learning or community-access partners.	Connectivity, affordability, data and delivery planning.	Official data used; no service-provider agreement.	Budget data access and learner support; protect privacy and avoid surveillance.
Environment and natural resources	Environmental Protection Agency; Forestry Development Authority; National Fisheries and Aquaculture Authority and other sector bodies as relevant.	Environmental, legality, sustainability and sector-specific review.	Prospective only.	Timber, fisheries or resource-related pilots remain on hold until due diligence.
Culture and youth	Liberian National Commission for UNESCO; cultural, education and youth institutions; rights holders and creators.	Content validation, participation, consent and follow-up.	One completed 27 May 2026 event provides a precedent.	Use accurate UNESCO wording and secure creator consent and rights.

Table 4. Prospective Liberian institutional stakeholder map

Chinese buyers may have different roles; none can be replaced by the project authors.

6.2 Liberian institutional stakeholder map

LAS and AOU are important to the present project, but they should not be presented as the sole national entry points for all cooperation. Table 4 identifies institutions that may need to be consulted or involved according to sector. Except for organisations already participating in the project, these are prospective stakeholders, not confirmed partners. Their precise mandate and willingness must be verified before any pilot is announced.

6.3 Digital conditions and educational access

Liberia's digital environment contains both opportunity and constraint. The Liberia Telecommunications Authority's 2025 sector snapshot reports 4G population coverage of 93 percent and a mobile broadband subscription indicator of 63 percent. The same source estimates that a 5 GB monthly data package costing USD 8 represented 12.1 percent of average monthly income in 2025, far above the 2 percent affordability benchmark used in the report (Liberia Telecommunications Authority, 2026). Coverage therefore cannot be treated as equivalent to affordable, continuous access.

Any digital learning pilot should be mobile-first, low-bandwidth and capable of asynchronous or downloadable use. It should state who bears data costs, whether devices and charging are available, how local tutors support learners, how errors and privacy concerns are handled, and how completion and application are analysed by relevant learner conditions. Login counts alone are not evidence of learning.

6.4 International cultural and educational cooperation

Project records document that the international dialogue "UNESCO International Arts Education Week in Africa" was held online on 27 May 2026 during UNESCO Culture and Arts Education Week, which ran from 25 to 31 May 2026 (UNESCO, 2026b). It was jointly organised by AOU, LAS, the Global Youth Dialogue Among Civilizations Alliance and IAOA, with additional supporting and collaborating institutions recorded in the event materials (Africa Open University et al., 2026; Organising Committee, 2026). UNESCO's events webpage lists the activity under Liberia but displayed 27 April 2026 at the time of access (UNESCO, 2026a). The event date documented in the organiser records was 27 May 2026; the discrepancy is recorded rather than silently reconciled.

The activity should be described as listed on UNESCO's Culture and Arts Education Week events webpage and held during the Week (UNESCO, 2026a, 2026b). No evidence reviewed for this article establishes UNESCO funding, contract, accreditation, implementing-partner status or authority for the organisers to represent UNESCO. This completed event provides a precedent for low-cost cultural and digital exchange, but not evidence that all future activities are effective.

7. Practice-Based Findings and Priority Areas

7.1 Education and public-sector capacity

Project inputs identified interests in practical international training, project design, digital skills, agricultural development, China-related trade

Criterion	Operational question	Evidence required	Decision implication
Local demand	Is the problem identified or formally confirmed by Liberian actors, and is the target user defined?	Institutional confirmation, sector evidence and intended-user input.	No locally confirmed problem: hold or redesign.
Institutional fit	Is there a capable, lawful and willing lead or co-lead in Liberia and China?	Mandates, named focal points and responsibility matrix.	Unclear lead or authority: do not launch.
Regulatory feasibility	Can the activity operate without misrepresenting education, trade, data, procurement or government approval?	Regulatory and communication review.	Unresolved compliance issue: postpone.
Resource requirement	Can the pilot begin with proportionate funding, staff time, infrastructure and recurrent costs?	Budget, in-kind support, connectivity, equipment and lifecycle cost.	High or unfunded recurrent cost: defer.
Measurability	Can a specific output and a small set of outcomes be observed within 3-12 months?	Baseline, assignment, event, product, technical or user evidence.	Vague or publicity-only output: redesign.
Scalability and sustainability	Can local mentors, maintenance, finance and institutional ownership support continuation?	Local continuation plan, after-sales route, feedback and finance.	No local continuation mechanism: remain a one-off test or stop.

Table 5. Six criteria for pilot selection

knowledge and professional communication. These interests support further design work, but they do not constitute a national training-needs assessment. Short courses should be attached to a named user group and institutional problem. Public-sector participants should be nominated or confirmed by the relevant institution, and public administration modules should complement rather than bypass LIPA, CSA, GC or the competent agency. This complementarity requirement is consistent with the existing coordination framework among CSA, LIPA and the Governance Commission (Civil Service Agency of Liberia, 2024).

7.2 Scientific cooperation

The project evidence supports a low-cost scientific exchange mechanism more strongly than it supports an immediate research centre or funded joint programme. A first China-Liberia Young Scientists Academic Exchange Conference is therefore plausible if it is jointly convened, limited to one or two Liberia-nominated themes and linked to a concrete post-conference output. Illustrative themes include food systems, agricultural research, digital education, public health, environment or renewable-energy applications; final selection should be made by the Liberia-side scientific partners.

7.3 Agriculture and value-chain development

Liberia-side inputs and China-side observations indicate possible relevance of planting knowledge,

primary processing, small equipment and cooperative or youth agribusiness training. National agricultural policy provides a stronger basis for narrowing the first phase. The NADP identifies high post-harvest losses, limited mechanisation and weak infrastructure across rice, cassava, maize and vegetables and emphasises processing, storage, markets, youth and women. Rice and cassava are therefore treated in this article as two policy-aligned candidate value chains for validation, not as final procurement decisions (Ministry of Agriculture of Liberia, 2024).

7.4 Trade and export readiness

Liberia's recorded exports remain concentrated in a small number of primary products, while its imports substantially exceed exports. This supports two related but distinct objectives: improving domestic value chains and preparing a limited number of existing or realistic products for external market assessment. Export-readiness work should focus on evidence and sequence, not promotional claims. A product should not advance to buyer outreach until supply, legality, quality, traceability, rules of origin, packaging and logistics have been reviewed.

7.5 Digital learning and cultural exchange

Digital learning can connect youth education, public-sector training, scientific exchange, product communication and cultural documentation, but access and affordability are binding design variables.

Pilot	Strategic relevance to Liberia	Implementation readiness	Reason for current rating	Required next decision
Young Scientists Conference	Medium-high	High	Low-cost scientific network entry point; impact depends on research follow-up.	Liberia-side selection of 1-2 themes, joint convenors and post-event output.
GTC non-degree training	Medium-high	Medium	Potential human-capital contribution, but no institution-specific needs assessment or delivered cohort is evidenced.	Confirm target institution/user, conduct TNA and approve certificate and evaluation.
Export-readiness support	High	Medium	Trade imbalance and concentrated exports create relevance; product-specific access and buyer evidence remain incomplete.	Select no more than 1-2 products for a documented screening chain.
Digital and OER pilot	High	Medium	Cross-sector potential and wide 4G coverage; affordability, devices and local facilitation constrain adoption.	Approve mobile-first design, data-cost and local-tutor plan.
Rice or cassava value-chain pilot	High	Low-medium	Direct fit with food security and value addition; site, operator, market and lifecycle cost not yet validated.	Liberia-led baseline and selection of one first-phase value chain and site.
Culture/language follow-up	Medium	High	Completed precedent and low cost; direct development effect depends on learning or cooperation output.	Define target group and a substantive output beyond attendance.
Solar or tricycle application test	Low-medium	Medium	Exploratory commercial/technical opportunity rather than an automatically national priority.	Require user problem, safety, cost, after-sales and comparative-option review.
Large investment or regulated joint education	Potentially high but unassessed	Low	Beyond evidence, budget and authority of this study.	Independent feasibility, legal, financial and government review only.

Table 6. Indicative strategic relevance and implementation readiness

Cultural and language activities are relatively easy to convene and can strengthen relationships, yet they should produce a documented educational, research or cooperation output rather than being evaluated only by attendance or publicity.

8. Pilot Selection and Sequencing Framework

8.1 Six design criteria

The study retains six qualitative design criteria. They are not a numerical forecasting model. They make the basis of judgement visible and identify reasons to proceed, redesign, postpone or stop.

8.2 Strategic relevance and implementation readiness

Strategic relevance to Liberia and ease of implementation are assessed separately. A visible online event may be easy to deliver but have limited development effect without follow-up; an agricultural value-chain pilot may be highly relevant but require more institutional, technical and financial preparation. Table 6 uses qualitative ratings only and records the conditions that could change them.

9. Priority Pilot Designs

9.1 Global Talent Certificate Program

The Global Talent Certificate Program (GTC) remains

one proposed capacity-building pilot within the wider country study. It is a non-degree, non-governmental and non-licensing programme. Its document should be titled Certificate of Completion and must not be promoted as a government certificate, official professional qualification, academic degree, employment-entry credential or employment guarantee.

Before a pilot cohort is recruited, the organisers should identify a specific target group and complete a short training-needs assessment. Public-sector participants should be nominated or confirmed by the relevant institution. Where the content concerns public management, the organisers should consult LIPA, CSA, GC or the competent public body so that the course complements existing training systems. A dual-mentor design should combine subject expertise with Liberian contextual guidance. Data access, learner support, assessment, complaints and certificate records should be specified in advance.

9.2 China-Liberia Young Scientists Academic Exchange Conference

A first conference should be deliberately narrow. One or two themes should be nominated or confirmed by Liberia-side scientific partners. Chinese and Liberian academic convenors should jointly shape the agenda, and invitations should prioritise participants able to undertake follow-up work. The selection process should seek participation by women scientists, early-career researchers and relevant Liberian diaspora scholars

Design element	Rice post-harvest candidate	Cassava processing candidate
Policy rationale	Rice is a staple; NADP prioritises processing, storage and logistics, and WITS records substantial rice imports.	Cassava is a major staple, produced by over 60% of farming households; NADP identifies women, youth, processing, finance, market and mechanisation constraints.
Site rule	Select a validated rice-producing cluster with an identified cooperative/operator, baseline losses and local buyer route. No county is preselected.	Select a validated production/processing cluster with women/youth producer participation, raw-material consistency and product demand. No county is preselected.
Primary user	Farmer group/cooperative, local processor or service provider with accountable management.	Producer/processor group, cooperative or small enterprise, with explicit access for women and youth.
Problem to test	Threshing, drying, milling, grading, storage or logistics bottleneck identified by baseline.	Labour-intensive processing, inconsistent quality, drying, packaging, market linkage or waste management.
Technology rule	Choose only after comparing manual/current practice, locally available alternatives and lifecycle cost.	Choose only after product choice (for example gari or flour), process mapping, safety and energy assessment.
Energy and maintenance	Document power/fuel needs, operator training, spare parts, maintenance responsibility and downtime plan.	Document energy load, food-safety cleaning, blades/wear parts, local technician and spare-parts route.
Market test	Identify buyer or institutional market, quality specification, throughput and storage requirement before purchase.	Identify product, buyer, packaging, shelf-life and price/cost relationship before procurement.
Core indicators	Throughput, quality, loss reduction, labour time, cost per unit, downtime, user adoption and income effect.	Throughput, quality, labour time, food safety, cost per unit, waste, sales, women/youth access and income effect.
Stop criteria	Stop if there is no operator, market, maintenance route, cost advantage or acceptable safety/quality result.	Stop if raw-material supply, market, hygiene, energy, maintenance or unit economics are not viable.

Table 7. Policy-aligned agriculture pilot concepts for Liberia-side validation

without turning representation into a substitute for subject relevance.

Required outputs should include a verified programme, a concise meeting record, one joint research brief or project concept note, named follow-up responsibilities, a timeline and a verification point. Attendance, speaker seniority and publicity should be secondary indicators. The conference must not be described as an intergovernmental event or funding commitment unless formally authorised.

9.3 Agriculture: value-chain pilots before equipment matching

The first agriculture phase should select no more than one value chain for implementation, while retaining a second candidate for comparison. Rice post-harvest management and cassava processing are used here because they are strongly connected to the NADP and to small-scale processing questions raised in the project. The article does not select a county, cooperative, supplier or machine. Location and operator must be determined through Liberia-side validation in a production cluster with a credible market and maintenance route.

9.4 Export-readiness and product pathways

Export readiness should be separated from agriculture pilots intended primarily for domestic food security or local value addition. Existing export products may provide a stronger initial evidence base than products selected only because they can be produced. The first phase should screen three to five directions, but select no more than one or two for detailed regulatory and

buyer assessment. A product should advance only when its producer, supply, legality, origin, quality, traceability, packaging, logistics and buyer specifications can be documented.

9.5 Digital education and ICT capacity

A first digital pilot should be designed for mobile use, low bandwidth and intermittent access. Core materials should be downloadable where rights permit, and learning should not depend on continuous video. The budget should state whether data, shared devices, charging or local access points are provided. A Liberian tutor or facilitator should support learners and document recurring access, language and content problems.

Evaluation should distinguish enrolment, access, completion, demonstrated skill and later application. Where appropriate and ethical, results should be examined by relevant learner conditions such as location, gender and device or connectivity constraints without exposing personal data. Platform analytics should be limited to necessary purposes, explained to participants and subject to correction and privacy safeguards.

9.6 Cultural, language and youth exchange

The completed 27 May 2026 dialogue supports a modest follow-up programme in arts education, cultural documentation, language or youth exchange. A follow-up activity should identify a target group, educational aim, content rights and one substantive output, such as a bilingual learning resource, a documented discussion brief or a small digital cultural collection with creator

Product direction	Evidence-based rationale	Constraints to verify	Next step	Current status
Natural rubber and primary processed rubber	Rubber is Liberia's leading recorded export group and has an existing production/export base.	Processor mapping, consistency, grading, traceability, buyer specifications, logistics and value-addition economics.	Obtain supply and processor map plus buyer specification before sample preparation.	Priority for deeper assessment; no buyer commitment.
Cocoa and palm-related products	Both appear among Liberia's leading recorded export products and may support quality or processing improvement.	Food or commodity access, quality, traceability, sustainability, packaging, supply stability and buyer demand.	Regulatory and supply review, then one small sample test if criteria are met.	Further feasibility assessment.
Handicrafts and cultural/creative products	Suitable for small, low-risk display linked to cultural exchange and creator participation.	Creator consent, intellectual property, product consistency, payment, shipping and limited market size.	Small digital catalogue or exhibition test with consent and transparent revenue terms.	Small pilot possible.
Fisheries and aquatic products	Potential market opportunity only if species, sanitary and cold-chain conditions are met.	Import access, sanitary certification, traceability, cold chain, stable volume and cost.	Hold until sector authority and buyer feasibility review.	Hold pending regulatory review.
Legally sourced timber or processed wood	Possible value-addition interest but high environmental, legality and reputational exposure.	Legal origin, community rights, traceability, sustainability, environmental rules, certification and transport.	Independent legality and sustainability due diligence before any market work.	Deferred/high-risk.

Table 8. Preliminary product directions for further feasibility assessment

consent. Participant numbers and publicity should not be the sole evidence of value.

10. Responsibility Boundaries, Conflicts and Risk Control

LAS may provide scientific advice, peer input and evaluation but should not guarantee commercial projects, procurement, training fees or market access. AOU may support open education, short training and digital learning within its lawful non-degree scope but should not conduct degree education or claim higher-education authority without approval. IAOA may support academic coordination and international links. Beijing Talent Technology Co., Ltd. is expected to participate in selected follow-up implementation and may provide China-side coordination, training logistics, partner liaison, enterprise matching, industrial contacts or equipment-demonstration support under separate arrangements. Publication creates no procurement right, fee entitlement, government authorisation or commercial endorsement.

Where an author-affiliated entity may later provide paid services or commercial implementation, the role must be disclosed, alternative partners should be considered where appropriate, terms should be

documented, and evaluation should be independent of the service provider. Public institutions, regulators and partner organisations retain their own decision-making authority.

11. Monitoring and Phased Action Plan

The next phase should begin with validation rather than immediate delivery. The purpose of monitoring is to support decisions, not to justify continuation regardless of evidence. Each pilot should have a baseline, a responsible lead, a review date and an explicit stop or redesign rule.

Indicative outputs such as one conference, one course or one product dossier are useful only when paired with outcome evidence. For training, applied work and 60/90-day use matter more than certificates. For scientific exchange, a research brief and assigned follow-up matter more than attendance. For agriculture, unit cost, quality, downtime, market and user adoption matter more than equipment delivery. For trade, a documented go/no-go decision is a valid result even when a product does not proceed.

12. Discussion

Risk	Required control
Liberian ownership is asserted but not operationalised	Require institutional confirmation, named Liberia-side co-lead, co-designed indicators, data access and authority to pause or redesign.
GTC certificate is misunderstood as an official qualification	Use Certificate of Completion and explicit non-degree, non-governmental, non-licensing wording.
AOU activity exceeds legal or institutional scope	Limit to open education and short learning unless separate approval is obtained.
Public-sector training duplicates existing systems	Use a training-needs assessment and consult LIPA, CSA, GC or the competent institution.
UNESCO relationship is overstated	Use "listed on UNESCO's events webpage"; do not claim funding, accreditation, contract or authorisation without evidence.
Academic or public role is interpreted as commercial endorsement	Separate advice from procurement; publish responsibility and conflict disclosures.
Beijing Talent Technology has a future commercial interest	Disclose the role; use separate agreements, transparent partner selection where appropriate and independent evaluation.
Trade preference is confused with market access	Complete product-specific regulatory, origin, quality, logistics, supply and buyer review before promotion.
Equipment is unsuitable or lacks after-sales support	Use baseline, comparison, lifecycle cost, small test, local operator, spare parts, maintenance training and stop criteria.
Digital access is assumed from network coverage	Budget data/device/charging needs; use low-bandwidth design and local facilitation.
County and community perspectives are missing	Conduct a documented Liberia-side validation round before site or beneficiary selection.
Pilot funding is not sustainable	Document total and recurrent cost; phase activities and avoid scale-up without financing and local continuation.
External communication creates legal or reputational risk	Require fact-checking and partner review; avoid official, national, authorised, accredited or guaranteed language unless documented.

Table 9. Principal risks and required controls

Phase	Priority action	Minimum indicator and evidence	Decision rule
0-3 months: validation	Conduct Liberia-side institutional validation; update stakeholder map; select target users; complete GTC TNA; choose 1-2 conference themes; screen products and agricultural candidates.	Written confirmations or meeting record; revised responsibility matrix; documented selection criteria and unresolved issues.	No pilot launches without a willing Liberia-side lead and a defined user/problem.
3-6 months: low-risk pilots	Prepare first Young Scientists Conference and one small GTC or digital learning pilot if approved.	Programme, learning materials, applied assignments, verified participation, research brief/concept note, budget and feedback.	Continue only if outputs are substantive and local partners confirm relevance.
6-12 months: market and technical tests	Complete one export-readiness dossier and, if prerequisites are met, one small agriculture or equipment test.	Regulatory and supply checklist, buyer specification, baseline, user test, total-cost and maintenance record.	Stop if access, operator, market, cost, quality, safety or maintenance conditions fail.
12-24 months: evaluation and selective scaling	Review 60/90-day training application, conference follow-up, digital use, product feedback and technical pilot outcomes.	Adoption evidence, local mentor continuity, cost per beneficiary/unit, outcome note and independent review where conflicts exist.	Scale only after Liberia-side approval, evidence of benefit and a sustainable financing/management route.

Table 10. Phased actions, indicators and decision rules

The revised country study moves beyond a list of cooperation ideas in four ways. First, it situates pilots within the history of China-Liberia relations and the AAID rather than beginning only from available Chinese resources. Second, it translates Liberian ownership into a protocol of problem confirmation, co-design, local leadership, data access and decision rights. Third, it separates strategic relevance from readiness, making it possible to recognise that agriculture may be more nationally important but less immediately implementable than a conference or short course. Fourth, it maps the sector institutions that may need to be involved and prevents LAS, AOU, IAOA or a private company from being treated as substitutes for competent Liberian authorities.

The framework also provides a historically informed response to the Kpatawee lesson. Instead of beginning with an available machine or imported model, the revised agriculture approach begins with a value-chain bottleneck, local operator, market, lifecycle cost and stop criteria. The same logic applies to trade: zero tariffs are an enabling policy, not an export outcome. It applies to education: a Certificate of Completion is meaningful only if learning is used. It applies to scientific exchange: a conference is useful only if it produces follow-up research or cooperation.

This study has important limitations. The evidence is project-based, not nationally representative; Liberia-side inputs are institution- and Monrovia-oriented; county-level and community perspectives are limited; no pilot outcome is yet available; and the trade and technical sections are screening exercises rather than full feasibility studies. Some proposed pathways may require approvals, financial resources, infrastructure or partner capacity not yet available. The roles of author-affiliated institutions create potential conflicts that require independent editorial and implementation

review.

Future research should document the Liberia-side validation round, develop baseline indicators for the selected users and sites, compare implementation across counties or institution types, and evaluate pilot outcomes over time. Comparative work with other small or capacity-constrained China-Africa cooperation cases could test whether the dual-axis relevance/readiness framework and ownership protocol are transferable.

13. Conclusion

China and Liberia possess a durable diplomatic and cooperation foundation, and Liberia's current development agenda creates legitimate space for education, science, agriculture, trade, digital and cultural initiatives. The evidence reviewed in this article does not justify immediate large-scale investment or the automatic transfer of Chinese programmes and equipment. It supports a staged approach in which Liberia-side institutions confirm the problem, select users and sites, co-design indicators and retain the authority to stop or revise an intervention.

The most feasible early actions are a narrowly focused China-Liberia Young Scientists Academic Exchange Conference, one institution-confirmed non-degree training or digital-learning pilot, and one product export-readiness dossier. Rice post-harvest management and cassava processing are nationally relevant candidate value chains, but the first technical pilot should proceed only after local baseline, site, operator, market, energy, maintenance and cost validation. Solar or tricycle tests should remain commercial or technical feasibility exercises unless a Liberia-side public need and responsible institution are established.

The study's central conclusion is therefore procedural

as well as substantive: bilateral goodwill should be translated into small, reversible and measurable cooperation; national relevance should be separated from ease of delivery; and scaling should follow local validation and evidence. Under these conditions, the country-study approach can support China-Liberia cooperation that is more credible, locally governed and capable of cumulative learning.

Declarations

Funding:

The underlying project had a budget of USD 10,000, self-raised by the joint project leaders. The amount was a project planning budget and is not presented as an audited statement that the full amount was expended. No government grant, procurement approval or financial commitment for any follow-up pilot is implied by the manuscript.

Author contributions:

Liwei Zheng: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Project administration, Resources, Writing - original draft, and Writing - review and editing. David B. Kolleh: Conceptualization, Investigation, Validation, Resources, Writing - original draft, and Writing - review and editing. Both authors contributed to substantive discussion, interpretation of findings and stakeholder coordination; approved the final manuscript; and agree to be accountable for the integrity of the work.

Competing interests:

Liwei Zheng serves as General Manager of Beijing Talent Technology Co., Ltd., Director of the International Academic Organizations Alliance (IAOA), Executive Vice Chairman of Africa Open University (AOU), and Senior Advisor to the Liberia Academy of Sciences (LAS). David B. Kolleh is affiliated with Africa Open University (AOU) and also serves as Senior Advisor to the Liberia Academy of Sciences (LAS). These affiliations are disclosed because the manuscript discusses institutional cooperation involving the above organisations. Beijing Talent Technology participated in China-side resource coordination and is expected to participate in selected follow-up implementation, which may include training, coordination, enterprise matching, equipment demonstration or other services under separate arrangements. Independent editorial handling is required for review and publication decisions. The manuscript does not constitute procurement, endorsement, a guarantee of commercial benefit, or a commitment by any government or partner institution.

Independent editorial handling:

Because GHSS is published by IAOA and one author

holds a role in IAOA, the authors request independent editorial handling. The authors and any editor or reviewer directly involved in the project or affiliated with a potential implementing entity should be recused from reviewer selection, substantive review and the final publication decision.

Ethics and consent:

The manuscript reports institutional project work, public-document analysis, non-identifiable project consultations and practice-based observations. It does not report names, direct quotations, sensitive personal data or an individual-level research dataset. Formal ethics approval was not sought because the underlying activities were conducted for institutional project development rather than as a designed human-participant study. Any future empirical study using identifiable interviews, personal data or systematic participant research will require appropriate review and consent.

Data and materials availability:

Public sources are listed in the references. De-identified project summaries, visit notes and event materials may be made available to the Editorial Office or qualified researchers on reasonable request, subject to institutional approval, third-party confidentiality and privacy restrictions. Private communications and personal data will not be disclosed.

Prior version disclosure:

An earlier unpublished project completion report, Research Report on Cooperation Opportunities Between China and Liberia (Project No. LAS-2025-001), formed the institutional basis of this article (Zheng & Kolleh, 2026). The manuscript has been substantially reorganised, expanded and analytically reframed. The earlier report is disclosed to the Editorial Office and cited below.

AI-assisted tools:

AI-assisted tools were used for language editing, structural refinement and formatting. The authors reviewed and verified the manuscript and remain responsible for all content. AI tools were not used to fabricate field evidence, participant information, data, references, quotations or findings.

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