Sierra Leone

Did you know that...

people in emergency situations or recovering from emergencies - such as wars and natural disasters - often do not have enough food. They must be given food and helped to recover by receiving the additional help, care and training they may need to improve their economic resources and rebuild their lives.

Some facts about my country

There are over 5 million people living in Sierra Leone, almost half of whom are children under the age of fourteen. The country is recovering from the civil war of 1991-2002, when tens of thousands of people died and more than 2 million people (about one-third of the population) were forced to move away from their homes. The war especially affected those in the rural areas, where seventy percent of the population lives.

Three out of four people live on less than two dollars a day.

One out of two Sierra Leoneans is undernourished. Six out of ten Sierra Leoneans have no access to health services. Four out of five women cannot read and write.

Seven out of ten Sierra Leoneans have no safe drinking water.

In 2002, the President of Sierra Leone pledged to do everything in his power to ensure that no Sierra Leonean should go to bed hungry.

Read my story to find out...

What effect war in our country had on farming and our food supply.

How we rebuilt our lives and got food after the war.

How our government can help those of us who have lost everything.
Starting Over

UNCLE JOHN AND MR. KAMARA ARE WALKING IN THE SIERRA LEONEAN COUNTRYSIDE ON A HOT SUNNY DAY. UNCLE JOHN IS A DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICER. MR. KAMARA IS A NEW TRAINER IN THE FARMER FIELD SCHOOL.

Good morning, Mariama! How are you?

Could be better, thank you.

This field is about a hectare. Over there I have a small piece of land where we plant vegetables to eat with the rice. I also have six chickens and a sheep. That is all I own...

And your family? Where are they?

Do you remember the idea of a farmer field school we discussed at the village meeting? Now you can start going to it. This is a new trainer.

Hi, Mariama! Is this your plot? What size is it?

My husband was killed by rebels...

I see... I lost my wife during the war...

And your children?

This is my daughter, Kadi. My older sons have left, like most of the young men.

farmer field school: teaching adult farmers new farming practices in the field
rebel: a person who fights against authority
Starting Over

You know, one of Mariama’s sons was a child-soldier. After the war he was helped to return to normal life and trained to drive a taxi. He got his licence and moved to the city where he makes more money.

My son hardly ever comes to visit us. People are afraid of him. Even I was afraid of him. That is because he was killing people during the war when he was only twelve...

One drives a taxi in the town. Another one works in the diamond fields.

So, are we going to have rain this season? You know, last year there was no rain and all my crops failed. Besides the rice, what else should I plant?

Well, we need different foods, don’t we? Try planting vegetables - pumpkins, tomatoes, maize.

Well, this variety requires little water and it grows faster than weeds. You will have higher yields.

Higher yields?

Yes, and it matures in 90 days.

In 90 days? You are right, we could grow some vegetables as the second crop. But...

New rice? Well, two years ago somebody convinced us to plant some new rice. The harvest was too bad, it was not enough even for us... So we had to buy and eat this imported broken rice which is not good.

You should also try this new rice. It produces much more grain than our traditional rice.

I love tomatoes!

yield: the amount that can be harvested from a crop
Sierra Leone

I have no money to buy seed. I told you, my rice harvest is enough only for half a year... When it finishes we go to bed hungry. So I take a loan to buy food and new seeds. The same story repeats every year. I am always out of money...

This time you do not have to pay. Come to the village meeting place in the afternoon and you will be given a bag of seed. It is distributed to all widows and orphans.

Really? Somebody does care about us...

But what?

This is not just care and charity, Mariama. We, as the government, have an obligation to help you help yourselves. It is our responsibility to support your attempts to provide for yourselves.

Because this rice requires less labour, you can now make sure Kadi goes to school.

But we would like to have something in return.

Kadi, we have no money for school...

Look, you know, school is free now. Our government wants parents to send their children to school. They provide the textbooks, learning materials and uniforms.

Wow! I can go to school and wear a uniform!

---

**loan**: a sum of money borrowed that is usually repaid with interest

**responsibility**: a duty, something for which a person is responsible
Starting Over

See, Mariama? You should send Kadi to school. Our boys and girls need education. It is their right. Otherwise, what kind of future will our country have? We already have too many people who never learned to read and write.

You know, my son goes to school and wants to be an engineer. Now he does his homework in the light of a kerosene lamp. But maybe one day he will bring electricity to our town.

Like me... If only I knew half of the things you know!

It’s never too late to study. After you get your seeds, come to the farmer field school in the afternoon. Everyone will be there.

Thank you! See you later.

Hello! Would you like a mango?

Look at this fruit! Isn’t it beautiful?

Thank you, Adama. Where did you get them?

In the bush. They grow wild and there are plenty of mangoes this season! There are also many papayas, guavas, pineapples. I would like to sell some and buy soap, but it is not easy.

I know, with this heat they will soon be rotten...

We cannot store the fruit, because there is no storing place. We cannot take it to the market, because this road is terrible. And there is no fuel.
Everything is in ruins! Roads, schools, houses, hospitals...

The war ended, but its damage did not. We are so poor that we need help to start anew.

At least we have both hands and feet and can grow our own food. But orphans, amputees, polio victims, old people? How can they survive?

Welcome to our village! The farmers are already waiting for you in the barrie. Let us go, I shall introduce you to them.

During the war our village was attacked by the rebels...

I know, they came to my village too. We had to escape and live in the refugee camp across the border. We thought we would never see home again. The war seemed to have no end...

Amputate: to remove a body part, such as an arm or leg
Polio: a disease caused by a virus which can lead to paralysis (inability to move)
Barrie: a meeting place in an African village
Refugee: a person forced to leave home to seek safety or protection in another country
We also ran away to save our lives. We took nothing with us.

Many people fled across the border. Some hid in the bush.

When we returned home we could not recognize our village. Our farmlands were overgrown and we had no food, no seeds and no tools.

The rebels not only destroyed our houses, they also burnt our crops and killed our animals...

Well, we started farming from zero, but the war has made us dependant on support. We do not want to depend on somebody else’s support all our lives; we want to rely on ourselves and we need help to do this.

We have just heard it on the radio: the president has promised that soon no Sierra Leonean will go to bed hungry!

Yeah!!

No more hunger!

What is going on?

This is a good promise. But we should not sit and wait for the president to solve our problems and bring us food. We have to take our future in our own hands.

This is Mr. Kamara, your trainer. Those of you who volunteered to go to the farmers’ field school will meet him weekly. All together you will observe, learn and decide for yourselves how to take care of your crops.
Welcome to our farmer field school, Mariama. Please take a seat. I see you have received your bag of new rice seed. We will now watch the video about this new variety. And next time we will go in the field to observe it.

You see, you plant this rice and transplant it after 10 days. In this way you use little seed and produce more... You will have a big harvest. There will be food in your stomach all year round!

Sounds good! But we have no place to dry and store it...

I have good news for all of you. On graduation, your group might apply for a start-up grant to invest in your community.

Great! Now we can build drying floors!

Or a store house!

Buy new tools and seeds!

Or have clean water and new latrines!

We have suffered a lot, that is enough! Now let us join hands to rebuild our farms, houses and lives.

**latrine**: a specific area used as a toilet
Starting Over

SOME TIME LATER KADI GOES TO SCHOOL.

Today is an unusual day in our school. It is the Celebration Day!

Yeahhh! Let us play football! I love athletics!! Volleyball!

Now, there are only a few rules.
Rule one: "No boy or girl should be left out!"
Rule two: "Play fair!"
Rule three: "Respect each other!"

Skipping rope!

"Let’s play our joyful drums, let’s play drums, peaceful drums. There’s hope for Sierra Leone Peace, joy and hope!
No more bombs and guns, no more blood and drugs, our sisters will laugh, our mothers will smile, there’s hope for Sierra Leone Peace, joy and hope!"

This is great!

The End
Think about our world

So, what do YOU think?

Have you thought about...

what happened to farmers and their families during the war?
why it was a good idea to open a Farmer Field School in the village?
what help people need to recover after a war?

Is it fair that...

people in emergencies should be given free food?
people who have been affected by war should receive extra help, care and training to rebuild their lives?

Everyone can do something

You can gather information about emergencies and talk about how to respond to them at home, with your friends, neighbours, at school.