

MAKING A DIFFERENCE



FAO's work in Sierra Leone



Background

▶ Since emerging from a decade-long civil war in 2001, Sierra Leone has made substantial progress in its recovery, reconstruction and democratisation, though it remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The country is rich in natural resources and minerals; however, an estimated 65-75 percent of its population lives in poverty. Agriculture is regarded as the backbone of the economy and provides a living to 60-70 percent of the work force (around 400,000 farm families).

FAO maintains a cordial and professional relationship with government authorities and is supporting the attainment of agricultural development and food security goals at policy, programme and project levels. FAO and the Government of Sierra Leone are implementing the various components of the SCP with financial support from various international donors. FAO also works with a wide range of local, established service providers in the private sector, non-governmental and civil society spheres, and makes use of their specific thematic expertise and intrinsic knowledge of the socio-economic environment to strengthen the quality of work being done on the ground.

Smallholder Commercialization Programme (SCP)

▶ As a response to global food price volatility, the Government of Sierra Leone announced a five-year flagship programme in 2008 that would have the goal of moving agricultural production from subsistence to commercial endeavour. FAO has been heavily involved throughout the process of formulation and implementation of the Smallholder Commercialization Programme (SCP).

One of the major objectives of the SCP is to intensify and diversify agricultural production. The main activities included under this objective include the training of farmers through Farmer Field Schools (FFS), helping farmers organize themselves into Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs) and formation of Agri-Business Centers (ABCs). The last two, (FBOs and ABCs) are the nascent cooperatives that are gradually transforming Sierra Leone's rural landscape in terms of increased productivity, commercialization of agriculture and value addition, but also in terms of augmented social cohesion and cooperative spirit at the community level.





Strengthening the Government's Capacity to Deliver

▶ The decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone led to a serious “brain drain” that adversely affected human capacity in almost all sectors. Now that the country is recovering and increased agricultural productivity is a top priority for economic growth, the importance of rebuilding infrastructure and developing capacity in key areas of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) cannot be overstated.

With support from Australian Aid, FAO is currently doing just that, using a capacity building approach that combines strengthening of infrastructure with on-the-job training and the introduction of innovative solutions to help fill yawning capacity gaps. The project, which began in early 2012, has already recorded an impressive number of successes, including but not limited to: introduction of the Results Based Management (RBM) approach in all 13 districts of the country; significant improvements in budgeting, transparency and accountability; and much-needed upgrades to the Ministry's IT infrastructure that will allow staff to work and communicate more efficiently.

Perhaps more importantly, the project has recognized that human capacity development is not only about strengthening knowledge and skills, but also requires changes in behaviours and attitudes. Activities have therefore focused heavily on promoting team work, transparency and communication. The project is now rolling out a training programme to address specific capacity needs of staff, which it complements with an in-house mentoring programme to make sure existing skills are passed down to younger generations, as well as the creation of partnerships with the private sector and international donors to ensure that the change process in MAFFS, and in Sierra Leone, keeps moving forward.



Seeds of Hope

▶ Sierra Leone's Seed Multiplication Project (SMP), now referred to as the Seed Multiplication Unit (SMU), used to produce seeds to meet the needs of small and large-scale farmers as well as institutional buyers in Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries. After the war, the country was in a precarious food security situation as a result of severe damages inflicted on the human and physical resources of its agricultural sector, and the SMU's services were needed more than ever. In response to this urgent need, the SEED project, which is funded by the German Trust Fund, is supporting the SMU to reliably produce and multiply quality seeds, focusing especially on developing, monitoring and enforcing independent seed quality control procedures and standards side by side with supporting the development of a vibrant and sustainable commercial seed sector.

Thanks to this strategy, the SMU has been able to increase the production of quality rice seed, as well as the range of commercially viable crops in its portfolio. A total of 390 farmers with 805 hectares have been registered as growers of quality rice seed for the SMU, and the 2012-2013 season will see the production of high protein maize seed for both human consumption and animal feed. A seed lab has been built for quality control testing, with two more underway, and the capacity of the national seed board is being strengthened. The ultimate goal is for the SMU to fully transition into a profitable private enterprise, thereby making the way for sustained growth of the sector.

Building lasting rural institutions: ABCs in Sierra Leone

"People are beginning to see that farming can be a profitable business."

*Fatmata Sesay, 45,
ABC Chairlady*

▶ In the last two years, FAO has supported the Government of Sierra Leone to construct and equip a total of 193 Agricultural Business Centres (ABCs). These ABCs are operated by 490 Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs), involving a total of about 122,500 farmers, of which 30 percent come from female-headed households. This country-wide project, which is currently being implemented in every chiefdom in Sierra Leone, is generously supported by funding from the European Union, the Italian government, the Irish government (through Irish Aid) and the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme (a G20 multi-donor trust fund).

An ABC plays a dual role as:

1. A farmer owned multi-purpose facility providing rural communities with a place to process their agricultural produce, buy inputs and sell products.
2. A centre that provides an interface between farmers and rural service providers as well as serving as hub for social interaction.

Each ABC is designed to deliver services to around 400 smallholder farmers. Services include micro-credit, sale of inputs, rental of agricultural tools and equipment, storage of agricultural produce, transportation of harvest to markets, access to communication and information technology.

According to the Agricultural Statistics Bulletin compiled by the Statistics Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security in January 2011, the development of Sierra Leone's agriculture sector made significant progress between 2008 and 2010. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in agriculture (contributing to 46 percent of national GDP) recorded an increase of 25.8 percent between 2008 and 2010, contributing to a significant reduction in the country's dependence on imported rice (76.3 percent reduction over the same period). The injection of improved agricultural inputs and machinery into the national market through SCP-related projects, combined with the provision of extension services by FAO and partners to farmer organizations all over the country, has certainly played an important role in boosting agricultural production and productivity.

Mr. Hassan Gbow Conteh, chairman of the Mafunday ABC in the Tonkolili District describes the ABC in his community as a blessing from the Almighty. He points out that the ABC currently has a bank account with well over Four Million Leones (approx. 1,000 USD). Apart from the processing services the ABC offers to farmers, he says the group has also managed to turn the centre into a social meeting place where European football league competitions are shown for a small fee that most members of the community are able to afford.





*"In the short time of the existence of this ABC, we have been able to build houses, send our children to schools and colleges, provide food and clothing for our families and open bank accounts, jut to name a few positive developments",
Allie Amara,
Deputy Chairman of the Board,
Nongowa ABC*

What makes a successful Agri-Business Centre? A look at Nongowa ABC.



*"Many people haven't bounced back since the war; they just depend on others. The ABC can help them find jobs, such as shop keeping or equipment operation,"
Mammy Gbanie, 49, Head of the Magbenyani farmer organization*

Kenema district, where the Nongowa Agricultural Business Centre (ABC) is situated, was badly affected by the civil war. Recently, however, life for ordinary people in the area has seen some positive changes. The ABC was built in the Lambayama community in 2008, and its growing influence has led to significant improvements in local household economies. The Deputy Chairman of the board of Nongowa ABC, Mr. Allie Amara, asserted that his community is gradually winning the war against poverty. He says that the ABC can boast of having a bank account of close to Le 20 million (\$ 4,500). As a result, the ABC is now giving out loans to both individuals and FBOs. Despite a high interest rate, there has been a zero default record so far.

One may be tempted to ask about the secret behind the successes of Nongowa ABC. According to the Chairman, Abu Mattia, accountability, transparency, trust and honesty are guiding principles. All transactions, both financial and otherwise are recorded and kept for audit purposes and for the sake of transparency.

Many among the younger generation who once thought that mining was the only option for survival or income-generation, are now members of FBOs and are working as full time farmers. These young and able bodied men and women form the core of the different farmer groups, investing their skills, labour and strength into the enterprise, and affirming that they are gaining much more than they first thought.

Most notably, women (particularly widows) who are members of the ABC have been experiencing a complete turnaround as a result of the business activities conducted there. Madam Isata Gbetuwa, 58, member of the Board and Financial Secretary of the ABC, explained how she reluctantly joined other women to form one of the FBOs around the Lambayama community. Booming agri-business activities have helped Madam Gbetuwa to build her own house, freeing her from the burden of paying rent. Most of the women in and around Lambayama are smallholder farmers and entrepreneurs. They pointed out that before the ABC, they struggled for survival: "even to eat a single meal a day was a luxury". Children were malnourished and dropped out of school as they could hardly afford to pay school fees or buy books. Madam Gbetuwa proudly revealed that her eldest daughter is now in university in Freetown reading Accountancy, and she would spend her last cent just to see her complete her university education.

Exchanging Knowledge through South-South Cooperation

The South-South Cooperation (SSC) programme supports the development of agriculture through sharing of knowledge, skills and experience. The current group of SSC cooperants is made of 21 technicians and experts from the People's Republic of China. The main focus is on the rehabilitation of swamp lands in order to promote the expansion of rice production, as well as providing training in improved processing techniques and maintenance of agricultural machinery, all in an effort to help ensure increased performance of the agricultural sector. The project has also contributed significantly towards the introduction and provision of improved seeds for cultivation in rehabilitated swamps as well as the establishment of a variety of agro-forestry initiatives. FAO ensures that any work being carried out is supported by hands-on demonstration and training, and that the cooperants work directly with farmers and field extension staff, so as to facilitate knowledge transfer.



Core activities

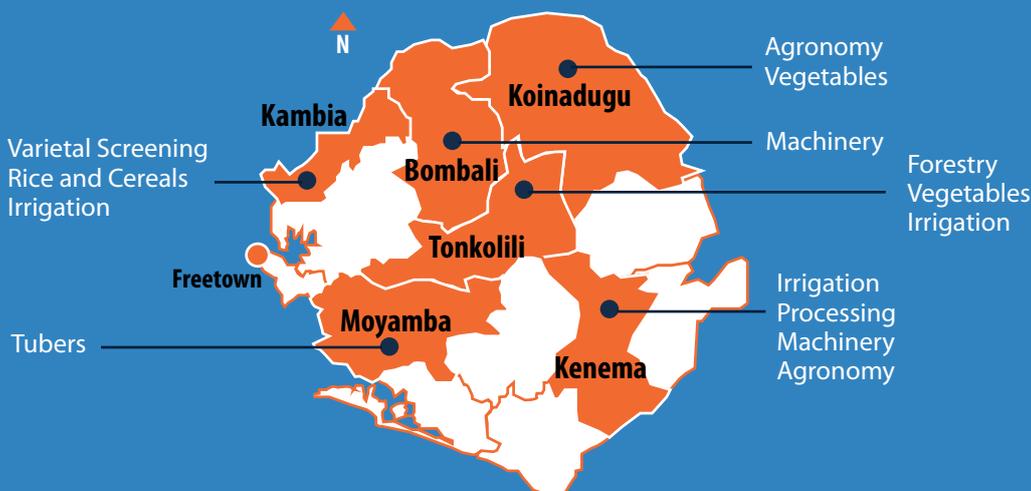
Rice Production: Developing inland valley swamps irrigation for all year rice production (multiple year harvest)

Mechanization: Maintenance of farm equipment including the training of mechanics on operation and maintenance

Commercialization of agriculture: Reduction of post harvest losses, improvement on product quality through optimized agro-processing

Agro-Forestry: Establishment of tree crop nurseries and agro-forestry

Location of SSC Cooperants in the Country



A Grassroots Approach to strengthening Nutrition and Ensuring the Right to Food

There is a growing recognition in Sierra Leone that interventions addressing food insecurity and malnutrition are more effective when there is direct participation of the most vulnerable population groups in the design and implementation of those interventions. This understanding is the guiding philosophy behind FAO's project on "Mainstreaming Food and Nutrition Security and the Right to Food into the Smallholder Commercialization Programme (SCP)", which focuses its efforts on empowering farmers in rural areas who are not normally considered when district agricultural plans are being formulated.

The thrust of the project is to build institutional and human capacity to: 1. Create awareness on nutrition and right to food issues and 2. Impart knowledge and skills in mainstreaming nutrition and the right to food in key agricultural development programmes at national and district level. According to the Chief Administrator (CA) of the Moyamba District Council, Madam Vivian Senesie, by including ordinary citizens in the planning process, the project has ensured that her Council's agriculture plans actually capture the issues that are relevant to them.

Bioenergy and Food Security in Sierra Leone

There has been substantial debate regarding the potential of bioenergy as an alternative to fossil fuels, and its likely impacts on rural development, food security and the environment. The food price spikes of 2008 created concern about the conflict between bioenergy development and food security due to the possible competition for scarce resources such as land, water, and agricultural inputs, in the context of growing challenges such as climate change. Private sector investment is extremely important for the growth of the Sierra Leonean economy, and in the past few years, there has been a sharp increase of interest by foreign investors that is generating high expectations of economic growth and job creation.

Sierra Leone has no specific policy on bioenergy, yet recent growth in investment has been coupled with a growing number of conflicts in communities affected by large-

scale investment projects. An outdated regulatory framework, low capacity for understanding the risks and benefits related to bioenergy development, and a lack of clear processes and procedures have resulted in a lack of common understanding and growing distrust between investors, the government and community members on how to achieve development objectives. In order to respond to the growing urgency for clarity coming from all parties, FAO has worked closely with the government Bioenergy and Food Security Working Group (BEFS-WG) to develop draft Guidelines for Sustainable Bioenergy Investment. The Guidelines were formulated with the objective of ensuring that globally agreed best practices are adopted in Sierra Leone, and that opportunities for export and financing are maximized by informing all stakeholders of the necessary criteria for ensuring sustainable bioenergy development.

A broad range of issues are addressed in the Guidelines including:

Crosscutting Issues

- Stakeholder Consultation
- Land Tenure
- Food Security
- Energy Access
- Water Use and Management
- Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
- Environmental, Social, and Health Impact Assessment

Environmental Issues

- Biodiversity and Conservation
- Fertilizer Application
- Pesticide Use
- Waste Management and Residues

Social Issues

- Employment and Labour Rights
- Community Development
- Contracts with Local Suppliers
- Gender Equity and Youth Empowerment
- Cultural Heritage

The Guidelines include a rating system that involves minimum criteria, good practices and actions that demonstrate exemplary performance in relation to each issue area. The allocation of points for good practices and actions exhibiting exemplary performance are based on the potential environmental and social impacts and livelihood benefits of each of the actions; and on the difficulty of implementing the action. Investors can receive 'credit' for performing above the minimum criteria required; and the Government can differentiate investors based on objectively developed criteria.

The Guidelines have illustrated how FAO's support for cross-ministerial dialogue and flexibility to work across sectors is extremely necessary to address the country's significant development challenges related to food security, energy access, rural employment and land tenure. The Guidelines are still under review by stakeholders and may eventually be developed into a comprehensive policy document.



A Closer Look at the Impact of FAO's Work on the Ground: Koina Pure Forest Honey



Pastor John Kamara saw his first improved beehive when he was working with missionaries in Koinadugu in the early nineties. Initially, he and other villagers were highly sceptical about this wooden box, but when the harvest time came, they compared the production. The local beehive produced twice as much as the improved one, but destroyed the entire bee colony with each harvest, while the missionaries harvested 3 times per year with the same hive. After the war, Pastor Kamara thought about apiculture as a source of food and complementary income for his rice farm. Since farmers in Sierra Leone prepare the fields for crop cultivation in the months of May through August, honey is a good source of alternative income during the hunger gap before harvest.

The Pastor soon became a honey expert in the area, and learning-by-doing improved his skills. He decided to form a honey group in order to teach others how to produce more honey and take care of the bees. The Musaia Honeybee Association is an FBO that was created in 2007 and quickly grew to 25 members: 10 women and 15 men. However, the members had no

proper place to store the honey, and after processing they were forced to sell it to traders coming from Freetown, Guinea and Liberia at very low prices with no possibility of bargaining.

After an initial assessment on potential value of the crop in the area, the FAO team quickly agreed that honey could be a profitable source of revenue, as well as a strong motivating factor for farmers to protect their forests' natural resources. Under the ensuing project, which was funded by the Italian Program for Food Security, FAO provided technical and material inputs to support the successful commercialization of sustainable beekeeping. New and locally made improved beehives were created and tested, and new techniques and tools to collect, extract and process honey were successfully identified. The quantity and the quality of the honey produced increased and the group now gets significantly greater revenue from this activity. It is now available in almost all supermarkets in Freetown, and sells at over five times the price it fetched before FAO's intervention.

Improvement in the Honey Value Chain after project intervention

PRODUCTION

Training on Apiary concept and Bees cycle

HARVEST

Training local Craftsmen to produce bee suit and smokers

PROCESSING

Training on extraction techniques and tools

Before

Traditional Local Beehive hanging in a tree scattered in the forest, with one harvest per year killing the entire colony. To protect the beehive from the rain, farmers use cow dung in the external part and mixed grass.



Farmers used to harvest at night with normal clothes in order to avoid enraging the bees. They would climb the trees and unleash the beehive. Their only tools were: a pot to use as a smoker and a bucket for storage. This created a high risk of uncontrolled fires and stings.



The combs were heated in a pot and when the wax started to melt, the farmers separated the honey. Many dead bees were in the comb after harvest and sometime the comb was not yet full of honey.



After

Creation and distribution of the "Kamara" basket Hive. The separate honey chamber eliminates the need to kill the bee colony. Farmers can harvest twice a year without disturbing the queen and the second production is much faster. Farmers now understand the reason to preserve the bees.



Now Beekeepers can harvest at any time, free of stress with improved equipment:

- Bee suit (locally made by tailors)
- Hive tools made by craftsmen (smoker, bucket)
- Pair of gloves, Pair of long boots, Harvesting buckets



Now beekeepers collect better combs with very few dead bees inside and produce high quality honey. They use a special honey press, made locally in Freetown to improve extraction.



Towards a Robust Early Warning System on Food and Nutrition Security

Since the end of the civil conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone has moved consistently toward restoring national security and good governance, including by preparing a National Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan that involves a comprehensive approach to managing national incidents. However, while the plan includes the collection of data on food security, no functional system has yet been put in place in the country. The lack of an operational Early Warning System on Food and Nutrition Security prevents the government of Sierra Leone from performing one of its most basic functions: protecting its citizens from hunger and malnutrition when disasters occur. Without such a system in place, the government and

its partners do not have the capacity to reliably detect threats and respond accordingly.

With support from the UN Multi-Donor Trust Fund, FAO is tackling this urgent issue by providing local government and key development partners throughout the country with the training and infrastructure they need to begin regularly monitoring, analyzing and reporting on crucial data affecting food and nutrition security. Eventually, stakeholders should have the capacity to not only raise the alarm when threats arise, but also to identify and carry out actions to reduce the impact of impending disasters, both in terms of rapid response and long-term planning.

STORAGE

Training on how to improve storage preserving quality of honey

Simple storage in blue drums scattered in houses with low hygienic conditions. Every time the drum was opened to collect honey, the product was contaminated and oxygenated. This created a need to sell the honey very quickly before it started to ferment.



ADDITIONAL

Training on how to process wax and produce candles, lip balm

Wax was extracted but not processed.



MARKET

Training on value addition products and market opportunities. Connection of farmer with supermarket

Local honey sold in plastic bottle and wax sold raw in local market at very cheap price.



Before

Farmers now have sealed drums with a tap to facilitate collection and preserve the honey quality. There is no need to open the drum, so sales can be delayed to when the price is higher.



Now beekeepers can produce better wax and process into candles, lip balm.



The quality of honey has increased. It is now sold both locally and in supermarkets at a higher price.



After

Empowering rural communities, one drop of water at a time



Water is an issue, especially in Sierra Leone, where rural women and children spend between seven and eight hours per week gathering water and firewood, where maternal and child mortality are among the highest in the world, and where cholera outbreaks occur on a regular basis.

Improving access to water is an unavoidable first step to strengthening rural livelihoods and health and supporting sustainable community development. With this in mind, and with support from the UN Multi-Donor Trust Fund, FAO contracted CARITAS to construct 20 water wells in selected sites throughout Bo, Kenema and Pujehun districts. The wells were all treated and chlorinated, and in each of these sites, a water and sanitation committee made up of two men and two women was formed. One woman and one man from each group were trained in mechanical repair and maintenance of the pumps, while the remaining two received training on hygiene standards. The selected communities were all previously getting their water from streams, so the construction of the wells and accompanying trainings, which rendered them self sufficient in more ways than one, were especially appreciated. Most of the communities have already taken the knowledge gained during their trainings to the next step by instituting by-laws to ensure regular hygiene practices are maintained. These communities are fully aware of the value of having the burden of fetching water and responding to disease relieved: it means they can now focus their energy on other activities that will generate income and improve their quality of life.



Promoting Peace, Stability and Growth through Youth Employment in Agribusiness

As Sierra Leone moves out of the ravages of a decade long civil war, the country faces a unique situation in building and maintaining peace: about 80 percent of the population is aged between 0 and 35 years, and 60 percent of young people (ages 10-35) are unemployed or underemployed. Agriculture is still mostly subsistence-based, with much higher levels of poverty and a severe lack of decent work prospects for young people in rural areas. Young people have been steadily migrating to urban areas in search of a better life, thereby increasing the strain on jobs and public goods in urban and peri-urban centres without necessarily improving the working conditions of those left behind in rural areas.

The current unemployment situation is becoming critical and many people fear that if the trend continues, youth discontent will grow and the country's economic and social progress could be reversed. FAO SL recognizes the need to think creatively about the problem and address youth concerns as a top priority, and has developed a comprehensive approach to scale up and broaden the scope of its interventions aimed at empowering youth.

With the support of funding from the UN Multi-Donor Trust Fund, FAO has recently revived the SABI Centre (Sierra Leone Agri-Business Initiative) in Newton to be used as a centre for "Youth Employment in Agribusiness". One part of the training programme is to address an issue that urgently requires attention: ABCs all over the country have been receiving agricultural machinery for the processing of crops on a commercial scale thanks to the various projects operating under the SCP. Unfortunately, capacity within the ABCs to maintain and repair these machines is usually low or nonexistent. As a result, much of the machinery that has been donated is not being used, which in turn affects the productivity of the ABCs. The trainings currently taking place at the SABI centre will not only provide young people with instruction in maintenance and repair of the machines in question, they will also build the capacity of trainees to teach

others in their districts.

The central concept guiding FAO's strategy on decent employment for young Sierra Leoneans is based on a major lesson learned from previous employment creation activities in the country: namely, that merely providing skills-based training without considering existing economic opportunities, helping beneficiaries to organize themselves, or addressing the relevant policy environment, is not sufficient to make an observable impact in the numbers of gainfully employed youth in Sierra Leone. Past projects that have focused solely on skills provision have often seen the greater part of their investment lost as beneficiaries drifted into other income-generating activities when they did not find employment in the area of training. Other initiatives focusing entirely on policy support or on private sector involvement have seen a similar issue play out in reverse: opportunities were made available, but few beneficiaries had the qualifications necessary to take advantage of them. FAO is taking the innovative approach of addressing these interdependent factors as functions of each other, rather than as isolated areas of intervention. To this end, FAO has developed an entrepreneurship-based curriculum built around the ideas of organizing and training young women and men, mobilizing the private sector and government, and linking youth to potential employment opportunities.

The strategy is also based on the recognition that women, men, disabled and otherwise war-affected youth have different needs and potentials, and that demand exists in the private sector for various types of employment. FAO's activities will therefore be tailored to the identified existing needs of both the beneficiaries and the private sector. Training centres like the SABI centre will be expanded to provide agri-business training in identified areas of opportunity in the market and along the value chain, and interventions will be customized to tackle the constraints faced by both rural and urban and peri-urban youth.





In partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone, thank you to our resource partners for making FAO's work possible.

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