



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S COOPERATIVES IN SIERRA LEONE

The agriculture sector is one of the major income generating sectors in Sierra Leone and more than 70 percent of the population is engaged in subsistence farming. The outbreak of the Ebola virus disease caused a major disruption to farming activities, closing periodic markets, creating price volatility and worsening food security in the country. Women play a crucial role in farming, accounting for nearly 60 percent of the total workforce, but they generally lack access to fundamental agricultural inputs (improved technologies, extension services or access to credit services). Therefore, this project aimed to enhance the participation of women in agriculture by piloting a cooperative model for farm-based organizations and providing women farmers with relevant training and business skills development, thereby improving their productive capacity and incomes.



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WHAT DID THE PROJECT DO?

The project introduced an effective cooperative system to women farmer groups in the districts of Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema and Koinadugu. By promoting cooperative principles of voluntary membership, democratic governance and leadership, women were given the necessary skills and training on good farming methods and agribusiness practices. The introduction of an effective cooperative system further enhanced the management, governance and marketing skills of participants, and mini-projects were financed to support the development of start-up opportunities, outgrower schemes and contract farming agreements with private sector actors. An agribusiness centre was established and women's agricultural cooperatives were created in each of the four districts. Additionally, a national database of all registered women farmer groups and agricultural input dealers across the country was created.

IMPACT

This project demonstrated the productive capacities of women and their strength as independent producers when empowered. Agricultural activities were revived following the Ebola epidemic, and the incomes and social cohesion of 480 smallholder women farmers were improved. Better agronomic practices and stronger capacities for women farmer groups help strengthen food security and improve productive capacity. The newly created database on women farmer groups and agro-input dealers provides crucial information for more informed policy making in the agribusiness sector. Most of the women farmers are gradually becoming the breadwinners in their homes, paying school fees and settling domestic problems without relying on men. The common motivating slogan among women farmers is "if a man disappoints you, go to the farm; if you want to educate your child, go the farm; if you want to have shelter, go to the farm".

KEY FACTS

Contribution

USD 230 000

Duration

September 2015 – October 2017

Resource Partners

FAO

Partners

Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security; Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs; Ministry of Trade and Industry

Beneficiaries

Smallholder rural women farmer groups; Agribusiness centres; Private sector; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security; Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs; Ministry of Trade and Industry

ACTIVITIES

- Database on women farmer groups and agricultural input suppliers, equipment and repair service entities established.
- One agribusiness centre established and four functioning women agricultural cooperatives created (one in each district).
- Knowledge and skills on good farming methods, nutrition and agribusiness for production and marketing enhanced.
- Four mini-projects in each selected district financed and income and social cohesion improved for 480 smallholder women farmers.
- Women cooperatives linked to market opportunities and agricultural input dealers within their districts.



Project Code
TCP/SIL/3503

Project Title
Promoting effective engagement in agribusiness for women’s cooperatives in Sierra Leone

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



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