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Comprehensive Assessment of the Agriculture Sector  
Volume 2.3 - Crosscutting Issues





# **MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE**

## **COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR IN LIBERIA (CAAS-Lib)**

### **Volume 2.3 - Crosscutting Issues**

**Liberia 2007**



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# **I. GENDER ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR**

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**Liberia 2007**



## I. GENDER ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This report reviews gender issues in Liberia's agriculture and rural sector with a special focus on rural women and how to improve their participation and contribution to rural development. The report reviews women's roles in agriculture and the rural economy; their access to key inputs and services which are essential to carry out their socio-economic role in rural areas; as well as gender related social trends and problems that may have an impact on productivity and poverty reduction in rural areas. The assessment also reviews the institutional and policy framework for agriculture and rural development and identifies opportunities to improve the rural sector's capacity to address gender issues and support female farmers and rural entrepreneurs. The findings and recommendations will inform the reform of the sector, currently underway, and thereby support the Government of Liberia (GoL) poverty reduction effort and the implementation of the IPRSP.

#### 1.1 National Context

Data limitations are severe in Liberia's current post-conflict context. The report builds on an earlier gender needs assessment produced by the World Bank in Liberia (2007)<sup>1</sup>. The main sources of information for the analysis of rural issues in that report were the recently published Food Security Survey (CFSNS, 2006), and the last available Agricultural Baseline Survey (2001). The report incorporates as well the results of a small scale Gender and Agriculture Survey (SSGAS, 2007) conducted among 148 men and women of 15 rural communities in Central, South Eastern and North Western regions of Liberia in 2007 by LISGIS and the World Bank<sup>2</sup>. Quantitative information has been complemented with extensive interviews in Liberia with government staff, representatives of CSOs, and technical staff from the different international agencies, and with focus groups conducted in 6 rural communities. While the report focuses on women and on how to improve their participation and contribution to rural development, the analysis compares, to the extent that data allow it, men and women's situation regarding the different aspects reviewed, and identifies key male gender issues which need to be taken into consideration when formulating rural development policies in Liberia.

#### 1.2 Structure of the report

Section 2 following this introduction describes men and women's economic roles in rural areas. Section 3 analyzes men and women's access to key productive inputs and services which are essential to carry out their functions in rural areas. Section 4 assesses selected social factors and trends which influence men and women's engagement in rural development processes (e.g. migration, social capital, human development indicators, socio-cultural and gender norms). Section 5 presents a gender analysis of Liberia's institutional and policy

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<sup>1</sup> Ruiz Abril, forthcoming, Towards Women's Economic Empowerment in Liberia: a Gender Needs Assessment. Washington DC: World Bank.

<sup>2</sup> A rapid survey was designed to fill in data gaps on gender and agriculture and rural development in Liberia. The survey was designed taking into account existing information on the topic, mainly through the CFSNS 2006. While the analysis of the survey data allows for the identification of key issues, the small size of the sample precludes generalization and the results of the survey should be corroborated in the future using larger samples.

framework in the area of rural development. Section 6 offers conclusions and policy recommendations.

## 2. MEN AND WOMEN 'S ECONOMIC ROLES IN RURAL LIBERIA

### 2.1 Women major role in the rural economy in Liberia

They engage in the production, processing and trading of agricultural produce in a major scale in Liberia. They play a critical role in the production of food crops and they are as well dynamic entrepreneurs. Men's work in rural areas focuses mainly on the production of cash crops, followed by mining, salaried work, skilled labour, and contract or casual work (CFSNS, 2006).

### 2.2 Women critical role in the production of food crops

Agriculture is the main economic activity in rural Liberia, generating 90 percent of all rural employment. Women comprise the majority of agricultural workers, 53 percent of those involved in farming in 2001 (MoA, 2001) – see Fig.1, and produce 60 percent of all agricultural production (MoA, 2006). Within agriculture, women are major producers of food crops - they contribute approximately 42.5 percent of labour compared to 35.3 for men according to Liberia's Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey (CFSNS, 2006)<sup>3</sup>. Within the production of food crops, women are responsible for planting, weeding and harvesting while men are in charge of brushing, felling, clearing and fencing (MoA, 2001) (see Figure 2).

#### **Women's participation in other key areas of agricultural, mainly cash crops production and natural resources, is however constrained by a rigid gender division of labour.**

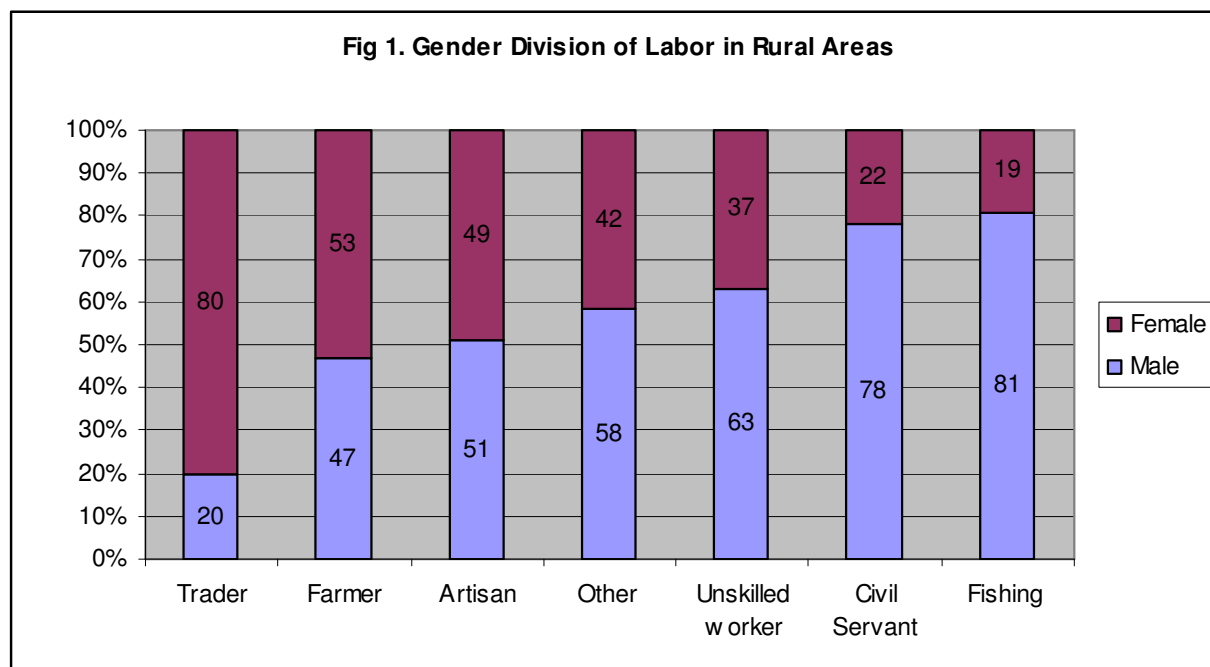
The Government of Liberia foresees the natural resource sector (timber, mining and rubber) as the main source of growth in Liberia in the coming years (GoL, 2007). From the point of view of employment, these are male dominated sectors. Women's contribution to cash crops (whether rubber, palm oil, coffee or cocoa), while important, is smaller than that of men, who are the main producers of cash crops in Liberia. Women carry out 31.5 percent of the cash crop production compared to 48.5 percent for men<sup>4</sup> according to the last Food Security Survey (CFSNS, 2006). Women are experienced agriculture agents however, and their engagement in the production, processing and trading of cash crop in a larger scale, could improve the sector productivity. This has been for example the case in other countries with the emergence of export-oriented fresh fruits and flower cutting industries, in which women comprise the majority of workers. Overall, lifting the barriers for women's involvement in commercial agriculture and other emerging sectors could contribute to economic gains.

**In addition, women play a prominent role in the processing of agricultural produce.** The results of the SSGAS show that women play an important role in the processing of agricultural produce, and are engaged in processing activities in significantly higher numbers than men. According to the survey, the majority of the rural population is engaged in agricultural production, and while men are more likely to focus on it exclusively – over 50 percent of men work on agricultural production only compared to less than 25 percent of women, women tend to combine agricultural production with processing, trading, or both.

<sup>3</sup> The rest is produced by other members of the household or by all household members working together.

<sup>4</sup> The rest is produced by other members of the household or by all household members working together.

Overall, double the number of women - 50 percent against 25 of men, are engaged in agro-processing activities (SSGAS, 2007). Policies to revitalize the rural economy, must take women's role in processing into account, specially pertaining to the design and planning of agribusinesses strategies.

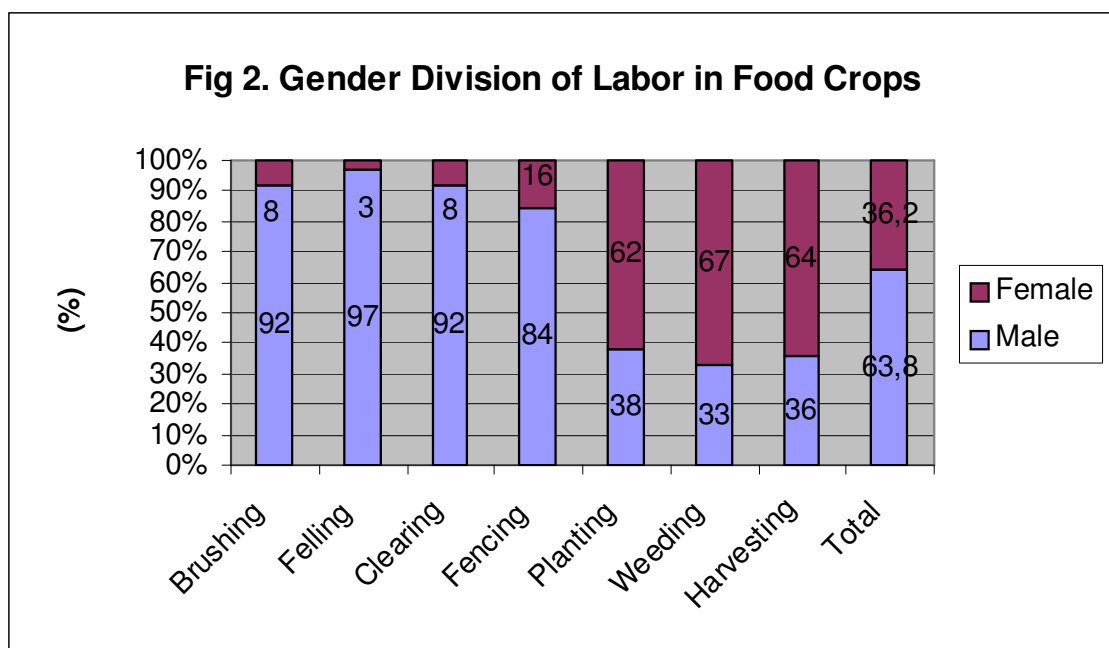


Occupation of Agricultural Population, 2001

Source: Liberia Gender Needs Assessment 2007 using data from the Agriculture Baseline Survey, Ministry of Agriculture, 2001

**Women are instrumental in rural, and rural to urban trade, bringing rural produce to urban markets, facilitating the basic functioning of the economy.** After agriculture, women work in trading and men do so as waged and salaried work in rural areas. Women comprise the vast majority (80 percent) of those involved in petty trade/ small scale business, and sales of food in rural areas (see Fig 1). In addition, women associations and informal networks represent one of the most important channels to bring agricultural produce to urban markets (e.g. through urban based 'market women' who buy rural women's products). In Liberia's current context of depleted infrastructure and market breakdowns, these networks, although incipient and informal, play an important role for the basic functioning of the economy.

**Additionally, evidence from urban areas shows that women could become the engine for business development in rural Liberia.** Liberian women are dynamic entrepreneurs. They represent the majority of those working in trading and small scale service sector in both rural and urban areas. In greater Monrovia, 77 percent of women are self-employed, almost twice as many the number of self-employed men (40 percent) (CFSNS, 2006). If provided with adequate support – especially access to credit, women could play a key role revitalizing the rural private sector. Women comprise 86 percent of micro-credit borrowers in greater Monrovia, but micro-credit facilities are almost non-existent in rural areas (UNDP, 2006).



Note: crops refer to rice and cassava

Agricultural workers by type of work, 2001

Source: Liberia Gender Needs Assessment 2007, using data from Agriculture Baseline

Survey, Ministry of Agriculture, 2001

**Finally, women's economic contribution in Liberia has important positive effects for household welfare and poverty reduction.** As in other parts of the world, female earned income in Liberia has an important role in ensuring family welfare and fighting poverty as female earned income is spent in household's basic needs and education in higher proportions than male earned income. The Food Security Survey of Liberia conducted in rural areas shows that female-headed households have significantly higher per-capita food expenditures than male-headed households (522 LD against 487 LD) and a larger share of expenditures spent on food (69 percent against 66 percent). Female headed households spend higher shares on bulgur wheat, oil/butter, condiments and education while male headed households spend higher shares on bush meat, alcohol and tobacco, transport, agricultural and fishing tools, social events and fines (CFSNS, 2006). Increased income generating opportunities for women will therefore have a multiplier effect in ensuring food security in the short term, and improving education outcomes, contributing to break households' poverty cycle in the medium and long term.

### 3. MEN AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO KEY PRODUCTIVE INPUTS AND SERVICES IN RURAL AREAS

**Despite women's prominent economic role, they find severe difficulties to access productive inputs and services essential to undertake their economic activity.** This section reviews women's access to key economic assets and services such as land, credit, training, technology and inputs, information and markets.

#### 3.1 Land

**In Liberia, women own significantly less land than men, and do it in a more insecure way. This may hinder the economic contribution of female farmers and increases their**

**vulnerability to poverty.** Access to land has been a complex issue in Liberia for centuries as in pre-war Liberia, only a few elite men owned land and both women and young men have been deprived of land ownership for a long time. Now days, the data available show that women own land in much lower proportions than men. Only 56 percent of female-headed households, compared to 68 percent of male headed households, and almost double the number of men compared to women (33 against 16 percent) owned land in 2006 (CFSNS, 2006). The analysis of the small scale gender and agriculture survey (SSGAS, 2007) confirms women's lower ownership patterns, shows that women tend to access land through their husbands, and that they experience higher insecurity of tenure. While 65 percent of men and women have access to land according to the survey, only 10 percent of women, compared to 44 percent of men, own the land they cultivate. This means that married women tend to cultivate their husbands' land. Overall, lack of land titles is a generalized problem in Liberia, but especially important for women. Just 11 percent of women, compared to 20 percent of men own titles. Absence of titles for female farmers at a large scale, like in the case of Liberia, may have important economic repercussions as studies associate security of tenure with higher productive investments and improved productivity. Similarly, lack of ownership and lack of titles in particular place women in a vulnerable position in case of economic crisis, family conflict or marital breakdown. This may affect the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts in rural areas.

### 3.2 Legal, customary, and practical factors limit women's access, ownership and security of tenure in Liberia

- **Legal factors** – Until recently, women married under customary law, the most common system in rural areas, had no right over their husbands' property. This has changed following the passing of a law on inheritance in 2003, which grants wives the right to a third of their husbands' property, regardless of the regime under which they are married. According to the law, both sons and daughters have equal rights to inherit land. The extent to which the law is being enforced is however difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, the fact that 32 percent of rural men and 28 percent of rural women interviewed under the SSGAS thought that the law did not allow women to own land, reveals potential shortcomings in the application of the law.
- **Customary factors** – There are grounds to believe that community norms and arrangements continue to restrict women's access to land in Liberia, despite advances in legislation. Community leaders, most of them men, have the right to grant communal land to individuals on a yearly basis for cultivation, and the responsibility for settling land disputes. Women report community leaders' systematic preference for men in the process of granting land. The reason most commonly reported during community discussions for women's lack of access to land was that "*women are strangers to the community and tradition forbids them to inherit land*" pointing to the fact that women lose their informal right to land when they marry out of their community, a common practice in Liberia. Overall, even if under the law women can inherit land, tradition still says differently in many communities in Liberia and it is at the origin of community and family conflicts which deprive women from actual access to land.
- **Practical factors** – Practical factors linked to the division of labour in agriculture in Liberia also constrain women's access to land. As men are responsible for

clearing and felling the land at the beginning of the agricultural cycle, tasks which are carried out in groups through communal arrangements (*kuu*), the inability of female headed households to contribute labour to the *kuu* comes in their way of actually using the land productively. This is in turn the reason used by community leaders not to grant land to these households. Also, practical factors limit women's access to land titles as their higher illiteracy rates and unfamiliarity with legal and administrative matters put them at disadvantage when initiating the cumbersome procedure to obtain deeds in Liberia.

### 3.3 Credit

**Access to finance is limited in rural areas, hampering men and women's agri-business and off-farm employment opportunities.** Lack of credit in rural areas is particularly critical, with credit facilities virtually non-existent, leading to the use of traditional forms of community credit like borrowing from friends or *susu-clubs*. Almost 30 percent of rural households interviewed by the Food Security Survey considered lack of cash as a key agricultural constraint. Only half (53 percent) of rural households have access to credit, out of which 38 percent borrow from friends and between 12 and 56 percent, depending on the region, from *susu clubs* (CFSNS, 2006). Women borrow primarily from family and friends while men's main source of credit is *susu clubs* according to the SSGAS (2007). However, wherever micro credit institutions exist, women are significantly represented among borrowers, 52 percent of the 1,700 members of the 7 community credit unions created by the UNDP Community Based Reintegration Recovery Programme in rural Liberia being women. In urban areas of Liberia, women represent 86 percent of micro-credit borrowers (UNDP, 2006). This suggests that improving credit services in rural areas will have a significant impact on women's business development.

### 3.4 Training

**Training services are scarce in rural areas and women access them significantly less than men.** Overall, absence of training services across the country, and in rural areas in particular, limits significantly men and women's training opportunities. However, access to training is particularly limited for women - half the number of women (11.5 percent) compared to men (20 percent) received training in the last 12 months according to the SSGAS conducted in 2007. Literacy training, skills training, agriculture extension and business management training are essential to improve livelihoods and revitalize the economy in rural areas.

#### 3.4.1 Literacy

**Women have a severe handicap when starting and developing entrepreneurial activities because of their high illiteracy.** There is double the number of illiterate women than men in Liberia (62 percent of women are illiterate against 29 percent of men). Access to literacy courses is limited as adult literacy classes are scarce, and scattered across the country implemented by an array of institutions. Lack of adult literacy programme in the community was repeatedly highlighted as an important women's problem across communities in focus groups' discussions. In addition to NGO and donors programmes, there are 200 centres of the Ministry of Education which used to provide evening classes around the country. However, they are insufficient to meet the needs of the illiterate population, and lack teachers and supplies. No clear policy to tackle illiteracy is in place in Liberia yet, and the education sector strategy, currently under preparation, does not address this issue.

### 3.4.2 Agriculture extension

**Problems of access and inadequate agricultural extension services for female farmers in the past might have limited women's economic opportunities and agricultural productivity.** Given the importance of female labour in agriculture, adequate extension services for women are essential to improve agricultural productivity as well as to provide economic opportunities for women in rural areas. The extension system of the Ministry of Agriculture is however severely damaged by the war and not restored yet. Extension agents are currently not in the field and training centres have been destroyed. While no hard evidence or studies exist to assess the quality of the services received by female farmers, evidence from other African countries points to gender biases in extension services with extension workers focusing exclusively on male farmers for crop support services. Existing information from Liberia reveals that in the past, extension services for women have focused on nutrition and food security, neglecting the commercial aspect of agriculture. "Teaching housewives and girls within the communities appropriate methods of home making food preservation and nutrition" was the focus of the extension programme for women before the war (UNMIL, 2004).

### 3.4.3 Vocational & Skills Training

**While essential to improve women's economic opportunities, an effective system of vocational and skills training is not yet in place in Liberia.** Skills training services are delivered by local and international NGOs as well as by donors. Programmes are scarce and, for the most part, fail to promote women's involvement in new economic niches as they focus on traditional areas of women's involvement like tailoring, tie and dye, cake making, etc. for which market opportunities are not necessarily buoyant.

### 3.4.4 Business training and support services

**Men and women's access to business support training and services are extremely low as such services are virtually non-existent in Liberia.** Just 5 percent of men and 3 percent of women reported having used business support services in the last 12 months according to the SSGAS. Some of the skills training programmes implemented by NGOs and donors include business development training. No government agency provides such services yet, although the Ministry of Commerce and the Liberia Employment Action Programme have plans to implement this type of service. Basic business support through training, mentoring and technical assistance is essential to improve the profitability of agri-businesses, and support women in their role of rural entrepreneurs.

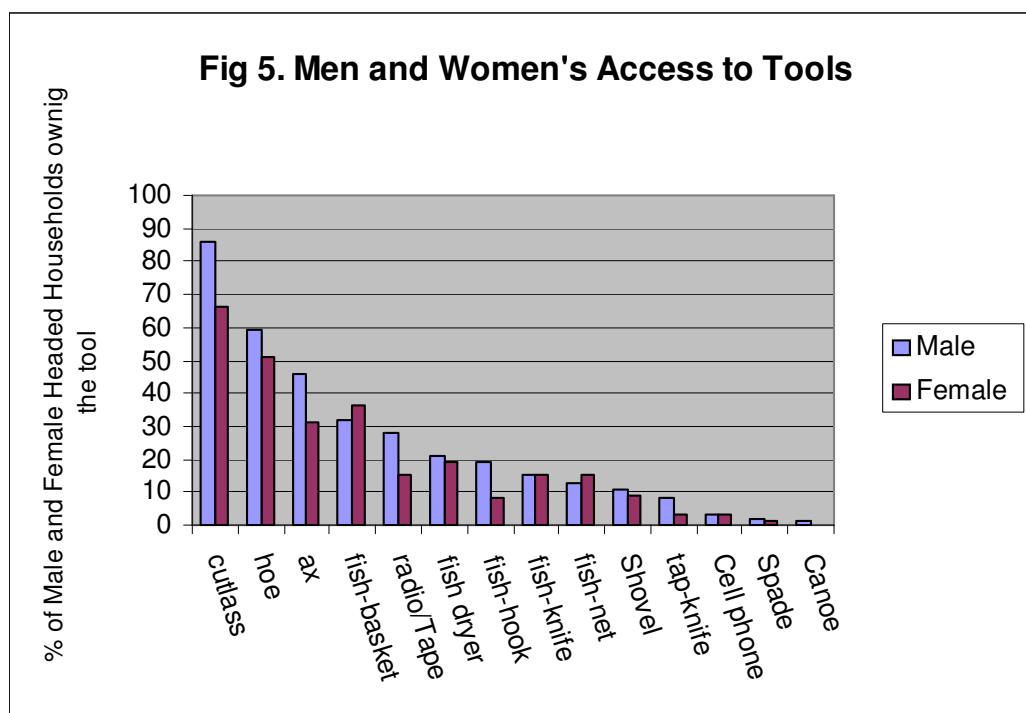
## 3.5 Inputs, Technology & Information

**Women's have low access to key inputs and technology which are vital for agriculture production and for the development of agri-business in rural areas.** Seeds and tools are basic inputs for agricultural production. Information is essential for business development and for marketing of products. Processing technologies are essential to create value chains and business opportunities in agriculture. Overall, male headed households have significantly higher access to **seeds** (13 percent against 8 percent) than female headed households (CFSNS, 2006). With regard to **tools**, and while use of tools is gendered and patterns of ownership may reflect the gender division of labour in rural areas, women enjoy significantly less access to tools than men (18 percent for male headed households compared to 10 percent for female headed households) (see details in Fig 5). Regarding **information**, only 3 percent of men and

women in rural areas have cell phones, and male headed households have higher access to radios than female headed households (28 percent of male headed households compared to 15 percent of female headed households). **Storage capacity** is almost non-existent, causing substantial post-harvesting losses (45 percent for cereals – MoA, 2006) and severely constraining both men and women's agribusiness opportunities. **Processing technologies**, even the most basic types, are lacking in Liberia. Small scale processing devices could improve the opportunities for women's owned agri-businesses, and at the same time, save women considerable time, as they spend long hours in arduous tasks in food processing for domestic and market use (e.g. cassava processing, palm oil production, etc.).

### 3.6 Infrastructure and Access to Markets

**The destruction of roads and bridges during the war has had an important negative effect on economic recovery, especially damaging for marketing activities, in which women predominate.** Most of basic physical infrastructure (from roads to bridges or training centres) was badly damaged during the conflict and is still in the process of being restored. In rural areas, while 81 percent of households have access to weekly markets, on average people have to walk two hours and a half to get to them, some of them walking up to 9 hours in certain counties (Grand Gedeh). Only 29 percent of rural households interviewed in the Food Security and Nutrition Survey reported to have access to daily markets. This is likely to change given the government's emphasis in building marketplaces across the country. Problems of access to markets are particularly damaging for women, who are responsible for produce marketing. According to the last agriculture baseline survey available, 80 percent of all trading in rural areas was done by them in 2001. Data show that women make almost double the number of trips to the market than men – 8.4 against 4.8 for men on average per month (SSGAS, 2007).



Source: Liberia Gender Needs Assessment, 2007, using data from Liberia Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey, 2006

#### 4. SOCIO –CULTURAL FACTORS INFLUENCING MEN AND WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT

**Men and women in Liberia’s current post-conflict environment experience different socially originated problems, and are affected differently by culture and traditions which determine, and often limit, their ability to engage in productive and social activities in rural areas.** This section reviews some of the social and cultural processes taking place at the local level in rural areas which affect men and women’s participation and contribution to rural development. Migration and displacement and their effect on men, health problems with important social ramifications like HIV-Aids and gender based violence, girls and women’s problems to access education in rural areas, social definitions of community gender roles for men and women, and women’s role in local decision making are examined in turn.

##### 4.1 Migration and displacement

**Displacement and migration, coupled with cultural norms prevailing in rural communities that may discourage men from returning, may cause a deficit of (young) men in rural areas.** Liberia’s protracted conflict has caused massive displacement of population -more than 814,000 people or 25 percent of the population were displaced during the 14 years of conflict. Despite resettlement efforts, much of the displaced population has not returned to their areas of origin yet. While gender disaggregated data do not exist on displaced persons, women tend to predominate among those who stayed behind during the conflict. Similarly, many ex-combatants, the majority of them men, have not returned either. This joined to the fact that labour migration out of rural areas is a male phenomenon in Liberia and countrywide, in 93 percent of households with migrants, it is the male who leaves (CNFSS, 2006), might have led to a deficit of men in rural communities. Additionally, anecdotic evidence points to young males’ reluctance to go back to rural areas. Lack of work – 30 percent of those displaced declared lack of work in origin area as one of the main reasons for not returning (CNFSS, 2006), as well as cultural perceptions linked to pre-war agriculture in which young males were exploited by adult elite men, may be influencing the slow path of return for men. If this trend is confirmed, absence of men may have profound implications for the organization of social and economic life in rural areas, which should be analyzed carefully in the design of sector strategies.

##### 4.2 Community rules & gender roles

**Gender equitable social and institutional arrangements at the local level will be a precondition to maintain a sustained path of development in rural areas in Liberia post-conflict environment.** Community discussions held during the preparation of the assessment reveal that despite advances in the legislative and public policy front regarding women rights at the national level, complex community arrangements and long standing traditions continue to restrict women development opportunities at the local level in rural areas. Social customs limit women’s mobility, constrain their participation in decision making and determine their involvement in productive activities in a narrow way. Liberia is in the process of rebuilding its social fabric following the war through the creation of new institutions and the recreation of old ones. In the process of rebuilding social fabric, and reworking norms and rules that will govern community life, it will be crucial to avoid pre-existing arrangements which discriminated against women and young males in rural society regarding many aspects of life including their access to assets, labour –including their own, and decision making.

**The new social contract emerging from the transition should also be able to recognize the changing roles of men and women during and following the conflict in order to make the most of their capabilities to consolidate a sustainable path of local development.** In this sense, women's new economic roles and their participation in previously male dominated sectors like infrastructure or commercial agriculture should be acknowledged and endorsed by communities and society at large. Regarding men, the current difficult economic situation characterized by unemployment and joblessness, poses serious threats to their ability to fulfil their breadwinners roles. Landlessness adds to it in the case of young men in rural areas. Men's inability to meet their societal role has led to stress, self-destructive behaviour, and broader psychosocial problems (e.g. alcoholism, social violence, and violence against women) in other post-conflict environments. The government needs to take this challenge seriously and put in place measures to prevent and cope with the potential effects of this through programmes targeted to men in rural areas.

### 4.3 Participation in decision making

**Women's low participation in decision making, particularly at the local level, deserves special attention as more gender balanced representation in public life may contribute to higher attention from public programmes and policies to meet the needs of women as social and economic agents.** Despite recent improvements following the last elections, women's participation in public life and decision-making is limited in Liberia. At the local level, community structures have been traditionally dominated by male chiefs and elders and custom has excluded women from community decision making processes – e.g. 90 percent of the members of elders' councils are men according to the SSGAS. As reported by the focus groups, one of women's obligations is "not to attend meetings when they are not called". However, the reconstruction phase is opening new opportunities for women's participation in decision making bodies. For example, District Committees of the UNDP Community Based Reintegration Recovery Programme; and Project Management Committees in the Liberian Agency for Community Empowerment projects, the main decision making bodies for community based projects require equal representation of men and women. This is an important improvement over the past and can be the stepping stone for women's greater involvement in local politics and decision making processes. Overall, the process of decentralization to which the government has committed presents an opportunity to improve women's representation in the new structures, and to redress the gender inequalities of the past.

### 4.4 Health

**Overall, socially rooted health problems put a heavy burden on women's lives and limit their contribution to their communities by affecting their ability to work.** *Gender based violence* is without doubt one of the most serious socially originated health problems that women bear in Liberia. A survey of 1,216 women in four counties conducted by the WHO in 2005 shows that 81.6 percent of women reported having experienced one or multiple acts of violence during and after the conflict; between 25 and 74 experienced any type of sexual aggression (depending on the act) and 34.3 percent reported domestic violence from their husbands or partners (WHO, 2005). Sexual violence against women continues to be a problem even after the conflict, aggravated by cultural prejudices that discourage victims from reporting serious aggressions such as rape. In addition, while data for *HIV/AIDS* are scarce, the information available on the basis of pregnant women's health checks puts the infection at 12 percent and on the rise. As the Agriculture Sector Policy Intent recognizes,

HIV/AIDS has the potential to affect productive capacities in rural areas (MoA, 2006). In the case of women, the direct effect of the illness is aggravated by the burden of caring for the sick which falls primarily on them. HIV/AIDS and domestic violence have their causes and/or consequences on social practices that discriminate women or determine their societal role in a narrow way, and in turn limit women's ability to contribute to rural development in a more comprehensive manner.

#### 4.5 Education

**Severe gender gaps in education that disadvantage women and girls at all levels, limit women medium and long term economic participation.** In addition to the already mentioned gender gaps in literacy, girls exhibit lower education outcomes than boys across all levels in rural areas. According to the Food Security Survey, male 19-years-old and above, were twice as likely as females to have received some schooling. In cases where females did receive formal schooling, they were likely to reach basic education levels only. The overall percentage of females having completed elementary school was half of males and the percentage completing high school was only one-quarter to that of males (CFSNS, 2006). Lower education outcomes, particularly at secondary school level, will severely constrain women's ability to benefit from short-term and long-term economic opportunities as the private sector develops in Liberia.

**Several factors compound girls' low enrolment and high drop out from primary and secondary school in rural areas.** Liberia's Food Security Survey highlights the following factors causing low enrolment of girls in rural areas: lack of money to pay for school fees (56 percent); lack of school in the community (24 percent); problems of long distance to school (11 percent); pregnancy (10 percent); and the need for the child to help with house or farm work (7 percent) (WPF, 2006). In addition, Liberia's MDG report points to (i) entrenched cultural and religious practices and values, such as early marriage, and domestic labour; (ii) biases against girls education; (iii) limited number of female teachers in the school system to serve as role models for girls (only 20 percent of the teaching labour force are women according to Liberia's Civil Census of 2005); (iv) violence against girls and women - e.g. sexual harassment by male peers and teachers against girls; (v) increased mobility of girls into the sex industry to earn a living; and (vi) inadequate institutional support for the development and empowerment of girls and women, as the factors contributing to women's and girls low education outcomes.

### 5. INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS GENDER ISSUES IN THE RURAL SECTOR

The iPRSP and the upcoming reform of the agriculture sector set the tone for the formulation and implementation of policies and programmes to facilitate women's full participation and contribution to rural development as well as their empowerment.

The iPRSP recognizes women's role in rural development and proposes actions to support rural women. Revitalize agriculture to achieve pro-poor growth is one of the priorities of the government's iPRSP. The iPRSP recognizes both, women's socio-economic contribution as well as the gender specific obstacles that women face to fulfil their productive roles. The strategy proposes the implementation of measures to facilitate women's access to land, finance, and business development, and to promote female participation in non-traditional

employment sectors. The iPRSP also envisions a strategic action plan and programme to enhance rural women leadership and management capabilities.

**There is room for improving the gender focus of Liberia's Employment Strategy.** Launched in July 2006, the Government of Liberia employment strategy (LEEP/LEAP), provides for a phased approach to employment creation by looking at immediate job creation and simultaneously setting the foundations of a long term employment programme. The strategy has six key initiatives, and a leading ministry responsible for each of them. Boosting employment in the agricultural arena is the sixth initiative under the responsibility of the Ministry of Agriculture. While employment generation for the youth is an important focus of the strategy, and most of the objectives of the strategy have activities associated targeting the youth, the strategy has not explicit focus on women's employment, nor seems to account for the differentiated employment needs of young men and women. UNIFEM and ILO are in the process of preparing a technical assistance programme to help the government address gender issues in LEAP.

**The upcoming reform of the agriculture sector** (see box 1) **presents an important opportunity to support women's role in rural development and to work towards their empowerment.** The shift towards people oriented participatory rural development as well as the decentralization of key services like extension and research opens the door to the integration of women to rural decision making processes *vis a vis* the weight of their socio-economic contribution. The gender aware principle that will guide the reform presents as well an opportunity to ensure that gender issues are adequately integrated in the design and implementation of key areas of the reform. The emphasis on the modernization of the sector and the focus in the creation of value chains will as well create improved opportunities for women's economic empowerment in rural areas. It will be important however, to design concrete mechanisms to implement on the ground the gender focus of the reform, and to monitor and evaluate gender progress during the implementation. Next section offers recommendations on how to achieve this.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Liberia's rural development policies and programmes need to acknowledge women's changing socio-economic role in order to adequately cater to their needs as producers, traders, and entrepreneurs.** Liberia needs to reach *a new consensus on women's socio-economic role* in rural areas, one which acknowledges women's important and diverse contribution to the rural economy. Women contribute *the majority of agricultural labour* (53 percent) and *generate the majority of agricultural produce* (60 percent). Despite commonly held beliefs, women's economic role in rural Liberia goes beyond their (important) contribution to food crop production. They are the *main processors of food and cash crops* for domestic and commercial use. They are the *primary traders and marketers* of rural produce, responsible for 80 percent of trading in rural areas, and actively participating in key farm to market networks. In addition, judging by women's performance in urban areas, they could become the *engine of business development* in the rural economy if provided with the necessary support -77 percent of self-employment in urban Liberia proves women's large entrepreneurial potential.

**Investing in female farmers and lifting the barriers to their Participation in the economy will help revitalize the rural economy, and combat poverty.** Women's access to key productive inputs and services and to decision making do not match their prominent role in

the rural sector in Liberia. Studies in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Kenya, show that more equal control of inputs and farm income by women and men could raise farm yields by as much as a fifth of current output (World Bank, 2001). According to this, improving women's access to land, credit, inputs, extension services and decision making power in Liberia may contribute to increase rural output. Similarly, lifting social barriers and addressing social and cultural biases that confine women to narrowly defined social and economic roles will help them participate in profitable sectors like cash crops, or forestry and improve rural livelihoods, contributing in turn to reduce poverty. Improved participation in decision making will contribute to more effective and efficient programmes and policies by adjusting them to the often overseen needs of female farmers, which may in turn contribute to improving productivity. In addition, increased economic opportunities for rural women will have a positive effect in household welfare and poverty reduction judging by the results of the Food Security Survey which underscore the importance of female expenditure on food and education.

#### **Box 1. Liberia's Agriculture Sector Reform**

**The Government of Liberia has committed to a comprehensive reform of the agriculture sector, in order to make it a leading engine of growth, and food security and in so guarantee sustainability of livelihoods and poverty reduction.** Over the next six years the government intends to pursue a truly integrated rural development strategy with agriculture as the leading sector. The vision of the Government is the holistic development of agriculture with special focus on the transformation of smallholder agriculture into a sustainable, diversified, income-generating, modernized and competitive sector well integrated into the domestic and international markets. The vision also encompasses a vibrant commercial agriculture providing support and incentives to smallholder agriculture.

##### **Key features of the reform, currently under preparation, include:**

- Emphasis on participatory and people centred services' planning and delivery.
- Decentralization of service delivery at the county level, namely regarding extension and research, combined with a regulatory role of the Ministry of Agriculture at the central level.
- Service planning and delivery through direct contact with farmers through the creation of Farmers' Field Schools (FFS) which will operate a system of farmer to farmer training.
- Comprehensive capacity building strategy for the human resources of the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Rehabilitation and privatization of parastatal and state owned plantations.

**Gender issues in the Policy intent.** The Agriculture Policy Intent, which represents current thinking about the future reform of the agriculture sector, identifies women (and youth) as key groups to revitalize the rural economy and achieve rural development. One of the five principles which will guide the reform explicitly refers to "gender and youth sensitive development, particularly empowering women and creating incentives for youth (both girls and boys) for involvement in agricultural and rural development". The policy intent recognizes women's role in the production of food crops, and calls attention over gender specific obstacles that women face to carry out their productive functions in rural areas, particularly regarding gender discrimination in access to land. It proposes targeting rural programmes and policies to female farmers in the context of achieving food security objectives.

*Source: Liberia Statement of Policy Intent for Agriculture*

## **6.1 Recommendations**

**This report proposes a strategy to put women at the centre of rural development in Liberia, empower them and create an enabling environment so that women can fully contribute and benefit from rural development and poverty reduction.** The strategy focuses on five areas: (i) supporting women in their role of food crops producers; (ii) improving women's participation in the creation of agriculture value chains;

(iii) promoting the immersion of women in new economic activities; (iv) improving the institutional capacity of the sector to address gender issues; and (v) addressing social barriers that limit men and women's full contribution and participation in social and economic life in rural areas.

### 6.1.1 Supporting women's role as agriculture producers

**The government and the donor community need to support women in their role as agricultural producers.** Access to land and to adequate extension services are the key areas of action which the government should prioritize to provide women with long lasting assets and capabilities to carry out their productive functions as agriculture producers.

**Land reform** deserves special attention as, despite achievements of the new inheritance law, there are still gender issues to be addressed to ensure equal access to land by men and women. Unfortunately, the sector lacks adequate gender analysis of land issues on which to base its land reform policy. Preliminary data point to different factors causing important gender gaps in land ownership and limiting women's security of tenure in Liberia with subsequent consequences for poverty reduction and the rural economy. This report recommends to undertake an **assessment of land** issues which reviews the complex dynamics that link gender and land reform in Liberia. Using a representative sample, and complemented with qualitative information, the study should review legal, cultural and practical factors limiting women's access to and ownership of land, paying special attention to existing land legislation and customary regimes/arrangements, in order to come up with culturally acceptable mechanisms to enhance women's access, ownership and security of tenure.

A well-functioning **extension service** is an important piece of the reform of the agriculture sector in Liberia, and a crucial aspect of the strategy to support and expand women's role in agriculture. Evidence from other countries shows that participatory extension services have greatly contributed to improving the quality of services delivered to female farmers as well as to enhancing women's participation in key decision making processes pertaining the planning and delivery of these services (World Bank, 2006). However, **a participatory focus does not guarantee the gender awareness of extension services**. To achieve this, international good practices propose several measures like: establishing targets for female participation in the different services (and mechanisms to monitor them); reviewing the design of extension packages based on men and women's productive needs; reviewing extension delivery methods (by including more female extensions and adapting them to female farmers' practical needs); improving women's participation in decision making through quotas for female in decision making bodies and structures; etc.

**Liberia's extension service should design a strategy to adequately integrate gender issues in the new phase of its operations.** The strategy should define the extension service's vision of women's role in agriculture, establish the objectives of the service for female farmers, define targets for each objective as well as institutional mechanisms and measures to implement and monitor them under the new decentralized structure of the service, and define the adequate channels for female beneficiaries' participation in decision making processes.

- **Vision.** The role of female farmers should be understood as flexible and changing as presented in this report (see first paragraph of this section) and not restricted to food crop producers but rather acknowledge women's broader participation as processors,

- marketers, and rural entrepreneurs and their presence in other areas such as cash crops and natural resources.
- The definition of *objectives* should be based on a reassessment of pre-war extension methods and international best practices integrating gender in extension which recommend the **eradication of the dual system** by which men and women receive different types extension services aligned to their traditional gender roles which confine women to health and nutrition training neglecting capacity building in productive and commercial areas. This has proven to be ineffective and inefficient in other countries, and should be given adequate consideration during the design of the strategy.
  - The definition of the *targets, packages and delivery methods* for female farmers should follow an assessment of female farmers' extension needs and a review of international best practices in this area.
  - The extension service needs to create the adequate *institutional structure* to plan and implement gender issues at the decentralized level by defining responsibilities for gender issues in planning and implementation at the county level. Training **planning officers** in the county offices, and including gender related responsibilities in their job description, coupled with the establishment of adequate institutional incentives, would be one way of achieving this. Comprehensive **training to extension staff** to first, communicate the vision and rationale for a gender strategy for the service, and then build their technical capacity to implement it, should follow.
  - **Decision making and Farmers' Field Schools.** Farmers Field Schools (FFS) will be the cornerstone of the participatory new extension service through which services will be delivered to farmers and rural productive activities organized. Ensuring women's participation in decision making positions in field schools is therefore essential to ensure that women are not left out of this important channel of development. **Requirements for percentages of female participation in decision making** of the FFSs, as those mentioned for District Committees (UNDP Community Based Reintegration Recovery Programme) or Project Management Committees (Liberian Agency for Community Empowerment) should be considered.

### 6.1.2 Improving women's participation in the creation of rural value chains

**The government needs to support women in their role in food processors, rural entrepreneurs, and marketers of agriculture produce.** Women carry out almost 80 percent of trade in rural areas and play an important role in processing for commercial purposes. The government needs to support the expansion of this facet of women's involvement in agriculture, in order to maximize women's farm and off-farm contribution to the rural economy.

First, the government should facilitate women's access to processing technologies for agribusiness. The role of the **central agricultural research institute** (CARI) will be fundamental to provide such technologies and to work with rural women in the development/adjustment of technologies for agri-business development. CARI is aware of this and has women as an important target group of its programmes. As part of the overall effort to rebuild the technical capacity of the human resources of the institution, specific **training and exchange of experiences** with other countries in the area of gender and agriculture research should be considered.

Second, the government should **ensure that women access credit under the new system proposed by the reform**. The government plans to review the formal credit system for the agricultural sector and will consider the establishment of a special line of credit in the private commercial banks targeting smallholder agriculture and rural business development. Regardless of the strategy chosen to facilitate credit to smallholders, **flexible arrangements** that allow **landless individuals** lacking collateral to access credit should be put in place. Similarly, close monitoring of borrowers by sex should be undertaken to ensure that women apply and obtain credit in adequate proportions.

Third, in addition to women's participation in FFSs, the government needs to **organize and promote the association of rural women**. The move from isolated small scale production to integrated market production can be achieved by creating networks of women. To a certain extent, this exists on an embryonic stage as "**market women**" from urban areas informally contract rural women establishing chains of produce from farm to market. The government should **support this type of women's network**, formalize them, and strengthen them, by providing them with information and basic management skills, and by facilitating their contact with chambers of commerce and the broader corporate sector. **Integrated packages for rural women** which target them through capacity building and organization, training, micro-credit and business support have been successful in organizing women, creating networks and graduating women's groups to larger business enterprises in other countries (e.g. Ethiopia's Women's Empowerment Initiative). Finally, they could be studied and piloting considered in Liberia. The **results of a comprehensive study of 'market women'** and their links to the rural economy are soon to be released, and they should be carefully considered in the planning for future rural development strategies.

Fourth, agribusiness interventions which organize and target female farmers, with high potential to offer rapid results and lessons (**RBI- results based initiatives**) like the one currently under design by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Gender and Development with the support of the World Bank and UNIFEM could be used to inform the ongoing design and redesign of sector strategies to support female agribusiness.

## 6.2 Promoting women's participation in new economic areas

**Women should be introduced in economic areas where they are not yet present, and for which growth prospects are high**. This report backs the recommendation of *Liberia Gender Needs Assessment* that advocates for women's higher involvement in the natural resource sector. Cash crops production and processing like rubber tapping, coffee, cocoa and palm oil are natural candidates, as women already play an "invisible" role in them and have the necessary skills to participate in the sector. The reform of the plantation sector and the rehabilitation of tree crops present an opportunity for increased female employment which should not be missed. In addition, according to the Ministry of Agriculture, great potential also exists for the development of other crops for export such as sunflower, sesame and other vegetables, oil seeds, maize, commercial quantities of coconut, bananas, pineapples, cashew nuts, cola nuts, avocado, spices, and fruit. However, the strategy should go further, opening the doors of male dominated sectors like fisheries and aquaculture and the logging industry to women, including furniture making. In order to achieve this, the following will be necessary:

- First, **sector agreements and public-private partnerships** to pilot schemes for women's participation in these sectors, followed by **impact evaluations** of women's performance should be undertaken.

- Second, adequate training strategies for women, including *apprenticeships and stage* periods should be put in place as needed to provide women with skills that allow them to enter these new activities.
- Third, the programme for *capacity building and vocational education and training* in agriculture, agro processing and entrepreneurship for the youth, that the MoA plans to implement, should *account for the differentiated needs of young girls and boys*. It should avoid failures of the past that focused training for girls in areas with no clear market demand.

Also, the combination of productive training with other subjects like *life skills* or *healthy life styles* has been tested in other countries to address social problems of boys and could contribute to consolidate Liberia's still socially fragile post-conflict society, and to maximize the impact of productive activities.

### 6.2.1 Strengthening the institutional framework to address gender issues in rural policies and programmes

**In order to support the PRS effort, Liberia needs to build its institutional capacity to address gender issues in rural development policies and programmes.**

**Policy dialogue on gender and agriculture** should be conducted **in the context of the preparation of the PRSP**. The Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Gender should establish regular channels of communication at the highest possible level to monitor the integration of gender issues in the PRSP currently under preparation.

**The Ministry of Gender and Development (MOGAD)** should improve its capacity to lead the policy dialogue in the area of the area of gender and agriculture/rural development. The MOGAD should consider restoring its pre-existing focal point/department on gender and agriculture or a similar structure, and integrate it in its overall strategy for women's economic empowerment. Donors could support MOGAD in improving its capacity on gender and policy analysis, including rural development policy.

**Strengthen the capacity of MoA for strategic planning and implementation in the area of gender.** In addition to the already mentioned targeted *capacity building* efforts within the *agriculture extension* service and the *agriculture research institute*, the MoA needs to improve its capacity for strategic planning in the area of gender.

- The *Department of Planning of the MoA*, supported by donor and government partners (e. g. MOGAD) should lead the development of an overall *gender strategy for the agricultural sector* following the process outlined for the extension programme earlier in this report.
- As a precondition for this, the ministry needs to improve its *data collection and analytical capacity* in the area of gender. The ministry, in the process of rebuilding its Monitoring and Information Systems, should use this opportunity to integrate the collection of sex disaggregated data for key sector variables through its regular data collection instruments (e.g. agriculture baseline survey). In addition, and with the assistance of donors and other government institutions (e.g. MOGAD) the MoA should build its capacity to conduct targeted analysis of gender issues pertaining to the sector.

- Finally regarding **implementation**, the current capacity building programme for the ministry's **human resources** should include a **training module on gender issues in agriculture and the rural sector** in Liberia which reviews men and women's role in the rural economy in Liberia, analyses their needs on the basis of their access to key inputs and services, and reviews the sector policies and programmes that are/will be implemented to address those needs. Donors could support the preparation of the module providing technical assistance to the MoA.

### 6.2.2 Addressing social barriers that limit men and women's contribution and participation in social and economic life in rural areas

#### **Rural policies and programmes need to pay attention to the needs of young men in order to support and empower them to play their part in the agriculture sector and rural life.**

The government needs to design and implement a strategy to attract and retain young men in rural areas. In the short term, young men will be attracted by the availability of jobs. The **labour intensive** roads and infrastructure rehabilitation **programmes** that the government has launched should be continued. In the medium term however agriculture based jobs will be the backbone of rural life and the main source of employment for the youth. Young men's potential reluctance to "go back" to farm jobs should be considered and adequately tackled. The government could aim at **'changing the face of agriculture'** by presenting it as the modern, profitable, technology and export based sector that it aspires it to be. To that end, in parallel to the measures to modernize the sector, the government could consider the design and implementation of a **communications campaign**, which emphasized agribusiness and off farm employment in the sector, targeted to the youth. Similarly, care should be taken in the way in which the **Farmers Field Schools** (the visible face of the reform) will be presented and in how to make them **attractive to the youth**. The provision of on-site Information and Communications Technologies (**ICTs**) and activities which are amenable to young people could be for example considered. In the medium term, the overall modernizing effort of the sector, including the development of agribusiness and the improvement of commercialization may bear fruit to attract landless youth. In parallel however, **land reform** should be a priority to tackle long lasting inequalities in access to land that discriminate against women and the youth.

**Farmers Field Schools could be a vehicle to address social and culturally gender discriminating practices of the past and become the cornerstone of the new rural social contract based on the values of participation, ownership, inclusion and non-discrimination.** Beyond their role in the service delivery chain for farmers, the reform of the agriculture sector envisions FFSs to become the organizer of rural economic life. This report proposes to expand that role so that FFSs participate as well in the governance of social life. As newly founded institutions they offer the opportunity of not reproducing pre-war unequal socio-cultural arrangements and becoming new local governance structures operated under new rules – which allow for women participation in decision making for example. FFSs could be gradually expanded to make them a hub for community services other than those strictly productive. They could become a source of information for the youth, provide access to ICTs once the communications infrastructure is restored in Liberia, they can serve as a gathering place for NGO-operated training in areas as important as life skills and healthy life styles. They could in the future be as well used to transmit important social messages such as education against gender based violence through training and other community activities. The MoA, in conjunction with other government institutions should consider the role of FFSs carefully, in order to seize the full potential of these new community structures.

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**II. LINKING IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS  
TO AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT AND PRO-POOR GROWTH  
IN LIBERIA**

**Comprehensive Assessment of the Agriculture Sector in Liberia  
(CAAS-Lib)**

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**Liberia 2007**



## II. LINKING IMPROVED FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS TO AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT AND PRO-POOR GROWTH IN LIBERIA

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 National context

Since the January 2006 presidential elections, the government of Liberia has worked to systematically address the challenges confronting the country following two decades of conflict and instability. An interim policy reduction strategy (iPRS) has been adopted as the centrepiece of the country's efforts to guide the transition from relief to development. Based on the four pillars of national security, economic growth and poverty reduction, strengthened governance and rule of law, and rehabilitated infrastructure and improved delivery of basic services, the iPRS represents the first step toward implementation of a more comprehensive PRS centred on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG).<sup>5</sup>

The agricultural sector is looked upon as one of the key vehicles through which the country can achieve the growth, equity and security objectives outlined in the iPRS. Food security is enhanced through pro-poor economic growth that creates employment opportunities for Liberians to participate in remunerative and sustainable livelihoods that increase incomes, thereby facilitating access to food, health, water and education. Better utilization of food and improved nutritional outcomes are, in a reciprocal manner, critical investments in human capital needed to increase productivity and sustain economic growth.

To this end, the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) has initiated a number of actions aimed at establishing the policy and institutional framework to guide development of the food and agricultural sector. In October 2006, the MOA, in collaboration with supporting partners, produced a Position Paper<sup>6</sup> outlining a strategic framework centred on three core clusters of interventions: building institutional and human capacity; supporting the transition from emergency and relief to recovery and development, and; ensuring household and national food and nutrition security. Subsequently in the Agriculture Briefing Note<sup>7</sup> prepared by the MOA in February 2007 for the Liberia Partners' Forum, Liberia articulated its expectations of the agricultural sector:

- A source of employment for ex-combatants and new entrants into the labour force, particularly the large number of youth under fifteen years of age.
- Higher incomes from cash and food crop production; improved nutrition for children and other vulnerable groups, which is a principal input into higher labour productivity; growth in agricultural exports.
- Sustainable natural resource use.

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<sup>5</sup> Republic of Liberia, Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy, Breaking with the Past: from Conflict to Development, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, "Agriculture: Ensuring Food Security as the Entry-Point to Poverty Reduction", Position Paper by the Ministry of Agriculture and Supporting Partners, October 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Agriculture Briefing Note, prepared for the Liberia Partners' Forum, January 19, 2007.

To achieve these aims, the Note suggests that future interventions need to address the problem of low yields of food and tree crops, limited agricultural markets and weak institutions.

## 1.2 Comprehensive Assessment of the Agricultural Sector (CAAS-Lib)

In this same direction of developing the policy and institutional framework of the food and agricultural sector, the Ministry of Agriculture, in partnership with the FAO, World Bank and IFAD, initiated a Comprehensive Assessment of the Agricultural Sector (CAAS-Lib) in 2006. By analyzing the key challenges in responding to both the immediate needs of recovery and longer term development objectives as well as outlining the policy, institutional and programmatic priorities and options for the food and agricultural sector, the CAAS-Lib will establish the analytical foundation for transitioning from ‘relief’ to ‘development’.

The CAAS-Lib commissioned ten studies focused on agricultural research, extension, institutions, land tenure, fisheries, mechanization, land and water, finance and markets, food crops and livestock.<sup>8</sup> Following their completion and prior to the production of a synthesis report, it was deemed important to analyze the study results through a poverty/food security prism in order to ensure that the policy and programmatic recommendations and investment strategies proposed by CAAS-Lib would be consistent with the government’s focus on reducing poverty and improving food security. This paper takes a medium- to long-term vision in asking how policies and programmes can be designed, implemented and monitored in order to more effectively target vulnerable groups and contribute to the development of sustainable livelihoods. In other words, it centres on issues related to the development of a pro-poor, food security-oriented, agricultural development strategy.

While the other CAAS-Lib studies analyzed the prevailing situation in their respective area of inquiry and content of future agricultural and food sector interventions, the analysis presented in this paper focuses largely on questions of process and how to move forward in designing and implementing a pro-poor, food security strategy. It asks the questions: how can Liberia create an enabling environment that allows vulnerable households to actively participate in and benefit from agricultural growth? How can policy, technology, institutions and investment be tailored to address the primary causes of poverty and hunger for households, livelihood groups and communities?

This paper is based primarily on an analysis of the ten CAAS-Lib reports. A review of other available studies (e.g., the Comprehensive Food Security and Nutrition Survey, CFSNS) and discussions with numerous people in Liberia served to complement this appraisal.

This introduction is followed by eight sections: the second section presents a brief analysis of the current food security situation; the third section examines the conceptual issues of pro-poor economic growth, poverty reduction and food security, agricultural productivity growth and transformation; the fourth part proposes how to operationalize a pro-poor approach in the agricultural sector; the fifth section addresses crosscutting issues to be considered by public and private actors in developing a vibrant smallholder sector; the sixth section looks at the government’s role as steward of food security in Liberia in the areas of smallholder development, child malnutrition, safety nets and the real cost of food; section seven discusses the importance of analysis and information for improved decision-making;

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<sup>8</sup> The gender study was not completed before this paper was written.

the concluding section synthesizes the salient findings of this paper and makes recommendations for future investment to improve food security in Liberia.

## **2. FOOD SECURITY IN LIBERIA**

It is understandable after fifteen years of conflict and emergency interventions that there is a dearth of socioeconomic information and analysis of the food security situation in Liberia. During the protracted crisis, limited data collection and analysis were logically focused on generating information for emergency programming operations. Subsequently in the transition period, information-related activities revolved around the needs in recovery and resettlement operations. Having completed a large portion of the resettlement process, the Liberian government in collaboration with technical partners has begun to address the information needs required to guide, prioritize and target development activities.

It was toward this aim that the Liberian Government and development partners undertook the CFSNS between February and June 2006 (CFSNS 2006). This survey was conducted in 5,409 households in 375 randomly selected rural and semi-urban communities and included anthropometric measurements of 6,041 children under five and their mothers. It represents the most up-to-date source of information on food security in Liberia. This section highlights several of the key findings.

### **2.1 High levels of vulnerability**

The CFSNS revealed that 81 percent of Liberian households are presently vulnerable, meaning that they are subject to factors that place them at risk of becoming food insecure or malnourished, or affecting their ability to cope (40 percent are high vulnerable and 41 percent are moderately vulnerable to become food secure).<sup>9</sup> The study reports that households which have recently moved back to their communities are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. This situation may persist to the extent that people continue to return to their counties, albeit in smaller numbers.

Based on its classification of households' current livelihood activities, the CFSNS found that those with seemingly more regular sources of income garnered from salaries and remittances as well as those involved in charcoal production, fishing and petty trade are more likely to be food secure while those engaged in palm oil production, hunting, or are contract labourers are more likely to be food insecure. Households involved in food and cash crop production are the least likely to fall in the food-insecure group. Households are more likely to be food secure if they cultivated crops in 2005, cultivated a vegetable garden or a "hunger farm" (CFSNS 2006).

The CFSNS indicated that food insecure people are located everywhere in Liberia, primarily where there are high rates of recently returned refugees and ex-combatants. The informal sector plays a major role in assuring daily survival for many people.

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<sup>9</sup> Household food security profiles were developed by combining the results of a two-step analysis: 1) assessing food consumption frequency and dietary diversity as proxies of access and nutritional intake; 2) assessing household's potential to access sufficient food through purchasing power or own production.

In addition to serving as a valuable source of information in a context characterized by a lack of data and analyses for decision-making, the results of the CFSNS provide an effective starting place for beginning to assess how to address the medium-term development needs of the vulnerable households. Unfortunately, as the figures attest, the overwhelming number of Liberian households can be characterized as vulnerable, particularly in terms of their involvement in sustainable livelihoods. Further, given the rapidly evolving nature of the food and agricultural sector in Liberia, many of the livelihood systems used by households in this recovery period may be transitional in nature as other opportunities develop.

The large number of households characterized by various states of vulnerability underlines the importance of several factors: thinking in a medium-term; focusing on the development of functional systems; and reorienting efforts from an approach emphasizing short-term assistance to one centred on the establishment of an enabling environment and development of sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, the results of the nutritional component of the CFSNS indicate that Liberia faces a major structural problem of malnutrition.

## 2.2 High prevalence of malnutrition

The CFSNS estimates that 6.9 percent of Liberian children suffer from wasting or acute malnutrition. In five counties located in central and south eastern Liberia, the prevalence of wasting is over 10 percent, a level considered as an alert in the WHO classification system. Malnutrition rates are even more worrisome for children between the ages of 12 and 24 months for which the national wasting prevalence was estimated at 12 percent. In addition to responding to the immediate needs of wasted children in Liberia, it is equally important to develop the institutions and the mechanisms that are required to systematically identify and address the causal factors of malnutrition.

Beyond the short-term problem, the study recorded that **39 percent of Liberian children less than five years are stunted** (chronically malnourished) with rates above 40 percent in nine of the fifteen counties. This problem is not new. Contrary to popular perception, similar levels of child malnutrition existed in the 1970s; the Liberia National Nutrition Survey, conducted in 1975-76, recorded a national stunting prevalence of 36.5 percent (Ministry of Health and Social Welfare 1978).

Current figures on child mortality also show little variation from the 1976 levels. Current under-five mortality rates are estimated at 235 per 1,000 live births, a similarly high level as the figures of 243 and 220 respectively for the periods 1976-80 and 1981-86 and among the highest in the world (WHO 2006; DHS 1986).

The survey also reported that only 32 percent of Liberian households have access to safe drinking water and 10 percent have access to health facilities in their immediate vicinity. Both issues merit close attention and collaboration with other sectors as part of a strategy to improve nutritional outcomes and food security in Liberia.

## 3. FOOD SECURITY POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND PRO-POOR ECONOMIC GROWTH

The value of this information and additional detailed analysis will ultimately depend on its use as input into the design, prioritization and targeting of policies, programmes and investments. The ability to carry out this work will, however, be limited to the extent that an overriding vision and framework is not developed to guide future planning and policy making

in Liberia. It is toward this aim that the CAAS-Lib has been undertaken. This section outlines a number of concepts and issues that may be useful in the development of the major orientation and objectives for the agricultural sector. In particular, it discusses three main issues: pro-poor, productivity-led agricultural growth, the transformation of the rural economy and the relationship with food security and poverty reduction.

### **3.1 Food security, higher incomes and growth linkages**

Improving food security and reducing poverty are both inextricably linked to increased income that is generated by rapid agricultural growth. Higher incomes permit households and individuals to increase their expenditures on food, health and education, all important components of improved food security and a reduced level of poverty. Real income is also the most important determinant of savings, which is the foundation for increasing investment needed to expand economic growth.

Numerous studies have documented the important ways in which rapid agricultural growth contributes to economic transformation and poverty reduction, particularly for countries such as Liberia with a large percentage of poor and food insecure people:

- Provision of basic foods, raw materials for agro-industry, and exports that frees up foreign exchange for the importation of strategic industrial and capital goods.
- Poverty reduction through increases in labour productivity and employment, and by lowering food prices for all.
- Release of labour and capital (in the form of rural savings and taxes) to the non-farm sector.
- Increased purchasing power among the rural population for non-food consumer goods and services, thereby supporting growth in services and trade and providing a nascent market for an emerging manufacturing sector (Hazell and Haddad 2001).

In other words, while agriculture growth is driven through technological change, the rural non-farm sector is stimulated largely by increased demand for locally produced goods and services arising from higher farm incomes. The burden for employment growth and poverty reduction fall primarily on agriculture, particularly through its multipliers to the labour-intensive rural non-farm sector. The rural non-farm sector includes many people who may be nominally declared as farmers, but who in fact derive a high proportion of their income from rural non-farm activities.

#### *3.1.1 The importance of agricultural productivity growth*

Agricultural productivity growth through technological change is indispensable to sustained broad based agricultural growth, providing the critical first steps in economic development in many countries. Experiences from many countries clearly demonstrate a strong statistical relationship between agricultural productivity and poverty. Depending on the model and data set used, a 10 percent increase in crop yields leads to a 7.2 percent decrease in the percentage of those living on less than \$1 per day (von Braun et al. 2004).

Given this strong relationship between agricultural productivity growth and poverty reduction, future efforts in Liberia need to focus on productivity-enhancing measures that increase incomes. Growth based on extensification is generally not profitable and sustainable, often having damaging implications for the environment. Experience has shown that

increasing productivity both at the farm level and throughout the various stages of agricultural commodity value chains is not easy. It is through a mix of effective policies, well-structured institutions and appropriate technology that productivity has improved, value chains have become more competitive and incomes have risen. Contrarily, a weak incentive environment, lack of access to credit and affordable, high quality inputs and minimal intensification of production are among the factors that have constrained yields from increasing and hindered growth in incomes.

Competitive, productive and profitable agricultural commodity value chains that generate higher incomes have been shown to contribute to capital accumulation and productive reinvestment needed to foster growth in many countries. Assuring that value chains can be re-established in Liberia will strongly depend on investment that improves productivity and allows them to compete in national, regional and international markets.

### *3.1.2 Pro-poor growth: participation is key*

The impact of economic growth on poverty depends on the pattern of growth and the degree to which households are able to participate in remunerative activities that generate higher incomes. Poverty reduction is not just a question of growth in absolute income levels but the manner in which it is distributed among the population and the relative gains in income achieved by the poorest segments of society (Eastwood and Lipton 2001). In other words, distribution and equity issues are strongly influenced by the pattern of growth, which concerns the extent to which the poorer segments of the population participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth (OECD 2006).

Pro-poor growth policies must generally be based on a good understanding of who are the poor, how they earn their livelihoods and what will be the expected impact on their income and assets. In present day Liberia, this task is complicated by the fact that the overwhelming majority of Liberians currently live in poverty, and the livelihoods practiced during this recovery period may not necessarily be those utilized once economic systems improve. In fact, over three quarters of the Liberian population is poor (iPRS 2006). Further, the CFSNS study indicates that over 80 percent of the population is classified as “vulnerable” to food insecurity (CFSNS 2006). While not surprising for a country coming out of two decades of conflict, the widespread prevalence of poverty and food insecurity has particular implications for the future process of addressing the underlying factors that contribute to this situation.

Economic activities need to be broad-based and inclusive of the largest part of the work force. In addition to maintaining macroeconomic stability, a favourable investment climate and continued support to people in transition, a future programme of work must be oriented toward increasing incentives, opportunities and capabilities for employment and entrepreneurship for all Liberians. Establishing this environment depends partly on the quality of institutions and the effectiveness of governance mechanisms. It may also depend on concerted efforts to create the conditions and remove the obstacles for certain households and geographical zones to participate in the process.

In situations where the poor have few assets other than their own labour, some analysts argue that increased employment will have the greatest effect on poverty reduction. Gainful employment raises incomes by increasing the number of working hours, and, as increased employment tightens the labour market, by rising real wages. While the Liberian conflict has clearly left the majority of households with few assets beyond their own labour, simply

selling labour to extractive industries may not result in high incomes needed to improve food security and reduce absolute poverty levels. In fact, many analysts point to the high levels of absolute poverty and minimal remunerative opportunities for many Liberian households before the war as one of the underlying factors contributing to the conflict.

Given the presently low level of assets in the country, future efforts need to address how households will acquire assets (i.e. land, knowledge, inputs) as well as provide economic opportunities in an enabling environment. The latter issue may require systematic efforts to improve the terms on which the poor participate in the market (i.e. input and output markets) while considering how the risk-reduction behaviour of vulnerable households may inhibit them from taking advantage of new opportunities. Finally, it is not clear what accountability mechanisms need to be established in order to improve the chances that the voices and interests of the poor will be considered.

Several of the CAAS-Lib studies have underlined many of these same themes of participation, inclusion, transparency in decision-making and accountability. The challenge lies in moving from generalities to concrete actions that seek to implement these principles. It relates largely to the operationalization of the governance pillar of the iPRS as an intermediate input into the implementation of the economic growth/poverty reduction and infrastructure/service delivery pillars. In practical terms, it implies that future agricultural-related initiatives need to be linked with the past and on-going efforts to support communities during resettlement operations. It entails working with value chain stakeholders, community-based organizations and decentralized levels of government in order to mesh the policy, institutional and technological issues with the socio-cultural and political aspects.

In assessing the situation through a conflict-sensitive lens and with an appreciation for the importance of addressing the root structural causes of the conflict, future actions must consider how the socio-cultural and political dynamics in communities affect the social stability and the capability of households to develop remunerative livelihoods and ensure their food security (iPRS 2006).

### **3.2 Transformation, not just recovery of the agricultural sector**

This pro-poor approach is consistent with iPRS emphasis on moving from an emergency footing to relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts and subsequently to demand-driven, sustainable development. While many actions are needed to address widespread vulnerability and food insecurity during the implementation of this recovery process, CAAS-Lib findings indicate that simply “recovery” may be inadequate for dealing with the root structural causes of the conflict. Establishment of pro-poor policies capable of guiding broad-based economic growth entails inevitably that Liberia transform its agricultural economy.

There is some risk that Liberia could fall back into old patterns of growth and development based on natural resource extraction industries and heavily concentrated plantation and commercial agricultural sector. While policy pronouncements clearly indicate that this is not the government’s strategy, there is a risk that the pressing need for foreign exchange and fiscal revenues could eventually lead to acceptance of the easier strategy centred on large, commercial, rubber and oil palm plantations, extraction of iron ore, diamonds and timber along with revenue generation from ship licensing and import tariffs. This approach may be easier than transforming the subsistence sector into a diversified, viable smallholder rural economy that generates broad-based income growth.

Transformation of the agricultural sector begs the question of what needs to be transformed. In Liberia, it concerns the transformation of a bimodal system characterized by an economically-concentrated commercial plantation sector coexisting with large numbers of poor, subsistence farm households involved in low input/low output (shifting) cultivation, to one in which there is broad-based farmer participation in integrated, productivity-driven, cash-crop/food crop systems (Tefft 2005). Achieving this transformation depends on the development of an enabling environment in which former subsistence farmers have opportunities for participating in and benefiting from a diversified farm and non-farm activities.

In the past, Liberia did not systematically work to offer rural households these types of economic opportunities, particularly vis-à-vis cash crops. While some observers may argue that given Liberia's rich agricultural, forest and water resources, farmers did not need to intensify production in order to meet their food needs, it is clear that this approach left most rural farm households with some degree of food security but mired in poverty, socially marginalized and with chronically malnourished children.

Food security research has highlighted the strong positive interactions between cash-crop and food-crop activities. Higher value cash crops produced for international, regional or national markets provide access to credit, equipment and inputs that may not be feasible with food crops. They foster higher rates of food production, generate higher incomes and lead to greater capitalization at the farm level. Diversified farming systems contribute also to more sustainable livelihoods which are less vulnerable to shocks. Higher rates of capital accumulation and productive reinvestment by farmers contribute to improved productivity and welfare, spurring upstream and downstream growth linkages that drive broad-based, socio-economic development in rural areas.

#### **4. OPERATIONALIZING A PRO-POOR APPROACH TO IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY; SOCIAL INCLUSION AND BROAD-BASED PARTICIPATION**

Transforming the agricultural sector to one in which smallholders have an opportunity to participate in and benefit from a diversified set of cash crop, food crop and other activities in both the farm and non-farm sectors is not an easy task. The challenge is compounded by a situation in which "everything is important and at worst urgent" and every activity is a priority.

CAAS-Lib aims to provide the overarching vision and framework for undertaking actions in the agricultural sector to meet national food security and poverty reduction goals. Given this objective, the CAAS-Lib must logically consider how to prioritize and sequence public and private actions, particularly with respect to investment decisions that will enable the country to move from recovery to the development of functional systems.<sup>10</sup> Operationalizing this approach will require strategic direction, systematic processes and greater participation from a wide, cross-section of Liberian actors in order to move from fairly general policy and programme pronouncements to a set of concrete actions and investments. The systematic involvement of a more diverse group of actors in this process will help counter the dearth of

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<sup>10</sup> For example, it relates to moving from a situation characterized by free seed distribution to one in which households, farmer organizations, private businesses and government entities are involved in the research, multiplication and distribution of appropriate seeds to smallholders.

empirical information on the agricultural sector, low government capacity and a weak incentive system to attract and retain qualified personnel.

The suggested approach implies moving from the safety of a purely technocratic agricultural approach to one that incorporates social, cultural and political elements needed to develop social capital. In other words, how can future agricultural policy be implemented in harmony with social policies to meet the country's food security and poverty alleviation goals (Flores et al. 2005)? Experiences from other countries coming out of crisis situations have shown that sustainable economic growth must be socially inclusive if it is to break the cycle of violence and conflict (Global Monitoring Report 2005; Obidegwu 2004). Given the political commitment of the Liberian Government to these goals, as espoused in the iPRS, the country is well positioned to move forward on this agenda.

In practical terms, what does socially inclusive, participatory dialogue imply for future actions related to the issues discussed in the CAAS-Lib? What does it mean and how will it be conducted? What institutions and actors can be responsible for and participate in the important functions of prioritization, targeting, monitoring and evaluation? The answers to these questions would appear to offer the initial elements for implementing a pro-poor approach in Liberia. While the MOA will need to continue working with other line ministries, civil society and development partners, the establishment of partnerships and participatory processes involving the following three groups of actors may offer the best opportunity to effectively design and implement actions that are consistent with the interrelated economic and governance goals set forth in the iPRS:

- **agricultural value chain stakeholder boards** representing actors at all levels of the supply chain;
- **producer organizations** and other types of community-based organization (e.g., farmer associations, cooperatives, etc.) involved in collective action in the agricultural sector;
- **decentralized government bodies** and elected officials.

By working closely with these structures as primary interlocutors for sector development, the MOA can keep actors' needs and desires at the centre of strategies and action plans that are needed to develop livelihoods based on economically feasible opportunities and to address the binding constraints to economic growth and food security whether commodity specific or of geographic origin. This focus will result in an agricultural growth and investment policy that is market-driven, socially sensitive, inclusive of the most vulnerable groups, with shared responsibility of key actors.

#### **4.1 Value chain stakeholder groups**

Liberia is blessed with a natural environment conducive to the production of many high value crops, which, with the proper policy, institutional and technological environment, could develop into viable commodity value chains competitive in international, regional and national markets. This section suggests that their future development will depend largely on the establishment and active participation of value chain stakeholder boards.

Given the poor track record of the performance of public parastatals in managing agricultural commodity value chains and the government's avowed preference for a private sector-oriented development strategy, Liberia is challenged with the task of developing an enabling

environment and incentives to promote private sector involvement and investment, while at the same time, ensuring that equity considerations of a pro-poor growth policy are met. It is in the context of this institutional vacuum where value chain stakeholder groups could play a catalyzing lead role in assuming responsibility for development of key commodity sub-sectors<sup>11</sup>.

Composed of representatives of actors involved in the different functions of the value chain (from farmers and farmer organizations to traders, processors and exporters), a value chain stakeholder board serves as the primary organization responsible to guide the development of the sub-sector. In no way does the existence of such an organization imply that public agencies have no further role. On the contrary, experiences in other countries reveal that the delivery of key public goods is very important to the functioning and performance of value chains. For example, there is a crucial role for the public sector to play in establishing the rules under which such boards are formed in order to prevent them from acting simply as cartels that exploit the public.

Liberia's agricultural commodity value chains are unsurprisingly in various stages of dysfunction. While some initiatives have already been taken to resurrect them (e.g., cocoa), in the majority of situations, the MOA needs to organize meetings of value chain stakeholders to begin to discuss and develop a strategy and action plan for sub-sector development. Although generally managed and driven by stakeholders, in the present situation, the MOA will probably need to play an active role at the onset in establishing procedures and guiding their actions. At a minimum, elucidating public goals and government policy will reduce uncertainty and clarify roles and expectations. A comprehensive crosscutting policy review of fiscal, import/export, transportation, production, marketing and finance issues affecting value chain operations would be a valuable exercise.

The MOA could stipulate at stakeholder meetings that the government will concentrate its interventions in the following areas: ensuring a stable macroeconomic environment; developing transport infrastructure; establishing an agricultural market information system; providing broad sector and value chain oversight; and ensuring broad-based smallholder participation. It could, for example, envisage a set of key government objectives for the value chain along the following lines:

- Produce and market in a sustainable and productive manner, competitive products for national, regional or international markets such that the value chain contributes to economic growth, household well-being and is not a huge drain on government finances.
- Ensure broad-based smallholder participation at the farm level.
- Establish a representative stakeholder group to serve as the primary vehicle for the development of the value chain.

These groups will initially be called upon to develop a vision for their respective value chains and outline an action and investment plan for implementation. Stakeholder meetings could initially aim to discuss the following issues: How should the value chain initially be organized? What are the binding constraints for the improvement of the performance of the value chain? What are the critical public inputs needed to improve performance and meet country goals?

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<sup>11</sup> Value chain, supply chain and sub-sector are used interchangeably.

These meetings would help clarify the other public inputs that the government may consider providing to the value chain (e.g., product promotion – “Buy Liberia”). While certain NGOs with expertise in supporting community-based organizations could assist in smallholder development (e.g., quality production, credit), the MOA should insist that they will consider the priorities outlined by value chain stakeholders, including farmer organizations. This type of direction from the MOA may help stimulate discussion and ideas to guide the future development of the value chain.

Stakeholders at all levels of the value chain need to participate and inform decision-makers about “what really matters”. Ensuring adequate opportunities to participate in certain value chains may require a series of initial meetings with farmers in key producing counties (for example, cocoa in Grand Geddeh, Lofa, Bong, Nimba and Maryland and coffee in Nimba, Lofa and Bong) prior to hosting a national meeting. Inviting commodity experts (farmers, producer organizations, processors, exporters) from other producing countries (e.g. Ghana – cocoa) will enable Liberian stakeholders to profit from their experiences. South-south cooperation may offer longer-term opportunities for knowledge transfer and collaboration. The Liberian Cocoa Sector Roundtable in May 2006 organized by the MOA in collaboration with IITA exemplifies the type of useful information that can be produced by value chain stakeholders (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006).

Developing productive, competitive, profitable and sustainable value chains that produce quality commodities sought after in the marketplace is not easy and requires a systematic approach if they are to prosper and survive. Section 5 discusses a few critical crosscutting issues raised by the CAAS-Lib that are germane to the development of productive, competitive and profitable value chains: effective demand; coordination; public goods.

#### **4.2 Producer organizations and community-based organizations**

Producer organizations that group together smallholders and other forms of collective action (e.g., cooperatives) have proven to be effective in improving the performance of value chains and contributing to improved farmer welfare. They can facilitate the provision of services such as extension, credit, inputs and marketing and through economies of scale, increase market power which may prove elusive to a single farmer. When organized at regional and national levels, their unity can give farmers a voice in issues affecting their livelihoods (Bingen 1998).

In Liberia, various types of rural-based organizations have functioned in the past including cooperatives, farmer associations, *kuu* (co-operative labour groups involved in planting, plantation rehabilitation or house construction), rotational savings clubs, trading associations and secret societies (*poro* and *sande*). In some counties, particularly the three major agricultural ones (Bong, Lofa and Nimba), the cooperative system was well developed and active in tree crop value chains prior to the conflict. In other counties, primarily those with low population densities and difficult access, cooperatives were not as well established.

Existing historical information points to wide variability in the historical effectiveness and performance of producer organizations. In some circumstances, CAAS-Lib reports that producer organizations became little more than sources of manual labour for commercial enterprises (Thomas 2006). Given the multiple challenges confronting the agricultural sector in terms of providing services to farmers and facilitating their development as smallholders, producer organizations, in their various forms and areas of intervention will need to play a

more prominent role in the future development of the sector. Their participation and integration in value chain stakeholder groups and close work with decentralized governance units can provide a major contribution to community-driven development and growth of social capital.

*Membership, youth and women farmers:* Future efforts to organize and strengthen producer organizations will need to be sensitive to and inquisitive about the past and present socio-political situation, problems in communities and power relations among potential members. Human relations, rather than technical skills, will strongly determine the ability to form cohesive and functional organizations capable of effective work in the sector. Close collaboration with government, development partners and civil society who have been involved in resettlement and recovery and knowledgeable of social dynamics in the communities is advisable. Legal texts governing various forms of collective action will need to be reviewed to ensure that they are coherent with the government's focus on social inclusion and there are no barriers to participation.

Ensuring access to membership and the participation of the poorer and less influential households and young people less than 25 years of age in producer organizations will be particularly challenging. Some organizations could be constrained by social and generational conflicts. CAAS-Lib and other studies have documented the negative perception and stigma associated with agricultural work, principally among Liberian youth. The long civil conflict resulted in a change in the aspirations and desires of young Liberians. Many observers wonder under what conditions young people will work in the agricultural sector. A recent ILO study on Liberian youth shows how projects can alienate and marginalize young people by only addressing village leaders and elders (Munive et al. 2007).

Similarly, social norms and procedural rules established by producer organization may systematically exclude women from membership. Various statements were made in the CAAS-Lib regarding the special effort that must be made to address the needs of women in agriculture, as if they were not farmers (of which they represent 60 percent ) or were only marginally involved in agricultural work (80 percent of labour in cassava and rice production is contributed by women). Rather than marginalize their contributions, sector policy and programmes need to recognize women as key actors and participants, targeting actions in which they are involved just as they would logically target support to men for roles they play. Increasing agricultural productivity and stimulating economic growth will require a balanced, empirically guided gender approach. Future agricultural initiatives will also need to consider how women's activities and productive employment affects and is conditioned by their responsibilities as primary caregivers to children. Training provided to women should offer childcare, for example, to maximize their participation.

*Non-governmental organizations* can play an instrumental role in supporting this developmental work with producer organizations and responding to their requests for assistance and training that will be required to function in value chains. The MOA, in collaboration with decentralized authorities, will need to be selective in identifying NGOs with the experience and skills required to work with producer organizations. If well chosen, their services can be invaluable in working with nascent organizations or dysfunctional ones to clarify organizations' mandate and goals, to identify their interests and priority needs, and to work collaboratively in developing an organizational development and training plan.

In many countries, producer organizations have used risk sharing mechanisms to manage input and equipment credit thereby contributing to widespread participation of small farmers in cash crop production. This role has helped generate huge benefits in terms of equity and well being in villages (through higher household and communal income). Based on the principle of group solidarity with joint liability to guarantee loan repayment, farmer associations' revenues have been used as collateral to guarantee credit reimbursement, thus allowing a higher level of risk sharing. Since farmer associations were in a better position to determine the potential production capacity of individual farms and to collectively bear the risk of sponsoring more households, these experiences show how producer organizations facilitated access to formal credit for individual small farm households that otherwise would not have been eligible for loans.

CAAS-Lib identified several issues related to the development, opportunities and value of producer organizations.

- Improving skills: What is the most effective way to improve farmers' technical knowledge, organizations' management skills and commercial acumen?
- What role can producer organizations play in ensuring the availability of affordable and good quality inputs? Given the current weak state of the credit sector and lack of opportunities to obtain credit, cocoa farmers have been reimbursing loans to buyers in-kind at heavily discounted prices (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006). Given the weak status of the financial industry and credit markets in Liberia, it is important for actors to differentiate between grants and loans made to producer organizations in order to avoid the creation of credit problems in situations where actors are not able to reimburse loans (Aeschliman 2006).
- Given significant variability in the capacity of producer organizations, it has been argued that initial efforts should centre attention on strengthening the most cohesive organizations located in the most productive agricultural counties (Aeschliman 2006). A different set of activities may be needed in other areas with minimal experience in collective action (e.g., fishing communities in south eastern Liberia) (Thomas 2006).
- Agricultural labour is a potentially large constraint to increasing productivity and generating a supply response in Liberia. Cropping decisions have major implications for the work of women (Thomas 2006). Developing a better understanding of the specific labour demands of different crops and farming systems will contribute to more informed choices.
- What are the most effective systems for disseminating knowledge and technology to farmers (Connelly 2006)? What are the most effective and feasible options for meeting farmers' information needs (e.g., farmer field schools)?

### **4.3 Decentralized governance**

Implementing a pro-poor growth strategy and addressing the particular needs of vulnerable groups and geographic zones will require close partnership with decentralized structures that maintain (or will eventually have) frequent interaction with their constituents. While the decentralization process will take time to flourish, establishing transparent and accountable mechanisms at local levels and developing the capabilities of groups to carry out their expected roles will require a "process of education and sensitization of local government officials regarding the need for them and their people to become more participant and active

in matters affecting local administration” (Johnson Sirleaf 2007). It will also require “training and capacity building of local officials to enhance the effective implementation of their respective mandates” (Johnson Sirleaf 2007).

Effective implementation of a pro-poor strategy will eventually require close collaboration between line ministries and county Superintendents and Assistant Superintendents for Development, Development Committees (DDC) and the National Traditional Council (NTC) who will serve as coordinating points for county development projects. Some observers argue that it is difficult to advocate for a decentralized approach when national structures, let alone decentralized ones are still in nascent development. While a valid point, implementing a pro-poor strategy would seem difficult to implement without regular interaction with communities and the involvement of decentralized units. Working directly with decentralized structures may offer a more holistic and multi-sector vision and local view of the situation (less disciplinary vision of a line ministry). As discussed in previous sections, the effective design, targeting, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes at local levels may be better placed to take into account local specificities and socio-political realities.

Many constraints are county and locality specific which may not be clearly understood or considered a priority when considered from a national perspective. Counties and their respective councils are in a position to deal with development issues in their place of jurisdiction. This may be particularly important in low production zones with low population density where agricultural activities may not be as well developed and there has been minimal development of community-based organizations in the past. Similarly, zones characterized by integrated agro-forestry production systems may fall between the cracks of the ministerial mandates of agriculture and forestry. Local government can facilitate this process, helping to establish a demand-driven system, whereby local governments request services of line ministries.

This approach would also build on significant and on-going efforts undertaken by the UN and development partners to work with local communities (UNDP's Community-based Reintegration and Recovery Programme) during the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programme (DDRR). Close integration with the governance-related work of the UN Country Team and civil society would be possible through an approach embodying decentralized communities. Local authorities are arguably best placed to respond to grievances that if ignored, may foster unnecessary social tension.

The CFSNS revealed that many parts of the country exhibit specific characteristics that exert a large influence on households' access to economic opportunities and dictate the course of their development. For example, many people residing in counties along border areas are heavily involved in cross-border trade, particularly many young women and mothers. The CFSNS and CAAS-Lib found that economic actors are constrained by high transaction costs resulting from the payment of illicit and other unofficial fees. The dissemination and consistent enforcement of regulations that govern marketing and trade would reduce the cost of doing business and increase incentives for participating in the market. Livelihoods in other regions are hindered by their isolation and associated problems engendered by a general lack of access to the area.

Liberian policy makers recognize the importance of establishing an effective decentralized system as a building block of peaceful, socioeconomic development. The MOA needs to consider effective procedures for working with decentralized structures, communities and

civil society, particularly with respect to the implementation and integration of agricultural and food security policies and programmes and their integration with a county's or district's development plans. Even if decentralization is only in the initial stages of development as an operational platform and budgetary authority has not yet been delegated to the local level, insofar as decentralization represents government policy, every effort must be made to work with these nascent structures. For example, interventions and support involving value chain stakeholder groups and producer organizations could be coordinated to a certain degree with local government officials.

In many countries, decentralized levels of government and communities have used participatory processes to develop local development plans, providing an opportunity to obtain local input into planning processes. A similar approach in Liberia could help shed light on several questions:

- What is feasible in terms of value chains and sustainable livelihoods? What are the most viable opportunities in a given administrative zone in which communities and producer organizations can participate in viable value chains or invest to promote the development of sustainable livelihoods? What are the levels of fixed investment and economies of scale required to make these opportunities viable activities?
- What mechanisms must be established to allow households and individuals to participate in and benefit from such processes and thus increase control over their lives (Smith 2006)?
- What are the priority infrastructure projects in the county or districts (Agodzo 2006)?
- How does the uncertainty of land rights and administrative boundaries increase risks for individuals and communities (Agodzo 2006; Unruh 2006)?
- What are the potential environmental impacts of specific activities?
- What are the expectations and desires of local government vis-à-vis the role of NGOs? How can they best serve local needs? How should local government play a coordination or verification role (Smith 2006)?
- What type of procedures could counties or communities use to identify, target and monitor the food security and nutrition situation of vulnerable villages, households and individuals (e.g., pregnant single mothers, victims of abuse, etc.)?

County-level planning may be particularly important in under-exploited areas with favourable growing conditions and opportunities to expand production but where there has been little previous involvement. It could also serve to indicate a communities' interest in reclaiming and rehabilitating deforested areas or other once productive land for agricultural production (e.g., cocoa). This work will necessarily need to take into account the diversity of the local population, their experiences during the war years and skill level to undertake certain activities.

## **5. MARKETS, COORDINATION AND PUBLIC ROLES**

Three crosscutting issues resonate through the nine technical studies undertaken for the CAAS-Lib: market development and "making markets work" for the poor; coordination within agricultural commodity value chains; public goods and the critical roles of the public

sector. This section discusses each of these issues as they relate to the development of the agricultural sector and improving food security in Liberia.

## 5.1 Effective demand

Many of the CAAS-Lib studies addressed the problem of market development, providing examples of failed enterprises and initiatives in the past that resulted from marketing-related constraints or the concentration of market power to the detriment of small farmers. At first glance, in a country like Liberia, characterized by abundant natural resources, many commodities appear to offer promising production and marketing potential.<sup>12</sup> Once subject to market analysis and an evaluation of the cost and profitability of producing, processing and marketing commodities, however, the best intentions must face with the reality of the market.

The question relates primarily to the issue of the effective demand for Liberian agricultural commodities in national, regional and international markets. Effective demand refers to a situation in which the demand for a product is backed up with resources to pay for them.<sup>13</sup> For any economic actor, the interest in producing for the market hinges largely on the ability to earn a profit, which can only exist if there is effective demand for the product and it can be competitively and profitably sold in the market (the total unit cost of production is less than market prices).<sup>14</sup> In Liberia, low disposable income limits purchasing power, severely constraining an already small market (in terms of population). Regional markets are constrained by insecurity, high transaction costs and similarly weak purchasing power.

Opportunities for farmers to diversify production to new products may only be possible if modifications in policy, institutions or technology result in an increase in the effective demand for products or increase competitiveness through improvements in the productivity and cost reductions in the entire range of operations (i.e., production, processing, storage, and transportation) needed to bring the product to market. For many value chains, competitiveness is strongly influenced by the performance of the processing sector; how productivity enhancements lower costs. Capacity underutilization, mismanagement and fixed cost inflation are all contributing factors to cost inflation that undermine competitiveness. When there is little value-added processing of the agricultural commodity, productivity improvements must focus on lowering production and marketing costs, most notably the transportation sub-component.

Having determined that there is an effective demand and appropriate incentives to profitably produce for a given market, value chains need to ensure the establishment of an adequate incentive environment that stimulates a supply response and increases productivity throughout the levels of the value chain. Value chains also need to avoid situations in which lower market prices or stagnant productivity and cost inflation reduce their competitive edge, diminishing their profitability and dampening incentives to produce. At a minimum, stakeholders require

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<sup>12</sup> They include banana, plantain, vegetables, rice, cassava, coconuts, sugar cane and pineapple, not to mention rubber, palm products, cocoa and coffee.

<sup>13</sup> This is a different issue than the notion of comparative advantage which explains why it can be beneficial for two countries to trade if one has a lower relative cost of producing some good. Schoen's DRC analysis, concludes that Liberia has a comparative advantage in producing vegetables but not rice. Future analyses will need to undertake more thorough analysis once systems have developed and a detailed data set is available.

<sup>14</sup> Profitable value chains may only be possible when all by-products are marketed.

mechanisms to foresee and plan for such contingencies or at least improve the predictability of output price variability.

## 5.2 Value chain coordination

Maintaining a quality, competitively priced product in national, regional and international markets which are characterized by tough competition depends strongly on coordination of the production, processing and marketing functions required to bring the product to market. Effective coordination of public and private actions in the value chain is critical to remaining competitive in regionally and globally integrated markets. The challenge consists of determining the best way of organizing individual and collective action to improve the productivity of the different levels of the sub-sector and the coordination among those levels, while taking into account economies of scale and trying to avoid rent-seeking behaviour. In short, it involves determining the “appropriate roles of individual and collective action and then empowering the relevant actors with the legal, financial, organizational and technical resources needed to carry out these roles” (Tefft 1998).

The CAAS-Lib studies identified five issues for which coordination is critical to improve performance and competitiveness of value chains: value chain organization; product quality; input credit reimbursement; access to technology; smallholder investment.

*Value chain organization:* CAAS-Lib and other studies suggest that Liberia is in a position to completely redefine how value chains should be structured and function (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006). Experience shows that disorganized and poorly coordinated value chains increase costs and promote rent-seeking. Decisions on the new structure of a value chain will need to consider several factors including the overall value chain goals, the capabilities of value chain actors and their willingness to collaborate, asset specificity, the type of market on which the commodity is sold (national, regional, international), the level of investment required, the type and scale of technology used in processing and financing requirements to name a few. Effective harmonization of the critical functions in the supply chain will need to be ensured through various types of contracting arrangements and diverse forms of associations such as cooperatives, alliances, joint ventures or networks.

CAAS-Lib identified out-grower schemes as one potential option for integrating smallholders in value chains. While Liberia has had some experience in the past with out-grower schemes, they often did not produce the desired results in terms of successful smallholder involvement; smallholders often became labourers on commercial farms (CAAS-Lib 2007). In certain situations, value chains may need to identify a national or international processing or export firm to play a lead role in value chain development. In other cases, primarily for commodities produced for national or regional markets, the chain may be composed of a more diffuse group of actors and different types of coordination mechanisms. International organizations (e.g., IITA) or commodity associations in addition to specialized NGOs (e.g., CLUSA, Technoserve) have valuable capabilities that could assist in developing various parts of the value chain.

Irrespective of the form of value chain organization, the MOA will need to consider the type of public goods to provide. The recent creation of an investment code represents an important precondition to attract private investors. Investors’ perception of risk and the ability to earn and safeguard their returns in a given country or zone is a major determinant of investment decisions. A functioning legal code and procedures for enforcing contracts between value

chain actors is a second important issue for the MOA to consider. However, in the current economic environment in Liberia characterized by a high degree of risk for private actors, it is doubtful that this lone action will suffice as an incentive for investment in the agricultural sector. In this situation, the MOA may need to play a proactive role as a catalyst for future action, identifying key private sector actors who could play a lead role in various value chains and negotiating the conditions of their involvement.

The Government will also need to consistently monitor how various forms of value chain organization (i.e., level of vertical integration) improve productivity without threatening the country's pro-poor growth objective. Farmer participation in value chains will often depend on a community's ability to achieve sufficient supply and throughput that is required to attract traders or contract transport. Attaining scale economies will depend on a certain level of organization of producer organizations and their ability to manage these processes. Financial risk reduction or risk sharing mechanisms that affect actors' decisions to participate and invest throughout the value chain will also need to be considered, including at the farm level.

*Product quality:* Establishing mechanisms for quality control throughout the value chain is arguably one of the most important factors affecting value chain performance and competitiveness and for which the public and private sectors must collaborate. The ability of a value chain to produce quality products that satisfy market demand is the result of a myriad of decisions and actions from varietal research to export classification. Ineffective quality control systems result in low quality product, low profitability and reduced competitiveness.

There are innumerable examples showing how deterioration in product quality can quickly hurt value chain performance. Poor quality Liberian cocoa, for instance, is sold at an 18 percent average discount (US\$278) relative to the on-going world market price (US\$1553/mt) (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006). The MOA must work with stakeholder boards to assess where quality improvement interventions are cost effective and price premiums could serve as an incentive to improve quality acceptable to exporters and markets.

Product quality issues are important at the farm level both for inputs and outputs. Increasing productivity at the farm level will require regular access to quality, affordable inputs. While various procurement and distribution systems can be envisaged, public or value chain stakeholder groups will need to play an oversight and regulatory role to ensure that the importation and use of seeds, pesticides and fertilizer respect the Government's quality standards. The multiplication of quality seeds, in particular, represents a particular challenge to many value chains. Similarly on the output side, grading procedures that are not transparent and streamlined may offer opportunities for manipulation and subsequently affect actors' incentives to produce a quality product.

*Input credit reimbursement:* The system for organizing the provision of inputs on credit to smallholders and subsequently ensuring reimbursement to lenders represents one of the most difficult coordination tasks in a value chain CAAS-Lib studies reveal that credit markets are inexistent in Liberia and may take a long time to develop; former parastatals will also not be reinstated to assume their former roles. The strength of a smallholder credit system hinges often on the development of interlocking input and output markets whereby credit and inputs are issued, farmers are paid and loans are reimbursed in an integrated manner, thereby reducing credit defaults. Experiences from other countries have highlighted the negative impact on input use and access to credit when this link is broken. The performance of various

forms of credit and input systems and the ability to attract private investment will depend largely on the particular institutional details of how they are designed.

*Technology:* Access to new technology will largely determine the productivity and competitiveness of the value chain. Determining how actors in the value chain will acquire and adopt new technology as it is developed and becomes available represents a major challenge. Stakeholders and the MOA will need to assess several issues including: What is the strategy to increase productivity at the farm level and throughout the supply chain? For example, appropriate storage technology can reduce waste in certain perishable crops (Schoen 2006). What technological innovations (varieties, other inputs) can improve productivity? What are the potential gains from widespread adoption of a given technology? What is the most appropriate system for disseminating new technologies and ensuring their adoption? CAAS-Lib studies underscored the importance of establishing adaptive, demand-driven research and systems to deliver new technologies.

Experience has shown how international and regional partnerships in research and technology acquisition have been a determining factor of successful value chains. Developing institutional mechanisms to access this technology either through commercial means, regional and international research partnerships or demand-driven agricultural research will become critically important to long-term technological development. Linkages between technological research and dissemination and use by farmers or other economic actors are equally important. Decisions on the type of extension system to develop will need to consider farmers' technical, management and marketing skills and the most cost effective means to deliver technology (Connelly 2006; Schoen 2006).

In some cases, publicly funded research may need to be undertaken on topics that contribute to improved value chain performance but for which private sector actors have no incentive to fund. For example, all value chains could benefit from certain research on soil types, production potential and water resources (Anandajayasekaram et al. 2006).

*Smallholder investment:* The Government will need to especially consider how the value chain will deal with investments required by smallholders, given that many have few assets or experience. In the present situation, farmers have little income from farm and non-farm activities for productive investment. Studies in other countries have found that non-farm income represents a large share of household's cash income and has played an important role in equipment acquisition (Reardon, 1995). Further, the productive reinvestment of crop and livestock revenues has been shown to generate the highest growth linkages in the rural farm and non-farm economy (Delgado et al., 1998). Given this constraint, government, development partners and private actors need to determine how to fund and implement a smallholder investment particularly with respect to cash crops (e.g., planting tree crops). In this regard, land tenure arrangements in general and smallholders secure access to land in particular represents a binding constraint to participation and future investment in cash crops as well as the adoption of new technologies and intensification of production practices.

From a food security perspective, investment in tree crops that does not generate a return for several years (cocoa: 3-5 years; rubber: 15 years) may need to be combined with investment in activities with shorter term pay-off (e.g., banana, plantain, vegetables, rice, and livestock) (Aeschliman 2007). For many investments, more detailed feasibility studies will be required (e.g. swamp rice) that consider relative returns and technical merits of alternatives. For example, in many cash-crop producing regions, years of neglect of tree crops has resulted in

them “being carried away by the bush”. In this context, is it more prudent, feasible and remunerative to replant plantations or to use labour to rehabilitate existing ones?

Similarly in the processing sector, investment needs to be market-driven and carefully assessed in terms of energy costs, economies of scale required for the activity to be profitable, managerial talent, and work force productivity and transport costs. There have been too many unsuccessful attempts at financing promising opportunities without having carefully assessed their feasibility and profitability (Thomas 2006). CAAS-Lib identified investment in fish smoking technology or tools for aquaculture pond development as promising opportunities to be considered by producer organizations or county/district development plans (Drammeh 2006).

### **5.3 Role of the public sector**

#### *5.3.1 Government action during the recovery period*

*Food security:* The Liberian government and development partners have invested extensively in action to preserve peace and promote stability during the recovery period. These efforts to ensure a minimum level of food security have been centred on a variety of programmes including food and non-food distributions, food for work, school feeding, training programmes, infrastructure rehabilitation and the provision of seeds and tools to Liberians returning to their communities.

Ensuring adequate availability and access to food in the short run will undoubtedly need to be continued until households complete their transition from an emergency footing to sustainable livelihoods supported by functional credit systems and input output markets. This support will concern both new returnees as well as certain vulnerable groups requiring social protection. For example, targeted, short-term assistance may be required for acutely malnourished children, young, unmarried mothers and the elderly. It is also clear, however, that given the large numbers of vulnerable Liberians, the country needs to focus increasingly greater attention on and accelerate investments in the development of the country. In essence, it implies that short-term aid should not come at the expense of establishing the food system (Pingali et al. 2005).

*Macroeconomic issues:* It is toward this aim that the Government has been working to regain the trust of Liberians and the international financial community through sound and transparent macroeconomic management (GEMAP). These measures have contributed to satisfying the critical preconditions for debt relief and have laid the groundwork for restoring investor confidence. Coherent and stable fiscal, monetary and exchange rate policies are critical preconditions to establishing a viable food and agriculture sector, developing sustainable livelihoods and improving food security. The macroeconomic policy framework has an important influence on sector performance through the incentives offered to economic actors, the effect on terms of trade and the competitive position of African economies.

There is little doubt that without a stable and secure situation, it will be difficult to address the other constituent elements of food security (availability, access and utilization) and structural causes of poverty. Concrete improvements in food security (i.e., access to food) and the development of sustainable livelihoods (e.g., remunerative activities and employment) will in a reciprocal fashion solidify social stability and peace in the country.

### 5.3.2 *Defining critical public goods for food security and poverty reduction*

The Government provision of public goods and services represents a critical input to the functioning of a market economy. In a country coming out of a prolonged crisis, these public inputs are very important as they set the stage for how actors will behave and invest in the future. The Liberian Government has decided that the private sector and civil society will assume the lead role in implementing policy and programmes. This decision to retract public institutions from direct involvement as an economic actor represents a major change from the pre-war period. Although the decision to allow the private sector to take the lead in implementing functions previously executed by state agencies like the LPMC, one cannot underestimate the importance of public goods and services to the development of the rural economy and achievement of food security and poverty reduction goals.

Determining the type of public goods to provide in an effective and sustainable manner is a difficult and important task for the Liberian Government given limited financial and human resources. While the Government is called on to intervene in many areas, the results of the CAAS-Lib underline five areas where the Government should focus its efforts: infrastructure; catalyst, coordinator and stewardship; policy design and coordination; efficient and equitable markets; human capital. Section 6 complements this discussion by examining in more detail the Government role as a steward of food security, pro-poor growth and equitable development while section 7 focuses on the importance of monitoring and evaluation to this process.

*Infrastructure:* CAAS-Lib studies unanimously support the priority focus of the Government and partners on rebuilding Liberia's economic and social infrastructure throughout the country. The impact of any intervention in rural Liberia will be limited until infrastructure is improved. Every study underlined the importance of continuing and accelerating investment in the road network through maintenance of paved roads, upgrading primary roads and rehabilitation of secondary and feeder roads. Rebuilding transport infrastructure is a critical input to agricultural commodity market development as well as rural Liberian's opportunities to develop their livelihoods. This emphasis on infrastructure is consistent with research findings from other countries showing the large positive impact of investment in rural roads on poverty reduction and agricultural productivity (Fan et al. 1999). These efforts could be enhanced through close collaboration with decentralized governments to prioritize and target feeder road and bridge rehabilitation. In a similar fashion, major investments in port infrastructure and electrical power generation and distribution are additional elements needed for economic development.

*Catalyst, coordinator and stewardship:* The MOA needs to serve first and foremost as a catalyst, coordinator and steward of the entire development process of the agricultural sector. In addition to providing the vision, strategy and action plan, MOA will need to oversee and monitor the implementation of the process and ensure accountability of different actors. Coordinating the aforementioned work and processes with value chain stakeholders, decentralized governance and development committees, and the diversity of producer organizations in Liberia will be a major challenge. Based on information generated from these diverse forums with these actors, the MOA will need to quickly assess the relevance and coherency of recommendations to strategies and action plans for different geographic regions and value chains, determining the relative attractiveness of producing certain crops in terms of feasibility, economies of scale and profitability.

Since achieving economic growth, poverty reduction and food security will require inputs from other sectors, as documented in the CAAS-Lib, MOA will have to serve as a conduit with other key ministries involved in macroeconomic issues (e.g., fiscal, taxes, exchange rate), decentralization, commercial policies (e.g., import and export policies), education (e.g., training), health and water (e.g., nutrition) and land tenure. The sequencing, cross-fertilization and consensus building among the diverse actions and partners will strongly affect success. Collaboration is particularly important on issues that cut across sectoral lines.

*Policy Review:* Ensuring a coherent policy framework and accurate application in rural areas is an important oversight function for the MOA. Several areas must be targeted:

- *Price policy:* Liberia's value chains in the past were primarily oligopolistic with a very concentrated number of buyers with opportunities to influence prices. The LPMC often kept farmers share of world market prices at a low level, thus dampening incentives to produce. Allowing world prices to be transmitted freely to Liberian producers with mechanisms to minimize the negative impact of large price fluctuations is increasingly used in most successful value chains. Development of hedging mechanisms may be required to manage price risk throughout the value chain, particularly at the farm level. Establishing a value chain that transmits incentives throughout the various stages through competitive practices can contribute to the production of a quality product.
- *Agri-business policy:* A national investment code is a necessary but insufficient mechanism to guide the private sector in their new role. Liberia's agricultural sector needs a coherent agri-business strategy, particularly for micro-business and small agro-industrial concerns (Schoen 2006).
- *Tax policy:* The manner in which Liberia taxes agricultural value chains will have a major influence on actors' incentives (Drammeh 2006). The Government will have to balance the need to generate fiscal revenues with the importance of creating a positive incentive environment required to generate a supply response. In the cocoa sector, taxes and fees currently collected by the Liberian Government represent approximately 3.7 percent of the estimated FOB price, thereby reducing the farmers' share of the world market price and potentially weakening incentives (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006).
- *Import policy:* Actors' incentives, the agricultural sector's performance as well as the cost of living for all consumers (i.e., cost of food) are strongly influenced by import policies that affect duties and tariffs on imported products (e.g, inputs and spare parts) (Drammeh 2006; Schoen 2006; Thomas 2006).
- *Marketing and trade policy:* A lack of clarity and consistency in enforcement of existing legal texts provides opportunities for rent extraction (i.e., indirect taxes) from uninformed, illiterate actors in the informal sector. This behaviour affects livelihoods but also increases transactions costs and raises the cost of food for rural and urban consumers. For example, it takes cattle traders approximately ten days to transport imported cattle from the Guinean border to Monrovia due largely to rent-seeking behaviour of Government authorities (Rhissa 2007). Any regulation or legal text is only as strong as the associated enforcement capability; streamlined and enforced customs procedures are needed.

- *Transport policy*: There is very little information on the state of transport sector. The MOA will need to collaborate with other ministries and private sector actors to assess issues and constraints related to the performance of the transport sector in order to determine how policy and programmes can assist its development.
- *Commercial Law*: While it is necessary to establish a body of commercial and contract law consistent with open market conditions, finding practical solutions to the problem of deliberate default remains an issue. Legal frameworks and mechanisms for contract enforcement, dispute resolution and private contract adjudication will allow individual actors, organizations and decentralized government organizations to regulate their sector and address problems as they arise.

*Efficient and equitable markets*: Many actions can be undertaken to level the playing in Liberia's agricultural commodity markets, enabling smallholders to profit from their activities.<sup>15</sup> As highlighted earlier, improvement of transport infrastructure, both major trunk roads and farm to market roads, is unequivocally the most important investment to improved market performance. Improving port facilities is a second complementary investment for improved export marketing (Drammeh 2006). Widespread regular dissemination of market information is another critical public good that facilitates participation and improved negotiating stance of smallholders in market transactions.

Several other actions are equally important to functional and more equitable markets: standardization of local measurement units used in markets (Thomas 2006); accurate weighing and grading; development and application of quality standards for inputs and agricultural products (Drammeh 2006; Rhissa 2006); transparent licensing procedures that remove barriers for marketing agents to enter the profession; renovation of market facilities where sufficient supply is available and demand is present (Schoen 2006); availability of low-cost transport; strengthening of the competitive position of farmers through organization into producer groups with improved economies of scale and training in marketing skills and contracting procedures; coherent and enforced anti-trust legislation; access to warehouse space at ports and markets; access to processing. One could equally consider Government surveillance of coastal waters to monitor adherence to treaty regulations as well as enforcement of licenses and net mesh size in the fisheries sector as actions aimed at maintaining an equitable playing field (Drammeh 2006).

*Human capital*: Overseeing the acquisition of skills needed for households and actors to participate in the rural economy and develop sustainable livelihoods represents another major crosscutting issue for all ministries to address. Meetings of value chain stakeholder groups, producer organizations and decentralized governance structures can assist in clarifying requisite skills needed, thereby helping to define the focus of vocational, technical and management training. This approach would help ensure that formal and non-formal training is consistent with the sector's priorities and market opportunities. It is equally important for the agricultural sector to consider how to most effectively develop entrepreneurial and managerial skills required to develop a vibrant private sector (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006).

Government capacity to deliver the public goods outlined in this report hinges equally on the development of a new skill set in Ministry officials who will manage and execute these new

<sup>15</sup> One buyer currently holds an 80 percent market share in Liberia's cocoa exports (Wilcox and Pay-Bayee 2006).

roles in such diverse areas as planning and budgeting, negotiation, contract administration and conflict management. CAAS-Lib provides details along these lines (Smith 2006).

## **6. FOOD SECURITY STEWARDSHIP IN FOUR KEY AREAS**

This report has advocated for the establishment of appropriate incentives, an enabling environment and opportunities for small farmers to participate in and benefit from a diversified set of farm and non-farm activities that increase income and improve welfare. This paper has suggested that the main thrust of the Government's strategy to improve food security and reduce poverty should centre on the development of a smallholder agricultural sector. This approach, by itself, however, is insufficient to improve food security. As a complement to the smallholder strategy, Liberia needs to develop similar approaches to deal with three other food issues: child malnutrition; the real cost of food; safety nets for vulnerable groups. This section looks at the Government role as steward of food security in these four areas.

### **6.1 Monitoring the formation of a smallholder sector**

The Government of Liberia will need to closely monitor progress in the development of a broad-based smallholder sector and its impacts on food security and poverty reduction goals. A pro-poor perspective will logically focus attention on issues that affect participation and provide or constrain opportunities to Liberian farmers to develop sustainable livelihoods and improve welfare. The following examples illustrate this point.

The overall incentive environment in the rural economy and the remuneration of farmers are major determinants of farm-level profitability and sustainable livelihoods. Government price policy which alters or prevents the transmission of world market prices to farmers represents a serious disincentive to produce cash crops or intensify their production. For example, the unit cost of production of cocoa in Liberia is currently more than the farm gate price.

Access to land represents a major constraint for many farmers. Diversification into the production of new crops or intensification of production presupposes that farmers have secure access to land. CAAS-Lib land tenure reports outlined the tremendous challenges in this area: confusion over administrative authority and responsibilities and lack of collaborative mechanisms between different branches and levels of government; lack of clarity in the definitions of various types of tenure; disagreements over jurisdictional boundaries; unclear rules regarding the criteria for what constitutes legitimate evidence (e.g. oral versus deeds), ownership and use rights; dispute resolution and appeal mechanisms; regulations regarding the type of land that can be verifiably and legally owned (Unruh 2007; World Bank 2007).

Available evidence suggests that there is a significant bias in the laws and regulations governing women farmers' access to land, credit, inputs and participation in farmer organizations.

In each example and undoubtedly many more, the Liberian Government, in its role as a steward of food security, will need to closely monitor and work to remove structural constraints limiting participation in and access to economic opportunities.

## 6.2 Improving nutritional outcomes

The CFSNS drew attention to the widespread problem of child malnutrition in Liberia. Immediate efforts must centre on monitoring and responding to the problem of acute malnutrition, particularly in central and south eastern countries, where in 2006, the prevalence of wasting exceeded 10 percent. Beyond responses to short-term needs, Liberia, like many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, is confronted with a serious problem of chronic malnutrition; 39 percent of children under 5 are stunted or too short for their age.

*Why is malnutrition an important issue?* The implications of high rates of chronic malnutrition are serious and far-reaching. A significant body of research has shown how malnutrition “prevents poor people from escaping poverty because it diminishes their ability to learn, work and care for themselves and their family members ... it reduces the ability of adults ... to give birth to healthy children, and erodes children’s ability to lead productive, healthy and happy lives” (IFPRI 2004). This link between malnutrition and economic development needs to become a centrepiece in awareness –raising interventions for all Liberians.

The proximate determinants of nutritional status are health status (disease) and dietary intake (nutrition). Health and nutrition jointly affect each other, and these two factors, in addition to genetic traits, determine growth. These immediate causes are influenced by insufficient access to food, poor water/sanitation and inadequate health and nutritional services and inadequate child care and feeding practices. Heavy social and economic demands on women to work, lead to less time for child care and feeding by the primary caretaker. The demands on women’s time are compounded by limited access to and poor management of key labour-saving devices particularly wells and cereal mills (Tefft et al. 2004).

*What we know about improving nutritional outcomes?* In most countries in the world, malnutrition is an invisible problem; it is everybody’s business and nobody’s responsibility. Although a food security framework addresses the nutrition through its utilization component, in practice, most attention and investment is directed to the issues affecting the availability and access to food. Similarly in the health sector, interventions focus on the development of clinical services while promotional and preventive services (i.e., nutrition) are marginalized in application. The invisibility of nutrition in many countries explains why the high prevalence of chronic malnutrition persists year after year (as is the case in Liberia).

Experiences in other countries have shown that multi-sectoral, community-based interventions can be effective in improving children’s nutritional status. Using such an approach, Thailand reduced malnutrition rates among preschool children from over 50 percent to fewer than 20 percent in nine years. Communities in Thailand created multi-sectoral teams that were instrumental in planning, coordinating and monitoring local actions to improve child nutrition (Tontisirin and Gillespie 1999). A review of community nutrition programming in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda underscored the importance of proactive community participation, broad-based social mobilization, community/government partnerships and coherent policies at all levels of the government as driving forces of successful interventions.

*What must be done?* This evidence underlines why Liberia needs a special nutrition strategy and plan of action to complement its pro-poor, food security approach. The risk of nutrition slipping through the cracks is too great. On-going efforts to develop a multi-sectoral nutrition

programme that will direct nutrition-focused interventions represent a positive development. Liberia has already to lay the foundation for dealing with nutrition in the iPRS such as investing in health centres, bore wells and agricultural sector as a source of income growth. As with the case of pro-poor growth, the impact of higher incomes on child nutrition depends on who within the household controls the income and how it is spent. More systematic efforts emanating from the national nutrition action plan will need to address the underlying factors affecting health status and dietary intake through interventions at multiple levels (national, county, community).

This action plan will naturally need to address the important issue of micronutrients and in due course, consider how to broaden its orientation in order to deal with the double burden of nutrition - the epidemic of obesity developing alongside the continuing problems of under nutrition. Achieving results in the short term will need to find innovative solutions for developing a critical mass of qualified, well-trained and motivated individuals and for iteratively monitoring and distilling lessons. Determining the most effective institutional procedures that ensure collaboration and accountability is equally important. Finally, it is important that nutrition-related activities are inserted in ministry budgets so that they are not overlooked in the PRS.

### *6.2.1 Reducing the real cost of food*

The majority of Liberians are net buyers of food; they do not produce enough of their own food to meet their households' consumption needs. With high population and urbanization growth rates, consumer demand will continue to grow. For this large segment of the population, reducing the real cost of food has a large influence on their ability to secure their food needs. Liberia, as many other countries, is familiar with the political importance of low, stable food (i.e., rice) prices as a wage good to urban and rural consumers.

Reducing the real cost of food depends on multiple factors which may include: increasing the productivity and supply of domestic food production; improving the competitiveness and efficiency of the marketing system; coherent import and fiscal policies that balance domestic production with national consumption interests; accessing and disseminating a stream of productivity-enhancing technologies for rice- and cassava-led farming systems (including integrated systems and intercropping) whether through research or partnership; strengthened economic governance mechanisms to reduce transaction and reduce illicit payments in the food system.

The MOA, in collaboration with civil society, needs to participate in monitoring key food security indicators at the household level and in input and output markets to ensure that the Government's equity objectives are not compromised (e.g. terms of trade that may discourage participation and or reduce incomes of households and small-scale economic actors). Similarly, the MOA and civil society will need to determine national interest in a rights-based approach to food as possible complementary tool for achieving national food security objectives.

## **6.3 Safety nets**

A variety of different safety net programmes (e.g., food for work) have been used during the recovery process to address specific needs. These programmes will undoubtedly evolve as assistance and resettlement of returnees to communities winds down. Developing future

programmes will strongly hinge on the existence of a regular source of detailed information on vulnerable groups in need of some type of social protection. This begs the question of how safety net programmes will be used in combination with the aforementioned pro-poor strategy. What constitutes a vulnerable group in need of a safety net rather than access to opportunities and support for developing their livelihood?

*Elderly and young women:* The CFSNS indicated that elderly people with minimal access to traditional support systems that had broken down during the conflict period represent a vulnerable group which may require regular assistance. The specific problem of young mothers, including many of whom are victims of gender-based violence, must become a central focus of development efforts. As one of the most vulnerable groups in Liberia, a comprehensive programme of support and safety nets must be developed to meet the particularities of their situation.

A focus on vulnerable girls and young women would be consistent with a nutritional strategy centred on breaking the cycle of malnutrition and addressing dietary and care needs at each stage of girls'/women's lives. The nutritional status and intake of a woman before conception and very early in pregnancy has a strong effect on intrauterine growth and birth weight. Low birth weight infants have much higher mortality rates as well as greater rates of morbidity and poorer neurological development. Developing effective systems that can improve maternal and child malnutrition require active involvement of community groups, families and male relatives; it is not just the responsibility of women and health workers.

*Unskilled labourers:* Time will tell, however, whether unskilled labourers in the plantation sector represent a vulnerable group whose livelihood limits opportunities to improve their welfare. While some type of safety net could potentially respond to certain needs, it may also be useful to consider how they could benefit from new opportunities presented by a future pro-poor growth strategy.

Rather than considering traditional safety nets, the assistance may relate more to investments required to develop a smallholder sector. For example, many rural households will probably need financial help to invest in tree crops as part of a smallholder development programme. This type of investment support programme with long time horizon to bear fruit could be complemented by more short-term centred investments such as restoring livestock populations to households and communities.

## **7. INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS FOR IMPROVED DECISION MAKING**

The effectiveness of policy and programme decision-making is usually no better than the quality of empirical analysis used in the decision-making process. Two decades of conflict have severely weakened the data and analytical systems in Liberia, resulting in a lack of empirical information for decision-making in the food and agricultural sector. The iPRS identifies the lack of data as a primary constraint to policy and programme formulation and calls for the creation of a socio-economic and demographic database as national priority. Although the production of accurate, reliable data is the foundation of credible information and useful analysis, its value derives from analytical added value and its use in decision-making. In other words, it is not just an issue of improving statistical systems and creating socio-economic and demographic data bases for development planning; it also concerns the capability to add value through analysis that can provide the empirical underpinnings of policies and programmes.

*Analysis for programme prioritization and targeting:* The MOA needs to take the lead in working with households, communities, private sector actors and other ministries to outline a strategy and concrete plans to reduce poverty and hunger in each county and community. This analysis would seek to answer questions such as:

- How will people improve their welfare?
- What set of activities and livelihoods provide the greatest opportunities to reduce hunger and poverty?
- How can policies, institutional evolution and technology be used by public and private actors to relieve binding constraints existing in the activities?
- What mechanisms must be established to ensure accountability to communities and households (i.e., participate, have opportunities, and improve welfare).
- What mechanisms must be established to ensure that issues related to social inclusion, risk and uncertainty at community and household levels are considered?

*Monitoring and analysis:* As experiences in other countries have shown, transformation of the agricultural sector and management of commodity value chains are part of a dynamic, iterative process that often proceeds by trial and error. Through continuous monitoring and analysis of the complex and dynamic interactions between policies, institutional reform, technological change and human capital development, monitoring and analysis can contribute to greater understanding of what works, what doesn't and what are the criteria for success. In this sense, monitoring and analysis are dynamic learning tools to guide the process and chart the progress. They can also help to hold actors accountable, particularly with respect to meeting social inclusion, poverty reduction and food security goals.

Interest in a pro-poor approach necessarily calls for the development of a light, flexible decentralized system that can monitor proxy indicators of income, consumption and nutrition and respond to local priorities. Developing local monitoring capacity also increases the likelihood of producing timely analysis of dynamic situations in rural areas.

*Policy analysis:* Monitoring and analysis tools must be linked to more systematic agricultural and economic policy analysis and detailed assessments of investment programmes. Liberia will need to develop the capacity to conduct demand-driven research on a multitude of specific questions.<sup>16</sup> Many countries have found that there is a high payoff to building local analytic capacity to participate in and guide sector development. How this will take place depends on the specific needs in decision-making, realistic assessments of capacity and capability in different institutions and the feasibility of creating supra-ministerial economic analysis units with a critical mass of trained personnel, supported by institutions of higher learning.

## **8. CONCLUSIONS**

### **8.1 Synthesis**

Most Liberians are living below the poverty line and a large number are vulnerable to food insecurity. Access to food is a daily struggle as households rebuild and strive to develop more

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<sup>16</sup> See Annex 1 for a list of indicative questions.

sustainable livelihoods. Developing an enabling environment and creating opportunities for communities, households and individuals to increase income represent a crosscutting goal that links livelihood development to improved food security and poverty reduction.

Given the tremendous resource base in Liberia, generating growth appears to be easy. Implementing a socially-inclusive, pro-poor growth approach based on the participation of people who have been (and many still are) in survival mode presents a daunting challenge.

The CAAS-Lib provides a framework and analytical content that can serve as the basis of this approach. This report has focused primarily on the issue of process. The impact of economic growth on poverty and food security depends on the pattern of growth and the degree to which groups and households are able to participate in remunerative activities that generate higher incomes. Successful implementation of this strategy and associated actions will hinge largely on the manner in which it is implemented.

The report advocates for the adoption of participatory processes with key actors involved in the agricultural and governance sectors: value chain stakeholder groups; producer organizations; and decentralized local government. Their involvement is crucial to transforming Liberia's subsistence agricultural sector into a diversified, viable smallholder rural economy that generates broad-based income growth. While most of these structures are institutionally weak after two decades of conflict or have not yet been developed, the majority of institutions in Liberia are in similar situations. Further, the Ministry of Agriculture does not currently possess the mandate, capacity, expertise, local knowledge or requisite incentive structure to manage the whole process. Involvement of these actors offers the best chance of achieving food security and poverty reduction goals.

In light of the recent history of conflict and insecurity and subsequently, the tremendous investments made to establish lasting peace, the MOA's leadership is critical as Liberia begins to systematically deal with the socioeconomic, political and social factors that contributed to the period of instability. The importance of addressing socio-political issues in the process of implementing agricultural policy and programmes necessitates close collaboration with other ministries, civil society and development partners with more experience in these matters. A multi-sectoral approach is equally important in dealing with the pernicious and invisible problem of child malnutrition. Liberia needs a special nutrition strategy and plan of action to complement its pro-poor, food security approach.

CAAS-Lib and the pro-poor approach advocated in this report provide a vision of a way forward. Because the criteria of success are not known, significant effort must be invested in active learning. Information and analysis must be consistently used to guide the process.

While demands on the MOA are many, it needs to initially serve as catalyst, coordinator and steward of the process. Their actions will set the context and largely determine opportunities available to other actors as they translate concepts into concrete action. In this context, their work may deal more with institutional, organizational and social issues than technical ones.

Successfully carrying out this mission will require well-trained, competent and motivated officials. The importance of establishing the necessary incentive environment to attract, train and retain staff can not be overlooked. Given limited budgetary resources, the Government and development partners must develop innovative solutions to ensure that qualified Liberians can make a living in these critical public roles.

## 8.2 Pro-poor investments

With almost every issue discussed in this paper, there is need for investment. While investment in roads and other critical infrastructure projects are straightforward and easy to rationalize in present-day Liberia, consideration of investments in human and social capital, which are the bedrock of a pro-poor approach, enters a realm that is less obvious, requiring longer time horizon to see evidence of returns.

Based on the analysis presented in this paper, investment should be carried out in an iterative manner, initially focused on financing the participatory processes with value chain stakeholder groups, producer organizations and decentralized government. If the Government and donors are serious about ensuring broad-based participation, significant resources will need to be invested in various types of awareness-building exercises and training of the rural population. These processes take time to produce measurable results. Liberian actors would probably benefit from significant interaction with peers in other countries who have successfully participated in the development of farmer organizations, value chain stakeholder groups or work in local government.

Commitment to financing value chain stakeholder group and producer organization meetings will eventually bear fruit in the form of detailed investment plans for resurrecting moribund commodity supply chains. While investment projects could be easily conceived by external experts or a select group of private sector actors, this tactic would run counter to the pro-poor approach advocated in this paper. Having said this, this work probably could advance quickly in certain agricultural commodity value chains which predominate in the most productive agricultural counties.

In a similar fashion, this report calls attention to the need for a dynamic, refocused Ministry of Agriculture staff, capable and qualified to lead this new partnership with private and civil society actors. Investment in training as part of efforts to retool and streamline the Ministry of Agriculture is an equally important prerequisite to achieving good results.

This paper also makes the case for strengthening Liberia's capacity to collect data, monitor processes and outcomes and undertake analysis on a number critical issues already identified by CAAS-Lib (see Annex 1). Development of effective and sustainable market and food security information and analytical systems does not take place over night. Establishing certain systems will require substantial investment (e.g., marine surveillance). Partners must recognize the need for longer term financial support to such endeavours. Systems should strive to create demand-driven analysis and research processes to minimize investment in lower priority activities.

Investments to reduce child malnutrition will initially be fairly straightforward given the need to re-establish community infrastructure (e.g., health centres, bore wells, food processing technology, and child care). Establishing or strengthening adequate management capacity and procedures needed for long term sustainability will however require longer term investments. Beginning the long-term process of sensitizing the population to the problem could also be initiated. The recently completed nutrition strategy can undoubtedly serve as the basis for prioritizing other key investments in the nutrition area (Ministry of Agriculture 2007).

In addition to these suggestions for investments to improve the pro-poor processes in Liberia, each CAAS-Lib report and synthesis document provides very detailed investment proposals.

Given the importance of human and social capital development to sustainable improvements in food security and poverty reduction in Liberia, the assessment of these diverse investments should logically include a pro-poor and conflictive-sensitive prism through which to assess their impact on the livelihoods of rural Liberians.

## ANNEX 1

**Indicative research questions and topics highlighted by the CAAS-Lib  
and that require future analysis**

- a. What is the nature of the household unit in Liberia? How has it evolved during the crisis? What are the implications for sampling and the unit of analysis?
- b. How can improvements in farming system productivity relieve perceived labour constraints in the agricultural sector?
- c. Analysis of farming systems: profitability may not just come from one crop but by-products and inter-cropping. Swamp rice may be more profitable but maybe not when considered with other crops in the farming system.
- d. Can people make living as labourers from forest and mineral resources?
- e. What type of fiscal system is able to tap income growth from increased agricultural productivity for investment in health and education programmes at the local level without killing the goose that lays the golden eggs?
- f. What factors are driving changes in livelihoods? Conduct diagnosis of diversity of groups by geographic zone and farming systems and their binding constraints.
- g. Conduct a crosscutting study of the relationship between rural livelihoods, the ecological carrying capacity of Liberia's natural resources and sustainable economic growth. This work would examine trends in rainfall, water resource availability and forestry resources. It would consider issues such as the impact of production methods (e.g., slash and burn) on agricultural productivity and the effect of diminishing forestry resources (i.e., supply of wood) in coastal areas on drying technology used in fish processing. It would also examine how integrated agro-forestry farming systems could be used in Liberia (e.g., South Asian examples of livestock-tree crop systems).
- h. Farming systems research on intercropping and opportunities for mixed tree crop-food crop systems.
- i. Comprehensive agricultural commodity marketing and price policy study.
- j. Rice value chain study with emphasis on the competitiveness of upland and swamp rice production vis-à-vis imported rice.
- k. Labour markets: Anecdotal evidence alludes to the presence of labour shortages in rural Liberia. Whether related to the on going recovery period or an actual structural constraint affected by urbanization trends and lack of interest in agricultural activities, the MOA will need to closely analyse information produced by stakeholders in order to better understand the problem and assess implications for rural development. It may also affect investment decisions for certain value chains and choice of technology. Do reciprocal labour institutions (kuu) represent a potential solution to relieve labour constraints at the farm level?

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