

Since 2002, Sierra Leone has been recovering from a devastating civil war that virtually destroyed its social, economic and institutional fabric. One of the most urgent tasks is to rebuild the country's agricultural base, which has been left in ruins. Many rural areas have ceased to function economically since huge numbers of people have migrated to the towns and infrastructure like roads and energy supplies have been destroyed. Corruption is endemic and the private sector and investment climate are very weak. Natural resources research has stopped and a lot of information and knowledge has been lost.

On the positive side, Sierra Leone has a good natural resource base and a favourable climate for agriculture. Seventy-five percent (5.36 million hectares) of the country's land area is arable and a wide range of food crops (including sorghum, millet, maize, cassava, beans and rice) can be grown. Progress is being made on peace and security, elections, primary healthcare and education. In addition, the government has begun a process of resuscitating the rural economy.

This is a pivotal time of transition for Sierra Leone as it moves from post conflict relief efforts to longer term development. There is a great sense of determination in the air. In many ways the country's future is being invented now as institutions are established or rebuilt – and the Research into Use Programme (RIU) can contribute much to this process.

There is no shortage of knowledge relevant to Sierra Leone's current needs, both inside and outside of Sierra Leone, but this knowledge is not being used on any scale for innovation because the conditions to use it are lacking; the principle bottlenecks stem from information and related coordination failures that make it near impossible for a coherent system of innovation to operate.

The RIU Sierra Leone strategy will address information and knowledge flows as a principle driver and means to enhance performance of the Innovation System as a whole. It will do so by supporting institutional developments to 'make the market' for knowledge. It will focus in particular on the intermediary function, i.e. those actors operating within or with influence upon the rural service economy, whose interactions with each other and with other actors provide a conduit for knowledge linkages and flows. Its operational mechanism will be to support the emergence of gap-filling 'knowledge market services' as a 'smart subsidy' mechanism to facilitate these interactions, focusing on critical areas where the existing system is currently weak:

- Demand Support Facility: enhance effective demand for knowledge-based services
- Knowledge Brokerage: match this demand with sources in Sierra Leone and elsewhere

- Innovation Finance Facility: match good ideas with appropriate finance

There is existing knowledge and experience within each these service areas that can be brought to bear, but each is innovative to some degree in the Sierra Leone context. A specific business/sustainability plan for each will be developed through an action research approach led by the country programme secretariat with partners in Sierra Leone.

The Partnership mechanism in Sierra Leone is an evolution from approaches being used in other RIU countries. The process has begun with the establishment of the Partnership for Agricultural Innovation and Development (PAID). This partnership, broadly representative of the Sierra Leone system, will operate essentially as an open, membership based social business network - accessing, exchanging and utilising information and services, and undertaking other mutually supporting activities to build opportunities and capacity for delivery of knowledge-based services into agriculture. In effect the PAID of Sierra Leone is a 'knowledge marketplace'; it will have straightforward, inclusive and democratic membership arrangements. Organisations will participate in their own best interests to the extent that they benefit from interactions with other participants.

The strategic logic of the Sierra Leone strategy is as follows: the RIU programme finances development of gap filling knowledge market services for the Sierra Leone Innovation system. These services are deliverable outputs of the Sierra Leone RIU County Programme, to be fostered and piloted through the RIU Programme Secretariat. The use of the Knowledge market services supports a virtuous circle thus: members of the PAID use the services to help identify and work up innovative ideas (new products, technologies, ventures, processes, etc.), and develop them through action research activities - these action research activities generate learning; the learning results in institutional developments which feed further demand for services and increasingly for 'high value' research-based knowledge; the learning from the Sierra Leone programme, and the demand for research, contribute directly to fulfilling the RIU programme purpose.

The development of each of the knowledge market services is an area for innovation and learning in its own right; additionally, the *use* of the services will take place within thematic areas of key strategic importance for Sierra Leone, where there are both needs and opportunities for platform development:

- Making markets work for the poor and increasing their effective participation in value chains
- Engaging youth meaningfully in the development process in a post-conflict environment
- Rebuilding and managing relationships between the research system and the production/agribusiness system.

There is substantial available research-based knowledge in these areas (RNRRS and other) that members of the PAID can apply now, and the Sierra Leone RIU program will actively seek to put this to use in the short to medium term. The use of this 'process/institutional knowledge' within innovation platforms will also create enhanced conditions for applying more specific commodity or technology oriented research products, and generate specific demands for such products. These opportunities will be identified and links facilitated into the UK (and other) science base as the demands arise.

A policy platform will provide a new 'space' to focus on areas of policy that require more evidence and more advocacy in the Sierra Leone context, that is: means to improve the position and performance of rural services and entrepreneurs as essential intermediary actors within the Sierra Leone innovation system. Members of the PAID have a real stake in the outcomes of policy in this area and will effectively be operating as a 'self-interested' lobby to influence and advocate for change. Additionally, there are concrete opportunities for linkage and learning between the Sierra Leone RIU Programme and the DFID Country Programme, specifically relating to DFID's support for the decentralisation process and for strengthening business development services provision.

A communications plan will address the quality of communications, best practices in the use of relevant media, and the packaging of information to meet the needs of different target audiences. The Sierra Leone RIU Programme will operate at the leading edge of opportunities to develop and use mobile phone, web and related content services to support the use of the knowledge market services as outlined above. At the same time, the currently constrained communications environment requires that approaches used will also make 'joined-up' use of other relevant media such as community radio.

The criteria, and process for developing specific initiatives, will include livelihoods analysis to identify and validate opportunities that are (i) broadly accessible amongst rural communities and not exclusive or liable to capture by elites and (ii) generate economic linkages into poorer households. While the strategy has a focus on youth, it will also pay explicit attention to gender issues, which are serious and important in Sierra Leone, and to environmental sustainability.

The Sierra Leone RIU Programme will operate under the framework of an MOU with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS). Under the provisions, the PAID essentially represents the operational mechanism by which RIU will contribute to the development of the Sierra Leone innovation system and related objectives. The RIU secretariat has been offered a seat on the Agricultural Advisory Group (AAG), which is the new high level policy coordination group under the MAFFS; the PAID membership will have a seat on the Agricultural Technical Committee (ATC) to the same group.