

Sierra Leone RIU Country Assessment Executive Summary



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Executive Summary

Background

Recent history is key to understanding the 'windows of opportunity' for the Research into Use Programme in Sierra Leone.

The civil war virtually destroyed its social, economic and institutional fabric. Major areas of rural society ceased to function economically, people migrated to the towns in large numbers (especially Freetown the capital) virtually halting agricultural production. Infrastructure like roads and energy supply were also destroyed. Corruption is endemic and the private sector and investment climate very weak. Natural Resources research has stopped and a lot of information and knowledge lost. Since 2002 the country has been starting virtually from scratch.

Sierra Leone has good natural resources and a favourable climate for sustainable production including a long coastal stretch from Kambia in the north to Sulima in Pujehun district in the south. A large stretch of grazing land is available for livestock production; Seventy five percent (5.36 million hectares) of the country's 72,000 square kilometers land area is arable land. A wide range of food crops are grown under the upland bush fallow system. Sorghum, millet, maize, cassava, beniseed and beans are the associated crops grown with rice. Most farmers sow a first crop of rice after clearing the bush, while the other crops follow. There are regional differences: with the south and east growing a wider range of crops and the north relying mostly on rice, cassava, some millet and sorghum. Lowlands are generally cultivated to crops, particularly rice, in pure stands.

In the rural areas the problems are fundamentally associated with poverty and feed upon each other in a vicious cycle of negative impact. Seeds, fertilizers, tools and other inputs are in short supply and subject to exploitative behaviour on the part of traders; access to markets is constrained by poor transportation, decrepit feeder roads (some impassable in the wet season); livestock was virtually wiped out and restocking is still only slowly taking place; capacity to engage in agro processing is limited. The capacity of government to help resolve these issues is weak.

A recent DFID report maintains that some progress appears to have made on fundamentals, e.g. peace and security, elections, primary health and education areas. In addition the government has begun a process of resuscitating the rural areas through establishing a decentralization policy designed to boost the local economic activity. Nevertheless, corruption is widespread and this combined with stultifying bureaucracy, an inadequate judiciary, poorly developed financial institutions (there is very limited commercial banking outside Freetown) is having a strong negative impact on normal drivers of economic change, particularly foreign direct investment.

Process

The Sierra Leone Team used a recently completed World Bank study as a basic methodological source¹.

This showed that it is how well such groupings are networked that often determines the success of innovations in the agricultural sectors of very poor countries. In particular the methodology specifies the actors, roles they play, and activities in which they are involved; enabling environment (policies and infrastructure); attitudes and practices of the main actors and patterns of interaction among them.

Literature reviews and key informant interview in Freetown made it clear that the team would need to field test the information that it was gathering. The team split into two, one visiting the south and east of Sierra Leone, and the other the north and west. These teams collected information on demand and institutions, assessed the situation of the poor and marginalised groups using key informant interviews and focus group discussions which facilitated the full participation of all partners/stakeholders in the review process. In some cases it was possible to pre-arrange interviews either through District Agricultural Co-ordinators or through the equivalent officers of CBOs such as women's groups and farmers

¹ See World Bank (2006). See also Arnold and Bell (2001). For a detailed account of the development of innovation systems approaches in the RNRRS CPHP see Barnett (2006)

associations. In these cases the meetings were quite large (in one case over 300 people were present).

The private sector more generally is confined to the import, trading, diamond and construction sectors most of which is tightly controlled by "non-indigenous" communities. Most Sierra Leoneans rely on petty trading, small scale agriculture and diamond digging, most of this informal. In consequence the major donors such as the World Bank, the EU and DFID are presently concentrating their efforts on macroeconomic support and institutional reform, particularly on governance structures.

RIU Opportunities

Despite this relatively bleak picture there are a number of areas where innovations could make a big difference:

- Livestock enhancement and provision of complementary veterinary capacity - In all regions visited there were expressed wishes for help in re-establishing livestock as integral components of farming systems. There was special emphasis given to poultry and small ruminants but mention was also made of pigs, rabbits and cattle.
- Assistance in post-harvest arrangements - One of the major issues in Sierra Leone lies in an inability to deal with agricultural surpluses at the end of the growing season. The problems are poor transportation, bad feeder roads, a lack of agro-processing facilities and ineffective marketing processes
- Establishment of micro credit and related facilities in rural areas
 - The establishment and operation of micro credit facilities would add value to rural development initiatives.
- Assistance in developing the operations of farmer field schools
 - Considerable assistance is now being offered in the form of support for farmer field schools. The main actors here are the FAO, UNDP and some INGOs.

Each of these show evidence of reasonable innovation platforms and all map on to each other quite closely, the difference lying in the main field of focus and perhaps on the most appropriate

institutional entry point. These opportunities should start at very basic levels, focus on operations within rural communities and concentrate on improvements in incomes, empowerment, employment and market access. The lead agencies for innovation platforms should be INGOs and/or local NGOs or CBOs. This is partly due to lack of adequate capacity at local government level and weak private sector activity. Partnerships should include key RNRSS technology suppliers², CBOs³, research/academic bodies, private sector operators and local government agencies. RIUP interventions should be subject at all times to close financial scrutiny with regular reporting and auditing arrangements in place. Base line data should be collected in all cases to ensure effective M&E work. For innovation platforms to be able to operate well all RIU programmes/projects should include a strong capacity building element.

²The team acknowledged that they had not been able to consider the outputs from the RNRSS in any detail,

³There may be instances where CBOs might be suitable lead partners. The team across a small number of instances where this could work but further investigation would need to be done before a decision was made



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