

## Sierra Leone

# Accelerating the transition to sustainable agriculture: which approach?<sup>1</sup>

### Context

Sierra Leone has faced significant challenges in ensuring food security for its population during the past two decades. The country has depended on imports to meet the growing gap between food production and consumption. In 2021, Sierra Leone imported over USD 130 million worth of rice. This situation got worse in 2023 with the continued war in Ukraine. The price of rice on the local market has continued to increase, a situation that has been exacerbated by India's decision to ban the export of most rice varieties, except for basmati rice.



The high dependence on agriculture and natural resources, coupled with high levels of poverty, unemployment and environmental degradation, makes Sierra Leone vulnerable to climate change impacts. Over the years, the country has been experiencing significant negative impacts from climate change. Heavy rainfall in coastal areas lead to soil erosion, frequent flooding and mudslides along the coastal mountain areas.

Sierra Leone has one of the lowest electricity access rates in the world, with only 36%<sup>2</sup> of the population having access to electricity – mostly in urban and peri-urban areas. The country's poor access to energy has limited inclusive growth, thus deepening poverty and food insecurity. Improved access to electricity in rural areas will help stimulate socioeconomic development, improve learning outcomes for children, and increase food security by reducing post-harvest losses. Rural communities remain particularly vulnerable, with electricity access rates in remote rural areas being as low as 1.3% compared to 45% for urban areas. Deforestation for farming and cooking is on the increase with no commensurate reforestation.

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<sup>1</sup> Senior Officials Policy Dialogue on Accelerating Transition to Sustainable Agriculture through redirecting public policies and support and scaling innovation. Held at Villa Wolkonsky Via Ludovico di Savoia, 00185 Roma RM, Italy. 27 July 2023.

<sup>2</sup> World Bank MTF Report 2023

## Promoting privatization for food security

In 2019, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAF) introduced a Cabinet Paper detailing the Enhancing Private Sector Participation in Agriculture Strategy, which is commonly known as the “MAF Policy Shift”. The main components of the strategy are: (i) an agricultural mechanization service scheme managed by the private sector; (ii) an e-voucher scheme to improve targeting and enhance efficiency in the delivery of public subsidy programmes for agricultural inputs; (iii) training of agro-input dealers and farmers; (iv) an e-extension service; (v) setting up an agricultural credit facility; and (vi) an agricultural investment bank.

A central pillar of the “MAF Policy Shift” was to expand the provision of mechanized land preparation and planting services. To start this effort, the Government of Sierra Leone made 410 machines and implements worth SLL168 billion (USD 13 million) available to the private sector in 2019 through a competitive bidding process for a lease-to-own public-private partnership arrangement. This action was to address previously failed agricultural mechanization approaches that relied heavily on the government directly providing tractors and equipment to farmer groups, or private individuals. The scheme is complemented by the Sierra Leone Seed Certification Act (which established the Sierra Leone Seed Certification Agency) and the National Fertilizer Regulatory Agency Act, which regulates the fertilizer trade, distribution and use in Sierra Leone.

Despite some challenges during the first year relating to the machines and equipment, the scheme has contributed to an increase in the land area under cultivation – in the first year to 15,600 ha – the highest in the past 20 years. It has also served as a proof of concept and has established a public-private partnership pathway for providing agricultural mechanization services, fertilizers and seeds in a more efficient and transparent manner.

## Soil health management

As part of the national effort to improve soil health and contribute to food security improvement, poverty reduction and minimization of environmental degradation, the Government of Sierra Leone, through the Ministry of Agriculture, has concluded a National Comprehensive Soil Survey. The survey provides updated data and information on the soils in different agroclimatic and agroecological zones, land use patterns, soil fertility and determination of land sustainability for cropping in Sierra Leone. It is expected that the data and information provided by the survey will help guide sustainable soil management, including the management of soil acidity and soil fertility by small-scale farmers. It will also help to promote the judicious use and management of fertilizers and for sustainable crop production in the country.

## Political commitment to address climate change, rural energy and food security nexus

In an economy where agriculture is mainly rain-fed, rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events are reducing the viability of agriculture-based livelihoods and putting a significant share of the population at risk of increased hunger, malnutrition and poverty. With less than 45% of the population having access to electricity, accelerating

electrification rates across the country is critical for economic growth, rural development and the delivery of critical social services across the country.

The Government of Sierra Leone has increasingly realized climate change, access to energy and food security are inter-connected. The climate change- renewable energy-food nexus impacts on development, peace and security and economic growth. Thus, addressing one without the others in a holistic approach could be counterproductive. In July 2023, the government elevated the importance of addressing the nexus to a Presidential Initiative. As part of the process, integrated and comprehensive technical assessments, complemented by detailed economic and policy analysis are integrated in designing programmes that are mutually reinforcing for impact.

## Lessons

- Sierra Leone's agriculture is mainly rain-fed, thus rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and extreme weather events are reducing the viability of agriculture-based livelihoods and putting a significant share of the population at risk of increased hunger, malnutrition and poverty. In this respect, addressing climate change impacts must be integrated with improving access to energy and food security.
- Integrated and comprehensive technical assessments, complemented by detailed economic and policy analysis and processes are required to design programmes that are mutually reinforcing to contribute to the 'triple win' criteria: for people, climate and nature.
- The global food and fuel supply chain disruption has deepened food insecurity and poverty in small-developing countries (like Sierra Leone). Thus, repurposing policies to accelerate the transition to sustainable agriculture should not be decoupled from food security, poverty reduction and overall socioeconomic development objectives of countries.
- Although Sierra Leone has private sector friendly agricultural and trade policies in place and has demonstrated the highest level of commitment for transitioning to sustainable agriculture, the country has not been able to attract the intended private sector investments and foreign direct investment, especially for investments in climate-smart and other climate change mitigation technologies.



This is one in a set of country case studies demonstrating policy action that individual countries are taking with the aim of transition to sustainable agriculture. They are country owned and do not represent wider views of the Policy Dialogue participants.