

## Executive Summary

The following report addresses the findings of an external impact assessment of Tearfund Disaster Management Team's (Tearfund DMT) Food Security programme funded by ECHO in Sinoe County over the period January 2007 till June 2009.

The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant. Findings and observations were shared and discussed with a second independent consultant who focused on evaluating the remaining components of Tearfund's integrated programme in Sinoe County. The evaluation was conducted well before the end of the funding period (in June 2009) and before Tearfund's phasing out and handing over to its national partner, the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia, AEL, which was to take place by the end of 2008.

The regular progress reports provide a good and realistic insight in the level to which activities have been implemented as per the plan, and have contributed to the outputs. This report touches upon such issues but does not intend to provide a comprehensive overview as its focus is on impact; the level to which the project outputs have contributed to the purpose and overall goal of the project.

## Background

With the end of the 14-year civil war and stable security conditions in place to permit the large-scale return of refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Tearfund DMT has been undertaking a full operational programme in Liberia since October 2004 in partnership with AEL and EQUIP. Tearfund's strategy in Liberia is to support the recovery process for the country, enabling rehabilitation of targeted communities which have been devastated following the years of civil conflict. The strategy includes the undertaking of an operational response to the humanitarian crisis and in parallel developing and resourcing local Tearfund partners for ongoing rehabilitation and development programming for the longer term. Tearfund and its partners are helping war affected communities re-establish essential basic services at the community level through a developmental approach that promotes sustainability, replicability and fosters self-reliance.

According to the UN the people and the Government of Liberia have made impressive strides since 2006 in consolidating peace and strengthening national authority<sup>1</sup>.

*'These achievements have indeed paved the way to more sustainable recovery and development. Yet, despite these advances, far too many Liberians remain vulnerable and confront acute humanitarian needs on a daily basis. These include lack of access to basic services, notably health care, safe drinking water, shelter and education'.*  
(Source: Humanitarian Appeal, 2008).

The operational environment in Sinoe for organisations like Tearfund DMT has been favourable in terms of safety with no major security related incidents reported over the project period. Target communities were found to be energetic, upbeat regarding the future and highly interested and involved in Tearfund's FS project in Sinoe. The situation has been conducive for Tearfund to link emergency type of interventions with longer-term development initiatives. This is because fundamental conditions have been in place such as a basic level of security, respect for human rights and humanitarian access. Evidence from the field suggests that the emergency (representing a life threatening situation for the people) is

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<sup>1</sup> The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is less positive and observes that following the general election in 2006 the political evolution in Liberia continues to be personality driven and internal rifts in the lower house of the National Assembly is slowing down the pace of progress expected from the government (IFRCRCS, 2007).

over and that donor governments accept the legitimacy of national and local government structures.

Sinoe County has not been an area of high return for refugees and IDPs like Bomi, Lofa or Nimba County. However, Sinoe is one of the largely neglected Counties in Liberia's south-east and has seen significant refugee and IDP returns. Tearfund's programme has been sensitive with regard to return dynamics.

## **Purpose and Methodology**

The purpose of the impact evaluation was to assess the effectiveness, impact, relevance, efficiency, sustainability and co-ordination & coherence of the Food Security intervention in Sinoe and capture recommendations for the future development of AEL's ongoing food security work after the exit of DMT.

The main methods applied were key informant interviews, group discussions (including SWOT and PRA exercises), direct observations by the consultant (site visits, transect walks and household visits) and review of project documentation and secondary supporting data.

The evaluation concentrates on the Food Security project covering the period January 2007 till November 2008.

## **Findings**

### **General**

The general impression was that with continued access to the target villages, support of Tearfund DMT's skeleton staff in Monrovia and with AEL employing key Tearfund Sinoe programme staff the Food Security project will implement all activities listed in the project log frame in a timely manner.

Tearfund's Food Security project has been very ambitious given the challenging operational context in Sinoe, particularly the very poor state of the rural roads. Tearfund is complimented for having achieved so much in a relative short period of time.

### **Food Security**

Tearfund's Food Security project over the period 2007-8 has contributed significantly to the purpose and overall goal of the 2007 and 2008 ECHO supported interventions<sup>2</sup>. Agricultural production and food security in general has increased significantly over the 2007-8 period with Tearfund's intervention playing a key role, particularly so for the more vulnerable households.

Seed and tool distributions, and particularly the distribution of improved upland and lowland rice seed varieties, has been instrumental in boosting agricultural production. Tearfund is to be complimented for taking a developmental approach to relief by trying to set up seed supply systems to create sustainable access to key agricultural inputs. The communal rice seed supply systems are very well received by the communities and if some minor issues are

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<sup>2</sup> The overall goal of the 2007 ECHO ('Tearfund Integrated Community Rehabilitation Project in Sinoe County, Liberia – January to December 2007') proposal was defined as: *'to alleviate the suffering of the Liberian population affected by civil conflict by means of support to rehabilitation and restoration of basic living conditions within the country'*. The specific purpose as: *'to improve the health and food security status of targeted communities in Sinoe County through increased access to water, improve sanitation, hygiene practises and increased agricultural production in a replicable and sustainable manner'*.

The overall goal of the ECHO II008 ('Food Security Project in Sinoe County, Liberia – February 2007 to June 2009') programme has been defined as *'Household food security for war affected communities in Sinoe County, Liberia'*. And its related specific purpose as: *'Improved food production for vulnerable households in Sinoe County by creating access to agricultural inputs, restocking and improved farming systems'*.

addressed then Tearfund will have managed to establish a viable system serving the interests of a large group of households.

The animal restocking activity has been highly successful although its start has been problematic and it will take time for the banking system to benefit a substantial number of vulnerable households.

Tearfund has found that work on communal and backyard farming has been challenging partly because of the difficulties in sourcing seed of sufficient and reliable quality. The level to which gardening has contributed to improved food security is doubtful although it must be said that Tearfund has struck a cord with people adopting improved agricultural practise (such as vegetable seedling production on raised seed beds and the use and application of compost) which will particularly benefit women to grow a wider variety of vegetables both for consumption and sale.

A start has been made to rehabilitate some of the existing plantations as these represented a vital part of the local farming system and village economies in peaceful and stable times. However, its ultimate success will depend on the re-establishment of demand for such products.

Rehabilitation of former rice swamp schemes and development of new schemes is a highly visible project output and has produced encouraging results though it is felt that continued encouragement and support is needed to develop the potential that is available.

Farm machinery to process cassava and rice is currently being introduced and is likely to be met by challenges of an operational nature. It will require proper follow up to be sustainable over time.

## **Partnering/Capacity Building**

Tearfund has done an excellent job in building the longer-term capacity of its main strategic partner in Liberia; the Association of Evangelicals of Liberia (AEL). Tearfund and AEL operate from the same support office in Sinoe County, and staff work closely together and share resources.

Management and field staff have benefited from training opportunities provided by Tearfund, strong co-ordination and sharing of lessons learned. With Tearfund phasing out by the end of the year AEL is well capable to follow up on Tearfund's FS project and implementing the FS activities to meet the objectives as laid out in the log frames and plans of actions for the ECHO II Food Security component.

## **Summary**

The following table presents the summary of the scores attributed to the objective categories for the food security project. The scores are based on a four point scale where 1 = very weak and 4 = very strong.

**Table 1: Summary of objective categories scores attributed to the Food Security project.**

<b>Objective category</b>	<b>Food Security</b>
Effectiveness	2.7
Impact	3.0
Relevance and Appropriateness	3.5
Efficiency	2.8

Sustainability	2.9
Co-ordination & Coherence	2.9
Average	3.0

## Recommendations

As Tearfund will withdraw from Sinoe by the end of the year recommendations addressed to ‘Tearfund’ should read as recommendations to AEL as well.

## Food Security

### Seed and tool distributions

1. Donor procurement guidelines have seriously jeopardised agricultural good practise (using good quality and ideally certified seeds). Tearfund should have requested ECHO for derogation. In the absence of reliable traders and availability of good quality seeds in Monrovia, Tearfund should have purchased seeds by making use of the services of specialised regional or international seed companies.
2. Tearfund has emphasized the importance of rice over cassava and coco yam as major staple foods of strategic importance in times of disaster or duress. By, for example, including improved short-term mosaic resistant cassava and orange flesh sweet potato varieties, Tearfund could have contributed more to improved food and nutrition security for vulnerable groups.
3. In case Tearfund’s partner, AEL, decides to embark on longer term food security programmes it might consider to make quality inputs available by organising seed fairs or look into the possibility to make inputs available via middlemen or shops in Sinoe county (it might be an option to discuss possibilities with AfriDev, the pump spare parts dealer set up by Tearfund in Greenville).

### Rice seed distributions and seed system development

4. For Tearfund to monitor and assess the appropriateness of its communal rice seed storage with particular reference to controlling post harvest losses due to fungi, pests, small rodents and/or insufficient ventilation.
5. For Tearfund to distribute simple weighing scales to the treasurers of the communal rice seed banks and to make sure that rice seed beneficiaries repay the required 30 kilos of rice seed needed for a viable communal rice store bank.
6. To set clear quality control guidelines for rice seed repayments to be accepted by those who manage the communal rice seed banks. Quality control standards and criteria as well as storage procedures should be clearly set. Promotion of improved threshing practise, drying and cleaning of rice seed as well as preventing the mix up of different rice varieties are important elements for improvement.

### Distribution of small livestock and village banking system

7. For Tearfund and AEL to monitor progress of the banking system and the timeliness with which other vulnerable households benefit from this intervention. If thought appropriate, Tearfund and AEL staff might engage with the Community Development Committees (CDCs) to look at the possibility and level of acceptance of beneficiaries passing on every second off-spring produced by the donated goats (instead off passing on the products of the first pregnancy only to the CDC for further re-distribution).
8. Seek discussion with the CDCs to see if a stall feeding or enclosure system can be introduced in villages, with all households (project beneficiaries and households acquiring small rudiments on their own) committing themselves to keep domestic

animals in pens. Otherwise, it will only be a matter of time for a serious conflict of interest to occur between individual owners of free ranging small livestock and the village community at large, which has come to appreciate the dramatic reduction in morbidity as a result of the use of latrines, access to clean water and a generally much cleaner village environment.

#### Communal gardens and backyard farming

9. Further promote backyard farming and seeking dialogue with the CDCs concerning the issue of free ranging animals in the village centres vis-à-vis the viability of home gardens as promoted by Tearfund (vegetable growing within fenced gardens).
10. Discuss the viability of the communal gardens with the CDCs and women's groups and promote/lobby for the establishment of a more limited number but centrally located farmer field schools to demonstrate improved agricultural practice and farmer training centres (beyond the current FS project time frame and for consideration by AEL or any other agency interested in promoting improved agricultural practise in Sinoe County).

#### Cash crop rehabilitation

11. If resources are available, Tearfund is recommended to use the Cash for Work modality to promote smaller scale rehabilitation of existing plantations (particularly oil palm as there is a demand for oil in the villages) instead of major rehabilitation work on fewer, larger plantations. It is more efficient to partially rehabilitate a larger number of plantations benefiting more people in more villages.
12. If funding allows, Tearfund could facilitate interested women to plant good quality rubber trees to create a longer term productive asset providing a steady source of income six to eight years from now.
13. AEL could lobby and advocate for the Liberian government and its international partners to re-establish the Liberia Produce Marketing Corporation in Greenville. This would encourage farmers to rehabilitate their plantations as a vital component of their livelihoods.

#### Upland farming

14. Tearfund and AEL should share their environmental concerns<sup>3</sup> about upland farming with agricultural or food security actors in Sinoe County and promote agro-forestry interventions in combination with improved tillage practises in traditional upland farm areas (target developmental oriented actors – farmer field schools are instrumental within a longer term developmental oriented approach).

#### Swamp rehabilitation and development

15. Involve or train up agricultural department staff in the technical expertise needed to develop and lay out rice swamp schemes.
16. Monitor people's intention to develop more swamp rice and provide, if possible, the required inputs (e.g. determine to what extent the Cash for Work modality has been instrumental for rice swamp scheme rehabilitation and development).
17. For swamp rice cultivation to be more generally accepted and adopted as a viable alternative to upland rice, continued support and encouragement is needed. Tearfund should therefore promote government and NGO support for developing more swamp rice schemes.
18. Lobby and advocate government authorities about focusing on swamp development over the current proposals to develop large scale communal farms in eight districts of Sinoe County.

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<sup>3</sup> These include farming near or in national park boundaries and the planned 1000-acre communal farms on cleared virgin forest lands as planned in eight of Sinoe's districts by senior County government officials.

Pre- and post-harvest loss control and pest control

19. For AEL to help seed and tool beneficiaries to make traditional rice stores mice proof by placing metal caps over stilts of the storage platform.

Farm machinery

20. Guidelines for operation and maintenance of processing machinery should be developed, including a user's fees to pay for maintenance and repairs.
21. The degree to which most vulnerable households will benefit from the processing machinery should be closely monitored by AEL and the CDCs and if needed measures taken to include them as beneficiaries.
22. Look into possibility of making spare parts available via the AfriDev spare parts dealer's store in Greenville and central cluster villages.

### **CDCs & Community Extension Workers**

23. For AEL to continue to monitor the CDCs sensitivity with regard to the needs and vulnerabilities of the most vulnerable vis-à-vis the FS project activities (within and beyond timeframe of ECHO II intervention).
24. For Tearfund to engage with AEL and CDCs to discuss the need to adapt the static nature of the MoU's, which guide major FS activities within and beyond the FS project component's timeframe in order to reflect the changing context and dynamics.
25. As in essence the CDCs are an alternative or parallel structure to the TDCs (Town Development Committees) it is unclear where the formal responsibilities rests with regard to the CDC. What is the CDCs 'position and role with regard to current plans for decentralisation as promotes by the PRS process? Tearfund and AEL are advised to clarify this issue and take appropriate actions if and when needed as the CDCs are central to the sustainability of the agricultural and FS intervention.
26. Tearfund and AEL should carefully consider what role they see for the Agricultural Community Extension Workers beyond the timeframe of the ECHO II intervention. The extension workers have been an important element of Tearfund and AEL's operational FS response. Tearfund and AEL should be careful that the sustainability of FS interventions does not rest with these people or else find innovative and appropriate ways for such people to continue to support relevant community based FS activities.

### **Co-ordination with other Actors and Stakeholders**

27. For Tearfund and AEL to advocate for continued support for paddy rice farming to be adopted on a larger scale in favour of upland rice cultivation and advocate for more appropriate use of upland agriculture, e.g. by emphasising more appropriate agro-forestry interventions.
28. Tearfund should enable AEL to continue to support the district and county authorities capacity to monitor and address humanitarian issues and to promote overall government-led aid coordination as envisaged in the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.
29. In general, co-ordination and coherence of county FS plans with national and local policies is weak as demonstrated by the initiative of the Sinoe County officials to develop large-scale communal upland farms on virgin forest lands. Tearfund should play an active role in engaging with FAO and UNDP to raise the issue and advocate for county level FS initiative to be based on local realities and be environmentally sensitive.

## **Partnering**

30. AEL is committed and capable to implement the FS project as Tearfund has invested in timely and appropriate capacity building of AEL.
31. Tearfund should pro-actively promote AEL as its long-term strategic partner to relevant representatives of donor organisations, such as FAO and UNDP, at both County and national levels.
32. AEL, if needed with support of Tearfund or other potential donors such as World Relief Canada, is advised to explore other funding opportunities to promote further FS work with a particular focus on the promotion of lowland rice cultivation. In case ECHO or the EC is launching a call for proposals, Tearfund or World Relief Canada might want to consider their options together with AEL.

## **Logistics**

33. Logistics and transportation is key to programme implementation but demands considerable investment in time and resources; the budget for repair and maintenance has been consumed. Tearfund is advised to ensure that AEL has sufficient resources to keep the vehicles operational and to recruit Tearfund's Sinoe Logistical Officer for the remaining ECHO II programme's timeframe.

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