

Executive Summary

- i. The overall finding is that FAO's cooperation in Sierra Leone during the evaluation period made a valuable contribution to the planning and initiation of agricultural rehabilitation following the period of civil conflict. FAO is considered a trusted partner of the Sierra Leone Government, due to its constant presence through most of the civil conflict period and its responsiveness to the President's rights-based food security pledge of 2002. Strong support was given by FAO Headquarters to a response to the pledge and the FAO Representative, who was in post through almost all of the evaluation period. FAO is considered a valued member of the UN Country Team.
- ii. After the policy and strategy development assistance in planning agricultural sector rehabilitation in Sierra Leone, the focus then turned to implementation. Implementation of agricultural programmes in Sierra Leone is constrained by a number of factors that are discussed in the report. While many donors supported the emergency rehabilitation effort, almost all the post-emergency cooperation funding for FAO projects came from the Federal Republic of Germany. These projects have now ended, or will end by early 2008. Possibilities for programme development in country are limited by the relatively small number of donor interlocutors and, more significantly, by the absence of an FAO Representative since the former one retired in August 2006.
- iii. As Sierra Leone moves progressively into a more normal development mode, FAO will need to define what it can best do and how it can serve the needs of Sierra Leone. It will have to be proactive in asserting this, if it wishes to continue to be considered as a key partner in the country's development.

Context

- iv. Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world with a ranking of 176 out of 177 countries in the UNDP Human Development Index for 2006. Three-quarters of the population lives in absolute poverty. Rural households headed by farmers have the highest incidence and intensity of poverty, even though the agriculture sector (including livestock and fisheries) currently employs 75% of the country's labour force and accounts for about 45% of GDP. Subsistence bush-fallow cultivation is the predominant type of farming, accounting for about 60% of agricultural output and followed by two-thirds of the farming population.
- v. Domestic agricultural production has increased in recent years and now covers about 69% of the national rice requirement and over 100% for cassava and sweet potato. However, the country still faces a number of critical constraints to increased production including:
 - poor infrastructure
 - general low soil fertility
 - poor understanding of the economic background of production
 - policy unfavourable to local agriculture
- vi. Food security is one of the three pillars of the Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The Agricultural Sector Review prepared by FAO, with

assistance from UNDP, IFAD and the World Bank, was a key contribution to the PRSP. The Government continues to rely heavily on foreign assistance; some 60% of the national budget is supported by development partners, especially DFID, the EC and World Bank. The Government has embarked upon a decentralisation policy, encouraged by donors.

FAO Representation

- vii. The FAO Representation is a medium-sized office. As part of the current reform process in FAO, three administrative posts have been cancelled and a programme post downgraded. Particularly on the programme side, this is incompatible with the increased responsibilities given to FAORs through DGB 2007/04. It raises the likelihood of continued high staff turnover in this unit, the need for continuous staff training at entry level, and consequently a lower level of efficiency than is required to ensure growth in the field programme and its effective management. Savings from the restructuring may neither off-set the cost of constantly replacing trained staff nor repair the damage to the Organisation's image caused by inadequate staffing capacity.
- viii. Only 3% of programme staff time was spent on programme/project identification. This is inadequate to grow the programme beyond its current level. Given the workload already in the programme unit and the increased demands, the evaluation concluded that the FAOR was not adequately resourced.
- ix. During and just after the evaluation period, there were two long periods (10 months and 8 ½ months) when the FAOR post was vacant. These long gaps resulted in: weakened control of the office; overloading of local programme staff; weakened FAO's presence in multi-stakeholder discussions (e.g. UNDAF, DACO); negatively impacted on resource mobilisation initiatives; and created delays in addressing pressing project implementation issues.
- x. Priorities for the office were set as a result of Government requests. However, FAO in Sierra Leone does not have a plan or guide for establishing priorities. Such a tool is essential in a situation where there are many competing needs, scarce resources and donor reluctance to invest in certain areas such as capacity building of the Ministries.
- xi. The FAOR was active with advocacy campaigns in various areas, including within the international community and the UN Country Team. There was less opportunity to work with donors, both because their numbers in Freetown are relatively low and some major donors either do not support agricultural projects or prefer to work through other sources.
- xii. Resource constraints were viewed to be a major problem. For example, funds were not available for project monitoring visits, meaning that the Representation had to rely on written reports. Decisions on budget allocations for the office were made in Rome.
- xiii. Budgetary controls in the office were weak. Systematic monitoring was constrained by the limitations of the Field Accounting System budget module and the limited capacity of the administrative unit to perform this task regularly.

Activities and Results in Areas Supported by FAO

- xiv. FAO enjoys considerable credit for its constant involvement in **emergency rehabilitation** throughout most of the civil war period. FAO began operating emergency rehabilitation projects in the country as early as 1995, while the war was going on. The assistance programme grew after the signing of the Lomé Agreement in July 1999. During the evaluation period, some 18 emergency rehabilitation projects were implemented in Sierra Leone. Aside from the provision of rehabilitation supplies, FAO played a vital role in coordination of the large volume of emergency assistance to Sierra Leone. This assistance was widely acknowledged to have resulted in better targeting of beneficiaries and reducing duplication of efforts. Assessments of FAO emergency assistance in Sierra Leone showed that the quality of local rice seed distributed was often poor and seed was sometimes distributed late. The assistance was appreciated but in many cases the amount of assistance was found to be insufficient to feed the family through the season. Some later emergency rehabilitation activities were pilot initiatives aimed at vulnerable groups. Follow up to some of these has come through Operation Feed the Nation.

- xv. FAO had a key role in **agricultural policy and agricultural development strategy**, because of a desire to respond to the President's food security pledge at the same time that the scope of FAO's Special Programme on Food Security was being broadened. A key output was the Agricultural Sector Review, which was praised for its quality and timeliness by many partners in the country. FAO also supported the establishment of a **Right to Food Secretariat**, although the prospective effectiveness of the Secretariat is in doubt after the cessation of donor funding. A major success, though, was the role played by the Secretariat in the inclusion of food security and agriculture in the PRSP.

- xvi. A considerable success has been FAO's involvement in the introduction and expansion of **Farmers' Field Schools** through **Operation Feed The Nation**. FFS, with funding from various sources including a TCP project and a German Trust Fund, has trained over 36,000 farmers so far. FFS were positively assessed in an impact study carried out for this evaluation, in terms of increased production and incomes, introduction of improved agricultural practices and satisfaction of farmers with their participation. The study also pointed out areas needing to be addressed in future, such as storage and marketing.

- xvii. The largest single intervention funded by FAO in the evaluation period was a project for the development of a sustainable **Seeds** programme. The evaluation found that in less than two years, the project had made considerable progress in improving coordination in the seed sector and increasing capacity for seed production and dissemination. Although the project has been successful in a technical sense, it is not yet operating on a cost-recovery basis. The evaluation recommends putting the project on a sound business footing to ensure sustainability and address operational issues. If this is done, an extension of the project was recommended.

- xviii. A German-funded regional project in which Sierra Leone participates promotes opportunities for **organic and fair trade** certification for agricultural products in West African countries; cocoa in the case of Sierra Leone. The main issues are whether the cooperative working with the project can purchase its own members' crops against competition from cocoa traders and if its management can develop the skills and trust to service the members effectively. Assuming this happens, the project could serve as a model for other organisations in Sierra Leone also seeking fair trade and organic certification.
- xix. An evaluation of **Telefood** projects was undertaken because of the large number of such projects (27 during the evaluation period) and to augment the evidence base with respect to the conclusions of the corporate evaluation of Telefood undertaken in 2005. This evaluation found some successful projects, but the sustainability of the projects was generally low and those with livestock components were particularly unsuccessful. Projects tended to operate in isolation and did not benefit from strategic linkages with other FAO programmes, other international development partners or with the government; thus they were not part of broader efforts for poverty eradication. The absence of technical support was one of the main causes of project failure. Due to absence of resources, project monitoring and follow-up were carried out neither by FAO nor by any other partner or agency. The evaluation validated the recommendation of the corporate evaluation that Telefood funds should support clearly identified components of wider FAO projects and programmes, where they can be better targeted and monitored. In the case of Sierra Leone, the evaluation recommended that Telefood projects be linked to FFS and FFS District Networks, in order to have better access to capacity building and advice.
- xx. The evaluation examined eight **Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)** funded projects implemented over the review period. Overall performance of the TCP in Sierra Leone over the review period is judged to be above satisfactory, with a mixture of good projects, poor ones and some that could not be adequately assessed in the absence of key information. The use of TCP in the Agricultural Sector Review was particularly strategic, as without it, FAO would have been unable to play the leading role that it did in its implementation. Using TCP for "buy-in" to key national policy-making processes is extremely effective and the TCP Unit should be prepared to respond to such requests, if technically sound, in a rapid fashion. Efforts in the medium-term should be focused on developing sound technical proposals in close consultation with potential funders and thus a higher likelihood of follow-up.
- xxi. In terms of **cross-cutting issues**, the evaluation found that FAO has a stronger role to play in terms of **environmental protection** in Sierra Leone and has identified this as a priority area for the future, because of the strong linkage to soil fertility and consequent agricultural production and food security. FFS should be the key mechanism for delivering messages at field level in this area. The evaluation identified a need for FAO to play a stronger role in terms of promoting **gender equity**. Utilising concepts developed by FAO Headquarters and with technical support from UNAIDS, the evaluation found scope for establishing a workplace policy for FAO staff, incorporating

HIV/AIDS mainstreaming and for including modules on HIV/AIDS within FFS in particular.

Results by FAO Services

- xxii. **Sharing and applying knowledge** was assessed through FAO's pilot activities and use of Regular Programme information and products. The pilot activities were few: the FFS were deemed successful as was an initiative to increase rice seed production through an emergency project while the Right-to-Food project was not considered successful. Little use is made of FAO information and products in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone does participate in meetings and seminars and these are useful for keeping abreast of latest technical developments. However, due to poor Internet connectivity and lack of knowledge in the FAO Representation about what is available, little use is made of information products.

- xxiii. FAO engages in **partnership building** with the Government, members of the UN family, donors, NGOs and civil society organisations. FAO is considered to be a trusted partner by the Government and the Representation has built linkages, including with the most senior decision-makers. FAO, thus, enjoys a high profile in the country, perhaps higher than in most countries.

- xxiv. **Capacity building** in Sierra Leone is particularly challenging. Within the UN system and among donors and NGOs, lack of capacity is universally cited as an obstacle to sustainable development interventions. While nearly all FAO interventions (except Telefood projects) have a capacity building component, they are invariably small, often of too short duration and thus have only limited impact. As FAO is not a funding agency, its possibilities for carrying out extensive capacity building will always be constrained. Accordingly, it may be able to make a greater impact through assessments of capacity building needs in particular areas and make this information available to Government and Development Partners. Such assessments should take into account capacities outside of government.

- xxv. In terms of **resource mobilization**, FAO was not notably successful. Despite the Presidential pledge, the Maputo Declaration, the goals of the PRSP and the agricultural and food security strategies developed, the amounts of national and international resources directed to agriculture have remained below expectations. Government resources for agriculture, although increased over the evaluation period, remain less than half the Maputo Declaration target. The major donors in the country have given emphasis to sectors other than agriculture and investment projects in agriculture, even when identified, have been very slow to come on line. There have not been any sector-wide programmes, so projects remain the form for international assistance. The relative lack of donors present in the country is also a difficulty.

Recommendations

- xxvi. The evaluation made 12 recommendations, eight of which are general, three relate to specific programme areas and one to Telefood. The general recommendations covered the following areas:

- Developing a framework for FAO support to Sierra Leone;
- Continuing advocacy for food security issues;
- Continuing assistance in agricultural policy and strategy formulation and linking this to resource mobilization;
- Provision of agricultural policy and training support aimed at elucidating better understanding of the economic background of production and promoting agriculture as a profitable business;
- Provision of policy support aimed at sustainable agriculture;
- Ensuring adequate capacity in the FAO Representation;
- Provision of continued technical support for the development of Farmers' Field Schools; and
- Specific consideration of cross-cutting issues (in particular environment, gender equity and HIV/AIDS) in future support.