



2011 Sierra Leone
Comprehensive Food Security
and Vulnerability Analysis
(CFSVA)

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Sierra Leone – small steps in post war recovery

Less than a decade after the end of its devastating civil war Sierra Leone still has some of the worst human development indicators in the world – especially for maternal and child mortality and malnutrition. Since the war ended in 2002 recovery of the agriculture sector has been steady but largely as a result of a threefold increase in the area planted with rice than significant improvements in yields. In fact rice yields remain low and far below potential. The country remains

highly dependent on imports, exposing households to price shocks such as those in 2008 which hit it hard. It is in this context that WFP, in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS), undertook the CFSVA. In addition to working with MAFFS, WFP collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Statistics Sierra Leone, UNICEF, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Innovations for Poverty Action – Sierra Leone (IPA-SL) in this study.

Four main objectives of the CFSVA

- To produce reliable baseline food security data in a rapidly changing post-war context
- To compare food security status between rural and urban areas, particularly given the rise in food prices
- To identify districts and livelihoods most affected by food insecurity
- To produce an updated reference document for agencies and institutions working on food security and nutrition issues in Sierra Leone.

Nearly half of the population is food insecure

The survey found that nationally almost half (45%) of households or 2.5 million people are classified as food insecure during the lean season, reflecting seasonal food access issues. Of those about 374,000 people (6.5%) are severely food insecure. Hunger peaks in August with people's access to food starting to deteriorate in June and July. This classification is based on having a poor or borderline diet as noted by the Food Consumption Score (FCS), a key WFP indicator measuring household food consumption.

Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates were found to be 6% nationally, using standard MUAC thresholds. This finding was confirmed by the SMART survey which showed 5.8% of children suffering from acute malnutrition. In both surveys, girls had higher GAM rates than boys – a surprising result. Some 35% of children between six and 59 months of age suffer from chronic malnutrition and 10% are severely stunted.



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Methodology for the CFSVA

The survey covered all 12 districts of Sierra Leone, with the Western District further subdivided into urban slums, non-slums and rural areas. It is statistically representative for each of these categories and by urban and rural areas. The CFSVA is also representative for the newly created livelihood zones defined by Famine Early Warning System (FEWS NET) and partners in May 2010. Data was collected in June and July of 2010. In total, 4,896 households in 408 communities were interviewed during the primary data collection. Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) measurements were taken for all children under five and their caretakers. In addition, results from the concurrent Standardized Monitoring and Assessment in Relief and Transitions (SMART) survey conducted by UNICEF were used to complement the nutrition aspects of this study.

Rural households face greater food insecurity than urban

The districts most affected by food insecurity are Pujehun (80%), Moyamba (76%), and Tonkolili (74%). The least affected districts are Kailahun (21%), Western Rural (22%), Western Urban (23%) and Bonthe (23%). The Western Slum is 40% food insecure. Rural households are more food insecure than urban (54% versus 29%).

The state of food insecurity varies considerably by livelihood zone. The rice and secondary gold mine zone (which covers northern Tonkolili and borders Koinadugu) has the highest prevalence of food insecurity at 69%. The livestock trade and food crop zone (most of Koinadugu and the northeast corner of Kono) fare little better at 68%.

The highest rates of acute malnutrition (according to the SMART survey and using MUAC thresholds) are in Pujehun (8.9%), Moyamba (8.2%) and Bonthe (7.4%) although less than 23% are classified as food insecure in the latter.



Marked link between low education and food insecurity

Low education levels show a negative impact on household food security. For example 55% of those that head food insecure households have no education and 79% of female spouses in food insecure households have no education.

The livelihoods most impacted by food insecurity are those relying on petty trade (55.9% food insecure), those in food crop production (53.8%) and unskilled labourers (50.2%). Food insecure households are significantly more likely to have children involved in the main activity that sustains their household. Over a third of food insecure households have children who work, highlighting the use of child labour as a coping mechanism.

Poverty is at the heart of food insecurity

Poverty levels are very high in Sierra Leone with 70% of the population living below the national poverty line of US\$2 day. And poverty is the most prevalent cause of food insecurity in the country, leaving people unable to acquire sufficient food.

Three quarters of the population depends on market purchases for food and on average households spend some 63% of their total expenditure on food alone. While more than half needed to borrow money in the past year, one out of three of these households borrowed money to buy food. Under such conditions, the trend of high and rising food prices poses a serious threat to food security.

Producing food is often not enough to guarantee household food security. Only 6% of rice

cultivators can rely on their own production to feed their family for the entire year. Poor infrastructure and storage facilities prevent farmers from selling rice and other crops, forcing farmers to sell their surpluses in the immediate post-harvest season, leaving rice producers reliant on purchasing from markets. In fact some 72% of rice-cultivating households bought rice in the seven days before the survey.

Most rural households (90%) may have access to agricultural land, but more than half of them leave some of their land uncultivated, mainly because of lack of agriculture inputs and labour. Only 19% of farmers use irrigation and less than 10% use fertilizer, pesticides and improved seeds.

There is a strong link between death, injury or illness of a

household member, which are the most frequent shocks that Sierra Leonean households experience, and the capacity to buy food: more than 90% of households with a working member affected by such shocks said they were less able to buy food.

Malnourishment in children has multiple causes, from poor caring practices to nutrition awareness, dietary habits and access to adequate water, sanitation and health care. Districts with poor sanitation have higher rates of acute malnutrition as seen in Pujehun, Bonthe, Moyamba and Kailahun. Mothers with poor hygiene practices are more likely to have malnourished children. What's more only 11% of children under six months old are exclusively breastfed, endangering the health of these children.

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Seasonal patterns of food insecurity

Food insecurity in Sierra Leone follows a seasonal pattern, reaching its worst in August. During this time, the number of food insecure can expect to rise above the figures presented in the CFSVA. In addition, the dependency on rice imports when domestic supplies dwindle, creates exposure to price volatility, potentially deepening the prevalence of food insecurity as many households are already compelled to stretch their budgets to buy food.

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Recommendations for interventions

- Seasonal hunger patterns can be addressed through livelihoods-based programmes targeted at subsistence farmers, unskilled labourers, the unemployed and petty traders.
- Increased agriculture productivity requires investments to improve the marketing of agricultural inputs, such as fertilizer and pesticides, through cost reduction schemes and education programmes. Support of agricultural cooperatives and livelihood recovery programmes can re-establish well trained farmers and improve rural labour skills. In addition, improved access to storage facilities and market infrastructure will help stabilize the domestic rice supply, increase profitability for cultivators and facilitate regional trade opportunities.
- While the Government's campaign to improve education has been effective, some areas remain behind and could be assisted by implementing WFP's school feeding programme in low-attendance / low-enrolment districts such as Bonthe.
- The burden of disease is extremely high; increased public health programmes would greatly benefit household food security as will continuing programmes such as WFP's HIV and TB initiative.
- Government-led nutrition awareness and health education programmes must continue to address hygiene and breast-feeding practices which still need further improvement. In several districts, better access to safe water and improved sanitation will save costs in health provisions and decrease the number of children suffering from acute malnutrition.



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