

POLICIES AND STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING FOOD SECURITY IN
SIERRA LEONE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO RICE

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By Emmanuel K. Alieu
Acting Director,
Rice Research Station, Rokupr

*Acting Director General,
Ministry of Agriculture Forestry & Food Security
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Food Security Pledge

Sierra Leone's Food Security Policy was launched through a Presidential Proclamation during President Kabbah's second inauguration as President of the Republic of Sierra Leone on May 19, 2002.

The pledge is hereby reproduced below:

"Fellow Sierra Leoneans, my own principal objective in this second leg of our Journey together is also centered on a Basic Human Right-The Right to Food. So today with the new mandate you have given me, I shall make another pledge. This time, I pledge to work even harder and with greater resolve to do everything in my power to ensure that within the next five years, No Sierra Leone should go to bed hungry. Alhaji Dr. Ahmad Tejan Kabba, May 19, 2002.

1.2 Implications on timing and preparedness

The declaration of a food security policy in the middle of the cropping season, against a backdrop of serious infrastructural damage; the displacement of over 70% of the country's nearly 550,000 farm families; a complete breakdown of local authority and a heavy reliance on poor returnee farmers was clearly over-ambitious. The war displaced about 1.7 million internally and about 500 fled to neighboring countries. Even the millennium development goal number 1 only aimed at halving the world's hungry and poor population in 10 years.

However, as a post-war strategy, engaging the energies and minds of the farming population could reduce the chances of mischief, provided policy implementation is supported substantially. Understandably, both government and donor efforts at providing agricultural inputs and food aid during the past 3 years was limited and in addition to the carbohydrate, protein and fat components of the food aid package, the beneficiaries had

to sell portions of the packages to obtain other excluded ingredients. As a result, firewood and charcoal sales augmented food aid supplies to the detriment of the immediate surroundings of the refugee and internally displaced peoples' camps.

1.3 **Stakeholder institutions to be involved.**

The attainment of food security is dependent upon the goodwill, cooperation and collaboration of donors; line Ministeries, Farmers' Organisations, Youth Groups, Traditional Rulers etc. Hence, the need to relate to existing plans, policies, legislations and strategies supported by all stakeholders in the food production, processing, distribution, marketing and related industries

1.4 **The Poverty Alleviation Strategy Paper (PRSP):**

Sierra Leone's food security policy has strong links with and benefits from synergies with the National Recovery Strategy, Medium Term Strategic Agricultural Plan, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and sectoral policies and instruments in the Fisheries (Fisheries Act 1994); Forestry (Forestry Act 1989), Health (Health for all by 2010); Education (Education for all by 2010) Water, Nutrition and Sanitation sectors. All these sector provided necessary ingredients in the development of the PRSP. Most of these stakeholder institutions mentioned above are on the Policy and Technical Committee of the German - funded Right to Food Programme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security.

Being the latest blueprint to provide a comprehensive roadmap for the nations development programmes in the next 5 years, all the 3 PRSP policy pillars directly or indirectly support the food security programme. For instance, policy pillar I - Promoting Good Governance, Peace and Security-underscores the need to create the enabling environment to produce food for peace. Pillar II, – Promoting pro-poor sustainable growth for food security and job creation-is clearly very supportive, while Pillar III- Promoting human development-underscores the value of agriculture in poverty alleviation, ensuring income security and economic development.

1.5 **Meaning and means of attaining Food Security**

Food Security in this context refers to a situation where nutritious food is available, accessible, affordable and acceptable to a population, normally a country, at all times.

Food Security could be attained through procurement, depending on the economic strength of the country or for countries, which enjoy the comparative advantage in growing basic food, and particularly countries with weak economic base, by producing most of the basic foodstuffs. Sierra Leone's per capita income is estimated at USD 120 (2004) having declined from USD237 in 1990 to USD142 in 2000. But with an ideal food production environment, the country should better grow than import major food items in perpetuity. Hence the need for implementing a food security policy.

1.6 **Food Security Policy Pillars**

Sierra Leone's Food Security Policy is based on Agricultural Intensification, Crop Diversification, Natural Resources Conservation and Food Safety nets policy pillars as highlighted below:

(a) **Agricultural Intensification**

The agricultural intensification policy underscores the need for the cultivation of improved and proven germplasm, with ideal agronomic practices, including the use of fertilizers, pesticides etc to ensure increased yield. Associated with this policy is the use of agricultural machinery for high productivity and also for the reduction of post harvest losses which currently range between 20-30%. For instance, the 100 units of tractors, now engaged in the field, should be ideally increased to 300 units while additional rice haulers and threshers are required. An additional 400 drying floors and 300 grain stores may be necessary in order to reduce post harvest losses from the current 30% to about 10%.

(b) **Crop Diversification**

Rice, the sole staple food currently enjoys monopoly in the household food consumption pattern. The crop diversification policy promotes the extensive cultivation of improved and proven cassava (SLICAS) and potato (SLIPOT) varieties and other improved tuber and legume varieties consumed in the country. This is supported by effective public sensitization and awareness raising on the nutrient content of these foods. Sensitization on different recipes for the diverse preparation methods of these and other food crops could improve the chances of their adoption by the populace. The aim is to improve the acceptability of these proposed second and third staple foods and others that are currently “unpopular” as staples. Rice consumption seems to be increasing with affluence with a concomitant increase in the price in proportion to the increased demand. Hence, the need for alternative or additional staple foods for a rapidly growing population in a war-torn economy like ours. The limited availability of rice during the unpopular Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) governance, from May 1997 to March 1998, when cassava and potatoes were widely “accepted” as staples, indicates that there is flexibility in the acceptance of these food types.

(c) **Natural Resource Conservation.**

In order to maximize the use of water in agricultural production, the conservation and rehabilitation of water catchments, and watersheds have been given top priority in consonance with NEPADs advocacy for the increase of agricultural land under sustainable water management, from the current 3.4% to 7% for Sub-Saharan Africa to about 10% (NEPAD, 2003). The development of all the 640 hectares of inland valley swamps nationwide could ensure at least double cropping, of short duration rice varieties, per year. The 90- day duration Nericas, will come in handy in this case. This policy pillar underscores the value of fresh water fish stock in the nutritional balance of particularly land-locked rural communities. The value of fresh water for domestic chores in rural homes cannot be over emphasized; hence the need for sustainable supplies of clean water through water catchment vegetation conservation and replenishment.

(d) Food Safety Nets

In order to make provision for the invalid, insane and minors in society, government cooperates and collaborates with food pipeline agencies to ensure that food stocks are available for that purpose. Food aid supports agricultural production through food for agriculture, which provides extra energy during the hungry season and through for seed which prevents the farmers from consuming their own seed rice. Food for work also supports feeder roads construction by rural communities and continues to be in demand for school feeding programmes as well. Also, mother-child health programmes enables expectant and nursing mothers and young children to meet their special nutrition and nutrition- related- needs (WFP, 2003).

2.0 Past Agricultural Policies**2.1 Factor Affecting Policy Implementation**

Past agricultural policies have been plagued with the following problems:

- (a) Inconsistency in policy directives
- (b) Influence of exogenous factors, i.e. donor conditionality imposing the removal of subsidies and negative trade policies on agricultural development.
- (c) Limited support for policy implementation by government and donors.
- (d) Overlap in sectoral mandates often sending confusing signals to the beneficiaries in the implementation of policies i.e. conflicts in land use policies between Lands and Agriculture Ministeries.
- (e) Inadequate intersectoral cooperation and collaboration for policy implementation.
- (f) Limited or no private sector involvement in agricultural development efforts.
- (g) Too much donor-dependency for policy implementation etc
- (h) Limited or no fellow-up on project gains after project termination.
- (i) The involvement of government in the procurement of capital agricultural goods i.e. tractor which should be procured by the private sector, which is yet to develop fully.

2.2 Phases of Agricultural Policy Development

Past agricultural development policies, could be conveniently categorized into five major phases as follows:-

- (i) Colonial period up to independence in 1961.
- (ii) Immediate post independence period up to military rule in 1967.
- (iii) The period 1968-1990.
- (iv) War period lasting from 1991 – 2000.
- (v) The period 2000 to date.

2.2.1. Colonial period up to 1961

The colonial era policy laid emphasis on forest conservation and timber production and exportation and therefore dissuaded farmers from upland cultivation. Instead, policy makers opted for a technologically intensive lowland irrigation practices covering large-scale polders in the Scarcies area but unfortunately largely excluding the small farmer. Initial high yields realised later declined due to soil acidity, iron and aluminum toxicity problems etc. The resulting policy re-direction saw the involvement of small farmers in crop trials and increased support to successful local farmers, which gained partial success.

The introduction of mechanical cultivation at this stage, was only partially successful after the introduction of input subsidy policy to facilitate the operations of resource –poor farmers.

2.2.2. Immediate post independence period up to Military Rule in 1967

Post independence agricultural policies introduced direct government intervention in rice production through the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB) as contained in the Government White Paper on Agriculture dated 1961. While the SLPMB was fully involved in the export crops sector, the Government-owned Rice Corporation actually cultivated about 590 hectares of lowlands in 1961. The main strategy at the time was on import substitution and industrialization. However, inadequate investment capital was a major limiting factor, which de-railed the programme. Also, due to poor management, rice yields were very low, making the project financially unprofitable to the extent that the Military Government of 1967 had to close the production division of the Rice Corporation and also the SLPMB. One remarkable achievement during this era however,

was the establishment of the Njala University College to train agricultural staff at middle and senior levels, thereby developing the capacity of the agricultural extension services.

2.2.3. **The period 1968 - 1990**

During the period 1969-1990, government policy focused on the small farmers problems, and stimulated investment in the Agriculture sector through the birth of the Integrated Agricultural Development Projects. However, the IADSs were generally analysed to be unsuccessful compared to the Green Revolution Programme in Asia. The IADPs failed because they were location specific, covered very large areas, were operated on ambitious targets with no marketing and pricing incentives (Kamara, 1991) The period 1980 to 1984 saw a shift in emphasis to tractorization but this was broadly unsuccessful due to poor resource management and poor prevailing economic conditions. The Green Revolution Programme, introduced in 1985, aimed at the provision of high yielding planting materials with ideal fertilizer and pesticide packages, in addition to the provision of credit and extension services to farmers. However, the non - fulfillment of the IMF, IFAD and World Bank obligations led to a premature suspension of the programme. The World Bank Funded Agric Sector Support Project which followed focused on technological, institutional and incentive frameworks to facilitate privatization, training, research, extension and incentives for both producers and workers. However the second phase of the project never took off in earnest.

2.2.4 **The period 1990 – 2000**

In the early 90s, government embarked on structural Adjustment policies which emphasized the following:

- (a) The liberalization of domestic pricing and trade policies
- (b) The liberalization of the exchange rate
- (c) Better expenditure controls and the strengthening of revenue collection
- (d) Premium was placed on encouraging competition, attracting private sector involvement etc.

Therefore, subsidies were removed on rice, fuel, fertilizer and other basic consumer items. The removal of these subsidies however, reduced the use of fertilizers and pesticides thereby resulting in low crop yields. Also, increased transport costs negatively affected agricultural

production, particularly the profitability aspect as the cost of conveying commodities to markets increased with no corresponding increases in the producer prices.

2.2.5 The Period 2000 to date

The period 2000 to date entails the Food Security Policy declaration (May 19, 2002), supported by the Agriculture Sector Review (2003) and the development of the Agricultural Sector Policy Statement of Intent (2002); the Investment Promotion Act (2004); the Medium Term Strategic Agricultural Plan (2003); the Food Security Strategy Paper (2004) the Food Aid Policy (2005) and the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute Bill (2004) etc. The sector review was aimed at identifying areas of strengths and weaknesses and the identification of policy measures to address them. The document laid premium on land use policy to make provision for women ownership of lands; good pricing policies; reduction of post harvest losses; investment promotion; facilitation of food production efforts to fully support food security etc. The Food Security Strategy Paper identified factors militating against food security and proposed policy measures, identifying appropriate institutions for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Food Aid Policy ensured that Government and other stakeholders identified areas that are relevant to the development phase of the country for assistance through food aid support. The monetization of food aid into tools for agricultural production, feeder road maintenance and above all increasing the positive impact of food aid, to enhance local food production, were underscored in the Food Aid Policy.

The Medium Term Strategic Agricultural Plan, actually computed production targets, spanning the 5 year period, indicating the logistics necessary for meeting those food and cash crop production targets for the attention of our development partners. The total cost involved in 2002 was about USD144 million but could be less now.

2.3 Interim Statement of Policy intent for the Agricultural Sector

The declaration of a food security proclamation on May 19, 2002, necessitated the development of a policy statement to address all the problems and constraints and also highlight all the potentials to be explored in preparation for the realization of the Ministry's mandate. In response to a request from the Ministry of Agriculture therefore, the UNDP and FAO supported a quick policy review from June to November 2002.

The Ministry's mandate then essentially entailed the creating of an enabling environment for increased productivity through extension and input support; applied research into high yielding varieties; best practices in farming; the provision of market informations and appropriate price incentives through value addition and agro-processing.

This mandate was fulfilled through the following objectives:

- (a) Increased diversified production and productivity of crops to increase rural incomes and create employment in agriculture and in downstream processing industries.
- (b) To ensure equitable income distribution, balanced agricultural growth and maximize foreign exchange earnings from the sector.

The following policies were identified to impact heavily on agricultural production:

2.3.1 Land Development policy

2.3.2 Pricing policy

2.3.3. Crop production policy

2.3.4 Livestock production policy

2.3.5 Forest Conservation policy

2.3.6 Fisheries policy

2.3.7 Support services policy

2.3.8 Decentralization policy

2.3.1. Land development Policy

2.3.1 **Land development Policy**

This aspect of the policy statement recognized the pros. and cons. of the two tier tenural system namely, freehold in the Western Area and communal ownership in the provinces. It therefore recommended the harmonization of the two in the long run, but strongly mandated the facilitated release of land for productive ventures; allowing access to land by women and youths and recommended land allocation on crop-site suitability basis, to maximise output.

2.3.2 Pricing Policy

The objective of this policy was to ensure that farmers received fair and stabilized prices to ensure income stability. Such produce prices were to be made competitive in the World market through ideal processing and value-addition to attract high prices necessary to address the foreign exchange limitation problems. An important caveat to this policy was the fulfillment of international obligations and commitments to financial institutions, international conservation conventions, treaties etc. necessary to stimulate sustained donor support to the broad agricultural sector.

2.3.3. Crop Production Policy

The crop production policy was based on efficient and sustainable crop production practices to alleviate poverty, through income security and sustained production of farmers own food. The objective was to attain self-sufficiency in the production of crops in which the country has comparative advantage and to also produce cash crops for export and for financial support to local food crop production. These objectives emphasized, inland valley swamp development to ensure two to three lowland - rice croppings per year; mechanised farming in appropriate agro-ecologies; the rehabilitation and expansion of cash crops namely cocoa, coffee, oil palm; cashew and ginger etc. The use of high yielding and proven germplasm with the application of appropriate doses of agro-chemicals was also recommended as a yield maximization strategy.

2.3.4 Livestock Production Policy

The general objective of the livestock production policy was to achieve self-sufficiency in domestic animals and animal products in which the country has comparative advantage. The initial objective was to attain the pre-war stock levels of 340,000 heads of cattle; 264,000 sheep; 145,000 goats; 17,000pigs and 3 million poultry and to also attain the annual domestic pre-war meat and milk production of 5,500MT and 5,000MT respectively.

The specific objectives of this policy entailed:

- (a) Increasing the production and sale of livestock and livestock products in order to improve farmers' income.
- (b) Fostering a more commercial attitude to livestock production

- (c) Attracting private sector involvement and promoting the integration of crop and livestock production activities on the same land management unit.
- (d) Encourage cross breeding of indigenous livestock, guarantee credit and technical assistance etc. Government was to waive duty on all imported livestock products in order to enhance local production.

2.3.5 Forest Conservation Policy

The objectives of forest conservation policy in favour of agricultural development were:-

- (a) To conserve and protect water catchment areas in order to maintain sustained water yield for inland valley swamp development and cultivation, inland fisheries and general fresh water livestock productivity.
- (b) To conserve, protect and replenish vegetation in order to reduce the negative impact of seasonal wild fires on crops and on the upland agro-ecologies in general.
- (c) To ensure the sustained production of plant biomass for domestic and industrial energy production for crop and food processing.

The introduction of planted fallows and fodder crops to facilitate the replenishment of fallow land for subsequent cultivation and the production of animal fodder on a sustainable basis respectively, was emphasised in the policy.

2.3.6 Fisheries and Marine Resources development Policy

The main objectives of the Fisheries and Marine Resources development policy entailed:

- (a) The reduction of post harvest losses in fish processing
- (b) The regulation of mesh size of fishing nets, to reduce the destruction of fingerlings through the reduction of by catch.
- (c) To introduce energy-efficient fish drying methods
- (d) To reduce the damage of artisanal fishermen's nets by industrial vessels such as trawlers.
- (e) To reduce piracy through effective surveillance of our territorial waters.
- (f) To provide refrigeration facilities at fish landings in order to decelerate the deterioration of catch and also introduce fish canning.
- (g) To develop aquaculture nationwide to service land locked areas in particular.

2.3.7. **Support services Policy**

The support services included in the policy statement of intent are research, extension, human resources development, credit availability, mechanization, crop protection, crop processing, marketing facilities, water and natural resources management, rural infrastructure and agricultural statistics.

The development of high yielding production materials and the development of “best production and management practices” to be extended to the farming communities, through a well developed generalist extension agents, (that could cover crops, livestock, forestry, water management and data handling to some extent), was strongly recommended. The availability of agricultural credit, on favourable terms, for supporting farm mechanization, adequate crop protection and input provision was a major objective.

Also, the reduction of post harvest losses through proper pre-and post harvest care, processing and value addition together with the provision of ideal marketing facilities, to ensure good price incentives, were objectives aimed at the maximization of returns to crop production

The proper management of water and other natural resources to enhance lowland crop and fisheries production, coupled with a good road infrastructure (particularly feeder roads) aimed at the maximization of returns to investment in agriculture, was strongly recommended.

The last objective was aimed at the production and maintenance of an agricultural database and market information systems to the benefit of both producers and buyers.

2.4 **Rice Policy Development**

The period 1991 to 2004 saw the development of the following programmes, most of them with rice production as a major component:

- (j) North Central Agricultural Project (NCAP)
- (k) Revised Agricultural Sector Support Project (ASSP)
- (l) Farmers Association Support Project (FASP)
- (m) Community Based Seed Project (CBSP)
- (n) Moyamba Integrated Rural Development Project (MIRDP)
- (o) FAO Emergency Assistance to Displaced Farmers (EADF)
- (p) FAO Inland Valley Swamp Development Project (IVSDP)

In addition, non Governmental Organizations operating in Sierra Leone assisted with input support, food for work, shelter development etc, to returnee farmers during that period and beyond.

2.4.1 Rice Utilization Policies

Rice, the country's staple food is cultivated and imported mostly for human consumption, eaten together with vegetable sauces, soup, stew etc. The quantities of locally produced rice converted to seed, rice flour, rice pudding, porridges etc are insignificant. Out of the total annual production of 450,000MT (2003) only about 5% was used for seed rice. Seed rice price is generally low during the harvest season but increases with scarcity until the next harvest season. Hence the need to protect the farmers seeds through financial support necessary for other social needs.

In the late 90s, when foreign exchange problem became acute, the Sierra Leone Brewery experimented with rice (ROK 3) as the basic raw material for beer production. This innovation understandably received condemnation from some quarters.

Currently, local sorghum varieties are being investigated at the RRSR Samu site (Kambia District) with the view to their use in beer and "maltina" production. The project is funded by Sierra Leone Brewery and Heineken International and implemented by the Rice Research Station, Rokupr in collaboration with the Community Biodiversity Action Network (CBAN). About 16 local sorghum varieties are being easted for maltability and other attributes in beer and "Maltina" production.

Government is now vigorously encouraging the utilization of cassava, potatoes, yams, bananas and plantains as alternatives to rice under a crop diversification policy.

2.4.2 Rice Trade Policies

The aim of the colonial government's rice trade policy was to ensure adequate supplies of good quality food to both domestic and foreign markets and to provide stable prices to producers. Hence, the creation of a Rice Mill Division in 1936, which was later converted to a supply Department during the Second World War and eventually became

the Rice Corporation. These activities were later taken over by the SLPMB (Kallon, 2002).

A large rice mill was installed in Freetown in 1936, followed by another mill in Mambolo in 1951. However, the Government Rice Committee set up in 1952 changed this policy by introducing a guaranteed producer price policy, which involved the fixing of farm gate price, purchase of domestic crop, processing and distribution as well as rice importation. Understandably, exclusive Government importation of rice ended in 1988 when private companies took over the function.

Failure of the Rice Corporation was mainly due to the following factors:

- (a) Political interferences into its management;
- (b) Inadequate financial support from Government;
- (c) Unrealistic low prices offered to local farmers and foreign traders, thereby discouraging local production.
- (d) Mismanagement of funds

SLPMB's attempt to salvage the situation ran into serious liquidity problems due to low export quality problems with overseas partners, delayed payments for produce etc. Hence the involvement of the private sector. Rice import tax by then included 15% customs duty and 2% income tax making a total of 17% tax on the total value of the rice imported. From about 1974 – 1979, Sierra Leone never imported rice except in 1979 when army worn pests and bad weather negatively affected yield.

Rice production fell drastically during the war period until 2001 when production increased from 198,000MT (2000) to 256,000MT of paddy in 2001. The Food Security Pledge was partly based on the past record of rice exportation in the 70's (see take II)

2.4.3. Rice in the current Sierra Leone Economy

Rice is the staple food for more than half of the world's population and for over 90% of the Sierra Leone population. The importance of rice in the international and national economies compelled the development of resolution 2/2001 of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN to declare the year 2004 as the International Year of Rice

Sierra Leone's Food Security programme is similar to that of Nigeria and Ghana except that while Nigeria is promoting domestic production and raising protection against imports, (FAO, 2003). Sierra Leone is merely increasing investment in production for fear that any additional taxation of imports may be passed on to the consumer. In the absence of subsidies to farmers, in these countries high local rice production costs result in higher prices for locally produced rice.

While annual rice imports of 160,000 MT cost about US\$50 to US\$55 million, Government's annual recurrent expenditure on the agriculture sector had been recorded as 1.8 million, 3.5 million; 4.8 million and 9.0 million USD in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively.

It is predicted that the attainment of food security could benefit the nation as much as US\$200 million saving annually through agricultural import substitution. Hence the justification for vigorously pursuing the food production strategy.

As indicated in section 3.1, Sierra Leone can produce adequate rice to fill the food production gap indicated in the following rice budget:

		(Milled) MT
Total Annual Rice Requirements	=	520,000
Total annual Production	=	293,150
Imports	=	160,000
Food Aid	=	66,850

Source: Planning Evaluation Monitoring and Statistics Division, MAFFS (2004).

It is estimated that local rice production declined from 97% to 67% in 1990 and down to 48% in 2000 just before the onset of the war (MAFFS 2003). Custom duty and 2% income tax making a total of 17% tax on the total value of the rice imported. From about 1974-1979, Sierra Leone never imported rice except in 1979 when army worn pests and bad weather negatively affected yield (Kallon, 2002). Rice production fell drastically during the war period until 2001 when production increased from 198,000MT (2000) to 256,000Mt of paddy in 2001. The Food security Pledge was partly based on the past record of rice exportation in the 70s (Table II)

3.0 Crop Production Environment

3.1 Crop Production potential and Constraints

Out of the 5.4 million hectares of arable land, 630,000 ha are covered by Inland Valley Swamps (IVS), 145,000 ha of grassland depressions locally know as “bolis”; 130,000 ha of riverine grasslands, 200,000ha of mangroves and the rest occupied by the Uplands.

(see table 1) However, only 15% of this total area of arable land is currently being cultivated mostly by resource-poor small farmers who are overburdened with resource, labour and input constraints. The lack of farm inputs, poor timing and low intensity of necessary tending operations etc. results in reduced yields. The soils are generally infertile with obvious nitrate deficiency, which is less prevalent when matured fallow bush of 10-15years is cultivated. Heavy leaching and erosion of nutrients is responsible for the low soil fertility. Population pressure has reduced the fallow period to between 4 and 6 year to the detriment of crop yields.

Table 1. Arable and Cultivated Land by Ecosystem

Ecology	Specific Area (ha)	% of Arable Area	% of Total Area
Upland	4,200,000	78.0	58.1
Inland Valley Swamp	690,000	12.9	9.5
Mangrove Swamp	200,000	3.6	2.7
Bolilands	145,000	2.7	2.0
Riverine Grassland	130,000	2.4	1.8
Total Arable Land	5,365,000	100.0	74.1
Other Land	1,870,000	-	25.9
Grand Land	7,235,000	-	100.0
A/ consist of basins with little drainage, covered with perennial grass b/ include 294 000 ha of forest reserve			

Sources: Ministry of Agriculture, Special Programme for Food Security, 4 October 2001

3.2 Estimated crop yields by ecology

According to IFAD/FAO 2003, the following attributes are characteristic of the 5 agro-ecologies in Sierra Leone

3.2.1. Inland Valley Swamps (IVS)

Traditional paddy yields from this ecology vary from 1.4 to 1.9 MT/ha while a potential of 3-4MT/ha could be attained in improved Inland Valley Swamps. With good water management strategies, the potential of IVS could be higher if double rice cropping or a second dry season cropping of short duration crops, which maximize returns to farming, is practiced. Despite this potential, crop production in IVS is negatively affected by (a) inadequate drainage and flash flooding (b) irregular flooding due to lack of or limited water management (c) low fertility levels coupled with iron and aluminum toxicity and (d) inadequate residual moisture and water supply during the dry season.

3.2.2. Grassland Depressions (“Bolis”)

The bolis are generally low in organic content and cation exchange capacity and consist mainly of heavy clay or silt. Although rice yields in this ecology are generally low (about 1MT/ha), roots and tubers could be cultivated during the dry season, thereby contributing to the crop diversification aspect of the food security drive.

3.2.3 Mangroves

The mangroves can be highly productive once the salt is flushed during July to August when rice is cultivated to be harvested in November to December when salt concentration starts to increase. Yields could be maintained at 3MT/ha with proper salinity management.

3.2.3 Riverain Grasslands

The riverine grasslands, mostly associated with the Sewa and Wanjei rivers in the south, could be highly productive once floating rice is cultivated attaining a yield of 3-4MT/ha with proper management, mechanization and pesticide and fertilizer application. Mechanical cultivation had been practiced in this ecology with Chinese Government Support from mid 70s until the civil conflict in 1991.

3.2.4 Uplands

The uplands occupy 60% of the arable land and crop cultivation is under rainfed conditions thereby limiting the operation to one cropping per year. For short fallow period, (5-6years) only one cropping is necessary before moving to a fresh site but for fallow periods of over 10 years, 2 consecutive croppings are possible before shifting to a new site. Yields are generally low, ranging from 0.8 to 1.2 MT/ha for upland rice and 4MT/ha for cassava. However, under a mixed crop system of this nature, the combined yields of all crops in the mixture should be ideally considered.

3.3 The small farmer's rice production operations

3.3.1 The small farmer's constraints

The small farmers in Sierra Leone generally realize very low rice crop yields due to declining soil fertility; high weed competition; pest and disease damage; high post harvest losses; limited and poorly timed crop tending operations; poor time management; the use of low yielding rice varieties etc.

Also, the farm holdings are generally small ranging from 0.4 to 1 ha subjecting them to hunger for about half of the year, when rice stocks are exhausted mostly due to poor food stock management.

Lack of necessary funds and the use of rudimentary tools; old age and sickness etc are factors that further reduce rice crops yields. The reliance on family labour sometimes

negatively impacts on schooling as the time for critical farming operations such as bird scaring, coincide with the reopening of schools for the first term. Also, large families have more mouths to feed thereby maintaining the vicious cycle of poverty and hunger.

According to table II and III, domestic rice production decreased steadily but slightly from 1982 to 2000, however the productivity of all food crops increased remarkably from 2001 to 2002 (Table IV)

3.3.2 Dependency Syndrome

Due to the unprecedented infrastructural, machinery and material damage inflicted during the decade-old rebel war, returnee farmers needed inputs such as chemicals, tools, seeds, fertilizers. About 30-40% of the total number of farm families had benefited from some

of these inputs from 2002 to date, but it appears that farmers who are supposed to have recovered up to pre-war level of self-reliance, keep coming back for inputs. In extreme cases some farmers convert proposed rice fields to cassava farms, if seed rice is not provided by Central Government, during a particular season.

Generally, most small farmers continue to view farming as a way of life, rather than farming for profit. In the absence of input/output balance considerations, the small farmer will tend to remain poor and food security may remain a far-fetched dream. Simple book keeping concept could improve the situation if capacity building by the Ministry of Agriculture, Local Government NGOs and the National Association of Farmers of Sierra Leone (NAFSL) is affected.

4.0 **Issues to be addressed to ensure Food Security**

4.1 **Factors Contributing to Food Security**

The present state of food insecurity in the country could be attributed to:

- (a) The insufficient access to food by large parts of the population
- (b) Insufficient food supplies due to low production and productivity in the agriculture sector
- (c) Unreliability and instability of food supplies
- (d) Ineffective food utilization by the populace (MAFFS, 2005)

Until these critical factors are fully addressed, it will be difficult to achieve food security within the stipulated period (2002-2007).

4.1.1. **Insufficient Access to Food**

Limited access to food could be contingent upon the non-availability of own food stock or due to income insecurity to ensure continuous purchase. With an overall per capita GDP of USD120.00 per annum in 2004 (compared to an average of USD450 for sub-Saharan Africa) and an estimated 70% of the population living under the poverty line, access to food through purchase could be problematic. Infact, the increasing cost of imported rice is mostly due to high insurance and freight charges and this factor, coupled with increasing demand, may result in more price escalation. Unfortunately, Sierra Leone

is still being considered a high risk country in the insurance industry. Hence the high insurance charges which swell up the delivered price of imported rice.

4.1.2 **Insufficient Food Supplies**

Reliance on the small farmers who cannot provide enough food to sustain themselves, all year round, is risky. Previous efforts at large scale mechanised farming by government parastatals had failed, due to poor resource management (see section 2). Proposals for the establishment of state farms are condemned from many fronts on grounds of poor accountability and poor resource management. Hence, only profit-oriented individuals or corporate organizations effectively can effectively do farming for profit. Two distinguished Master Farmers in the North have been cultivating over 3000 acres of rice each over the past 2 years with appreciable yields.

However, the problem of food distribution from highly productive remote areas to urban centers, where produce prices are higher, could be a major factor in food sufficiency.

Most of Sierra Leone's 7800Km of roads are bad, while most feeder roads are mostly impassable during the peak of the rainy season. This accessibility problem coupled with the inadequacy of rice mills, forces traders in Kambia District, for instance, to transport their paddy rice stocks to Guinea where these facilities have been established in a few boarder towns, in anticipation of this illegal export. In addition, bad road conditions and low produce prices forced farmers to transport rice across boarders in Kailahun, Kono and Pujehun Districts.

During the "hungry season" even highly productive areas experience rice deficit mostly due to poor stock management i.e. extravagant use during the harvesting and festive seasons and mere starvation during the hungry season. The extortion strategies of the "middle man" prevents farmers from benefiting from proceeds.

4.1.3 **Unreliability and Instability of Food Supplies**

During the rainy season when the rural roads are mostly impassable, rice haulage costs are high. Also, the chances of penalty charges due to accidental damage of the rice stock by rains, could further reduce the number of vehicles suited for such haulage services. This condition further increases haulage costs due to increased demand for appropriate vehicles which may be very few. The other factor influencing the price of imported rice is that there seems to be a sole importer of rice, and therefore the absence of competition.

4.1.4 **Poor Food Utilization/Absorption**

Even when nutritious food is available in adequate quantities, it is known that ill health, lack of knowledge of the nutritional status of the food, inadequate water and energy for food processing etc. could affect food utilization.

Sierra Leone manifests a high level of child malnutrition: 27% of children under five are under weight (indicator for transitory food insecurity) and 34% are stunted (indicator for chronic food insecurity). Infant and child mortality rates are at unacceptably high levels (170/1000 and 316/1000 respectively). Malnutrition contributes to 46% of child death nationally (MOH,2002).

4.2. **On-going interventions (Strategies)**

4.2.1 **Support to the Small Farmers**

The small farmer's food insecurity problems highlighted in section 4.1 (a-d) could be broadly addressed through support to increased agricultural production and productivity and through the reduction of pre-and post harvest-losses as contained in the Medium Term Strategic Agricultural Plan and in the Food Security Strategy for Sierra Leone. However the following on-going targeted interventions will yield more dividends:

- (a) The development of a seed bank in the long run will make the small farmers seed secured but in the interim, food aid in exchange for quality seeds is facilitating the seed bank development which could ensure timely farming operations and also reduce the perpetual dependency on central government for seed.
- (b) Credit is being addressed, albeit on a small scale, by the ADB/World Bank funded National Commission for Social Action; (NaCSA); the Department of Cooperatives and a limited number of NGOs. Also, the newly established Agricultural Business Units of the MAFF/UNDP Agricultural Transformation Programme, have potential for the provision of a reliable funding source for agriculture through joint savings. This savings scheme is based on increased acreages and the saving of rice stock for community development and for other social needs.

TABLE III PRODUCTION OF MAJOR FOOD CROPS

Item	Year Mt 1000								
	1987/88	1988/89	1989/90	1990/91	1991/92	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	2000/2001
Paddy	549.9	493.1	517.8	543.7	411.1	420.0	486.3	445.3	310.6
Maize	11.0	11.4	11.7	12.3	11.0	10.0	9.6	8.6	10.0
Millet	22.0	22.0	22.0	24.0	22.0	22.0	21.0	28.0	8.7
Sorghum	19.0	19.0	20.0	21.0	22.0	22.0	21.0	25.0	15.4
Cassava	133.0	147.7	174.2	182.4	163.4	203.4	240.5	243.5	314.4
Sweet Potato	32.6	33.6	35.6	38.8	40.8	34.8	39.5	43.9	21.2
Groundnuts	21.7	25.7	28.5	30.0	34.0	31.0	37.8	39.8	48.9
Beans	35.0	35.0	37.0	38.0	39.0	38.0	37.0	40.0	NA

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Special Programme for Food Security, National Programme Document, 4 October 2001 and MAFS Crop Survey of 2001.

- (c) Support to returnee farmers with tools, seeds, food aid etc is ongoing but there is a need to determine an appropriate cut off point, if a dependency syndrome is to be avoided.
- (d) Targeted food aid currently covers the rehabilitation of limited cash crop plantations, which will eventually maximize financial returns to support local rice production and also address the foreign exchange deficit problems. The development of inland valley swamps and rehabilitation of the damaged IVS structures which could facilitate increased rice productivity are being facilitated by food aid. Mining companies currently support this programme to some extent, through existing mining legislations such as the Mining Act 1994 which provide for agricultural development and environmental rehabilitation grants.
- (e) Women-targeted programmes including the development of improved chicken and small ruminants, home gardening, household food preservation and processing, energy conservation through the development and dissemination of mud stove etc are given priority, but for funding limitations.

Table II: RICE NATIONAL REQUIREMENT AND SELF SUFFICIENCY

Cropping Year 1	Domestic Production (*000Mt)		Imports Milled in (000Mt)	Total Supply in (*000Mt)	Population (Million)	National Requirement in (*000Mt)	Self Sufficiency (%)	National Deficit in (*000Mt)	Imports % Total supply 10
	Paddy	Milled Equiv.							
1981/82	523.50	274.84	53.10	327.94	3.16	328.64	83.63	0.70	16.19
1982/83	523.50	274.84	91.70	366.54	3.29	342.16	80.63	24.38	25.19
1993/94	460.20	241.61	36.20	277.81	3.37	350.48	68.94	72.67	13.03
1984/85	504.50	264.86	103.90	368.76	3.44	357.76	74.03	11.00	28.18
1985/86	430.00	225.75	100.10	325.85	3.52	366.08	61.67	4023	30.72
1986/87	525.00	275.63	118.30	393.93	3.61	375.44	73.42	18.49	30.03
1987/88	547.80	287.60	67.70	355.30	3.70	384.80	74.74	29.5	19.05
1988/89	493.10	258.88	75.60	334.48	3.80	395.20	65.51	60.72	22.60
1989/90	517.90	271.90	120.70	392.00	3.90	405.60	67.04	13.60	30.64
1990/91	543.60	285.39	123.70	409.09	3.99	414.96	68.78	5.87	30.24
1991/92	411.00	215.78	119.40	335.18	4.10	426.40	5061	91.22	35.62
1992/93	420.00	220.50	82.50	303.00	4.20	436.8	50.48	133.80	27.23
1993/94	486.30	255.31	113.03	368.34	4.33	450.32	56.70	81.98	30.69
1994/95	445.30	233.78	123.80	357.58	4.44	461.76	50.63	104.18	34.62
1995/96	335.50	176.14	185.70	361.84	4.56	474.24	37.14	112.40	51.32
1996/97	391.70	205.60	171.02	376.66	4.67	485.68	42.34	109.02	45.40
1997/98	411.30	215.93	28.90	244.83	4.76	495.04	43.62	250.21	11.80
1998/99	371.84	195.22	249.1	444.32	4.88	507.52	38.47	63.2	56.06
1999/2000	247.20	129.78	93.51	223.29	4.90	506.60	25.87	286.3	41.88

Table III Estimated Area and Production of Food Crops

No.	CROPS	2001			CROPS	2002		
		Ha (000)	Mt/Ha	Mt(000)		Ha (000)	Mt/Ha	Mt(000)
A	Cereals							
i.	Rice	273.45	1.14	310.62	Rice	402.20	1.05	422.07
ii.	Maize	12.75	0.79	10.03	Maize	16.80	0.78	13.06
iii	Millet	9.68	0.91	8.77	Millet	23.42	0.75	17.53
iv	Sorghum	14.42	1.07	15.46	Sorghum	28.94	1.07	30.95
B	Tubers	61.79		314.37	Cassava	81.54	4.90	399.67
i.	Cassava	8.60		21.21	S/Potato	10.39	2.47	25.45
ii								
C		57.37	0.85	48.86	Groundnut	126.00	0.78	98.38
	Pulses							
	Groundnut							

F/n/estimated area and production

- (f) Agricultural and rural development projects that could stem or even reverse rural-urban migration trends could ensure the involvement of able-bodied youths in agriculture. This will to augment the efforts of the aged who currently dominate the subsistence farming sector. Organization of youth groups and training such groups in agriculture and related skills are pursued to some extent. The on-going decentralization process has strategies for stemming rural-urban migration.

4.2.2. Safety nets for the vulnerable in Society

In addition to the food insecurity problems of the productive sector, the vulnerables comprising of the many disabled and handicapped victims of the war, the elderly and chronically sick people, the insane, orphans and street children need specifically targeted assistance. Since the communities are best aware of their vulnerables in their communities safety nets will be eventually managed at community levels. In the case of relief assistance, emphasis is placed on specific education and skills support aimed at the attainment of self-reliance. In case of therapeutic and supplementary feeding, this support is combined with awareness creation and nutrition education of the mother. On-going efforts at the provision of food safety nets by food pipeline agencies are being incorporated into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper to ensure sustainability and to avoid the duplication of efforts.

4.2.3 Increasing domestic food production through input support, credit provision and research.

(a) Input support

The issue of input supply is being addressed through support to the private sector to make available fertilizer and agrochemicals through customs duty reduction and the strengthening of appropriate institutions for the timely delivery of quality seeds and planting materials. However, the private section in Agriculture is generally weak and lacks capital for large scale investment of this nature. The Donor Community is being sensitized on this matter

(b) **Credit**

To be effective an ideal rural credit structure should ensure that overheads are kept very low; lending procedure should be simple to comprehend and transparent and also cover other social needs in addition to covering agricultural activities. Interest charges should cover operational charges and efforts should be made to maximize loan recovery. Farmers groups such as agricultural business units will eventually cover most of the overheads through voluntary service as a cost-cutting measure. Traditional thrift systems are too limited in scope to support agricultural development.

Credit availability is being addressed by Government in collaboration with donors in the agricultural sector.

(c) **Research Extension Linkage**

Research currently focuses on the development and selection of improved and high yielding production materials (seeds, livestock, fingerlings etc.) coupled with the development of best practices in farming, forestry, livestock and fisheries development. Reduction of pre-harvest crop losses and post harvest food stock losses should be further well researched into and proven technology transferred, through credible and effective extension delivery methodologies. A community based participatory extension service should be developed in consonance with the on-going national decentralization scheme. The FAO/UNPD supported Farmers Field Schools System is an ideal approach worthy of commendation. The rice Research Station which mandate covers researching into problems associated with the cultivation of rice, sorghum, millet, vegetable and plantains covered most of the issues in the past.

(d) **Land availability**

Policy directives should encourage the release of communal land to investors through the current lease or partnership programmes until an appropriate act is legislated to facilitate the release of communal land for investment in agriculture. Currently, lengthy lease agreement (29yrs,49yrs,99yrs etc) are being used to acquired land in some areas communal lands constitutes community shares in joint investment in agriculture.

(e) Livestock production

The livestock development policy emphasises a better use of the existing infrastructural facilities, which need to be rehabilitated. The promotion of poultry and small ruminant production to generate income for women, thus making them income secured is supported. Private sectors, through very weak is encouraged to fully participate in the production, processing and marketing of livestock and livestock products. Cattle (livestock) resettlement schemes to address the chronic crop-livestock farmer conflict are being effected. Most agricultural projects have a re-stocking component albeit on a small scale but with time the multiplier effect will yield dividend

(f) Fisheries development

Appropriate fisheries development policies should focus on the following strategies:

- (i) The provision of appropriate fishing gear
- (ii) Rehabilitation and improvement of fish handling, storage and marketing facilities
- (iii) Promotion of fish processing, particularly canning
- (iv) Surveillance of territorial waters to reduce piracy and the conservation and protection of water catchment areas to maintain sustained water yield.
- (v) Promoting aquaculture to service land-locked communities.

Community mobilization and full participation in the livestock, fisheries and crop development sectors could ensure sustainability. The on-going decentralization policy comes in handy to support same

The ADB funded. Artisanal Fisheries development projects and earlier FAO funded international address issues (I-V) above. Generally while paddy production decreased steadily from 1988 to 2001, cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts and beans indicated increases in production (Table IV)

4.2.4. Strategies to improve stability and reliability of food supplies

The following strategies aim at ensuring food availability, distribution, increased production and high returns to farming due to processing and value- addition, distribution and marketing etc.

- (a) The improvement of feeder and trunk roads, currently undertaken through donor support, needs to be fast-tracked and increased in scope. Food for work continues to

play an invaluable role in the community road rehabilitation and construction programmes. With improved road access the private sector will venture further into remote areas thus benefiting the producers in terms of increased farm-gate prices.

- (b) The construction of community stores, drying floors and markets undertaken by NaCSA and other development projects over the past 5 years is aimed at the reduction of post harvest losses and the provision of necessary platform for business, particularly in agricultural produce. What needs to be added to augment this effort is the establishment of an efficient and credible market information system on market prices, quantities, and location of agricultural goods to ensure effective distribution nationwide. Emphasis is being placed on crop diversification and double cropping of rice which could address the problem of seasonality in local rice production and also return it demand. Crop diversification campaigns coupled with the diversification of consumption habits currently effected could stabilize the household food availability.

Agro-processing efforts particularly leading to value addition could facilitate marketing and maximize returns to farming. Crop processing will also prolong the shelf-life of the commodities without forcing the farmers to sell off perishables very quickly often for incredibly low prices. Food preservation through canning of fish, fruits, livestock products etc could also prolong the shelf-life and facilitate export to other markets. Canning could also contribute to food security and provide jobs to guarantee the employee's income security.

4.2.5 Achieving effective food utilization

In addition to on-going interventions under the National Recovery Strategy and other development projects, even the PRSP has highlighted concrete set of measures to bring about improved food utilization through sensitization in the education, health, water supply energy and sanitation sectors. The National Food and Nutrition Policy document of the Ministry of Health had proposed measures to improve child and family feeding practices, nutrition rehabilitation, nutrition monitoring, control of micro-nutrient deficiencies and food safety. In pursuant of these, public sensitization campaigns ideally cover the following areas:

- (a) Nutritional value of different food commodities
- (b) Composition of a balanced diet, particularly based on indigenous food crops
- (c) Potentials of wild foods for human consumption
- (d) Hygiene in food preparation and consumption
- (e) Food preservation and processing

In addition, the Ministeries of Youths and Sports, Fisheries and Marine Resources and 28 Education do implement Food Security projects solely or jointly with the MAFFS.

- (f) Sensitization on other carbohydrate-based food types in order to reduce the consumption monopoly on rice. Twenty –eight rural radios, based in most districts, are more useful in terms of target coverage in the dissemination of these vital extension messages.

5. The Role of Different Stakeholders

The attainment of food security depends on multi - sectoral support from the production, input supply, processing, marketing and support sectors; hence the importance of the following collaborating, coordinating and complimenting institutions in attaining food security:

5.1. National Food Security Committee

In Sierra Leone, the National Food Security Committee comprises of

5.1.1 Ministerial Policy Committee (MPC)

5.1.2 Technical Committee (TC)

5.1.1 Ministerial Policy Committee

Chaired by the Vice President, this 13 - member ministerial committee provides overall guidance in setting policy priorities and in resource mobilization and allocation, in order to ensure policy coordination and the evaluation of policy measures relating to food security. It comprises of the following Ministeries:

- Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
- Finance
- Development and Economic Planning

- Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
- Health and Sanitation
- Trade, Industry and State Enterprises
- Transport and Communication
- Information and Broadcasting
- Youths and Sports
- Fisheries and Marine Resources
- Education, Science and Technology
- Lands, Country Planning & Environment

The MPC meets quarterly or more frequently as necessary.

5.1.2 Technical Committee

Chaired by the Director General of Agriculture, the Committee comprises of the technical heads of the 13 Ministeries in the MPC; representatives of UN organizations; bilateral donors; NGOs (local and international); civil society organizations; (National Association of Farmers of Sierra Leone, Youth league, Women's organizations). This committee which meets monthly has the following tasks:

- a. Coordinate inter-agency activities to promote synergy effects and avoid duplication
- b. Clarify technical and organizational issues in strategy implementation
- c. Initiate studies and assess results there on.
- d. Review food security update through coordination and evaluation of stake holder's reports
- e. Monitor programmes and make necessary interventions.

5.1.3 The Right to Food Secretariat.

This committee provides secretariat services to the MPC and it monitors overall programme implementation and any shortcomings in the food security process.

5.1.4 The Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS)

MAFFS spearheads the drive towards food security but this should be done through a Food Security Coordinating Unit (FSCU) in MAFFS. This unit which is set to be established should focus on the coordination of all Food Security related activities of all stakeholders and should be free of other un-related commitments.

All Ministeries and implementing institutions like NaCSA should ideally appoint Food Security Focal Points who will serve as institutional contact points and also serve on the TC.

5.1.5 District level Institutions

In consonance with government's policy on decentralization, Food Security Coordinating Committees (FSCC) at District level, are replicas of the TC at national level. There is a need for strong community mobilization and participation in order to ensure full community involvement in planning, implementation and monitoring of activities at that level. The multi-disciplinary technical committees of the District Recovery Committees simply transformed into the PSCC at District level

5.1.6 Civil Society Organisations (CSO) : Civil Society Organisations such as farmers associations, fisherfolks, women and youth organisations etc need to be strengthened adequately to facilitate their participation in the following:

- (a) Advocacy and fostering interest among its membership
- (b) Raising project proposal to address the needs of its membership in relation to food security.
- (c) Monitoring the implementation and impact of food security intervention
- (d) Encouraging the release of land for agricultural investments.

5.1.7 UN Organisations and Donors

In order to ensure sustained support, UN Organisations and Donors are actively involved in policy dialogue and in the design, implementation and monitoring of food security programmes in the country.

5.1.8 NGOs

On the strength of their substantial role in the country's recovery and post-war rehabilitation programmes, the NGOs are encouraged to get fully involved in advocacy and awareness creation in food security issues; mobilization and provision of material support; technical assistance; community mobilization and in the NGOs and farmer's capacity building.

5.1.9. The Private Sector

Ideally, the private sector should be fully involved in input supply, marketing, import and exports, commodity transport, operation of rural banks, food processing, commercial farming, infrastructural development projects, consultancy and training services etc.

The Investment Promotion Act 2004 and other pertinent legislations could provide the enabling environment and donor support to facilitate private sector involvement in the agriculture sector (MAFFs, 2005).

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Sierra Leones agricultural policies spanning the pre-and post-colonial periods have been marred with inconsistencies, inadequate support, influence of donors etc.

Recent policies, starting from 2000 tend to be more focused on the food security drive and the sustainability of production, distribution, marketing and the effective utilization of food. Cash crop rehabilitation and expansion strategies aimed at funding food crop production and at addressing the balance of payment deficit issues resulted in the enlargement of the export base through the introduction of new cash crops. The two national agricultural research institutions namely the Rice Research Station and the Institute of Agricultural Research continue to research into food production problems for their respective mandate crops in addition to the release of proven high yielding crop varieties.

Policy makers are taking full advantage of the nations comparative advantage in food production, particularly the staple food rice. Ideally, realistic strategies have been formulated but a weak private sector and limited funding of the agriculture sector exerts an ever-increasing pressure on government for the provision of inputs and services to fuel production.

The food security pledge which was made following a devastating 11 year war experiences numerous teething problems which are being surmounted.

From every indication, despite the herculian challenges, the nation is moving towards the realization of the food security goal against the target date of 2007.

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