

Rachel Mehmert  
Holy Trinity Catholic  
Fort Madison, Iowa  
Sierra Leone, Factor 16: Education

### **Sierra Leone: Increasing Education to Enhance Food Security**

Sierra Leone, officially the Republic of Sierra Leone, is located in West Africa bordered by Guinea, Liberia, and the Atlantic Ocean. The country gained independence from the United Kingdom in April 1961. However, due to a civil war from 1991 to 2000, democracy was slow to be established. This war resulted in tens of thousands of deaths and the displacement of more than 2 million people (CIA). It also caused the destruction of 1,270 primary schools in 2001. Despite the military taking full responsibility for security of the country after the departure of the UN peacemakers in 2005, Sierra Leone still places low in the human development category. The country has made important progress in strengthening democracy and implementing peace, but is still unable to fully overcome the effects of the civil war.

Currently, 60 percent of Sierra Leone's population live below the national poverty line ([www.sl.undp.org](http://www.sl.undp.org)). The country's revenue remains heavily on oil, gas, and mining business sectors. Sierra Leone has relied especially heavy on the extraction of minerals such as gold and silver because these minerals are sufficient generators of foreign currency earnings and lure for investment. This has caused problems in large scale agriculture of commodity products because industrial development and sustainable investments have been severely neglected by the government. Still, two-thirds of the country's population continues to take part in subsistence agriculture.

Sierra Leone has also relied extremely heavily on foreign aid. However, foreign aid has decreased the stability of the economy. The country has poorly managed foreign aid resources, raised the debt to the ceiling, and weakened its international borrowing credibility ([standardtimespress.org](http://standardtimespress.org)). If only corruption in the government could be eliminated insuring the trust of the people, coupled with the government relying more heavily on trade and a market oriented economy instead of foreign aid, Sierra Leone would have the potential to thrive.

Most of the population lives in rural farming communities ([conti.org](http://conti.org)). The typical household encompasses the extended family, with parents, children, grandparents, aunts, and uncles all living under the same roof. There is a great respect for elders in this culture in the family and the community. Typically, one of the parents—either the mother or father—will be responsible for supporting the family financially. However, men are the dominant figures in the home and may make decisions without the knowledge of the wife. Numerous families rely on subsistence farming for survival consuming a diet of rice, cassava root, and leafy greens. Occasionally a family may enjoy fish, chicken or "bushmeat".

Polygamy, the practice of a man marrying multiple wives, is still frequent in Sierra Leone. Therefore, numerous families have multiple children. Marriage is a mark of adult maturity. Almost all marriages used to be arranged between families, sometimes when the girl was quite young ([everyculture.com](http://everyculture.com)). However, marriages based on love are becoming more prevalent, especially among those who have attended school. The family unit as a whole, has the responsibility of caring for those who are disabled or those who are suffering an illness in the family. The men provide for the family while the women complete the domestic jobs of raising the children, cooking, and cleaning.

Due to the inability of most families to produce enough food to feed themselves, let alone produce enough to sell and generate an income, 18.6 percent of children under the age of five are considered underweight (CIA). The country can be divided into four distinct physical regions: the coastal swamp, the Sierra Leone Peninsula, the interior plains, and the interior plateau and mountain region ([britannica.com](http://britannica.com)). The country's

drainage pattern is dense in which river levels show considerable seasonal fluctuations. In most areas the dominant soils are of the weathered and leached lateritic type (britannica.com). Troubled drainage and soil coupled with the rainy season from May to October and the dry season from November to April, makes agriculture very limited.

43.3 percent of the total population over the age of fifteen is illiterate (CIA). In Sierra Leone, the first nine years of schooling is mandatory in law, and is also free of cost in most regions (classbase.com). However, due to the destruction of numerous facilities, this law is rarely upheld. Therefore, the average male attends school for only seven years and the average woman attends school for only six years (CIA). Since Sierra Leone is a democratic nation, illiteracy is a huge downfall. Democracy relies heavily on communication since it gives the people a voice, and due to the barrier of illiteracy, democracy does not have the structure it requires to thrive.

The median age for people in Sierra Leone is nineteen years, 18.5 years for men and 19.6 years for women (CIA). There are only .02 physicians per 1,000 people and .4 hospital beds per 1,000 people (CIA). 87 percent of the population is not able to access sanitation facilities (CIA). In 2012, there were 57,700 people living with HIV/AIDS, with the adult prevalence rate at 1.5 percent (CIA). However, there are only 3,300 deaths (CIA). The risk of major diseases is very high. Common diseases include bacterial and protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, typhoid fever, malaria, dengue fever, yellow fever, schistosomiasis, rabies, and Lassa fever. Despite the multitude of prevalent illness experienced in the country, only 18.8 percent of the gross domestic product is spent on health care (CIA).

The primary occupation in Sierra Leone is agriculture, employing two-thirds of the labor force and accounting for 50 percent of the country's gross domestic product (nationsencyclopedia.com). Most Sierra Leoneans live on small, scattered farms which carry out unsustainable practices of bush-fallow rotation, slash-and-burn field preparation, and limited use of fertilizer. Grown by 80 percent of farmers, rice is the staple crop (nationsencyclopedia.com).

Currently, the country has great potential to harness energy from agricultural waste, hydroelectric and solar power. Due to its position on the 'solar belt', it has large amount of photovoltaic energy that could be captured throughout the year (sites.google.com). An increase in solar energy could prevent further unsustainable deforestation due to the over reliance on fuel wood. Unfortunately, the government is focusing on hydroelectric power. Moreover, generators are failing to supply low-income rural farming areas of Sierra Leone that are most in need of improved energy access. With the lack of sufficient amounts of electricity and mechanized equipment, all sectors lack the adequate lighting, heating, and water facilities which are imperative to the improvement of education, food security, and all-over health and well-being.

Sierra Leone has been putting forth effort to improve the economy but has been struggling due to corruption in foreign investment. In an attempt to overcome this corruption, Sierra Leone's Anti-Corruption Commission in 2011 and 2012 increased convictions of high-level officials from 9 to 22 and recovered millions of dollars (CIA).

Education pertaining to agriculture techniques would help decrease the amounts of subsistence farming. One way of doing this would be implementing cellular phones in Sierra Leone. Cellular phones would allow farmers to have access to market prices, micro-insurance, instant weather information, iCow from M-Farm, and CocoaLink.

With access to market prices, farmers would be able to inform themselves of the current markets prices before they traveled long distances to sell their crops. Furthermore, SMS text messaging would allow farmers to quickly transfer information pertaining to the wholesale and retail prices of crops, ensuring the

ability for farmers to negotiate deals with traders. Micro-insurance would allow farmers to acquire insurance through a "pay as you plant" policy. Farmers can receive information on their policies and payouts based on rainfall. This insurance policy protects farmers against poor weather conditions. The iCow from M-Farm app would allow farmers to keep track of each cow's individual gestation. iCow also keeps track of feed schedules, local veterinarian contact information, and precise market schedules. Access to instant weather information would allow farmers to have crucial weather information so they can properly manage their crops. CocoaLink would allow farmers to receive information based on farm safety, child labor, health, improvements in farming practices, crop disease prevention, and crop marketing.

Not only will improved education on sustainable farming techniques improve Sierra Leone's economy, but improved education in schools will also help to enhance the economy. Recently, the country joined the Global Partnership for Education. This partnership has allowed Sierra Leone to improve access, quality and relevance, and strength to its education system. The country received its first GPE Grant of \$13.9 million in 2008 ([globalpartnership.org](http://globalpartnership.org)). This money has been put forth to help improve the learning environments and opportunities in targeted school areas.

However, the literacy rate among youth has only increased by 1% in recent years, 58% to 59% ([globalpartnership.org](http://globalpartnership.org)). I believe in order to further increase the enrollment of children in school, adequate supplies and teachers need to be attained. It's very difficult for young children to attend school when they are unable to attain the necessary supplies. Also, with limited teachers, it's incredibly difficult to distinguish between class levels limiting the learning environment. If adequate school supplies were available and the number of trained teachers was increased, it would allow for more people to attend school. This would then increase knowledge pertaining to how plants grow and animals develop. This knowledge would then apply to farms and would allow people to increase the productivity of their farms. By strengthening education, farms begin to produce more food making food secure, communities become stronger which allows the economy to become stronger, and eventually the government.

Recently, Sierra Leone has been ranked among the top five countries which lead the table of biggest governance improvers ([standardtimespress.org](http://standardtimespress.org)). The governance in Sierra Leone has improved significantly since 2000 ([standardtimespress.org](http://standardtimespress.org)). Since 2000, the country has shown its biggest improvement in the category of Safety and Rule of Law. This is a category in which numerous other African countries have seen recent deteriorations. Sierra Leone is heading on the right path for improving its economy. However, the country faces numerous challenges including being one of the top ten poorest countries in the world and suffering from food scarcity. Education pertaining to agriculture will help improve the understanding of sustainable farming techniques and practices which would enhance the growth of food. This would thus lead to food security and sustainability in the future.

## Works Cited

- "Energy and Technology - MDP Project: Sierra Leone." Energy and Technology - MDP Project: Sierra Leone. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.  
<https://sites.google.com/site/mdpprojectsierraleone/energy-and-technology>
- "Encyclopedia of the Nations." Agriculture. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.  
<http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/Africa/Sierra-Leone-AGRICULTURE.html>
- "Countries and Their Cultures." Culture of Sierra Leone. N.p., n.d. Web. 21 Mar. 2015.  
<http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Sierra-Leone.html>
- "Sierra Leone | History - Geography." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/543356/Sierra-Leone>
- "Sierra Leone." Index on Censorship 19.6 (1990): 52-57. Web.  
[http://yfuusa.org/media/yes\\_lounge/Sierra%20Leone.pdf](http://yfuusa.org/media/yes_lounge/Sierra%20Leone.pdf)
- "Sierra Leone." Children of the Nations. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.  
<https://cotni.org/where-we-serve/sierra-leone>
- "Boosting Sierra Leone's Revenue through Better Tax Collection." Crown Agents. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015. <http://www.crownagents.com/our-work/projects/detail/sierra-leone-national-revenue-service>
- "Education - Shine On Sierra Leone." Education - Shine On Sierra Leone. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2015.  
<http://shineonsierraleone.org/Education>
- "Education System in Sierra Leone." Sierra Leone Education System. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Mar. 2015.  
<http://www.classbase.com/countries/Sierra-Leone/Education-System>
- "About Sierra Leone." About Sierra Leone. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Mar. 2015.  
<http://www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/countryinfo/>
- "Sierra Leone | Global Partnership for Education." Sierra Leone | Global Partnership for Education. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 Mar. 2015. <http://www.globalpartnership.org/country/sierra-leone>