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Sierra Leone, Factor 20: Farm to Market

### **Sierra Leone: Improving Food Security and Life by Addressing Poor Infrastructure**

Sierra Leone, a country with tall beautiful mountains, long sandy beaches, and even tropical forests and farmland, has been subject to many atrocious actions. It is a country plagued by Ebola, a decade long civil war, and deficiencies in many crucial areas that came out of that conflict. This country had a growing population with a rich history that had the chance to become a great nation. Unfortunately, because of things like socially marginalized youth and control over blood diamond trade, there was a social conflict that killed thousands and displaced millions that call Sierra Leone home (Advameg, Inc.). This conflict hurt many things including the infrastructure needed for a thriving country with increased agriculture and economic stability. Sierra Leone is deficient in basically every aspect of infrastructure including roads, railways, power, communication, and more (The African Development Bank Group). The terrible outbreak of Ebola that ravaged the nation exposed the poor medical care system. Information from the World Food Bank estimates that the Ebola outbreak cost involved African countries a total of 1.6 billion in economic growth (Ighobor, Kingsley). While a small amount of government financing and development partner monies help, there needs to be more done to get the hurting country to pre-civil war and better conditions, including help from the private sector.

While Sierra Leone may have an economy that is improving, a return to its pre-war state will take more than 30 years. Poverty rates have improved from almost 70% in 2004 to less than 60% in 2016. The research done by every culture website shows the challenges experienced by the people of Sierra Leone. The infant mortality rate in the country is reported to be the highest in the world, impacting 195 out of every 1,000 infants, with a life expectancy of less than 50 years old. Health services in the country reach less than 30% of the population. The average woman bears six children in her lifetime, while taking care of other orphaned children and her parents. The average family eats rice for every meal; a common saying is: "If you haven't eaten rice today, you haven't eaten." Other foods include many fruits and vegetables, and even fish and chicken. (Advameg, Inc.). In other sectors of life, education has been pushed aside in the last few decades with many school buildings being destroyed in the civil war. Today, education spending is lacking, due to necessities in other areas. Prior to its civil war, Sierra Leone had a few very good universities, making the country a desirable destination for higher education, but many of them have closed, forcing students and business elsewhere.

Due to recent declines in the country's economy it has become very difficult to find a job with a life-sustaining wage. Even farmers struggle due to declines in food prices and difficulty getting products to market. The major crops farmers grow include, cocoa, coffee, peanuts, and tobacco. Farms in the country are passed down by generations, where the first son usually takes control. Most labor on the farm is done by hand by workers from around the area. Farm sizes range greatly depending on the amount of land owned by family and social and economic status. (Advameg, Inc.).

Farm to market is a key factor that affects stability and food security in developing countries. For this to change, all sectors of infrastructure need to be improved. The most important are railways, internet, mobile technology, and even electricity. There is a direct relationship between investments in these factors to the amount of poverty reduction in developing countries. With increased investments in roads, electricity, and telephone, agriculture production rises. For farmers, better roads translate to better productivity by helping them bring their products to market. Roads also help farmers get to farms after storms and transport fertilizer and chemicals to their crops. Infrastructure factors not only affect farmers

and their earnings, but also the community's food prices and how much food each community has access to. (Pinstrup-Andersen, and Shimokawa).

Infrastructure problems harm a country in many ways--most of all the well being and safety of its people. Sierra Leone has consistently ranked among the worst countries for infrastructure and growth in the world. Several reasons contribute to the country's ranking, perhaps most significant the ten-year civil war that displaced millions and destroyed many good roads, telephone lines, power lines, and buildings. Large amounts of corruption, followed by very bad legal reforms, have also wreaked havoc on the Sierra Leone government. Communication sector deficiencies make it so farmers don't know when they are getting under bid. Lack of electricity makes it harder for people to fix equipment and get places. Inability to get internet in order to check conditions, contact buyers, or hire workers limits business and quality of living. Infrastructure needs to change in a positive way to give Sierra Leone the chance to improve as a nation. Good roads, ports, and railways make food and markets more accessible for people living outside towns; make travel and oversea shipments possible; ensure food security; and even raise wages by lowering cost of living.

Problems in infrastructure harm not only agriculture, but also many other factors in the country, including healthcare. With poor roads and communication, citizens find it hard to impossible to call for help and access emergency vehicles. When farmers don't have the ability to bring their product to market because of poor roads, products turn to spoilage and waste. Lastly education and infrastructure go hand in hand. Kids would not only be able to get to school easier, but also if communication improved their quality of education may be improved. These and many other factors would be affected if infrastructure was improved. When one aspect of the economy is improved then all other factors have the ability and path to improve along with it.

Below are a few examples of how unfavorable the people of Sierra Leone really have it when it comes to infrastructure. In the country, the electrification ratio is 10%, most of which is in larger metropolitan areas such as Freetown, not helping rural farmers at all (The African Development Bank Group). Another statistic says that of the nation's 11,555 km of essential roads, almost all of them are in need of repair. There are no common carrier railroads in the country, making it very hard for anyone who wants to haul things over rails for long distances. Only .27% of the people have internet, with limited phone lines and outdated ports. These are only some of the real-life problems combining to create a detrimental effect on markets, living wages, and productivity.

Some things are being done right now in the country to help every aspect of this detrimental problem. There are great businesses and people that see the problems and are willing to give goods, services, money, and people to go out and tell the rest of the world how they are and how to help. Banks like IBRD and IDA have partnered with the World Bank and have devoted themselves to eradicating hunger around the world. Credit and grants from the two organizations have provided the country more than \$1.4 billion USD (World Bank Projects). There have also been promises of improved ICT (information and communications technology) in the country. They came about with new institutional reforms that have essentially gotten rid of monopolies to make way for better competition and incentives (The African Development Bank Group). Most problems are being dealt with right now and are slowly improving. For Sierra Leone to keep up with the global economies of highly developed nations, change needs to happen at a faster pace. Agriculture is the start--almost all countries and cities at one time went through a booming agriculture state.

Infrastructure improvements can change so much about a country and possibly bring about a new age of agricultural and technological advances. Investments in infrastructure benefit society through widening of markets, increased competition in the market, and dissemination of knowledge and technology (Pinstrup-Andersen, and Shimokawa). All of those points translate to lower poverty, better food security, and more

jobs. Widening markets makes it so more people have food at lowered cost due to a surplus in cities. Competition makes it so farmers have incentives to do better and be more efficient while fostering wealth with increased potential. Lastly, the advancement of knowledge and technology helps more people to have access to phone and internet connections. This also helps farmers know markets and new products, while ensuring that bigger companies can't beguile them out of earnings. Improvements in infrastructure can translate into growth in almost all sectors in an economy, fostering growth and harboring security.

Infrastructure reform plans will reinforce national stability and tap the potential of promising sectors (The African Development Bank Group). Transportation improvements will create jobs for youth by helping maintain and build roads, ports, and even railroads, while connecting the capital with outer populations, giving producers access to markets, and improving national security routes and procedures. Improvements to communications are important to many things like better police systems, more transparency in national government, and transfer of information to markets to become more efficient. Lastly, improving electricity helps by creating sustainable agricultural practices, running irrigators, sanitizing water, and even reducing inequality when the national grid is enlarged to encompass everyone in the country.

Sierra Leone's tremendous infrastructure problem is something that already has quite a bit of attention and is being worked on now. Unfortunately, it would take more than 30 years for the country to come up to base living standards at the rate it is going. Ag advocacy can make an impact through technology including commercials, Facebook pages, or even having people go out in communities and smaller towns to make people want to help the underdeveloped countries of the world. Existing programs going in Sierra Leone can be enhanced by people that would love to help if they had the chance. Many problems in the country boil down to a lack of technology, including communications and education. Newer technology is a great way to solve simple problems or even for upscaling what is already there. With that in mind people need to remember that changes like new technology need to be done slowly and over time. For instance, if people went in there with tablets and smartphones it would be useless for them, but maybe in time they will be helpful. Here are two specific projects that have happened or are happening right now that are making huge impacts on people, and could help even more if civilians knew more about the problem. First, the Sierra Leone Energy Access Project, increases energy access in the country. The objectives are to reduce energy loss in the capital, increase rural electrification ratio, and increase influence of the National Power Authority. Unfortunately, due to cost increases they have dismissed the objective to put more electricity in rural areas where it is most needed (Litwin). Something that could be done to get more money for the program would be companies going out and fundraising. The part that would help the most in the agriculture spectrum would be the rural areas helping with sustainable ag practices and clean water systems. That is the area that I think needs to be scaled up first in order to grow agriculture practices and a country as a whole. Secondly, the SL Infrastructure Development Project helps the transport systems, including ports, roads, and airports. The objectives include establish prioritized road maintenance programs and increase employment numbers on maintenance and construction jobs for roads. Others include improving environmental safety and performance at ports, also safety and cost reduction at the airports (Sethi). One way this could be scaled up would be increasing the density of connector roads to connect more farmers and villages with the capital and their farms. There are other businesses and organizations that support Sierra Leone. For instance, USAID has people and resources in that area. The reason these organizations are so successful is that they have the resources and money to do so much in these developing countries. Countries could do more to support local businesses that would help improve the life of the entire nation.

For these things to be accomplished correctly there needs to be help from all sectors of the community. For construction companies in the area it is crucial for them to do their best to work with the banks and to do good work. There has been road and other jobs done in the past with under-par work that then requires more work to fix in the future. Communities need to work with the companies and especially be able to supply workers for the growing businesses and jobs that go along with all this infrastructure. Other things

that the people could do include supporting these projects and even giving what they have to help in order to raise quality of life. Local governments can make it so there is nothing to get in the way of these innovations, and also give them money and supplies to give them the best chances at making the country greater. Lastly, the national government needs to not only support these organizations but build awareness, create programs and policies that will last, while supporting and subsidizing infrastructure. The national government needs to get everything figured out to stop corruption. Sierra Leone needs to have a well organized government that is focused on the betterment of their people and not how much money they have. That will give them a much better chance of making the improvements they need. With all of this in mind, Sierra Leone has the chance to become a great nation in the near future.

Sierra Leone is a struggling country that has the potential to become great. A devastating civil war beat the country down, but they are coming back now with improving agriculture and wages to show for it. Setbacks include a large Ebola outbreak, a decline in jobs, and poor governance. Families eat rice every day, have more children than they can provide for, and have a horrible health care system. Inadequate schools and few jobs at livable wages put young people at a disadvantage. A recent decline in the economy has made crop prices go down, affecting family farms that have been going for generations by making it hard for them to buy supplies and even pay workers. Inadequate infrastructure including 10% electrification, almost all roads in need of repair, and railroads and ports in dire need of construction results in lack of supplies, limited access to markets, and inability to communicate or get needed information. These are things that can be fixed and hopefully one day they will be. There are many banks around the world including World Bank that strives to help countries. Many programs exist in Sierra Leone right now, striving to recreate a powerful nation with improved infrastructure. The Energy Access Project and the Infrastructure Development Project, for example, strive towards improving roads, making electricity more available, and giving farmers access to markets by gaining access to internet. If most of the things outlined here can come to fruition, there is a good chance that things could work out well for the country as a whole. Involving the locals is a very important in problem solving. It is usually the cheapest and easiest way to accomplish a goal. While the country faces many problems, this is one that needs to be addressed first. This factor affects most other factors including energy demand, sustainable agriculture, and water sanitation. This country will improve if everyone works together to make the world a better place.

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