

Programme Area Summary

Country: Sierra Leone

Programme Area: Secure Livelihoods 2007-2012

What is the aim of the programme area?

To reduce poverty among young women and young men through improved livelihoods opportunities.

Why is VSO working in this particular programme area and region?

Sierra Leone is one place from the bottom of the global Human Development Index. A little over 40% of the population is younger than 15 years, with young people among the poorest and most marginalised. Many were involved in civil conflict between 1991-2002 as both victims and perpetrators. Despite a stated commitment by government to address the concerns of young people, many of the problems affecting the youth have yet to be tackled. Any attempts to reduce poverty within Sierra Leone, and to contribute to a lasting peace, must therefore address young people in particular. Young people in Sierra Leone are poor because they lack adequate livelihoods opportunities (appropriate skills and resources) and are excluded from decision-making processes on resource allocation. VSO aims to address these factors through its two interlinked programmes focusing on Participation and Governance and Secure Livelihoods, both with a focus on young people. The aim of the Secure Livelihoods programme is to reduce poverty among young women and men in target districts through improved livelihoods opportunities.

Key beneficiaries and partners

The programme is currently being implemented in 3 of the 13 districts: Bombali and Tonkolili in Northern Region and Moyamba in Southern Region. These have been selected on the basis of high levels of poverty and concentration of young people. In 2007/8 the programme will expand into 3 additional districts.

Our partners reflect the range of action needed to address poverty among young people at both the institutional and service levels. They include actors at all levels, from small farmers associations to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and from small NGOs providing skills training to young people to micro-credit institutions and the Chamber of Commerce.

- Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
- Ministry of Development and Economic Planning
- Ministry of Youth and Sports
- Yoni Community Development Bank
- Fatima Institute of Development
- Swiss Sierra Leone Development Foundation
- Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture
- Future in our Hands
- Sierra Leone Indigenous Business Association
- Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organisation
- Association for Rural Development
- Makeni Town Council
- Tonkolili District Council
- Moyema Agricultural Land Tillers Association
- Centre for Coordinating Youth Activities
- Moyamba District Council

Key objectives of the programme and the cross-cutting themes

- Strengthen partners' capacity to improve services that support rural food security and agricultural development for youth.
- Strengthen partners' capacity to improve services that support the development of secure incomes through enterprise or employment for youth

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Gender and HIV and AIDS are crosscutting themes, and are being mainstreamed into VSO's programmes. VSO SL is also working with its partners to encourage knowledge and implementation of HIV and AIDS and gender mainstreaming.

Current programme activities

Focus of International Volunteer Placements

- Agriculture; Small Business Development; Micro-finance; Natural Resource Management; Organisational Development; Project Development and Fundraising; Youth Empowerment.

Workshops, training & conferences

- Workshops this year have focused on improving relationships between VSO and its partners, understanding the VSO Secure Livelihoods Framework and programme area plan, and mainstreaming HIV and AIDS into programme work. During 2007/8, training for partners will focus on gender mainstreaming, fundraising, and human resource management.

Support to national volunteering

- VSO SL is working with the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and other relevant government agencies, to explore the development of national volunteering in the country. This work is being developed alongside both VSO's programme areas.

Research

- Research this year included a large-scale market assessment, focusing on market barriers and opportunities. Further research will focus on low-tech agricultural processing opportunities or income-generation alternatives.

Partner exchange visits/study tours

- The programme will be organising an in-country study tour for its agriculture focused partners to a successful Farmer Field School to share experience and insights.

Providing grants and/or equipment for partners

- Poor infrastructure within Sierra Leone combined with general scarcity of resources means many partner organisations do not have basic equipment. It is therefore sometimes necessary to provide small grants to partners for equipment or to support to support their work (e.g. training workshops).

Other partnership activities

- VSO SL is currently expanding its partnership base, and will be expanding into 3 new districts. Developing new partnerships, and reviewing existing ones, will be a key part of ongoing activities.

What makes VSO's work in this programme area special?

Although a new area for VSO in Sierra Leone, livelihoods are a critical issue in Sierra Leone with unemployment around 50%. The programme is working with an exciting range of partners at both the macro level institutional environment and the micro level service environment to try to ensure a joined up and effective approach to improving youth livelihoods. VSO SL will continue with its approach of using a variety of tools and approaches including long and short term placement of volunteers, small grants to partners as well as training programmes and exchange visits to support the building of partners' capacity.