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Evaluation of the “LINKS” Program Promoting Linkages for Livelihood Security and Economic Development



July 2007

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Weidemann Associates, Inc.

EVALUATION OF THE “LINKS” PROGRAM PROMOTING LINKAGES FOR LIVELIHOOD SECURITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT FINAL REPORT

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Submitted to:

USAID/Sierra Leone

Contract No.: AEG-I-00-04-00010-00 Order # AEG-I-09-04-00010-00

Period of Performance:

May-July 2007

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
ARC	American Refugee Committee
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CCU	Coordination and Compliance Unit
CORAD	Consortium for Rehabilitation and Development
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DG	Democratic Governance
DRP	Developmental Relief Program
FDG	Focus Discussion Group
FFS	Farmer Field School
FFW	Food for Work
GAP	Good Agricultural Practice
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
IR	Intermediate Result
IVS	Inland Valley Swamp
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MAFFS	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
MIS	Market Information System
MT	Metric Ton
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PMP	Program Monitoring Plan
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SFCG	Search For Common Ground
SLBS	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service
SO	Strategic Objective
SUG	Start-up Grant
VDC	Village District Council
VSL	Village Savings and Loan
WVSL	World Vision Sierra Leone

Cover page photo: Garri processing by Wara Wara Youths, Sierra Leone, 2007
Photo courtesy of CARE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Weidemann Associates Inc. appreciates the extensive support and cooperation of all who participated and assisted in the conduct of this evaluation.

In particular we would like to thank both National and District authorities for their willingness to spend time with us and for their helpful advice.

Our special thanks go to all members of the CORAD Consortium for their assistance in providing program data, and for their willingness to provide information and be available to us when needed. We particularly appreciate the universal cooperation of all field staff and their helpful organization of field visits, interviews and beneficiary discussion groups. In addition we would like to thank the USAID office staff for their support in facilitating this study,

Finally, and most importantly, we would like to acknowledge our gratitude to the many LINKS beneficiaries who were willing to give of their time to speak to us, answered seemingly endless questions patiently and provided us with a unique insight into the problems that they are facing and the solutions that they are adopting to move towards a better future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During May and June 2007, an evaluation team assessed the LINKS Program “Promoting Linkages for Livelihood Security and Economic Development” in Sierra Leone. The program has been implemented by the CORAD consortium consisting of CARE, World Vision (WV) Sierra Leone, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and the American Refugee Committee (ARC). LINKS began on the 4th of December 2004 and is currently programmed to end on 30 November 2007, (although a four months extension is under consideration). This is the first evaluation of progress to date.

The following summary integrates observations, conclusions, and recommendations:

EVALUATION OF PROGRAM IMPACTS AND IMPLEMENTATION AGAINST INTERMEDIATE RESULTS

Overall the LINKS program has been extremely effective. With few exceptions, implementation has reached or exceeded targets. Impacts have been generally strong and sustainable with potential for replication. Individual intermediate results achievements follow:

Increased capacity to carry out market-orientated agriculture: The use of Farmer Field Schools (FFS) to introduce and consolidate a limited number of key agricultural practices has stabilized yields and made considerable improvement in production. This has been achieved in FFS groups through: group structures that use hands-on direct practice and peer pressure to reinforce Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs); and through the implementation of group-selected experiments, which themselves demonstrate simple GAPs. The ‘LINKS FFS concept’ is generating results that could be replicated in the three project districts; this concept could be integrated into the existing (but less effective) FFS system already in place in many districts.

While FFS groups had been able to increase their own crop production, general production levels still remain low and food security concerns have continued even in beneficiary households (albeit at a reduced rate). The level of training currently provided to the FFS groups is very basic and potential exists to introduce more intensive and commercially orientated practices to groups once they have mastered the basic GAPs; additional training is needed in these areas. There is additional need for an improved input supply system, additional finance for agricultural production, and increased attention to post harvest storage and processing technologies.

Development of business management capacities: have been supported by ARC’s Functional Literacy Courses and the Making Cents training programs. Progress in terms of Functional Literacy has been limited due to the delayed development and roll out of ARC teaching materials. Most functional literacy groups have only been operating for a relatively short period, so that this essential life skill is not yet contributing to enhanced business management capacity. It appears unlikely that this element of LINKS will be able to fulfill its potential before the end of the program. In contrast, Making Cents training appears to have made an immediate impact on business skills. Simulation learning led to a widespread understanding of key management practices including: the calculation of profit; resource allocation; market research and record keeping. Many beneficiaries were able to give examples of how these skills had resulted in direct and tangible improvements to their businesses. The training has proved a very effective adjunct to the provision of other program elements including Start Up Grants (SUGs), Finance Salone (FS) and Village Savings and Loans (VSL) loans and FFS activities. Business management capacities are being developed amongst a broad section of the target group, including petty traders, service providers and farmers. Demand for extensive business training was universal.

Increased access of youth to viable economic activities: A number of LINKS interventions have combined to impact in this area including, Capital Grants and micro-finance initiatives, supported by training in business management. SUGs have been particularly successful. Discussion groups reported that new business activities had many positive impacts ranging from increased food security, through the increased availability of cash for school fees and medical treatment, to better housing. The majority of the businesses initiated by SUGs were generating a rapid cash flow, i.e. petty trading. Commodities traded included both agricultural and non-agricultural items in roughly equal proportions. The majority of the SUG beneficiaries are women. FS also generated a large number of business activities. A significant proportion of the beneficiaries are female youth.

The provision of capital grants for group activities created opportunities for youth employment at both village and mezzo level (at the Chiefdom and District levels). There are sustainability concerns regarding mezzo-level capital grant initiatives targeting youth. Peri-urban youth appear reluctant to invest time and labor in activities that do not have immediate daily benefits. Young men in particular began garri processing, (cassava) but abandoned the activity when they realized that the cash flow cycle was too long to meet daily cash needs. They have remained disenfranchised from the program. However, this intervention has been generally successful at the village level. In all cases, successful capital grant interventions required initial business management training together with ongoing supervision.

Increased accessibility of agricultural inputs: The study team observed this to be the least developed element of the LINKS program. A limited number of individual commercial operations have only recently been initiated and have had limited impact to date. From the perspective of the majority of producers in the target areas, access to inputs has not altered significantly over the duration of the program. If the investments that have been made in these input companies are to be productive, it will be necessary for CORAD to provide ongoing supervision and support, both in financial management and overall business development.

Development of micro-finance institutions: Two main interventions have contributed to this IR, i.e. support to FS and VSL programs. Both interventions have had considerable positive impact upon distinct target groups, based on principles of simple procedures and group coherence. The FS micro-finance program achieved a repayment rate of greater than 99.9% on the basis of group lending procedures, gradual increases in loan size and simple collateral accumulation procedures. Most groups receiving loans managed to grow their businesses significantly; increases in turnover by a factor of between two and ten are common. The combination of a low rate of interest (2.5%), and easy access has ensured a consistent high demand for loans. The capital provided by the LINKS program has been significantly oversubscribed. Beneficiaries report that FS has allowed business expansion that has brought increased profitability. However, the level of utilization of FS funds for direct investment in agricultural production is low and FS does not currently meet the micro-finance needs of the emergent commercial farmer.

VSL groups are operating very effectively. Contributions of \$0.66 every two weeks had in the most successful cases led to the accumulation of more than \$3,500. Loans were used for a number of purposes, including direct investment in agriculture, non-agricultural and agriculturally related trading. A large proportion of all group members are women. Benefits derived from VSL include an enhanced ability to pay school fees, increased food security, improvements in the standard of living, enhanced self esteem, and improved overall quality of existence. In addition, it was observed that in the majority of VSL groups, a significant proportion of the accumulated capital was held in reserve as an emergency fund for the community. The group basis of the VSL program is a key element for success, coupled with well-defined bylaws and procedures that ensure complete transparency and accountability. The satisfactory operation of each group and adherence to procedure was also enhanced by the skills generated by the Functional Literacy Courses and the Making Cents training.

Development of market information system: An effective MIS system has been developed based on data collected regularly by CRS and disseminated through the SFCG-produced radio program network, including seven radio stations in the country and one in each target district. Market prices in key markets are quoted weekly for the target districts as well as for Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni. The program is produced in Krio, the lingua franca in the country. The radio program has been very successful. It has rapidly become essential for farmers; they now maximize income from their produce through informed decisions based on prices in different market outlets. Both farmers and traders acknowledge the value of the program.

ASSESSMENT OF CROSSCUTTING AREAS

The team assessed seven crosscutting aspects of program implementation in detail. These are summarized below:

Gender: CORAD has successfully integrated youth and women at the village level. Women and men, adults and youth, have fairly equitable gender representation in all LINKS activities. The strategy to encourage youth and women's participation has been culturally appropriate and hands on. Men, women and youth appear comfortable debating ideas within the LINKS activities. Labor is still largely designated along cultural patterns. However, males are now engaged in some traditionally female work such as food processing of cassava to garri. Younger widowed women with children stated that now men are interested in marrying them as a result of their new skills and successes. Some older widowed women said they are enjoying more food security as they can afford to pay for youth labor on their farms.

Some areas remain where gender concerns could be addressed. Currently, the provision of micro finance is adding to the workload of women and male youth are not taking up the potential opportunities that the loans present. There is a clear need to sensitize the male population as to the benefits of their greater participation in business opportunities so that a more equitable division of labor can be developed. In addition, women's workload could be reduced by providing low cost appropriate technologies, e.g. for post-harvest processing, efficient cook stoves.

Social Mobilization and Governance: LINKS Group activities have strengthened and improved upon pre-existing groups and in some cases introduced group cohesion to isolated communities. No group strengthening was abstract in terms of the purpose of group structuring and objectives. All group strengthening revolved around significant income generating and/or food security activities relevant to beneficiaries' daily lives. Groups' trainings had direct and immediate impact on improving income and/or food levels. Group bylaws were well established and practiced. Groups met on a regular basis. Contribution to group discussions and decision-making appeared to engage men and women quite equally (with the exception of young mothers) and executive positions were shared by men and women.¹ Group structure, work and management have shown many significant impacts. All members of the FFS now have access to a significant labor pool - the other members- exchanging farm labor amongst them. Group work has expanded into systematic rebuilding and renovating of homes across the membership. In some cases, they have implemented community infrastructure. The Grameen Bank practice of introducing life-enhancing skills to its members is well suited to the group structures that have been developed under LINKS. Future interventions could use the VSL groups in particular as effective channels for the introduction and strengthening of key practices.

LINKS successfully introduced and strengthened grassroots democratic culture. However, established confederations of groups have yet to achieve significant impact beyond information sharing. Opportunities for advocacy have yet to be addressed and interventions have fallen short of influencing

¹ However, the higher levels of illiteracy among women result in their holding fewer executive posts.

District development planning or national policy. The LINKS groups have little to no dialogue with local or national authorities. Few beneficiaries were familiar with District Development Plans. In many cases, the District has designated Ward-level officials with no input by communities and there is little awareness on the part of these communities regarding how these Ward and District structures are meant to serve them. USAID and other donors will need to encourage the GOSL's devolution of funds to the District level before these local structures can be perceived to be viable governance actors.

Capacity Development: The combination of skills development, asset provision (either through grants or loans) and participatory group formation and strengthening is a fundamental aspect of the LINKS program that has promoted effective capacity development and contributed substantially towards sustainability. However, ongoing supervision will be required beyond the initial start-up period for capacity development to be truly effective. In particular, group business activities – facing new and different challenges at each stage of their development - may require continual input over a two or three year period. In addition, many beneficiaries expressed a need for further training in the more detailed aspects of business in order for existing businesses to develop beyond their current ceiling, to become sources of employment in their own right. This would contribute to a multiplier effect of LINKS impacts.

Communication: Although the communications element of the program has been largely successful, different communications strategies need to be adopted for different target audiences. The program has effectively captured and addressed the issues relevant to the rural community, reflecting their views and experiences through interviews. LINKS has been quite successful in communicating at local government level; there is clear support from districts and chiefdoms for project activities. Other audiences have been less effectively addressed. The major communication strategy shortcoming has been its effort to influence government policy through the use of video documentaries and newspaper inserts. It is clear that neither channel has achieved any significant results. *The importance of the market price information to the continued growth of farming activities in the target districts cannot be overemphasized.* The World Bank is considering the establishment of a nationwide price information system that will eventually be based in the MAFFS, with CRS providing training and advisory services. This would allow for the continuation of the MIS. Other mechanisms for achieving the dissemination of market prices, including the use of the Internet and mobile telephony should be investigated further.

Ownership of Interventions: The participatory nature of the group formation processes and the element of independent choice inherent in SUG and FS-financed projects promote a strong sense of beneficiary ownership. The same is true of FFS, wherein the groups choose for themselves the types of experiments that they wish to conduct. Regarding VSL groups, members demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to the group and VSL practices. Overall, it was clear to the evaluation team that LINKS interventions are highly relevant to individual and/or community needs and have been taken up by the majority of beneficiaries.

Appropriate Technology Usage: The technologies introduced within the LINKS program are for the most part related to agricultural practices and new varieties of seed, together with some basic machinery for garri processing. In many cases new cultivation methods and processing technologies have included a gender analysis of how these new labors will be distributed. With few exceptions, the technologies were seen to be generally appropriate and relevant to local needs and capacities for maintenance and repair. However, although the technology introduced has been appropriate, the team observed that it has been somewhat limited in its scope. The high level of post harvest losses reported in FDGs suggests that, further attention on post-harvest processing for storage and/or the reduction of spoilage beyond garri processing would be a cost-effective way to increase household food security.

Environmental Impacts: FFS activities are small in overall size, but as individual members' farms expand, the potential for negatively affecting watersheds and deforestation increases. It would be

reasonable to introduce appropriate elements of agro-forestry practices as well as soil and water conservation practices to the members of the FFS.

KEY FACTORS PROMOTING AND CONSTRAINING PROGRAM SUCCESS: An evaluation of successful program elements revealed the following common factors:

Integration of interventions: The team noted the strong degree of synergism between different program activities. Numerous FDGs emphasized the need for an integrated package of assistance. Strong synergism was noted between the FFS and VSL interventions on the one hand and between both of these elements and the Functional Literacy and Business Management training on the other. This holistic approach is a positive characteristic of the overall program design and has a notable impact on the ground.

Participatory methodology: The LINKS project has integrated participatory mechanisms throughout its implementation of interventions. Participatory dialogues with all segments of the community populations have encouraged participation in activities by men, women and youth. FFS select agricultural experiments from an array of choices; VSL, FFS, and SUG beneficiaries selected their own enterprises. Participatory engagement of the District level has been strong on the part of CORAD members, but not the LINKS communities. Participatory engagement at the National level has been limited to GOSL interest in the MIS.

Development of pre-existing initiatives: In many cases LINKS interventions were developed around community initiatives that pre-dated the program. Strengthening these structures and practices: prompted rapid adoption of LINKS methodologies; the overlay maintained community ownership and initiative, and transformed and strengthened prior initiatives and increased impact.

Concentration of resources: The concentration of project management resources in limited areas resulted in both improved supervision and more sustainable progress by the beneficiary groups.²

Attitudinal development: The interventions promoted an: attitude of self-determination; effectively provided a sound “framework of opportunity” for sustainable development; and a shift from immediate and external delivery modes³ towards increased self-reliance and longer-term development practices. This process may take another three years to complete in the communities that have been assisted to date and longer elsewhere.

Cost effectiveness: Analysis of field budgets and expenditure indicates that almost all LINKS interventions have been extremely cost-effective. Those that appear unsustainable at current cost recovery rates achieve considerable developmental impact at a low cost. Brief analyses showed that the formation of VSL groups is the most cost-effective intervention combining very low cost per beneficiary with high impact. FFS group formation is also low cost and yields a high return. Making cents training also appears cost effective. The cost effectiveness of grant-based projects is dependent upon their success and can be strongly affected by how well they are supervised.

Constraints: Two external and two internal constraints to success were identified. Externally, the very poor condition of the feeder road network both increases administrative costs for all CORAD members and reduces the effectiveness of the human resources in the field. The condition of the roads network also

² District Councils unanimously preferred to see Consortium members operating over wider areas, either because they wished to see more development being achieved, and/or because a more equitable distribution of assistance would be politically expedient. This pressure should be resisted if possible.

³ Characteristics of the DRP

increases commodity transaction costs, reducing prices to the farmer, increasing prices to the consumer and acting as a brake on development. The limited decentralization process also prevents local government machinery from operating effectively. As a result, the potential for LINKS groups to express themselves through the proper representational channels is extremely limited. Internally, success is constrained by financial resources and the time frame available for the program. The demand for LINKS assistance far outweighs available resources, and that the time frame for effectively changing beneficiary attitudes is longer than that of the program.

OVERALL PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION: The evaluation team observed a degree of consortium rigour in terms of individual members' approaches and quality control. Although consortium members did not regularly adopt the results of other individual member's experience or work, the Consortium has proved an effective mechanism for the management and coordination of a large program over wide and varying areas. The performance of all CORAD members was consistently high regarding the core objective of encouraging women and youth to undertake agricultural activities as a business. Some variation in performance was observed, related to staffing levels, supervision and terrain. The achievement by CORAD members of individual targets has been more variable. The more innovative elements of the program have been harder to implement and frequently delayed.

Role of the Consortium Members in Development: Beneficiary communities perceive their LINKS partners to be more present, active and effective than the GOSL and donors. Interaction between CORAD members and local authorities was uniformly good. District officials saw CORAD as a partner in development.⁴ Overall, the role adopted by CORAD members in the LINKS program appears to be balanced and well integrated within the local development framework. All three Districts requested that LINKS be continued and expanded across all their Wards; one District Council said that CORAD coordination practices should be adopted across all USAID-funded projects. However, the role of CORAD in development at a national level has been limited.

Exit Strategies: While the need for NGOs in Sierra Leone remains very strong for the foreseeable future; all CORAD members should have an articulated exit strategy. The nature of most LINKS interventions is such that viable exit strategies are generally simple and straightforward.

Program Monitoring: The Team observed that while the LINKS program might be considered to support the SO1 "Reintegration of war-torn populations in target areas advanced", there are concerns regarding the selection of indicators within the revised Program Monitoring Plan.

Overall impact Assessment: It is difficult to identify the specific impacts of LINKS interventions per se. With few specific exceptions, the impacts of LINKS interventions have been strongly positive. They are: (1) Increased use of fundamental good agricultural practices amongst beneficiaries, (planting density, use of improved varieties, weeding and cultivation techniques) resulting in increased production from Farmer Field School group members own farms and reduced food security concerns. (2) Increased availability of finance both in rural and peri-urban areas, resulting in increased business turnover for petty trading, agriculture and service provision and increased profitability, although this has been dependent on... (3)... Significantly improved business management capacity of beneficiaries resulting in increased profitability and business development both in farming and in petty trading. (4) Improved access to market information (through the radio broadcasting of market prices) allowing farmers and traders to determine where they might sell their produce most profitably.⁵

⁴ The practice of quarterly planning meetings to integrate external NGO and donor resources is becoming more common across Districts.

⁵ These are the "Headline Impacts"; a wide variety of additional impacts were also observed.

Overall, the fundamental and most significant impact of the LINKS program is that the vast majority of the beneficiaries are clearly moving towards increased self-determination, increased self esteem and reduced dependency on external assistance so that, whatever their production, financial or nutritional circumstances in the future, they will have the ability to improve their circumstances through their own resources and efforts.

Summary: Best practices incorporated the principles and practices of participatory development, a holistic integrated development approach together with a regular grassroots presence, dialogue and face-to-face trust building. Within this effective framework of support, outstanding interventions included VSL Group formation, “Making Cents” training, MIS radio broadcasts and FS microfinance. Interventions that might be considered less effective and areas of concern include the delays in the adoption of the Functional course, and the provision of technical transport solutions. The newspaper inserts and videos do not appear to have achieved significant impact and the project has so far failed to make any significant impact on central government policy. The ability to reach and assist peri-urban male youth remains an area of concern. Finally, while the LINKS program has had a significant impact upon agriculture, the main areas of success and development revolve around non-agricultural trading.

In the short term LINKS should consolidate and strengthen the existing interventions, providing ongoing support to SUG and Capital grant interventions, introducing the delayed literacy courses, piloting commercial FFS demonstrations, reassessing interventions for peri-urban youth, addressing the sustainability of FS and the MIS and seeking USAID assistance to achieve high level impact in GoSL. In the longer term, follow-on interventions should be prioritized to deepen existing impacts through further attention to the same target groups. Possible interventions should include further technical training and business management support, the provision of access to finance for agricultural businesses, and increased attention to post harvest technologies. In addition, there are considerable opportunities for DG development within the context of the confederated groups.

A summary of all recommendations made in the text is included at the end of the main report.

Evaluation of the “LINKS” Program Promoting Linkages For Livelihood Security and Economic Development

1. INTRODUCTION

This report details the evaluation undertaken by Weidemann Associates Inc. of interventions to promote linkages for livelihood security and Economic Development (the LINKS Program). This is the first evaluation of the program. It is based upon extensive field investigation, but covers only a proportion of the wide range of interventions undertaken by the Consortium for Rehabilitation and Development (CORAD)⁶, the many of which were only 75% complete at the time of assessment. The projects under evaluation are still operational and may in some cases be subject to further modification. As such, it is anticipated that some conclusions might be altered in the light of subsequent project developments

Under these circumstances, the conclusions of this report cannot be considered fully comprehensive, particularly where negative conclusions might be drawn; in which case, criticisms must be taken to refer to specific instances and circumstances. On the other hand, where positive conclusions and recommendations have been made, there are reasonable grounds to assume that these have more general predictive value. The evaluation has therefore been undertaken from a positive perspective, of assessing the overall value of the activities undertaken within the LINKS program, of seeking out the most effective interventions in terms of both impact and sustainability, and of gathering insights into the transition from relief and rehabilitation to development, that the program has been supporting so as to provide potential guidance for the design and implementation of further interventions in this critical area.

1.1. Composition of Evaluation Team

The work was conducted by the Weidemann Associates Study Team consisting of Dr. George Gray (Agricultural Economist), Ms. Jenna Luché-Thayer (Gender and Governance Specialist), Dr Julius Spencer (Communications Specialist) and Dr. Harry Will (Agriculturalist). All team members took part in interviews with key stakeholders in Freetown and in the three districts of program implementation and in focus discussion groups (FDGs) with beneficiaries. This report was compiled by all four consultants.

1.2. Outline of This Report

This report consists first of an introduction (this chapter) explaining the background to the evaluation exercise. It is followed by a chapter providing a detailed evaluation of the LINKS initiatives, as assessed against the original Intermediate Results for the program, while the third chapter assesses cross cutting issues including gender, governance, capacity development and communication together with appropriate technology usage and environmental impacts. The fourth chapter summarizes key factors that were observed to be significant in affecting program success. Chapter five considers the performance, interactions and roles of the CORAD consortium members and other aspects of program design and implementation. Finally Chapter six presents conclusions in terms of key impacts noted, lessons learned and options for future interventions. The final chapter summarizes the various recommendations made throughout the text of the report.

Background information on the LINKS program and a general overview of progress to date is given in Annex A. Annex B lists detailed descriptions of the individual activities referred to in the main text, while

⁶ CORAD comprises CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), World Vision Sierra Leone (WVSL), Search for Common Ground (SFCG) and American Refugee Committee (ARC).

a summary of their sustainability and ease of replication is contained in Annex C. Farmer Field School data referred to in Chapter 2 is contained in Annex D. The list of documents reviewed, list of people interviewed, methodology for this review and Scope of Work are contained in Annexes E to H respectively.

2. DETAILED EVALUATION OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACTS AGAINST INTERMEDIATE RESULTS

The LINKS program was originally expected to achieve seven intermediate results (IRs), i.e:

1. Improved capacity of farmers to carry out market-oriented agriculture.
2. Improved business management capacity of beneficiaries to expand micro-enterprise activities.
3. Increased accessibility of socially marginalized youth to viable economic activities including agriculture.
4. Increased accessibility of critical agricultural inputs for rice cassava, commercial vegetables, oil palm coffee, cocoa to enable farmers to market surplus produce.
5. Establishment of micro-finance institutions (Finance Salone) in Kono and Kailahun Districts.
6. Institutionalize marketing information System (MIS) for producers and traders at District and National levels through various forms of media including radio and print media.
7. Increased access by socially marginalized youth to economic activities including agriculture at the Chief and District levels.

Although these IRS were subject to later modification, they have been used as the basis of this program evaluation. The following sections describe the performance and impacts of the LINKS program as assessed against these IRs. For the purpose of this exercise, IR3 and IR4 , which are very similar, have been combined.

2.1. Increased Capacity to Carry Out Market-Orientated Agriculture

The main achievement of the LINKS program in the area of agricultural production has been the use of Farmer Field Schools to introduce and consolidate a limited number of key agricultural practices namely:

- Use of improved crop varieties
- Timeliness of planting
- Row as against random planting
- Accurate and appropriate plant population
- weed and pest control

When properly observed, farmer practice based on the above factors has stabilized yields and made considerable improvement in production⁷. This has been achieved in FFS groups through the group

⁷ A detailed analysis of actual results obtained by FFS groups is given in Annex D. The literacy course has not shown the benefits anticipated to date. At this stage, this can be ascribed to delays in its implementation. The current scenario, which relies upon a limited number of skilled trainers working with high quality (and undoubtedly well adapted) material, does little to mitigate the effects of these delays.

It would appear that in many ways the situation of the youth with regard to literacy is similar to their situation with regard to fundamental agricultural practices, i.e. they have had little access to the basic principles that would be regarded as fundamental to education or to agriculture respectively. Hence it is possible that a course that emulated the principles of the FFS might prove an effective way of introducing at least the principles of the current Foundation Course (Basic Numeracy and Literacy).

structure, which uses hands-on direct practice and peer pressure to reinforce Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) and through the implementation of group-selected experiments, which themselves demonstrate simple GAPs. These maintain farmers' interest and serve as a focal point around which many ancillary practices can be disseminated.

The team observed that the experiments conducted by the FFS groups were rarely rigorous, occasionally misleading, and frequently inconclusive when assessed from a strictly scientific basis. However, the regular operation of the FFS group as a group, together with its focus on the selected experimental activity allowed the field agents or farmer facilitator to impart a wide range of key GAPs during the course of the group activities. Thus the experimental plots were almost always better prepared and sown, more effectively weeded, on a more timely basis and demonstrated a generally greater level of commitment to good husbandry than farmers' own fields. However, farmers directly observed the better crop growth and yield resulting from these GAPs and rapidly adopted them in their own fields. As a result, they consistently reported subsequent yield increases of their own.

The following analysis, based on data collected from a Kailahun FFS, indicates the potential production that can be achieved if the FFS model can be replicated on a wider scale:

The production of Inland Valley Swamp (IVS) and Upland rice feature prominently in FFS activities together with some other crops. Combining earnings from the FFS activities and estimated individual household production of the FFS members, estimations of the area and production of swamp rice, upland rice, cassava, and vegetables, related to market value of the crops, approximately \$10,000 can be the expected income per FFS from direct farming activities. A profitability analysis was conducted to determine sustainability and food security of FFS group production based on the following assumptions:

- Rice- allowance is made for 50kg/head per annum instead of the standard 104kg/head per annum; with this assumption, farmers can save 17% of the crop

A literacy group run along FFS lines, (whereby one field agent or group facilitator assisted the remainder of the group to work through the foundation exercises) would place emphasis on the most basic principles of literacy and would not require high standards of education amongst the trainers. Such a process would require minimal training of Field Agents in the foundation course materials and principles. Foundation level groups might be formed from existing FFS or VSL groups in rural areas or from Finance Salone or SuG groups in peri-urban areas. It could be easily replicated if only one course book was used (by the trainer) and exercises were copied by group members.

This scenario would allow the more-skilled trainers to concentrate on higher level learning (Courses One, Two, and Three) and might prove a more effective way of disseminating the first steps of literacy than that which is presently on offer.

It is important to recognize that this is a short-term intervention, bringing people to the first stages of literacy and numeracy. Once this had been achieved, beneficiaries would probably require more intense supervision and higher quality materials. However, it is also possible that if such local group initiatives would demonstrate that basic literacy can be imparted with relatively simple training mechanisms so that additional learning might also be possible through such groups.

The fundamental conclusion drawn by the study team was that the literacy course materials are well designed, insightful and focused. However, the logistics of the current training exercise are not designed to meet the needs of a very large illiterate population who all wish to learn as rapidly as possible. While the emphasis to date appears to have been on content, a sharper focus on delivery is now required. This may mean redesigning part or all of the training process to ensure that the necessary coverage of beneficiaries is achieved. If possible, group-learning mechanisms that can be easily replicated, as proposed above, should be piloted, and if successful, introduced on a wide scale as rapidly as possible.

- Cassava at consumption rate of 100kg/head per annum, farmers can save about 67% for market including garri processing;
- Vegetables- 10 % of production is consumed at home and 90% sold.
- Groundnut, 40% is consumed at home and 60% sold.

With this scenario about \$380,500 could be generated after home consumption needs have been met to meet the cash requirements of the 14500 FFS members in the groups initiated under LINKS. The details of the analysis are presented in Annex D.

The FFS concept as practiced by CORAD members is generating results that could be replicated in the three districts and in other districts in the country, working through the existing (but less effective) FFS system that is already in place in many areas. Such replication would require support, but would almost certainly be cost-effective given the low administration cost of the FFS and the ancillary training activities that raise farmers' proficiency.

In addition to the above, increased market-orientated agriculture in Sierra Leone requires an improved input supply system, additional finance⁸, and increased attention to post harvest storage and processing technologies, as well as a strong market and effective Market Information System (MIS). While some of these areas are addressed by other LINKS activities, post harvest storage technologies and agricultural finance in particular are areas that remain underdeveloped. Future programs should give increased attention to these critical areas if agricultural production is to be sustainably increased.

Finally, the team noted that while FFS groups had been able to increase their own crop production, General production levels still remained low and food security concerns continued even in beneficiary households (albeit at a reduced rate). It appears that over the limited duration of the LINKS program, the impact of FFS groups alone will not be enough to raise the overall level of production to the point at which food security is no longer an issue. A more extensive and longer lasting program will be required to achieve this.

There is the feeling among members of the FFS that the 10-day training cycle is short for participants to be properly grounded in the subject as Farm Facilitators and to emphasize re-fresher training of members of the FFS.

It was also noted that the level of training currently provided to the FFS groups is very basic and that the potential exists to introduce more intensive and commercially orientated practices to groups once they have mastered the basic GAPS. Future interventions should provide additional training in these areas.

2.2. Development of Business Management Capacities

Two LINKS program elements have directly contributed to the development of business management capacities, namely the ARC Functional Literacy Courses and Making Cents training programs. In addition, Finance Salone has provided basic training in loan repayment procedures and Field agents supervising FFS groups have provided general advice on resource allocation and business principles.

It is well recognized that adult literacy levels are low in the target communities (frequently below 20%), while the basic principles of business management are not widely understood. The team observed that even those currently engaged in small businesses including restaurants, trading, tailoring and other forms

⁸ Although Finance Salone is not giving loans to farmers either because of the risk element or the lack of loan capital. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) about to set up a Farmers' Financed Credit Board in Kono

of service provision may lack the basic numeracy required to calculate a sustainable profit. Under these circumstances, while a core group of entrepreneurs may already be able to undertake simple businesses, any widespread growth of business management capacity will require extensive basic training of target groups.

It is unfortunate therefore that progress in terms of Functional Literacy in particular has been limited. The team noted that most functional literacy groups had only been operating for a relatively short period (generally less than six months) and that although the skills acquired might significantly enhance self esteem (many people noted with pride that they could now sign their own names), improve the quality of life (the ability to understand written signs opened up new vistas for most) or provide primitive business skills (such as recognizing the difference between 5,000 and 50,000), these were essential life skills that were not yet contributing to enhanced business management capacity in a conventional sense. It is recognized that these fundamental building blocks are essential to the development of business management capacity, but it would be misleading to suggest that significant improvements in business management capacity could be observed from this interventions to date.

The team noted that this limited result may be due to the delayed development and roll out of the ARC teaching materials so that most students are still working on Course 1 (Cohesive Groups), having completed the Foundation Course (Introduction to Literacy and Numeracy). It must be anticipated that subsequent courses on “Doing Business for Profit” (Course 2- in printing) and Resource Management (Course 3 – not yet developed) will result in clearer benefits. Beneficiaries repeatedly underscored the need for higher literacy skills in order to evolve businesses and record keeping to the point that they would be able to access more market information resources, negotiate and revise written contracts and make agreements for inputs such as labor or transportation. However, it appears unlikely that this element of LINKS will be able to fulfill its potential before the end of the program.

In contrast, the “Making Cents” training appears to have been much more immediate in its impact on business skills. The simulation processes have led to a widespread understanding amongst beneficiaries of key management practices including the calculation of profit, resource allocation, market research and record keeping. Many beneficiaries were able to give examples of how these skills had resulted in direct and tangible improvements to their businesses, and it is clear that the training has proved a very effective adjunct to the provision of Start Up Grants, Finance Salone and VSL loans and FFS activities, enhancing the impact of each of these initiatives

Nevertheless, it was also apparent that there is extensive and strong demand for further business training. The “Making Cents” course has met the basic needs of beneficiaries, but most have requested additional input and/or follow up material to develop the skills that they now recognize are required to become successful entrepreneurs⁹. This need has been recognized by both CARE and CRS, who have independently developed follow up training for “Making Cents” beneficiaries. It would be useful for CORAD to examine these training programs further to develop a comprehensive package for all districts, either in conjunction with ARC or as an adjunct to their material.

It is also clear that the issue of non-voucher training should be addressed. Uptake in this area has been limited due to the high perceived cost (\$3.30 per trainee). Participants at the non-voucher courses indicated that they had found the training to be good value for money and cost-effective, but that it would take on average two months of trading in order to generate the profit necessary to pay for the course.

⁹ In addition some beneficiaries complained that the course had been abridged – although the training material can extend over two days some beneficiaries indicated that they were exposed for less than four hours.

When canvassed, potential beneficiaries (outside the LINKS program) indicated that the price should be reduced to less than \$1.60. However, they also agreed that a higher price could be paid if it could be met in installments over a period of four or five weeks. Given the well-developed capacity to mobilize and manage groups within the CORAD consortium, it should be possible to use develop a group-based credit scheme that would utilize peer pressure to ensure timely repayment.

Finally, it was observed that the use of copyrighted training materials and licensed trainers, albeit of high quality, is an inherent limitation to the spread of literacy and numeracy within the LINKS program. Participants of VSL groups were quite adamant that the groups' success was to a considerable extent due to the literacy and numeracy skills of all or some of their members. They also indicated that in a limited number of individual cases, these skills were being independently replicated (generally passed from wife to husband). However, there was a strong and widespread response from group members that the replication of both FFS and VSL initiatives was unlikely to be successful without external intervention to provide the materials and training needed for literacy and numeracy at a broader level within new groups. Unless this demand can be met, the potential for replication VSL initiatives may be constrained.

Currently, the demand for training does not appear to be well met beyond the limited extent of voucher-funded initiatives. This suggests that the LINKS, or future programs should either substantially increase the budget allocated to the licensed fundamental literacy and numeracy training, or investigate the development of replicable training programs that can have a wider impact (possibly through increased attention to training of trainer programs).

The overall assessment against this intermediate result must be that business management capacities are indeed being developed amongst a broad section of the target group, including both petty traders, service providers and farmers. The enhanced capacity has been synergistic to the impact of other interventions (notably FFS, VSL and SUG's), and has been derived more from "Making Cents" training than from Functional Literacy courses. However, when compared with the extent of the overall target group, a lot still remains to be done and the use of more easily disseminated and replicated training materials deserves consideration if substantial impact across the target group is to be achieved.

2.3. Increased Access of Youth to Viable Economic Activities in Rural Areas and at Chiefdom and District Levels

A number of LINKS interventions have increased the access of youth to viable economic activities, although these have not all been equally effective. The most relevant interventions have been:

a). Start Up Grants)	Supported by.....	Training in business management and functional literacy.
b). Microfinance initiatives)		
c). Capital Grants)		

In addition to the above, some more indirect effects were recorded by discussion groups from FFS's (whereby increased agricultural production stimulated the demand for rural labour to work the land) and from the Talking Drum sensitization program, which had made some youths more aware of the opportunities available to them through the LINKS program.

The Start Up Grant (SUG) program appeared to have been particularly successful. Beneficiaries in discussion groups noted new, or in some cases significantly increased¹⁰ business activities with a variety

¹⁰ Although SUG's are not intended for business expansion,(and thereby complement Finance Salone loans which are not intned for start-up purposes), in practice many youths have been surviving through petty trading at a very low level prior to the LINKS program and will have used the SUG to move those businesses to a significantly higher level.

of positive impacts ranging from increased food security¹¹, through the increased availability of cash for school fees and medical treatment, to better housing. The success of the SUG can be attributed to a number of factors:

- Most significantly, all beneficiaries received “Making Cents” training and all discussion groups emphasized the benefits of this.
- The stepped procedure, whereby the SUG was disbursed in two parts after a two monthly interval allowed for initial supervision and assistance, promoting business sustainability.
- The promotion of groups for SUG disbursement and of the group business approach (e.g. for garri processing, soap making or palm oil processing), strengthened the new businesses that were developed using SUGs.

The majority of the businesses that were begun using SUGs were those generating a rapid cash flow, i.e. petty trading. Commodities traded included both agricultural and non-agricultural items in roughly equal proportions. In some cases, group SUGs had been used to set up agri-processing businesses such as the processing of cassava to make garri for sale in urban centers. Few beneficiaries reported any direct investment in agriculture. The majority of the SUG beneficiaries met by the team were women.¹²

SUG beneficiaries are expected to graduate to the Finance Salone program for further business finance. In most cases, the program had not been operating long enough for this to occur, but Finance Salone has of itself generated a large number of business activities. The extent and nature of the positive impacts are described elsewhere¹³ and it is clear that a significant proportion of the beneficiaries have been female youth. At a different level, the VSL activities have also made a significant contribution to youth employment, again largely in trading and predominantly for women although at the household level, men have been able to reap the benefits of the increased cash flow.

Finally, the provision of capital grants for group activities has created opportunities for youth employment both at the primary village level and at the mezzo level (at the Chiefdom and District levels). This intervention has been generally successful at the village level (although in a number of cases, the interventions visited were too new for a proper assessment to be made). As in the case of the SUG, successful capital grant interventions required initial business management training together with ongoing supervision. It was very clear to the study team that where such ongoing supervision had been given, the beneficiary group was moving forward successfully. However in those instances where after initial training, supervision had been less intensive or absent, the team noted distinct concerns as to the viability of the group initiatives.

The main concern expressed by CORAD partners was the lack of sustainability of capital grant initiatives at the mezzo level. Peri-urban youth appear reluctant to invest time and labor in activities that do not have immediate daily benefits. This is in part a result of peri-urban living wherein their family farm food and lodging is not available and their non-work activities have costs, e.g. video games. As a result, young men in particular began garri processing, but abandoned the activity when they realized that the cash flow cycle as too long to meet their needs¹⁴. Under these circumstances, women might have an aptitude for petty trading as an alternative, but this did not appear to be a common alternative for men.

¹¹ As noted elsewhere, a proportion of the extra cash generated was commonly reinvested into own agricultural production. Increased business activities have not yet resulted in a significantly reduced dependence on agriculture

¹² It was noted that male youth were not as well represented in any of the SUG discussion groups as women and might need additional training and sensitization in order to take advantage of the opportunities under LINKS (see Cross-Cutting Elements: Gender).

¹³ See section 4.5 “Development of Microfinance”.

¹⁴ See Appendix B-Capital Grants for a more detailed discussion of the viability of peri-urban business groups.

Overall, it is clear that the LINKS initiatives have increased the access of youth to viable economic opportunities in a generally sustainable manner. Impact is limited however by the nature of the activities undertaken, which as yet generate few downstream employment opportunities, so that the beneficial effects of grants and loans is restricted to the beneficiaries' immediate household and the multiplier effect is small. In this regard, impacts are constrained by the LINKS budget reaching only a small proportion of the overall target group. However, it is important to note that while GoSL has recognized the significance of the marginalized youth, the resources made available to District Councils to resolve this issue are minimal. For example in Koinadugu, a district with a population of 265000, the quarterly budget for youth activities amounted to \$596. Viewed from this perspective, the Links interventions – although reaching only a small proportion of the target group, form a significant input. For example, over the course of the LINKS program to date, CARE has disbursed 623 SUG's of \$83 each in Koinadugu, equivalent to more than 20 years of the current annual Youth allocation for the District. From this perspective, the impact of the LINKS program (and the support provided to Ministry of Youth and Sport activities) is very significant.

2.4. Increased Accessibility of Agricultural Inputs

The study team observed increased accessibility of agricultural inputs to be the least developed element of the Links program. Four separate initiatives were observed:

- The Fachima Agribusiness services Company in Koidu,
- The Women's Agro-business Enterprise in Kabala
- Groundnut seed production and distribution in limited areas based on improved varieties supplied by the LINKS program.
- Seed banks had been set up by a number of FFS's for the storage and distribution of planting seed for members.

While each of these initiatives appeared to be successful, commercially viable and sustainable (although concerns regarding the operations of Fachima are noted further below), the individual operations were of limited impact when assessed against the needs of the overall target group of producers in the three districts. There are a number of reasons for this, including:

- Both Fachima Agribusiness and the Kabala Agricultural Inputs Company had only recently begun operations¹⁵.
- The demand for improved seeds and fertilizers is currently restricted by:
 - Current farming practices that use only minimal quantities of improved seeds and fertilizers:
 - Limited purchasing power of small farmers:
 - Limited knowledge of the availability of inputs:
 - Access of the majority of producers to the inputs shops.
- Concentrations of capital (required for the purchase of stocks) are limited in all of the program areas, restricting the number of potential intervention points.
- Stocks of improved varieties of seeds produced locally (by the Ministry of Agriculture Research Department) are of limited availability; e.g., a number of groups reported difficulty in obtaining Nerica rice varieties.

As a result, although the program can show some few activities that are increasing access to inputs, these have had only limited impact to date, so that from the perspective of the majority of producers in the target areas, access to inputs has not altered significantly over the duration of the program. The study

¹⁵ In the case of the Kabala Agricultural Company, a seed procurement business, purchasing seeds from Guinea had been in operation for some time. However, under the links project it had, within the last two months, received a capital grant for the purchase of a much larger stock of seeds and fertilizers.

team noted that this is not an unexpected result given the limited duration of the program, and the commercially sustainable approach adopted for the development of input supplies.

There is a necessary balance between supply and demand that will restrict the initial growth of the inputs supply sub-sector, and which would preclude the setting up of additional businesses at this stage. However, it is quite possible to stimulate demand in the future so that the inputs supply sub-sector might grow and access to inputs would increase. Within the context of LINKS, or any subsequent program, the following interventions are potentially relevant:

- The provision of capital grant funding to provide a partial guarantee to input supply businesses for the underwriting of credit to producers.
- Sensitizing FFS's, VSL groups and others to the existence of input supply shops
- The development of commercial plots, using more intensive practices (as an extension of the FFS concept) that would increase demand for improved inputs.

These interventions would all help to promote the growth of the input supply sector through the stimulation of demand for inputs. On the supply side, it was also noted that there is an ongoing need for technical business support. This was typified by Fachima Agribusiness Services, which, although strongly motivated and commercially orientated, lacked a coherent business plan for future sales and purchases and appeared to have a significant working capital deficiency when assessed against its declared purchasing plans. If the business is to meet the expectations of its clientele, financial management assistance will be required to address issues of cash flow and the procurement of additional funding (commercial finance).

If the investments that have been made in these input companies are to be productive, it will be necessary to provide ongoing supervision and support, both in financial management and overall business development. In particular this could include assistance in the development of distribution agents for input suppliers, linking the suppliers to the enhanced small business capacity within villages, to reduce the limitations of transport and access faced by many small farmers.

In terms of the IR, the LINKS program has implemented a limited number of interventions that have significantly increased the availability of agricultural inputs when considered in proportion to past supplies. However, the base from which such growth has been achieved is so small, that from the perspective of the majority of producers, neither availability nor access has perceptibly altered.

2.5. Micro-Finance Development

The two main interventions that have contributed to this IR have been the support to Finance Salone and the Village Savings and Loans (VSL) programs¹⁶. Both these interventions have had considerable positive impact upon distinct target groups, based on principles of simple procedures and group coherence.

FINANCE SALONE

The Finance Salone micro-finance program is impressive both in terms of its repayment rate (better than 99.9% for the two branches visited) and in terms of its impact upon the lives of beneficiaries: Those receiving loans have for the most part managed to grow their own businesses significantly and increases in turnover by a factor of 10 or more are not unusual.

¹⁶ Detailed descriptions of both the Finance Salone and the VSL programs are given in Annex A.

Discussions with Finance Salone beneficiaries highlighted four elements that have contributed to the high level of repayment:

1. Group-lending procedures whereby loans are made available to groups and subdivided amongst members, but the group as a whole remains responsible for the loan, generate peer pressure for timely repayment.
2. The gradual increase in loan size (from an initial loan of \$100 per group member to a potential maximum of \$3333) allows beneficiaries to grow their businesses over a period, minimizing risks of business failure.
3. The gradual accumulation of collateral through interest payments helps the poorest to participate and to perform in order to receive the eventual collateral repayment.
4. The graduation process whereby beneficiaries progress from Solidarity groups of ten or more members through “Club 5” groups of five and finally to “Single Enterprise Loans” (as yet piloted only in Freetown) allows successful beneficiaries to self select and form smaller groups from which they ultimately emerge as successful individual entrepreneurs.

It is essential that all applicants should have a history of owning and running their own businesses (i.e. Finance Salone is not funding new businesses) and all participants are required to take part in two workshops during which group solidarity procedures and the lending process are explained in detail.

The success of the program is also believed to be partly due to the low rate of interest (2.5% annualized, as compared with a commercial rate of 14-17%), although VSL experience suggests that many small businesses can operate at rates significantly above these levels. Nevertheless, the combination of a low rate of interest and easy access (no entry collateral and simple entry procedures) have ensured a consistent high demand for loans so that the capital provided by the LINKS program has been significantly oversubscribed. In Kailahun District, Finance Salone is currently lending \$93,000 to 707 beneficiaries and staff indicated that at least 800 more applications for loans could be accepted if finances were available. In Koidu, the program is lending \$221,000 to 2272 beneficiaries and has received over 7,000 applications for loans.

In general, Finance Salone beneficiaries have been self-selecting in that almost all groups have met the criteria of 70% women membership, and almost all beneficiaries are youths (i.e. between the ages of 18 and 35). Records of loan utilization are too general to allow a detailed analysis of the business sectors supported by Finance Salone, but discussions with beneficiaries indicate that the target groups have used the finances for a range of purposes. In Koidu, staff estimate that approximately 70% of funds support retail trading, 20% is used for service provision (including hairdressing, bike-taxi services, mechanic services or tailoring) while less than 10% is directly invested in agriculture or agro processing (oil palm processing, soap making or commodity marketing). However, in Kailehun, staff estimated that 45% of funds would be directed towards agro-processing or trading in agricultural commodities, 20% is used for non-agricultural trade and 35% would be used for both purposes.

In terms of impacts, beneficiaries report that Finance Salone has allowed business expansion that has brought increased profitability. It is significant that in both areas, both staff and beneficiaries reported that many beneficiaries would reinvest a proportion of the profits earned through trading into agricultural production. This is consistent with other observations that direct agriculture continues to be the most important element of food security for the majority of households, particularly those in rural areas, even when they might be involved in other forms of business activity.

Nevertheless, despite this element of reinvestment, the level of utilization of Finance Salone funds for direct investment in agricultural production is low; none of the respondents in discussion groups in either

district indicated that would use the funds for direct agricultural investment. This is a little surprising given that the term of the loans can vary from between four and twelve months, so that at the microfinance level, Finance Salone appears to be the only institution making credit available for a period that exceeds one agricultural production season. It is possible that the urban location of Finance Salone facilities might deter uptake by farmers, or that the beneficiary selection process precludes lending into the higher risk agricultural sector as opposed to lower risk trading. Whatever the reason, it is evident that Finance Salone does not currently meet the micro-finance needs of the emergent commercial farmer and while its impact amongst the trading sector might be significant and positive, its direct impact on the production sector is negligible. In this respect, the activities of Finance Salone are well complemented by the Village Savings and Loan activities described below.

VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOANS

This program has been introduced by CARE into rural villages in four chiefdoms. The program represents the only avenue for most of these rural communities to access credit and as such represents a major step in the entrepreneurial development of many individuals and a significant benefit to farmers who would otherwise be unable to access the funds needed to increase production.

The study team found that the VSL groups were operating very effectively. Contributions of \$0.66 every two weeks had in the most successful cases led to the accumulation of more than \$3,500. From these accumulated capital reserves, loans of between \$16 and \$50 had been made to members and (at a higher interest rate) to non-members. Loan beneficiaries used the funds for a number of purposes, in a rural vegetable producing area, roughly 25% of members used funds for direct investment in agriculture and a further 25% used loans to finance non-agricultural petty trading. The majority however used it to finance agriculturally related trading, buying and selling rice, livestock or vegetables either locally or in some cases in Freetown. In a poorer peri-urban area, a smaller group, with a lower contribution rate used funds for similar purposes with as much or possibly greater emphasis on direct investment in agriculture. It is significant that a large proportion of all group members were women and that where a married man was a group member, in at least 10% of all cases, the loan would be passed directly to the wife (frequently for petty trading).

Discussion group members listed many benefits derived from the VSL groups. For the beneficiaries, the clear primary advantage is an enhanced ability to pay school fees – either directly or using the profit generated from loan-financed activities. This was almost universally quoted by all women respondents and a significant proportion of men. The second most quoted benefit was increased food security, both through direct investment in agriculture leading to increased rice and groundnut production and through increased availability of cash. (Notably however, although the number of meals per day might have increased, few groups reported an increase in the diversity of their diet.) In addition, both women and men noted improvements in their standard of living (replacing thatched roofs with galvanized roofing sheets, purchasing better clothes and in the overall quality of their existence. This was best expressed by the women who indicated that many of the family tensions associated with meager income and poor food security had disappeared, that life was “more peaceful now” with less marital strife and a greater sense of cohesion.

It is also important to recognize the increased sense of self-esteem that the VSL program brought to members, especially women. The availability of finance has enabled a significant number of group members to conduct their first entrepreneurial activities, and the resulting successful generation of cash has brought them new standing within their families and a greater sense of worth within their communities, resulting in more active participation in community discussions.

In addition to these benefits from VSL loans, it was observed that in the majority of cases, a significant proportion of the accumulated capital was held in reserve as an emergency fund for the community. The team learned of a number of instances in which medical operations had been financed from this reserve and lives had been saved as a result. In one specific case, two VSL groups in one village intended to pool their accumulated capital and purchase a small truck to carry their vegetable produce to markets in Freetown. The team noted that this was entirely feasible and that the combined net worth of the two groups was already sufficient to obtain a loan from commercial sources for such a project.¹⁷ The VSL programs are thus able to strengthen both individual and community resources.

The group basis of the VSL program is a key element for success, coupled with well-defined bylaws and procedures that ensure complete transparency and accountability. Observation of VSL operations showed a strict adherence to procedure, full attention by members and well-moderated discussion concerning beneficiaries and loan amounts. It was clear that the fundamental principles of the activity had been well established and that initial supervision had been adequate to ensure continuity.

The satisfactory operation of each group and adherence to procedure was also enhanced by the skills generated by the Functional Literacy Courses and the Making Cents training. Without fundamental numeracy and literacy, the required procedures (record keeping and basic loan accounting) could not operate as effectively as they clearly did, while without basic business training, beneficiaries would be much less likely to be able to repay their loans. Beneficiaries of two VSL groups set up by CARE in one village noted that they had assisted a third group to become established by passing on knowledge of bylaws and procedures, but were concerned that that group would be unsustainable without the provision of training in functional literacy and business management. They (and other VSL groups canvassed) were adamant that these skills were essential to the successful operation of the VSL program. This is of concern, since although the VSL concept is self-sustaining, its replicability, which is potentially high (as assessed by the demand from non-members) may be limited by the availability of training to develop essential literacy and business skills.

2.6. Market Information Systems Development

CRS was tasked with establishing a national level market price information system capable of gathering and disseminating regular price information on key commodities in the country. This information is then passed on to SFCG for inclusion in its weekly radio programme, produced by SFCG's Talking Drum Studio. This is broadcast on 7 radio stations in the country, including one in each of the target districts. This program includes reports on program activities and interviews with beneficiaries and program officials. It also includes a segment on market prices in key markets in the target districts as well as in Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni. The market information is collected and compiled by CRS through its network of field agents and is passed on to SFCG for inclusion in the radio program. The program is produced in Krio (the lingua franca in the country) and is broadcast mainly in the evenings.

From all indications, this radio program has been very successful, and is reputed by virtually all those interviewed to have been largely responsible for empowering farmers to maximize income from their produce. The majority of program beneficiaries reported that they listen to the program, although many of them do not listen very regularly. Not surprising is the fact that the market price segment is the most popular part of the program. In fact, it was apparent that the majority of those interviewed only listen to the segment that deals with market prices, as many could not identify the other segments or issues reported or dealt with in the program. This is to be expected and should not be viewed as a failure on the part of the program to meet its target.

¹⁷ Although the VSL groups themselves also recognized that they would need further assistance in the development of a business plan for such a project to be successful.

While language is a factor in listenership, the use of Krio rather than the various other local languages has not significantly affected the program's effectiveness, since those who cannot understand Krio in the various communities always have people available to explain to them what is being said.

The impact of these radio programs, particularly the market information has been profound, as all those interviewed expressed the view that it has had a major impact on their capacity to generate income through sales of their produce. They gave several examples of how the market information has helped increase their income through their being able to make informed decisions on prices and market outlets. Although some traders felt they were now slightly disadvantaged, even they acknowledged that on the whole, the program is beneficial to both farmers and traders, because it provides them with choices.

The importance attached to this segment of the radio program by the beneficiaries and its success is indicated by the fact that even those who did not have direct access to radios were able to get the information through reports from friends and neighbors.

In order to ensure continuity of the radio programs at the end of the project life, SFCG has encouraged the radio stations in the target districts to produce their own local radio programs on agriculture. Consequently the three radio stations in the districts now produce weekly radio agriculture programs. These programs have also had significant impact on agricultural productivity in these districts because they have been able to provide farmers with important information related to agriculture. All the radio station managers, however, expressed the need for logistics support to enable them carry on the programs, and one of them has had to limit the activities covered in the program to those taking place in the district headquarters, due to logistics constraints.

3. ASSESSMENT OF CROSS-CUTTING ELEMENTS

3.1. Gender

Traditionally, most cultures in Sierra Leone do not encourage women to speak in public meetings, hold public office, lead in community activities, or share equally in household decision making. Adult males traditionally hold forth; which has given little space for youth males to decide their own participation in activities. In many cases, youth males have broken away from their communities and longer are dominated by these practices. However, those youth who remain in their villages are still haphazardly represented at the community level.

CORAD has successfully integrated youth and women at the village level. Women and men, adults and youth, have fairly equitable gender representation in all CORAD activities. Women generally outnumber men in the Savings and Literacy training and in some VSLs. Men slightly predominate in some FFS. Making Cents and SUGs show gender equity. The strategy to encourage youth and women's participation has been culturally appropriate and hands on. After meetings with District Councils, CORAD members requested audience with village elders, Village Development Councils (VDCs), Chiefs and paramount Chiefs in order to gain their support for encouraging participation by these groups. Some leaders were initially resistant; however, the rationale that the entire community would benefit by broader participation gained support. Furthermore, in many communities women take a more active role in petty trading than men and so training women in business skills seemed sensible.

The positive outcomes of the CORAD activities are noted at the household and community level. Participants noted that there is more peace in the families wherein women are now able to further contribute to school fees, medicine and food costs. Men and women are sharing their new knowledge with

those spouses that did not participate in the Making Cents or Savings and Literacy training with the result that these households are improving their profits and have savings to meet unexpected expenses. There is pride among those that can now sign their names and hope that they will be able to read and write business contracts and educational posters in towns.

Beyond the household level, men and women and youth appear comfortable debating ideas within their CORAD activities. Labor is still largely designated along cultural patterns, e.g. youth males plow and women weed. However, males are now engaged in some traditionally female work such as food processing of cassava to garri. Younger widowed women with children stated that now men are interested in marrying them as a result of their new skills and successes. Some older widowed women said they are enjoying more food security as they can afford to pay for youth labor on their farms. Youth males have gained appreciation for the economic opportunities provided at the village level and are proud of their new status.

However, there remain some areas where gender concerns could be addressed. Most households combine petty trading and farming to survive. Women undertake many farming labors, however, it appears that few men are interested in petty trading opportunities, which is therefore also undertaken predominantly by the women. In most FGDs and individual interviews, men said that women were better at trading/business and women spoke to how their profits contributed to the family. There is a clear need to sensitize the male population as to the benefits of their greater participation in business opportunities so that a more equitable division of labor can be developed. Currently this is not the case, the provision of microfinance is adding to the work-load of women and male youth are not taking up the potential opportunities that the loans present.

3.2. Social mobilization and Governance

GROUP FORMATION AND STRENGTHENING

In many LINKS communities project participants had a history of group farm work and house building. There was widespread practice of 'osusu', a form of weekly financial contribution and rotating distribution of monies to all members. In some cases, group farming and house building practices were limited to exchanges within extended families. In addition, certain communities, as well as some individuals who had resided in refugee camps, had benefited from other donor and NGO interventions that introduced group structures, group work and group management of development activities prior to LINKS interventions.

The CORAD Group activities strengthened and improved upon these existing groups and in some cases introduced group cohesion to isolated communities. No group strengthening was abstract in terms of the purpose of group structuring and objectives. All CORAD group strengthening revolved around significant income generating and/or food security activities relevant to beneficiaries' daily lives. Groups' trainings had direct and immediate impact on improving income and/or food levels.

LINKS training materials, such the Savings and Literacy Course One on Group Cohesion used pictures and text that reinforced gender balance in representation among members and executives and participation in decision-making. Course One also emphasized the need for transparency and accountability and the need for record keeping as well as verbal summaries of important information and decisions. Groups were reconfigured to a manageable size of 30 (average) members and those members were selected by the community to represent most households. Despite the fact that most CORAD extension agents are male, LINKS made many successful efforts to engage more women than men. In addition, some women-only and youth-only groups were promoted.

In those communities visited by the Evaluation team, it appeared that bylaws were well established and practiced. Groups are encouraged to meet on a regular basis, and it appeared that this process was implemented. Groups seemed to be consistent in upholding fines for agreed upon offenses, e.g. tardiness. They were consistent regarding sympathy for solving and assisting individual problems, e.g. a small short-term loan for a medical cost. In addition, contribution to group discussions and decision-making appeared to engage men and women quite equally with the exception of young mothers.¹⁸

Executive positions were to be shared equally by men and women if possible, with two women in executive positions at a minimum. However, men dominate in the executive roles. In most cases, men hold the Secretary position, as women do not have the needed literacy skills to maintain records. In most cases, it appeared that the executives were diligent in reporting the group progress or financial matters, but some members still had difficulty keeping track of progress.

CORAD members said it was difficult to find women to hold the position of farmer facilitator in the FFS. However, this did not seem to discourage women from participating in the FFS. There appeared to be little say on the part of men or women members regarding labor inputs to the pilot plots, as usually a 'work planner' was designated and everyone fell into line. How FFS groups extended their labor planning to their individual farms was not detailed consistently.

Group structure, work and management have shown many significant impacts. All members of the FFS now have a significant labor pool - the other members- exchanging farm labor amongst them. This has helped in expanding farm acreage and production practices. The restructuring of the VSL has provided some groups the ability to lend to significant amounts to non-members in their village and in other villages. Interest earnings have helped address many events, e.g., funerals, marriages, illness, and pregnancy complications.

Communities have now taken group work into systematic rebuilding and renovating of homes across the membership. In some cases these group work structures have implemented community infrastructure. In addition, some non-LINKS beneficiaries in these communities have begun their own VSLs with advisement from members.

Whereas individual LINKS groups have shown improved self-reliance and significant impact on income and food security, the confederated groups of FFS, youth, women and VSLs are in the very early stages or still to be structured. At this point in time, the established confederations appear to be focused on sharing information across members regarding good practices and the addressing of some common problems, e.g. availability of transportation to take perishable foods to market. There has yet to be an awakening that group strength can be harnessed to pressure for improvements or supports to their concerns from local or national authorities. Some individual members and some individual groups have raised issues with local authorities but have not seen adequate response.

GOVERNANCE

LINKS activities have successfully introduced and strengthened grassroots democratic culture. However, LINKS activities have fallen short of influencing District development planning, District level sectoral policy and national policy. The grassroots groups encouraged by LINKS have little to no dialogue with local or national authorities.

¹⁸ Of all the subgroups - adult and youth males and female - young women, particularly young mothers appear the most reluctant to speak in groups. However, the CORAD team said this was in part due to shyness before 'strangers' (the Evaluation team).

The confederation of groups to include advocacy and engage in regular development dialogue and planning with local authorities could be enhanced. However, this step would need to be tempered by the realities of local government authority versus local government resources. Some significant authority and responsibility has devolved to the District level, but there are little financial resources to support these objectives. Administrative costs alone eat much of the District budget. Regarding other capacity concerns, it was observed in Koinadugu that illegal teak wood extraction was widespread and that District Council had not been able to stop the practice.

Most project beneficiaries were not familiar with District Development Plan - including their own village or ward - nor its budget or the amount of money generated from local tax and market revenues. This information is posted on the exterior walls of the District Council offices but apparently not regularly disseminated or in some cases not communicated fully by the Ward authorities and Chiefs. The formation of District Councils is relatively recent (2004) and beneficiary expectations range widely from expecting clinics, schools, community centers, drying pads, roads and markets in most communities to no service delivery other than veterinarian support.

In many cases, the District has designated Ward-level officials with no input by communities and there is little awareness on the part of these communities regarding how these Ward and District structures are meant to serve them. It appeared that most communities still reported their concerns and priorities to the Chiefs, local and paramount rather than to the Ward or District structure.

Most beneficiaries said that they would rather work with NGOs than local authorities because NGOs spend time with them in their communities to reinforce skills and progress. Also, there is widespread belief that money passing through government hands diminishes with each pass so that little reaches the communities. In addition, a number of NACSA sponsored schools have hired outside contractors who have built shoddily constructed schools and community grievances have not been adequately addressed.

LINKS groups should continue on their path of self-reliance. USAID and other donors will need to encourage the GOSL's devolution of funds to the District level before these local structures can be perceived to be representative, legitimate and viable governance actors. Although the practice of communications between Ward, District and communities could be enhanced without devolved funds, the outcome of this more intense dialogue without concrete service and infrastructure delivery might be frustrating.

Given the current limits of District Council budgets to implement local development, additional facilitation is suggested to bring confederated grassroots groups representatives directly with national policy makers, e.g. an annual event whereby grassroots interact directly with policy makers. Advocacy training should be part of the technical assistance package for preparing confederated groups for these dialogues.

Confederation building efforts should emphasize internal resource mobilization and the focusing of objectives, so that the confederations have a strong chance for arriving at the resource base needed to undertake and achieve a particular objective. The confederations should commit to rotating its resource allocation within the membership areas. Objectives settings would have to be carried out on a small scale, e.g., 10 to 25 individual groups clustered to combine their resources to build a periodic market. In subsequent years, the monies raised could be applied to other sites of the individual groups and objectives within the confederation. For example, the year following the building of a periodic market could be devoted to improving water service to an individual group village. These monies might be matched with GOSL resources and technical advice and/or NGO and donor resources.

Grameen Bank Approach

The use of the Grameen Bank model for multi-sectoral development and grass-roots democracy could be employed across all SOs. This model has already been successfully adapted to many different cultural contexts and is extremely cost-effective. The Grameen Bank model allows its participants to address poverty through income-generating activities and group savings-and-loans, and training and support for internal DG practices, particularly those related to representation, decision-making, gender equity, transparency and accountability. The model reinforces attention to the myriad conditions that create poverty and supports grassroots problem-solving skills. For example, members of the Grameen Bank groups identify core causes of poverty and adopt a set of behavioral practices in order to address these, including: health and hygiene (improving habits that might contribute to disease and related medical costs; losses of perishable food; the education of children, particularly girls; the promotion of natural resource management, particularly sources of water and trees; and, among its membership, the abolishment of key cultural practices that plunge families into economic straits and/or discriminate against females. In addition, many of these organized groups move on to mobilizing for political representation.

The Grameen Bank practice of introducing life enhancing skills to its members (see box), is well suited to the group structures that have been developed under LINKS and future interventions could use the VSL groups in particular as effective channels for the introduction and strengthening of key practices.

The grassroots democratic culture could be further strengthened by introducing groups to focused human rights and civic education on concrete examples that resonate directly in peoples' lives, e.g. the right for all children to education, the rights to health care, water, the related process and government structures responsible for support of these services. Furthermore, focusing human rights and civic education on concrete examples that resonate directly in peoples' lives will have a much greater chance of being understood and applied than a more

formal pedagogic approach outlining broad legal frameworks and/or charters describing these rights and responsibilities.

3.3. Capacity Development

The team noted that the combination of skills development, asset provision (either through grants or loans) and participatory group formation and strengthening is a fundamental aspect of the LINKS program that has promoted capacity development very effectively and contributed substantially towards sustainability.

At the village level, the formation and development of cohesive VSL and FFS groups had resulted in significant changes in output (beneficiaries reported the increased efficiencies of working together), improvements in planning and decision-making and in the involvement of women in all these processes. These changes were highlighted by the responses of village groups that had not been part of the project. In this case, although the groups had some element of cohesion, they appeared unable to work together on a sustainable basis, to plan for the future or to indicate their priority needs without external assistance. Such group formation was further enhanced by the development of literacy, numeracy and business management skills, which could be seen to contribute to transparency in group activities, to enhanced planning capacity (the "Making Cents" resource allocation module was frequently referred to during discussions on the management of group assets) and to success in the business activities of groups. Finally, group capacity was further enhanced through the provision of cash or physical resources that allowed each group to make good use of its skills and to progress in development.

However, it was also quite evident that ongoing supervision was required beyond the initial start-up period for capacity development to be truly effective. In some cases it was seen that initiatives had been

started that were not progressing beyond a basic level due to a lack of ongoing assistance,¹⁹ and while it may be possible to let some interventions such as VSL and FSF groups run with minimal supervision after a year, others, particularly group business activities that will face new and different challenges at each stage of their development may require continual input over a two or three year period.

It is also evident that there is a ceiling to the development of existing enterprises, both in terms of size and nature of activities, which are restricted by the skill levels of beneficiaries. In addition to the need for ongoing supervision, many beneficiaries expressed a need for further training in the more detailed aspects of business, particularly in the development of business plans, in finance and loan application and management, and in the development of new business outlets. Such training would allow the existing businesses to develop beyond their current ceiling, to become sources of employment in their own rights and therefore to contribute to a multiplier effect of LINKS impacts.

Notwithstanding the above, beneficiaries universally indicated that the combination of LINKS initiatives had contributed substantially towards capacity development at the household, village group and business level and that such development was expected to be of lasting benefit.

3.4. Communication

The LINKS project has six clearly definable audiences as far as communication is concerned. These are as follows:

- national government,
- local government,
- youths at community level,
- youths at mezzo level
- other individuals and groups involved in farming
- other individuals and groups involved in agro-business enterprises

With four of these audiences, the communication strategies adopted have proved quite successful. Through the youth dialogues and radio programs, youths at both community and mezzo levels have been empowered to access the opportunities available under the project. The rate of uptake of these opportunities is however significantly lower for youths in the urban and peri-urban areas. This indicates that a different communication strategy needs to be employed for this audience. As noted earlier, the attitudes and needs of this category of youths are quite different from those of their community-based counterparts. The communication strategy needs to take this into account for the project to fully understand the attitudes of the urban and peri-urban youths in order to either cater effectively for them or devise a strategy to change their attitudes and bring them more fully into the current program. The latter will be more difficult to achieve and will require a period of sustained engagement using peer group role models.

The strategies employed for relating to the farming and agro-business audiences have been very successful. The channel of communication in this case has been mainly radio programs done in the lingua franca (Krio), and it is in this area more than any other that SFCG has been most effective. Using a team of correspondents based in the districts, the program has been able to effectively capture and address the issues relevant to the audience, reflecting their views and experiences through interviews. Through the market price segment, it has obviously had a major impact on productivity and household incomes in the

¹⁹ For example, two garri-processing units were observed to be producing well below the potential of the investment, the market and the raw material availability due to limited business management skills.

target districts through empowering farmers to make informed decisions about sale of their produce. This is however the area most at risk of not being sustainable.

CRS currently manages the market price database through its network of field agents making regular visits to the identified daily and periodic markets. Some interest has been shown by the World Bank to establish a nationwide price information system that will eventually be based in the MAFS, with CRS providing training and advisory services. Discussions with the World Bank team are ongoing. The funds earmarked for this are however inadequate in the view of CRS, thus putting a question mark on its viability.

The importance of the market price information to the continued growth of farming activities in the target districts cannot be overemphasized. It is therefore imperative that it be made sustainable. Currently the radio stations in the target districts are producing their own agriculture programs, but with limited capacity for outreach to capture the views and experiences of farmers in the rural areas. If these locally produced programs are to eventually replace the SFCG program, then it may be worth exploring the possibility of empowering these radio stations to capture the views and concerns of the rural farmers. This will require capacity building through training as well as logistics support. In addition, in order to ensure the effective use of the proposed nationwide market price information system, capacity to disseminate the information to radio stations in a timely manner should also be built into the system. This could be achieved through the use of mobile telephony (text messaging).

LINKS has been quite successful in communicating at local government level and there is clearly support for project activities from both district and chiefdom levels. Although there are constraints to maintain the monthly District Coordination Committee meetings, the lines of communication seem to have been well established and dialogue has been taking place on a continued basis, thus ensuring that project activities fit into district development plans.

The major shortcoming observed in the LINKS communication strategy is its effort to influence government policy through the use of video documentaries and newspaper inserts. It is clear that both channels are not achieving any significant results. In the case of the video documentaries, there are problems with professional quality, which seriously militate against their effectiveness. There are also problems with the capacity of both SLBS and ABC TV stations to reach the target audience. The newspaper inserts are also not effectively communicating with the target audience for reasons mentioned earlier.

While well-crafted video material could attract the attention of the target audience and effective use of the print media reinforce the message, there will still be need for a more direct engagement with government in order for the project to significantly influence government policy. This engagement needs to take the form of sustained advocacy through regular briefings of government at ministerial level. The briefings should include visits to project sites and discussion with project beneficiaries, screening of video clips of project activities and testimonials of beneficiaries. This may need to be facilitated at ambassadorial level

3.5. Ownership of Interventions

The participatory nature of the group formation processes and the element of independent choice inherent in SUG and Finance Salone-financed projects promotes a strong sense of ownership of most interventions by LINKS project beneficiaries. The same is true of Farmer Field Schools, wherein the groups choose for themselves the types of experiments that they wish to conduct. As a result, group interest in the ongoing trials is maintained and the overall environment is conducive to the transfer of knowledge from the field agent. The extent of the group ownership could be gauged by the survival of FFS groups beyond the first cycle and into the stage when they are largely self maintained through the support of their own farmer

facilitators. In the case of the VSL groups, members demonstrated a strong sense of commitment to the group and to the VSL practices and it was quite apparent that the VSL groups more than one year old were no longer dependent upon external assistance to maintain their coherence.

There are only two areas of LINKS in which the ownership of the interventions is questionable, namely the MIS component and some Capital Grant projects. In the first case, it has proved difficult to find an organization with resources adequate to take ownership of the MIS system and to carry out the necessary data collection and dissemination. This is regrettable since the MIS was regularly quoted by both farmers and traders as a useful source of information that helped them select profitable markets for crop sales. In the second case, the team noted that specific capital grant items were not always in keeping with group requirements²⁰. Under such circumstances, it was not surprising that the group felt a limited sense of ownership of the intervention. However, these were exceptions and in general it was observed that capital grant items were well suited to beneficiary needs and were generally well utilized.

Overall, it was clear to the evaluation team that the LINKS interventions were highly relevant to individual and/or community needs and had been well taken up by the vast majority of beneficiaries.

3.6. Appropriate Technology Usage

The technologies introduced within the LINKS program were for the most part related to agricultural practices and new varieties of seed, together with some basic machinery for garri processing. In many, but not all cases, new planting techniques, cultivation methods and processing technologies have included a gender analysis of how these new labors will be distributed. Overall, the technologies were seen to be generally appropriate and relevant to local needs and capacities for maintenance and repair.

The one possible exception to this was the use of machine-driven garri processing equipment in the more remote rural areas that was of a substantially greater rated capacity than potential supply or demand, and for which repairs might prove problematic.²¹ It was also noted that the capacities of such machine-driven equipment far outstripped the capacities of the associated presses, sieves and parching trays and ovens.

In such instances, closer supervision might have led to the development of a more balanced process. It was observed that in most cases, machine-powered garri processing units were not operating at any greater capacities overall than hand-powered units. The appropriateness of the machine-driven technology for garri processing is questionable unless adequate business management advice is provided to ensure effective utilization.

However, although the technology introduced has been appropriate, the team observed that it has been somewhat limited in its scope. The high level of post harvest losses reported in FDGs suggests that, further attention on post-harvest processing for storage and/or the reduction of spoilage beyond garri processing would be a cost-effective way to increase household food security.

Substantial and potentially expensive food-drying facilities are being considered for development, although the technology exists elsewhere that would allow the immediate introduction of inexpensive and low-tech solar dryer for the preservation of perishable foods. Some rice mills have been introduced; however, the post-harvest processing of grains – largely women’s labor – has not been addressed in any systematic fashion. In addition, there are a number of inexpensive appropriate technologies that that could

²⁰ In one specific instance a motorized garri processor has been supplied to a group that already owns one motorized machine, but has a dysfunctional press. The group’s productivity would be increased threefold if the redundant machine were replaced by a new or repaired press.

²¹ In one instance, machinery with a rated capacity of 1 MT per hour had processed less than this amount in the last six months.

be made by communities themselves that would reduce labor related to wood fuel use, e.g. improved cooking stoves made of local material, and thereby release labor for agricultural production. The FFS and VSL groups could provide useful entry points for such technologies.

Transport technologies have not yet been effectively addressed. A number of motorized tricycles have only recently been distributed and cannot yet be properly evaluated. No other initiatives were observed.

In summary, the technologies introduced to date are focus on planting methods and to a limited extent processing, rather than the broader array of conditions that underpin food security issues. Further opportunities exist for CORAD to enhance household food security through the adoption of a wider range of appropriate technologies.

3.7. Environmental Impacts

Regarding agricultural activities, the scale of natural resource use by the FFS pilot plots is currently quite small. The application of FFS technology to individual farms is creating expanded farms and greater use of swamplands. In some case the CORAD members are introducing livestock to communities, or communities are purchasing work oxen and ruminants with SUGs.

These trends taken altogether have the potential for negatively effecting watersheds and increasing deforestation. It is not uncommon for livestock owners to burn forest and brush areas to encourage new grass growth. The expansion of farm fields also deforests adjoining lands. Some beneficiaries noted that increased swamp use has already begun to lower water levels in the smaller streams that fed these areas. Given these realities and the potential for long-term resource stress and devastation, it would be reasonable to introduce appropriate elements of agro forestry practices as well as soil and water conservation practices to the members of the FFS.

The environmental impact of petty trading appears to be negligible with the exception of solid waste disposal issues created by the random discarding of commodities packaging. Some of the CORAD communities have been involved in CARE health training (a non LINKS activity) and implement monthly solid waste removal in their communities. This result was positive and striking compared to the debris seen in other communities. Solid waste disposal could be part of the package of life enhancing skills suggested to CORAD communities.

Compared to many of its West African neighbors, Sierra Leone is blessed with still significant forest cover and watershed. During the field trip the stress on these resources became apparent to the Evaluation Team. Apart from destructive agricultural and livestock practices, illegal logging was widespread in Kailahun and the opening of the Manoe Bridge significantly increases the opportunity for sale of poached endangered species. Messages regarding the economic and food security or agricultural importance of protecting these resources for future generations and possible tourism could be integrated into the LINKS radio program.

4. KEY FACTORS AFFECTING PROGRAM SUCCESS

This Chapter considers both the underlying principles that have contributed to the success of the initiatives described in Chapter 6 and to the LINKS project as a whole and the key constraints limiting project impact.

4.1. Integration of Interventions

While individual LINKS activities may generate some impact, the team noted the strong synergism between the different program activities and this was reinforced by beneficiary responses. Numerous FDGs emphasized the need for a complete package of assistance and were unable to identify the individual interventions that they considered to be most useful. Strong synergism was noted between the FFS and VSL interventions on the one hand and between both of these elements and the Functional Literacy and Business Management training on the other. The same applied to Start Up Grants and Capital Interventions, which were supported by training in the same way, while further complementarity was observed between Start up Grants and subsequent Finance Salone interventions.

This holistic approach is a positive characteristic of the overall program design and has a notable impact on the ground. It was not as completely adopted in some districts as in others, but it was clearly observed that greater impact and sustainability was achieved where it was being applied.

Integration is further enhanced through the communication element of the program, which creates increased opportunities for profitable business through the MIS. The successes of the FFS have also been quite effectively communicated to other communities, groups, institutions and individuals both through radio programs and the agricultural shows that have provided opportunities for them to showcase these achievements.

4.2. Participatory Methodology

LINKS interventions were selected in the design phase; however, the LINKS project has integrated participatory mechanisms throughout its implementation of interventions. Participatory dialogues with all segments of the community populations, including chiefs and traditional leaders, have encouraged participation in activities by men, women and youth. Existing societal structures were identified where possible and transformed, e.g. from osusu to VSL.

Capacity building has been strengthened through a reiterative process that went beyond initial planned modules. Self reliance has been reinforced and self initiating has been supported by SUGs, loans, FFS and VSLs. FFS select their own agricultural experiments from an array of choices; VSL, FFS, and SUG beneficiaries selected their own enterprises.

Group formation ranged from those persons interested volunteering to participate, to those individuals meeting certain criteria, to communities recommending membership in order to spread benefits amongst households. Applications of LINKS' supported skills and capacities went beyond activity objectives; e.g. from FFS work plans to sharing labor on community house construction. In many cases, beneficiaries prioritized loans and assistance in skills building that would enable them to further improve their lives over the top down and external delivery of material goods, infrastructure items and grants.

Participatory engagement of the District level has been strong on the part of CORAD members, but not so their communities. Likewise, participatory engagement at the National level has been limited to GOSL interest in the MIS.

4.3. Development of Pre-existing Initiatives

The evaluation team noted that in many cases LINKS interventions were developed around community initiatives that pre-dated the program²². These existing structures and practices allowed for the rapid

²² A number of VSL groups were based around pre-existing Osusu groups, some FFS groups had already been established and were effectively upgraded by LINKS interventions, some garri processing introduced previously by

adoption of LINKS methodologies; the overlay maintained a strong sense of community ownership and initiative.

In most cases, the LINKS interventions transformed and strengthened these prior initiatives, resulting in substantially increased impact. Additionally, the LINKS interventions that built upon an integrated community-based programs had greater impact than those working across less integrated sectoral development activities, particularly following initiatives built by non-CORAD organizations. The exceptions appeared to be: when the same CORAD partner and staff continued in the same communities that had shown an integrated approach for sectoral success, e.g. CARE health and hygiene activities incorporated illness source identification and problem solving methods and was then followed by LINKS; and if certain skills, e.g. soap making, were taught to individuals in refugee camps prior to their return to their communities.

4.4. Concentration of Resources

It was observed that the concentration of project management resources in limited areas resulted in both improved supervision and more sustainable progress by the beneficiary groups. Less supervision resulted in somewhat weaker groups. The CORAD field staff is more skilled and experienced than their community facilitators, therefore their supervision and reinforcement of the facilitators over time appears to be vital for sustainability. District Councils unanimously preferred to see Consortium members operating over wider areas, either because they wished to see more development being achieved, and/or because a more equitable distribution of assistance would be politically expedient. This pressure should be resisted if possible.

4.5. Attitudinal Development

Field staff emphasized the importance of developing a positive beneficiary attitude in order to achieve sustainable development. Such attitudinal development was not well described, but could be assessed as an increased “self-help” mentality, increased business acumen, reduced donor dependence, increased self determination and a sense that the future need not be worse than the present. It was also recognized that such change can only be a gradual process and it may take up to five years before it can pervade an entire community. Nevertheless, such change is essential to the developmental process. Without an attitude of self-determination amongst target groups, sustainability will be limited and new initiatives will not begin.

The development of a positive attitude can be enhanced by four key interventions:

- Training – both technical and commercial.
- Development of local role models, e.g. farmer facilitators and teachers for functional literacy.
- Exposure to success – “seeing is believing” was a phrase heard at every field visit.
- Provision of opportunity – generally the inputs (grants, loans or productive assets) necessary to begin new income generating activities.

These four elements are all essential if a positive attitude is to be successfully developed and are strongly reinforced when introduced within a group scenario in which individuals with less aptitude can be initially supported by other group members.

the FAO into Konno District was further developed under the LINKS program, while the input supply interventions in Koidu and Kabala built upon the experience and expertise of groups or individuals who had already been involved in the input supply business

It is trite, but effectively true that:

Attitude without opportunity= frustration
Opportunity without attitude= non-sustainability
Attitude + opportunity= sustainable development

To a considerable extent, the combined LINKS interventions are both promoting the development of an attitude of self-determination and effectively providing a sound “framework of opportunity” within which sustainable development can take place. Some of the initiatives that achieve this may appear limited in impact, but the significance of the approach cannot be overemphasized. Interventions that have an initially small commercial impact (such as VSL groups) nevertheless had a substantial positive impact upon beneficiary attitude, which was undoubtedly stimulating replication and self-determination. Those beneficiaries who have participated in such groups could be expected to be effective recipients of future, more complex interventions.

Overall, LINKS is successfully managing a shift in community attitudes away from the more immediate and external delivery modes that were characteristic of the DRP and towards increased self-reliance and longer-term development practices. However, it is easier to provide relief in a three-year time frame than it is to inculcate sustainable development. A two or three year intervention will not be adequate to generate the required impact. Ongoing programs should sustain and develop the initiatives that have begun under LINKS to the point where positive changes in attitude have become embedded in the community. This may take another three years in the communities that have been assisted to date and longer elsewhere.

4.6. Linkages with Government

CORAD members have shown consistent relationships and dialogue with Chief level and Village level authorities. In fact, it was noted by the project team that when CORAD field agents and other staff arrived at the community level, the first step taken was to speak to the Chief and other elders to let them know the purpose of their visit and duration of their stay. Elders confirmed that this was a normal practice.

According to District and Ward officials, two CORAD members had provided them appropriate and timely information whereas one member was perceived to be adequate but more ad hoc in this practice. It should be noted that the three Districts have somewhat differing practices in terms of NGO and donor coordination. This is in part due to the less frequent dialogue practiced by some of the non-CORAD project teams serving in those Districts and in part due to the fact that the Districts are still consolidating their planning practices with these development actors. One District made a point of saying that not all USAID-funded project teams were as good at reporting in and planning with the Councils as CORAD. This Council would like to see CORAD practices to be adopted across the board by all USAID-funded project teams.

The practice of quarterly planning meetings to integrate external NGO and donor resources is becoming more common across Districts. All district officials acknowledge that donor and NGO resources are their most consistent development resources (other than government support to administration costs) and that coordination of these resources is very important.

However, one frustration on the part of these Districts regarding CORAD is that communities were selected during the project design and that the Districts had little influence in changing these selections. District officials are under political pressure to spread CORAD benefits across all the Wards. However, they recognized that CORAD is building on the DRP. One outstanding indication that CORAD has good

relations with District authorities is that all three Districts requested that CORAD be continued and expanded across all their Wards.

4.7. Cost-Effectiveness

Analysis of field budgets and expenditure indicates that almost all LINKS interventions have been extremely cost-effective. Even those that do not appear to be sustainable at current cost recovery rates nevertheless achieve considerable developmental impact at a low cost. Brief analyses are given below:

VSL GROUPS

Data for 32 VSL groups indicated a total training cost of \$520, i.e. \$16 per group or approximately ¢55 per beneficiary (assuming an average group size of 30 people). To this might be added the cost of supervision, which would amount to \$72 per group per year (i.e. \$2 per person), if supervision were intensive (i.e. attendance at every VSL meeting – this would only be necessary in exceptional cases). Thus for a total cost of \$2.55, beneficiaries might receive individual loans that were seen to be generating at least \$3.00 as interest alone and considerably more as profit. In more than one instance, accumulated group funds had reached a total of \$55 per beneficiary. The figures show that from the limited perspective of financial impact alone, the intervention is extremely cost-effective without considering the additional benefits in social and personal development.

FFS GROUPS

Costs of FFS formation and support will vary according to location, but in Koinadugu, 52 FFS groups comprising 1,488 participants had been formed and supported at a total cost of \$15,118 (i.e. a cost of \$10.16 per participant). This is significantly higher than the cost of VSL formation and support, and increases to \$11.57 per participant if the additional cost of capital grant items is also included. Nevertheless, this cost must be compared with the benefits accrued by each member. FDGs reported an average increase of two months rice supply as a result of FFS participation²³. For an average household of five this is worth approximately \$36 per year²⁴ or \$72 over the duration of the project, suggesting that the intervention is cost-effective and will become increasingly so over time.

FINANCE SALONE

As discussed in the preceding section, the annual cost of administering Finance Salone amounts to approximately \$9 per beneficiary, or more than 12% of the total revolved funds. When compared with the costs and returns from the FFS activities, it is quite apparent that this figure is undoubtedly recovered in the profit generated by beneficiaries, which in interest plus collateral payments alone exceeds this amount²⁵. Nevertheless, the cost is unsustainably high and raises concerns as to the long-term future of this useful intervention.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL LITERACY TRAINING

Although there are concerns regarding the costing and sustainability of the “Making Cents” training, at its current cost of \$3.3 per person, it appears to be extremely cost-effective and was rated by paying beneficiaries as providing good value for the money spent. They report that in terms of the impact upon businesses and daily lives, this course will allow recovery of the funds within two months and benefits

²³ Although in practice this would be hard to disaggregate from the effects of other initiatives.

²⁴ Based on the assumption that a family of 5 will consume 40 kg of rice per month at a cost of Le 70,000 per 50kg.

²⁵ Loans are repaid at rates of 10%, 15% and 20% per cycle (normally 6 months). Much of this amount represents collateral accumulation.

will continue to accrue thereafter. The cost of the more fundamental functional literacy course is expected to be significantly higher at \$50 per beneficiary for the entire four-module course and \$30 for the first two modules delivered to date. This cost may be prohibitive, but it is too early to assess its true value or cost-effectiveness.

START-UP GRANTS AND CAPITAL GRANTS

Beneficiaries regularly stated that the start-up grants of \$83 per person had a significant positive impact upon business development. This was not unexpected. It might be argued that such expenditure is significantly higher than the amounts spent on FFS, VSL groups or on training. However, the development of trading capacity is essential to the growth of both traders and producers and injections of capital of this size may prove cost-effective in this regard. Ultimately, cost-effectiveness will depend upon the extent to which the businesses that have been supported are able to survive and grow and this can be assisted to a considerable extent by further ongoing supervision. It was notable that few SUG beneficiaries requested further capital injections. Instead they were looking for further training and advice to help them to develop their businesses more effectively.

The same considerations apply to the significantly larger capital grants. Compared with the costs of other interventions, the cost-effectiveness of capital injections of up to \$12,500 may appear questionable, but if properly managed, the recipient enterprises will be able to benefit more than 1000 producers and justify the investment. Much depends however upon the adequacy of follow-up supervision.

COMMUNICATIONS

The cost-effectiveness of the communications element of the LINKS program is not readily assessed. The positive impact of the MIS would suggest that it should be cost-effective, but farmer and trader beneficiaries are not in a position to contribute to its maintenance. The dialogue process was a useful part of the LINKS program, but again it is difficult to compare impact with cost. However, the newspaper inserts (which proved more expensive than originally estimated) have clearly not been cost-effective when assessed against impacts on national policy.

Overall, the team observed that almost all of the LINKS interventions appeared to be cost-effective, some extremely so. In other cases, (SUGs and Capital Grants) cost-effectiveness will be very dependent upon ongoing support to beneficiaries.

4.8. Constraints

ROADS

This evaluation was carried out before the long rains had begun and consequently the team had no difficulty reaching all the pre-selected project sites. However, it was obvious that once the rains have begun, many of the smaller feeder roads will become impassable to most traffic. In discussions with rural FFS and VSL groups, the topic of improved road access to periodic markets and urban centers was raised repeatedly by beneficiaries. Both producers and traders alike complained that there was little point in increasing production to commercial levels if their produce could not be taken to market.

It is evident that although the LINKS project can achieve a degree of impact under the current conditions, the poor state of the feeder road network significantly diminishes that impact and will effectively cap development at a low level. Unless the roads network can be improved, transaction costs will remain prohibitively high, reducing the prices paid to producers and increasing costs to the consumer, reducing the pace at which development can occur.

The condition of the feeder road network severely constrains the ability of project staff to reach beneficiaries in outlying areas. Journeys to some villages take days rather than hours so that staff take more time traveling than actually working with beneficiaries, reducing the extent of supervision and increasing the manpower required to achieve the desired impact.²⁶

It is recognized that this constraint lies beyond the scope of this program, but it is important to note that this is a significant factor affecting the degree of project success, which would be that much greater given an improved road network. Currently, the investment of funds into the LINKS program is substantially less effective than it might otherwise be in terms of developmental impact as a result of this constraint.

PROGRESS IN DECENTRALISATION

The current “top down” arrangements for the devolution of funds to the District Councils is a significant constraint to the planning process at the District level. As a result of this constraint, although Districts do provide some community selected infrastructures, planning and prioritisation in Chiefdoms and Wards is largely ineffective. Development is based on “what comes down the pipe” either from central government or NGOs, rather than the priorities expressed by local communities. Under such circumstance, although the LINKS project has had a major impact on the development of governance in community groupings, this has not been expressed at the Ward, Chiefdom or District levels where, although procedures for representation exist, they have been generally petrified by redundancy.

As a further result of the dislocation between districts and central government, there has been little observable impact of the project activities on the ground at the national government level. First hand experience of team members suggests that only direct Ministerial involvement can achieve impact in terms of national policy. This is beyond the capacity of individual Consortium members or even of CORAD as a whole. It will require the intervention of USAID, in conjunction with CORAD, to sensitize relevant Ministers through first hand exposure to successful interventions, if significant changes in national policy are to be achieved.

PROGRAM DURATION

Finally, it is evident that from a number of perspectives (especially the development of functional literacy) the time scale of the initiative is too limited and that much work will remain to be done even at the end of the LINKS program in 2008. Even where training has been provided and completed, further supervision and training will be required and positive attitudes of self-determination still need to be fostered if sustainability is to be achieved.

RESOURCE LIMITATIONS

It was universally observed by FDGs that the number of potential beneficiaries in each village, District or Chiefdom is much higher than the actual number of beneficiaries that have been reached so far. Lower outreach is chiefly due to a limitation of budgetary resources, otherwise Consortium members report that the number of people interested in, e.g., setting up VSL groups, developing improved FFS or applying for loans from Finance Salone is far higher than can be serviced at present. It is inevitable that funds available for development will be limited, but the LINKS program has generated such successful impacts and demand is such that a greater degree of funding either from USAID or from a consortium of donors would be justified.

²⁶ WVSL adopted a specific approach to mitigate this problem by recalling FFS facilitators at quarterly intervals for central refresher-training. This reduced the time spent by Field Agents in supervising second-cycle FFS's considerably.

5. ASPECTS OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

5.1. Interactions between CORAD Members

The evaluation team observed that results and impacts were generally uniform across the three target Districts, indicating a degree of consortium rigor in terms of approaches and quality control. It was noted however, that consortium members did not regularly adopt the results of other individual member's experience or work.²⁷ This might in some instances have been due to differing ecologies and terrains, but not always. Both CRS and CARE indicated that they had developed additional business training modules to supplement "Making Cents" however, neither of these had been taken up by other members nor had any consolidation or standardization of business training techniques been attempted across the Consortium.

Despite these observations, it was noted that relationships appear to be very cordial amongst CORAD members and overall the Consortium has proved an effective mechanism for the management and coordination of a large program over wide and varying areas.

5.2. Achievement of Project Objectives by Individual CORAD Members

It was hard for the evaluation team to identify significant differences in performance within a group where all members had performed to a high standard and the overall results are so satisfactory. In particular, with regard to the core objective of encouraging women and youth to undertake agricultural activities as a business, the performance of all CORAD members was consistently high. Nevertheless, on a comparative basis, the impact of WVSL is perhaps less integrated and less sustainable than those of other CORAD members. It was noted that they have targeted a higher number of groups using fewer field staff than other members. In addition, the territory around Kono is particularly rugged and villages are remote and frequently inaccessible. WVSL has modified its procedures to accommodate these problems²⁸, but the evaluation team observed that a very limited number of WVSL groups were not well supervised and were operating below potential or with inappropriate resources.

In contrast, CARE operated with the greatest concentration of resources in a limited area, within which a holistic approach employing all appropriate interventions was universally employed. Not surprisingly, this showed the greatest and most sustainable impacts.

While progress in terms of overall objectives has been uniformly good, the achievement by CORAD members of individual targets has been more variable. SFCG has helped farmers and traders to gain more profits prices through MIS dissemination; but institutionalization of the MIS has not occurred, while other interventions in print and video have been unsuccessful. ARC has developed appropriate modules for business training and functional literacy, and while these skills are positively affecting project success, the rollout of these modules has been slow and needs to accelerate for beneficiaries to move beyond limited business growth. WVSL has been tasked with the development of technical solutions for transport and post-harvest processing , but neither of these have yet to move past the pilot stage. CARE was tasked to identify, mobilize and coordinate groups for assistance and mobilization through capital grants, but has achieved only limited success (two companies formed).

²⁷ All CORAD members were aware of the market analyses conducted by CRS, but none could indicate any impacts of the findings on the implementation of their individual projects (except CRS itself).

²⁸ Instead of requiring field agents to visit each community group on a weekly or fortnightly basis, WVSL has established quarterly refresher training courses for local facilitators in Koidu. This allows for remote support of ongoing interventions and increased field agent attention to new start-up groups.

It would appear that while the basic elements of LINKS are both sound and readily implemented, the more innovative elements have been harder to undertake and frequently delayed. Under other circumstances this would not be remarkable, innovative work is frequently difficult. It is perhaps because of the degree of success achieved elsewhere in the program that these shortcomings are more noticeable.

5.3. Role of the Consortium Members in Development

In the context of Sierra Leone, NGOs, including CORAD members, are the only development actors that have the capacity to achieve a regular grassroots presence. Beneficiary communities perceive their LINKS partners to be more present, active and effective than the GOSL and donors, even though UNDP and USAID provide the majority of the LINKS financial resources.

Interaction between CORAD members and local authorities was uniformly good. Local authorities see NGOs, including CORAD, as providing communities' basic services such as health and education services, food aid, livelihoods training, support to improved agricultural practices and infrastructure. Some District officials said that while they were uncertain as to what some NGOs were doing, CORAD's mission was clear to them. District officials saw CORAD as a partner in development but were somewhat frustrated that they could not direct the geographical areas and nature of LINKS activities.

The team was told that NGOs are often perceived as competing with the GOSL for development monies. Additionally, there are some suspicions regarding the objectives and activities of certain NGOs and some jealousies regarding the population's recognition of NGO support and success. Fortunately CORAD members are not in that category.

The low devolution of funds to the District level limits the ability of local authorities to lead development actions. Therefore, NGOs such as those found in CORAD remain essential to development. Under such circumstances, NGOs may frequently develop a sustained role, embedded in the development process that crowds out the development of local capacity, both through the employment of skilled professionals and the control of financial resources. This was not observed to be the case in any of the districts visited. Although District capacity is only just developing, it was clear that CORAD members are playing a supporting role based upon regular dialogue with local administration, rather than adopting either an isolated or a dominant role.

At the same time, the presence of an NGO on a sustained basis in a community can lead to the development of paternalistic and dependent attitudes by NGOs and beneficiaries respectively. It was observed that the nature of the interventions undertaken within the LINKS program promoted a high degree of self-determination by community groups. This worked effectively against any tendency towards dependency and helped to maintain a balanced relationship of mutual respect.

Overall, the role adopted by CORAD members in the LINKS program appears to be balanced and well integrated within the local development framework.

The role of CORAD in development at a national level has been limited. CORAD members noted their inability to bring their successful results to a higher level so as to influence national policy despite sensitization of national level staff in relevant ministries. Experience within the evaluation team suggests that first hand interaction with Line Ministers is required to achieve the desired impact. It is recommended that, if CORAD could facilitate a trip under USAID leadership that engages the US Ambassador and key national officials, the GOSL adoption of CORAD interventions and policy influence would be greatly advanced.

5.4. Exit Strategies

Until there is significant change in GOSL funds and human capacity, the need for NGOs in Sierra Leone remains very strong. Despite these observations, all CORAD members should have an articulated exit strategy. The nature of most LINKS interventions is such that exit strategies are generally simple and straightforward. Thus FFS group can be expected to continue –at least in the short term –on a sustainable basis, as can VSL groups. Functional literacy and business management training require no exit strategy. Three key areas require attention if CORAD support is to be withdrawn. These are Finance Salone, support to ongoing business initiatives, and the MIS.

The issue of sustainability of Finance Salone has already been discussed. A viable exit strategy will consist of restructuring the financial arrangements so that administrative costs can be met from interest payments. Support to ongoing business initiatives is required for some time if their sustainability is to be assured. One option that might prove effective would be the facilitation of private sector linkages.

The team did not record any significant development of linkages between beneficiaries and larger private sector interests. This is not surprising considering the limited extent of private sector investment in rural agriculture. However, in the future, increased production, especially of tree crops (cocoa²⁹ and coffee) and vegetables will require that beneficiaries interact more closely and on a regular basis with larger private sector entities (buyers and export agents).

The introduction of larger private sector entities provides new roles and opportunities for the Consortium members and assists in achieving an effective exit strategy with an increased probability of sustainable development. Thus CORAD could promote private sector participation by inviting private sector players into the project as “Lead Farmers” or Lead Businessmen”. CORAD would then play two key roles: first in selecting and introducing the most appropriate private sector partners and secondly as an arbiter to avoid any element of exploitation in negotiations between the private sector partners and LINKS beneficiaries. Once a sound business relationship had been established, CORAD could progressively withdraw from the arrangement, leaving the private sector partner with the commercial incentive to ensure the sustainability of the beneficiary enterprises.

As regards the MIS, discussions are currently ongoing with the World Bank to set up a nationwide market Information System based on the CRS model at the MAFFS. This needs to be pursued to ensure it is set up properly and has the capacity to disseminate information to radio stations nationwide. This will ensure that a sustainable system is in place by the end of the LINKS project.

In addition, CORAD with facilitation by USAID could play a vital role in assisting the GOSL to integrate certain sustainable practices and interventions. CORAD’s community facilitators could be integrated into GOSL programs as local extension agents and capacity builders.

In the last few years, funding for USAID projects outside of a few countries has been restricted - and the same holds true for UNDP. It is recommended that CORAD consolidate their successes in this remaining phase of the project in order to increase sustainability of these interventions, particularly given the possibility of reduced donor support.

²⁹ Cursory observation suggests that the current trading environment for cocoa is generally exploitative of both producers and small traders. This will need to be addressed before private sector linkages can be promoted. However, the European Commission and World Bank are beginning initiatives that should address some of the trading dynamics affecting SL farmers and cash crops such as cocoa and coffee, so that equitable linkages may become possible in the future.

5.5. Program Monitoring

The Team observed that while the LINKS program may be considered to support the SO1 “Reintegration of war-torn populations in target areas advanced.”, there are concerns regarding the selection of indicators within the revised Program Monitoring Plan.

LINKS is improving its target population’s average household income, but the limited experimentation in each FFS does not provide uniform across the “average production per household of rice, cassava, commercial vegetables, oil palm, coffee, and cocoa”. By focusing on selected crops LINKS can show improved “averages [in] volume of selected crops marketed by target households.” However, communities’ households vary and communities vary widely on what crops they choose to produce for extra income.

IR 1.1 Indicators: (1) Percentage of USAID-supported businesses still in operation one year after start up; and (2) Average value of assets generated by micro-enterprises receiving loans from USAID-supported activities are useful for tracking this aspect of LINKS success. However, the Evaluation Team felt that the indicators under IR 1.2 could be modified. For example, the “Percentage of farmer field schools that conduct at least two experiments per year” does not necessarily lead to the result of ‘Agricultural production and marketing increased.’

The indicators for the Intermediate Result 1.3 are to be announced and there are rich opportunities for capturing the emerging grassroots democratic culture that dovetail improved community service and infrastructures. However, the PMP discussions or definitions regarding food security and the theory for conflict mitigation might be revised towards more manageable interests. For example, in Sierra Leone food is defined as rice, and therefore the LINKS project under-captures existing foods security coping mechanisms beyond rice. Prevention of environmental degradation should be added as a critical assumption as so many of the LINKS agricultural activities depend upon fragile ecosystems that are being rapidly deforested and whose watersheds are at risk.

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1. Attribution of Impact

In many cases, LINKS interventions are being undertaken in Districts and Chiefdoms that have been subject to previous interventions by Consortium members. This means that the interventions cannot always be considered as wholly discrete initiatives, but rather as the culmination of a series of events extending back over several years prior to the LINKS program. In particular, where Consortium members had been working over a lengthy period, a more responsive attitude could be developed amongst beneficiaries. This was evident not only in the strength of different community groups, but also in the development of a stronger sense of self-determination amongst some beneficiaries where assistance had been ongoing for some time.

This raises the issue of “development perspective” as a key aspect of this evaluation. From the perspective of an external observer, USAID³⁰ might view LINKS interventions as discrete activities, funded from particular sources, which can be evaluated as having specific and measurable impacts. This however is not the view of those who work with or benefit from these resources.

³⁰ Although USAID/Siera Leone would emphasise the continuity of the DRP/LINKS approach as a continuum of development over time.

From the perspective of many beneficiary households, the LINKS initiatives are part of a continuum of assistance, which may be subject to changing conditionalities, but which nevertheless represents a gradual progression (albeit with an end that is not always clearly defined).

It is therefore difficult to identify the specific impacts of LINKS interventions per se. Although the “Appreciative Inquiry” methodology used did seek to examine community and individual progress prior to the LINKS initiative and to segregate these effects from those caused by LINKS initiatives, many of the benefits observed can not be attributed entirely to LINKS alone, but to the gradual development process that had evolved from partnerships between Consortium members and beneficiary communities established over more than the two-year period under consideration. Such integration of programs over time may promote synergism, but it tends to confound the accurate analysis of impact.

6.2. Key Program Impacts and Implications

The evaluation team found plenty of evidence on the ground to assess that, with very few specific exceptions, the impacts of LINKS interventions has been strongly positive. For the overall program, the following key impacts were observed:

- Increased use of fundamental good agricultural practices amongst beneficiaries, (planting density, use of improved varieties, weeding and cultivation techniques) resulting in increased production from Farmer Field School group members own farms and reduced food security concerns.
- Increased availability of finance both in rural and peri-urban areas, resulting in increased business turnover for (most commonly) petty trading and (less frequently) agriculture and service provision and increased profitability.
- Significantly improved business management capacity of beneficiaries resulting in increased profitability and business development both in farming and in petty trading.
- Improved access to market information (through the radio broadcasting of market prices) allowing farmers and traders to determine where they might sell their produce most profitably.

These are the “Headline Impacts” which were observed to be significant and widespread amongst almost all beneficiaries met by the team. They are of themselves sufficient to justify the continued operation of the program, but there are additional impacts that must also be recognized:

- The increased availability of cash generated by business enterprises has allowed women in particular to play a stronger role in the allocation of household resources. Household priorities are reflected in the following frequently quoted benefits of LINKS activities:
 - Increased ability to pay school fees
 - Reduced food security concerns
 - Increased ability to pay medical expenses
 - Improved standards of housing
 - Reinvestment in agricultural production
 - Better clothing.
- Agricultural shows helped establish linkages between farmers on the one hand and business people and MAFS personnel on the other.
- The development of cohesive and successful FFS and VSL groups has:
 - Resulted in the adoption of a group approach to other village activities (e.g. house repair, field work and other community projects) accelerating development

- Enhanced the planning and representational capacities of rural communities, which can now articulate clear priorities for future development³¹.
- Allowed a reduction in the transport and marketing costs of producers and traders.
- Generated a sense of self-determination amongst group members who have now experienced at first hand the potential of the LINKS interventions for their own development.
- Stimulated strong interest from non-group members who see the benefits of group membership and would like to replicate the group activities.
- The ability to carry on successful small businesses has greatly increased the self-esteem of many community members, especially women, who now feel empowered to take part in community discussions.
- In addition to the above, there is a less tangible, but nonetheless important impact resulting from the improved quality of physical existence. Many women in particular noted the reduced level of domestic strife and commented that life overall “is more peaceful now” allowing them to concentrate more on their own work and less on food or cash crises that might otherwise result in discord.
- Radio programs have created awareness about the opportunities available under the LINKS program, thus facilitating uptake.

It is not easy to quantify the impacts noted above. Much of the information required could only be derived from a detailed household income, production and consumption survey beyond the scope of this evaluation. In many cases, households noted that the number of months that they had to “struggle for food”(i.e. rice) had been reduced from five to three or even two, but it is perhaps more relevant that the vast majority of the beneficiaries who took part in the focus discussion groups were clearly moving towards increased self-determination, increased self esteem and reduced dependency on external assistance so that, whatever their production, financial or nutritional circumstances in the future, they will have the ability to improve their circumstances through their own resources and efforts. This appears to be the fundamental and most significant implication of the LINKS program impacts.

6.3. Sustainability and Replication

Different interventions within the overall LINKS program appear to vary considerably in their sustainability and potential for replication. Comments on these aspects of each element of the LINKS program have been made throughout the preceding chapters of this report. For ease of reference, they have been summarized and compiled in Annex C.

6.4. Lessons Learned

In this section of the report, lessons learned are summarized in terms of what has been seen to be most effective, what has not worked or not been achieved and the next steps for future interventions.

WHAT HAS WORKED?

Almost without exception, LINKS interventions and activities resulted in positive and sustainable impacts. Best practices incorporated the principles and practices of participatory development, a holistic integrated development approach together with a regular grassroots presence, dialogue and face-to-face trust building. The extension agents are, for the most part, considered extended members of the communities in which they serve.

Within this effective framework of support, a number of outstanding interventions were noted:

³¹ Although it was noted that in many cases, this is still limited and many beneficiary group time horizons do not extend much beyond the next 12 months.

- VSL groups demonstrated the strongest impact, not so much in terms of finance mobilized, but in the relative development that they had achieved from their own resources, and the extent of the self reliance and determination generated within individual groups. This is clearly an effective intervention both in terms of impacts and costs that is relevant to beneficiary needs and merits replication in all LINKS districts.
- The “Making Cents” training is a second simple and low-level intervention, which may be of limited replicability, but was consistently mentioned by beneficiaries to have a significant positive impact. It is important to note that this impact spread beyond pure business into domestic and farm management, where the principles imparted by the course were equally relevant.
- The MIS radio broadcasts were also highly rated by beneficiaries as being important to their marketing decisions and having a positive impact on their profitability. Considering the almost complete absence of any other price information, such a response is not surprising. It is unfortunate that this initiative has not been readily taken up by external agencies and if possible it should be maintained in future interventions.
- The repayment performance of Finance Salone is an indicator of another initiative that has been outstandingly successful. This micro-finance initiative is clearly meeting a need amongst small businesses and is successfully assisting such businesses to grow. Business development can be monitored in terms of the size of loans disbursed which show substantial increases of between two and ten-fold.

WHAT HAS NOT WORKED?

Very few of the LINKS activities have had little or no positive impact. However, interventions that might be considered less effective, and areas of concern are summarized below:

- The adoption of the Functional Literacy material has been unfortunately delayed and development of the course may only be completed by toward the end of the LINKS program. This will undoubtedly have an effect to reduce program impacts overall.
- The provision of technical transport solutions has also been delayed and the motorized tricycles are only now being delivered to rural communities. It is recognized that these are pilot initiatives, but their impact may be limited.
- The development of newspaper inserts does not appear to have achieved significant impact. Few people report having read them and very few if any would have been influenced by them (other than NGOs).
- Video documentaries have not made any impact partly due to the quality of production as well as the medium of dissemination used.
- The ability to reach and assist peri-urban male youth remains an area of concern. Interventions originally planned both by and for them have not been sustained and this has resulted in their continued marginalization. Given the peri-urban emphasis on rapid cash-flow initiatives to meet daily costs, it will in future be necessary to consider ways in which existing initiatives can be modified to achieve such cash flow. If this is not possible, then new interventions must be actively researched.
- The original hypothesis that agriculture/income generation might be effective as a conflict prevention strategy does not appear to be valid. The team learned that the root causes of the Sierra Leone were sparked and then driven by many international political forces, e.g. Khadafi's leadership in promoting Pan-Africanism and corruption on the part of Charles Taylor as well as other African leaders outside Sierra Leone. While these international forces coincided with the swelling ranks of disenfranchised and underemployed SL youth, the project does not address the international root causes of the conflict. Within its manageable interests, LINKS has addressed the issues around livelihoods, food security and employment for war-marginalized members of society. Evidence has

shown that strengthened economies that provide broad opportunities can mitigate the chances for conflict, but agribusiness and income generation were at much higher levels prior to the SL conflict than they are now and it is recognized that the economic situation in SL prior to the war was not the seminal reason for the war. Although the impacts of the LINKS program include increased harmony at the local community and domestic level, national and international conflicts appear to be caused by other trigger factors largely beyond the manageable interests of the project.

- The project has so far failed to make any significant impact on central government. There does not appear to be an adequate strategy to create the necessary synergy with central government. This no doubt needs to be corrected in order for government to take enough of an interest in the project to facilitate replication of project activities nationwide. The Evaluation Team included two former GOSL Ministers; from their experience Ministers must be directly sensitized to project initiatives and results and then encouraged to adopt these practices within the GOSL. This reality is somewhat beyond the technical reach of CORAD members and should probably be facilitated through USAID diplomacy.
- Although the LINKS program has had a significant impact upon agriculture, the main areas of success and development revolve around non-agricultural trading. The agricultural sector continues to need improved access to inputs, finance, and further technical training beyond the basic principles of the FFS for it to achieve a higher level of production sufficient for the regular generation of a reliable commercial surplus that can become the foundation of sustainable trade (as opposed to the opportunistic marketing of occasional surpluses).

WHERE DOES LINKS GO FROM HERE?

Short Term Interventions

In the immediate short term, LINKS has nine months to consolidate and strengthen its existing interventions. During this period, the following interventions would be useful:

- Ongoing business management support to SUG beneficiaries, garri processing groups and input supply companies (including Fachima). This will help such groups maximize the benefits of the resources that they have received and minimize the risks of business failure.
- Implementation of the last two Functional Literacy course modules. These are overdue and should be at least piloted within the context of the LINKS program.
- Increased attention to the sustainability of FFS facilitators. An intensive program of exchange visits between FFS would provide access to additional methods that could be adopted post-project.
- Needs analysis for future training amongst SUG, Finance Salone and Capital Grant Beneficiaries. This might address possibilities not only for conventional training (in business planning, financial management, loan applications etc.), but also the possibility of developing a business mentoring service and/or a business support center. Either format could provide support in making business contacts, business planning and other key areas, within the context of a continuous support service or on an as-needed basis.
- Additional piloting of commercial production units for FS groups. The Bambukoro FFS has taken the first and desirable step to plant a 6acre groundnut farm as a local initiative away from the FFS site. In order to make quick impact on national production of crops, the FFS groups should be encouraged to take the next step of establishing large demonstration or commercial farms where crop varieties and new technologies can be tested on a large scale. The FFS concept would thus be moving from experimental field trials to the development phase.
- Renewed dialogue between SFCG and peri-urban youth to examine possible avenues for increased engagement in LINKS-type interventions, either in the peri-urban environment or through a return to rural activities.
- Reconciliation of the administrative costs of Finance Salone with its lending and interest practices so as to achieve long-term sustainability.

- Actively pursue the development of a national MIS. CRS have initiated discussions with the World Bank to develop an MIS in conjunction with MAFFS, using the model developed under LINKS. The importance of the existing MIS to farmers and traders is such that a hiatus in this service should be avoided if at all possible.
- Facilitation by USAID of a VIP tour of selected CORAD sites to influence adoption of certain interventions and practices by the GOSL.

Finally, in order for LINKS activities to continue and replicate post-program, the groups established must be at least self-reliant in terms of being able to function and raise monies. CORAD could facilitate this by informing beneficiaries of alternative resources for ongoing development initiatives and promoting linkages with other NGO or GoSL initiatives where these exist.

Follow-On Interventions

Future interventions may take two different courses. On the one hand, the successes of the LINKS program could well be replicated in other chiefdoms by following the same methodology developed in the LINKS program with refinements based on experience. There is a definite need for such replication. At the same time however, there is also a need amongst existing LINKS beneficiaries for ongoing support. The businesses that have been established under LINKS, have indicated further requirements for business management training, business supervision and business service provision, while FFS groups need further technical support to achieve consistent increases in productivity.

On balance, the evaluation team would recommend that the deepening of existing interventions through ongoing technical support should be prioritized above the broadening of LINKS interventions to other areas. While such a broadening will achieve higher short-term impacts, in the long-term there is the risk that the progress that has been initiated under LINKS may yet falter without additional support. A five-year time frame was frequently quoted by both beneficiaries and field agents as being necessary before sustainable development can be assured.

Within the context of the LINKS program a number of areas need to be addressed in any follow-on intervention:

- Further technical and business management support to businesses and FFS groups (as described above).
- Provision of micro-finance and/or other credit services appropriate to small-scale agricultural production.
- Increased attention to post harvest processing and storage technologies
- Increased emphasis on environmental protection and sustainability within the context of agricultural training in particular and community groups in general.
- Renewed targeting of peri-urban male youth and:
 - Either the development of new business packages that meet short term cash requirements,
 - or the sensitization of male youth to take part in trading,
 - or the facilitation of a transfer to a rural lifestyle where opportunities for direct employment in agriculture exist.
- Finally, both rural and peri-rban males need sensitization and skills to engage in daily income earning activities that complement the business activities carried out by their wives.

In addition to the above, opportunities for DG development include:

- Strengthening groups into viable confederations that can raise monies for revolving investment of services (e.g. transport) or infrastructure in their communities.
- Supporting national level dialogues with confederations' leadership and national policy makers.

- Integrating livelihoods and daily life focused knowledge of rights, responsibilities and laws to strengthen the grassroots democratic culture.
- Facilitating regular development dialogues between District and local authorities and communities.

6.5. Summary of Recommendations

FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS

- Future FFS programs should give increased attention to post harvest storage technologies and agricultural finance; provide additional training intensive and commercially orientated practices to the FFS. And introduce appropriate elements of agro forestry practices as well as soil and water conservation practices to the members of the FFS.
- The 10-day training cycle is too short for participants to be properly grounded in the subject as Farm Facilitators. Refresher training of facilitators was useful.
- Introduce inexpensive and low-tech solar dryer for the preservation of perishable foods. Address the post-harvest processing of grains – largely women’s labor. Introduce other well-known inexpensive appropriate technologies that that could be made by communities themselves that could reduce certain labors and thereby release labor for agricultural production or that underpin food security. The FFS and VSL groups could provide useful entry points for such technologies.
- Address the lack of organized and consistent incentives to support local capacity source persons, e.g. farmer facilitators and literacy facilitators.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

- Widespread growth of business management capacity will require extensive basic training and higher literacy skills in order to evolve businesses and record keeping to the point that they would be able to access more market information resources, negotiate and revise written contracts and make agreements for inputs such as labor or transportation. Provide further training in: the development of business plans, finance and loan application and management, and in the development of new business outlets.
- Making Cents’ could effectively reach more potential beneficiaries if the price is reduced to less than \$1.60. Alternatively a higher price could be paid in installments over a period of four or five weeks.³²
- Examine the CARE and CRS business training efforts; develop a comprehensive package for all districts, either in conjunction with ARC or as an adjunct to their material.
- Provide input businesses ongoing supervision and support, both in financial management (cash flow management, the procurement of additional funding (commercial finance) and business planning) and overall business development. In particular the latter could include assistance in the development of distribution agents for input suppliers, linking the suppliers to the enhanced small business capacity within villages, to reduce the limitations of transport and access faced by many small farmers.
- Sensitize the male population as to the benefits of their greater participation in business opportunities so that a more gender equitable division of labor can be developed.
- Provide adequate business management advice to ensure effective utilization of garri processing machines.

³² Develop a group-based credit scheme that would utilize peer pressure to ensure timely repayment of Making Cents training.

CAPITAL GRANTS

- Reassess the need to use high quality copyrighted training materials to disseminate basic and essential literacy and numeracy skills.

CAPITAL GRANTS

- Provide capital grant funding to provide a partial guarantee to input supply businesses for the underwriting of credit to producers;
- Sensitize FFS's, VSL groups and others to the existence of input supply shops; and the development of commercial plots, using more intensive agriculture practices that would increase demand for improved inputs.

GOVERNANCE

- Facilitate dialogues between confederated group representatives and national policy makers to improve policy implementation or development; advocacy training should be part of the technical assistance package for preparing confederated groups for these dialogues.
- Confederation building efforts should emphasize internal resource mobilization and the focusing on concrete objectives, so that the confederations have a strong chance for arriving at the resource base needed to undertake and achieve a particular objective.³³
- Strengthen the grassroots democratic culture by introducing groups to focused human rights and civic education on concrete examples that resonate directly in peoples' lives, e.g. the right for all children to education, the rights to health care, water, the related process and government structures responsible for support of these services.
- Direct support from USAID, in conjunction with CORAD, is needed to sensitize relevant Ministers through first hand exposure to successful interventions, if significant changes in national policy are to be achieved.

GROUP STRENGTHENING

- Introduce LINKS groups to the Grameen Bank practice of life enhancing skills; the VSL groups in particular as effective channels for the introduction and strengthening of key practices.
- Provide regular and significant supervision to all group activities on an ongoing basis.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Introduce monthly solid waste removal in those communities where LINKS supports petty trading that generates this waste. Or, solid waste disposal could be part of the package of life enhancing skills suggested to LINKS communities.

COMMUNICATIONS

- Messages regarding the economic and food security or agricultural importance of protecting watersheds, forests and wildlife for future generations and possible tourism could be integrated into the LINKS radio program.

³³ The confederations should commit to rotating its resource allocation within the membership areas. Objectives settings would have to be carried out on a small scale, e.g., 10 to 25 individual groups clustered to combine their resources to build a periodic market.

- Produce video clips of maximum 3 minutes duration instead of documentaries; have them aired just before or after the national news and in other appropriate venues.³⁴
- Continue working with the local radio stations to improve their capacity to produce comparable programs.
- Influence district councils to integrate support for the radio stations within their budget; this support should be in the form of grants tied to development and sustenance of agriculture and community development programs on the radio stations.
- The newspaper inserts in their present form should be discontinued. It is more effective to publish these stories in newspapers. Arrange periodic visits to project sites for journalists from these newspapers.³⁵ It is important that stories about the LINKS project appear with a degree of regularity in the newspapers, as this will ensure visibility with policy makers and the business community.
- Emphasize the use of Agricultural shows as a tool for establishing linkages among the various actors in the production and marketing chain. Since the cost of organising district level shows may be prohibitive, it is recommended that consideration be given to organising chiefdom level agricultural shows on a regular basis.

MIS

- A concerted effort needs to be made to set up a MIS that will outlive the project. The current discussions with the World Bank should be vigorously pursued in order to procure the required funds to set up the necessary structures within the MAFS. The system set up should not only have the capacity to collect the information, it should have the capacity to disseminate the information to radio stations around the country, since it will be difficult for the radio stations to take the onus of accessing the information for now.^{36 37}

OTHER

- Provide selected isolated communities motorized tricycles immediately.

BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL USAID COMMUNITY LEVEL ACTIVITIES

- Improving participation by poor people across all USAID-sponsored community-level activities would be much enhanced if economic incentives were built into all group-mobilizing frameworks. The emphasis on the generation of more resources and employing them effectively remains a necessary and core aspect of supporting community-level DG, provides an economic base for future political empowerment, and promotes the self-sufficiency of communities to initiate and respond to their own needs. Increased support for self-governing, revenue-generating, community-based approaches will also assist in conflict prevention.
- All USAID grassroots activities should integrate democratic self-reliant group structures for the promotion of a grassroots democratic culture.

³⁴ In order to do this, SFCG needs to employ the services of a professional videographer with experience in this type of work, since it is obvious that it does not have in-house capacity to produce good quality video.

³⁵ The project can facilitate publication of the stories in colour in those newspapers with the capacity to print in colour, while the others publish in grey scale.

³⁶ Eventually it may be worth exploring the possibility of using the internet to disseminate the information, provided the current capacity for internet access in the provincial towns is significantly expanded (the signs are that the mobile phone companies will in the not too distant future be in a position to provide internet facilities via mobile phones around the country).

³⁷ Efforts should also be made to secure additional funding if, as currently seems to be the case, the funds earmarked by the World Bank for the project are insufficient. Ultimately, however, the cost of maintaining the system will need to be integrated into the national budget.

- Encourage standardization of best practice processes whereby youth, women and other traditionally marginalized groups are integrated into development activities and groups.
- USAID and other donors will need to encourage the GOSL's devolution of funds to the District level before these local structures can be perceived to be representative, legitimate and viable governance actors.

ANNEXES

Annex A: Summary of the LINKS Program

The following information is derived largely from the USAID/Sierra Leone PMP . This document has evolved over the period of program implementation and new objectives and intermediate results have recently been formulated. The IRs described below reflect the original project design, which has formed the bases for most of the program implementation to date.

ASSUMPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Strategic Objective One is – Reintegration process of war-torn populations in targeted areas. The integrated development approach of “Promoting Linkages for Livelihood Security and Economic Development” (LINKS) Program is implemented by the CORAD consortium is intended to further reconstruction and strengthening in the areas of: Micro-enterprises are established / expanded ; Agricultural production and marketing increased; and Community Infrastructure Services improved.

It is assumed that war affected populations in the targeted communities will broaden their economic opportunities as micro-enterprises are established and expanded. Illegal income generating activities that foster instability will be replaced by legitimate means to addresses basic needs and care for their immediate families. Improved agricultural production, marketing and businesses will allow communities of men, women, youth farmers and traders to build rural and urban economies. Improved input flows to communities will assist in increased productivity. Successful reintegration of these communities should fortify against instability and the reoccurrence of war in Sierra Leone. It is assumed that LINKs and the GOSL will provide marginalized youth with job opportunities. Provision of community infrastructure and services should engage youth and others in related livelihoods. All these opportunities are intended to entice displace populations to settle and returned population to stay. ³⁸

COORDINATION AND CS COLLABORATION

CORAD members were configured given their proven successes in these development areas and their established field presence in the Districts of Koinadugu, Kono, and Kailahun Districts; areas in the North and East that had been most affected by the civil war. CORAD is charged with facilitating ‘the stimulation of agriculture, the economy and generating economic and job opportunities to improve the livelihood of the common people (especially Youth and women) in Sierra Leone.’ ³⁹

³⁸ From the June 2007 PMP; the following Critical assumptions remain valid: (1)Sierra Leone has reached a tentative peace and is addressing the root causes of the war; (2) Local security can be maintained after the UN peacekeeping forces leave Sierra Leone; (3) Peaceful transitional arrangements occur in Liberia and the Guinea impending succession crisis is handled without recourse to violence; (4) Government of Sierra Leone remains engaged and committed to the decentralization and poverty alleviation programs through the PRSP; (5) Government of Sierra Leone addresses the unemployment factor at a national level and the national government will support the job creation schemes especially for Urban Youth; and (6) The central government will continue to support community level action and the participatory methods used in SO 1.

³⁹ CORAD consortium is headed by CARE with CRS, World Vision (WVSL), American Refugee Committee (ARC) and Search for Common Ground (SFCG)

Inter-organizational coordination and collaboration takes place on many levels. There is a joint coordinating unit, headed by CARE and WV has the lead on M&E protocols. At the District level CORAD partners meet on a monthly basis.

The agricultural finance pilot program, capital grants, and loans are given technical support by ARC. ARC develops strategies based on consortium experience for the pilot including: policies, procedures, targeting criteria, loan terms and lending. ARC increases the numbers and viability of small business access to business training and capital. Training is innovated by ARC and disseminated through locally trained NGOs.⁴⁰ Making Cents Business Simulation is to be a fee per service and currently vouchers providing 80 percent of the costs to chosen entrepreneurs. ARC is supporting Finance Salome in the provision of capital loans to entrepreneurs in Kailahun (to be established) and Kono.

ARC is responsible for overall technical quality of the micro enterprise strategy, the implementation of business training and micro enterprise components. CARE, CRS and WV manage vouchers and refer beneficiaries to training opportunities. SFCG promotes information dissemination of these opportunities. Savings and literacy activities are initiated by ARC trained persons and provided to groups formed by CRS and CARE. CARE, and CRS help manage these groups and their saving practices.

FFS are to be implemented CARE, CRS and WV. CRS, WVSL and CARE refer farmers to selected organizations for loans. Start Up Grants are managed by CARE, WV, and CRS. SUGS of 250,000, 500,000 and 750,000 Leones go towards production infrastructure, agro processing technology, storage facilities, transport equipment, and input production. Some elements of cost sharing are processing through individual and group grants

CARE is responsible for implementing organizational development and capacities of selected local organizations, e.g. Kabala Women's Agribusiness organization. CARE and WV are testing prototype transport technologies for bringing goods to market.

WV is to identify at least 15 different agricultural practices or technologies focusing mainly on storage and agro processing, e.g. cassava. CARE CRS and VW introduce relevant technologies to the communities.

Search for Common Ground is responsible for implementing the media and communication activities of the LINKS project. These activities are as follows:

- a. To conduct youth learning dialogues on livelihood opportunities for 1,250 youths in 420 communities in the targeted districts (under intermediate result 1.6 of program objective 1)
- b. To conduct youth learning dialogues on livelihood opportunities for 1,250 youths in district and chiefdom headquarters in the 3 targeted districts (under intermediate result 2.4 of program objective 2)
- c. Under intermediate result 2.3 of program objective 2, SFCG was to provide the following:

⁴⁰ There are nine total local NGOs currently trained and licensed to carry out Making Cents Business Simulation. They are Sierra Leone Red Cross YRTP and CAN in Koinadugu, MCSL, FARDAR and Caritas in Kailahun and the Women's Multipurpose Center, Chita and NMJDA in Kono. Chita and NMJDA also provide Savings and Literacy training in Kailahun and Kono.

- i. Regular dissemination of information on economic opportunities and program services through weekly radio programs, annual harvest festivals, agricultural fairs and or trade fairs
- ii. Weekly written inserts disseminated in five national newspapers
- iii. Weekly national-level agricultural marketing information bulletins
- iv. Three videos on critical marketing or supply input issues to inform and influence policy makers

CRS was tasked with establishing a national level market price information system capable of gathering and disseminating regular price information on key commodities in the country. This information is then passed on to SFCG for inclusion in its weekly radio program.

WV is responsible for addressing the need for inputs and infrastructure to support agricultural enterprises. CRS leads on market analyses and strategy. CARE is responsible for building organizations at the peri-urban or mezzo level to provide needed inputs. VW and CRS are responsible for raising issues regarding these matters to the CORAD Steering Committee.

TARGETING PROCESS

USAID's post-war reintegration program 'facilitates the process through which war-torn populations in the targeted areas resettle into their communities, work together to rebuild their shattered lives and communities, encourage reconciliation, and build mutual respect between ex-combatants and war affected communities.'⁴¹ The Districts of Koinadugu, Kono, and Kailahun Districts were chosen by USAID as those areas, situated in the North and East, have been most affected by the civil war.

In addition: 'A critical threat to the success of the program is the risk that the fragile peace will shatter. One threat to the peace rests with youth who remain unemployed, underemployed or disengaged. A key element of the strategy of the LINKS Program will focus specifically on integrating socially marginalized youth, especially those who have as yet not received much tangible support.'

In the Sierra Leone context, the concept of reintegration has the following dimensions:

- Re-establishment of social and political structures
- Increased agricultural production for Food security
- Household Infrastructure rehabilitation
- Re-establishment of economic structures through income generation and marketing networks
- Creation of job opportunities for Young men and women through improved community infrastructural service
- Increase agricultural input and out put flow between communities and regional markets
- Increase women and youth engagement/participation in community infrastructure, governance and recovery (including corruption issues)⁴²

In summary, the emphasis is on 'reviving agriculture, the economy and generating economic and job opportunities to improve the livelihood of the common people (especially women and youth).'

⁴¹ War-torn populations include men, women, youth, ex-combatants, internally displaced persons and returnees.

⁴² Dimensions taken from PMP.

OUTLINE OF INTERVENTIONS

Micro-enterprises are being established to increase and expand production, build economies at the community level, enhance market led agriculture, provide livelihoods and improve the flow of agricultural inputs and outputs.

Interventions include the use of small grants and business training to stimulate the economy at the community level and provide opportunities for innovators to invest in new opportunities that test and demonstrate new techniques related to agricultural production, agro-processing, storage and value-added micro-enterprise.

Agricultural production and marketing focus on increasing production of the staple crops of rice, cassava, and vegetables. Plantation rehabilitation activities include oil palm, coffee and cocoa, since the results of the will start to become apparent.

Capacity building for farmers groups focuses on increasing their agricultural production through experimentation and innovation, facilitating activities in the non-farm sector in strategic communities and the regional economic centers, to stimulate growth in agro-processing and the micro-enterprise sector.

Post conflict restoration interventions (with contributions from the communities) include: community infrastructure and services, savings and literacy programs that teach basic literacy and mobilize capital from savings and assist in broader businesses development.

Marginalized youth and women are being targeted for these skills trainings and financial supports to gain job opportunities and improve their livelihoods.

Media activities are highlighting these economic successes and opportunities. National media will be used to send messages to influence national policies.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF PROGRESS TO DATE

The LINKS project has shifted from the ‘ex-combatant concept of reintegration’ towards broader reconstruction and recovery activities. By August of 2002, opportunities for moving the program towards “development” became apparent. Many communities were ready for strengthening governance practices. The Results Framework developed between September and November 2002, reflects this perception.

SO 1 has been refined to strongly focus on the community level. The IRs under SO 1 have gone through three evolutions that reflect the increasing opportunities for sustainable development. As of May 2007, they are:

1. Improved capacity of farmer to carry out market oriented agriculture.
2. Improved business management capacity of beneficiaries to expand microenterprise activities.
3. Increased accessibility of socially marginalized youth to viable economic activities including agriculture.
4. Increased accessibility of critical agricultural inputs for rice cassava, commercial vegetables, oil palm coffee, cocoa to enable farmers to market surplus produce.
5. Establishment of microfinance institutions (Finance Salone) in Kono and Kailahun Districts.

6. Institutionalize marketing information System (MIS) for producers and traders at District and National through various forms of media including radio and print media.
7. Increased access by socially marginalized youth to economic activities including agriculture at the Chief and District levels.

Annex B. Description of Common Interventions

VILLAGE SAVINGS AND LOANS

This program has been developed by CARE and successfully introduced into a number of countries. It promotes the development of credit at a very low level of development through the formation of small community groups (normally 20-30 members, although two groups with 60 members each were set up in Koinadugu). Each group member contributes a small amount on a regular basis (normally every two weeks). The contribution may vary between groups but is normally of the order of 30-60 US cents. After a short period to allow for the accumulation of funds (approximately three months) loans of between \$3 and \$50 are made available to individual group members. Beneficiaries are selected either on the basis of a rotational raffle, or by the group after discussion. The size of the loan may also be moderated by the group. The period for repayment is normally short (one to two months, extending to four months under exceptional circumstances) and interest is commonly charged at a simple rate of 10% per month (120% per year). The combination of regular contributions and regular repayment with interest promotes the rapid accumulation of a substantial volume of capital that can be lent out both to group members and in some cases non-group members. It can also be used for group projects, while a significant proportion is commonly kept in reserve for emergencies. Group discussions indicated that this reserve had been used mainly for medical purposes and had financed a number of life-saving operations.

The program has been introduced into rural villages in four chiefdoms and represents the only avenue for most of these rural communities to access credit and as such represents a major step in the entrepreneurial development of many individuals and a significant benefit to farmers who would otherwise be unable to access the funds needed to increase production.

The scheme relies for its success upon a set of comprehensive bylaws that dictate the contribution and lending procedures and ensure full transparency of all operations. In the examples seen, the absence of any local banking facilities required that accumulated funds should be held in wooden cash boxes. The groups' executive would then consist of a Chair and Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer (responsible for the cash box), two Key Keepers (holding keys to the two independent padlocks that secured the cash box) and two Money Counters. All contributions would be counted by each money counter, all loans would be recorded by the secretary in a book (kept in the locked cash box), and the signatures or finger prints of beneficiaries would be made against each loan. Fines of approximately \$0.15 would be levied for non attendance or late attendance at the weekly group meetings, for late contribution or for delayed repayment of loans. These would also be recorded.

The study team found that the VSL groups were operating very effectively. Contributions of \$0.66 every two weeks had in the most successful cases led to the accumulation of more than \$3,500. From these accumulated capital reserves, loans of between \$16 and \$50 had been made to members and (at a higher interest rate) to non-members. Loan beneficiaries used the funds for a number of purposes, in a rural vegetable producing area, roughly 25% of members used funds for direct investment in agriculture and a further 25% used loans to finance non-agricultural petty trading. The majority however used it to finance agriculturally related trading, buying and selling rice, livestock or vegetables either locally or in some cases in Freetown. In a poorer peri-urban area, a smaller group, with a lower contribution rate used funds for similar purposes with as much or possibly greater emphasis on direct investment in agriculture. It is significant that a large

proportion of all group members were women and that where a married man was a group member, in at least 10% of all cases, the loan would be passed directly to the wife (frequently for petty trading).

Discussion group members listed many benefits derived from the VSL groups. For the beneficiaries, the clear primary advantage is an enhanced ability to pay school fees – either directly or using the profit generated from loan-financed activities. This was almost universally quoted by all women respondents and a significant proportion of men. The second most quoted benefit was increased food security, both through direct investment in agriculture leading to increased rice and groundnut production and through increased availability of cash. (Notably however, although the number of meals per day might have increased, few groups reported an increase in the diversity of their diet.) In addition, both women and men noted improvements in their standard of living (replacing thatched roofs with galvanized roofing sheets, purchasing better clothes and in the overall quality of their existence. This was best expressed by the women who indicated that many of the family tensions associated with meager income and poor food security had disappeared, that life was “more peaceful now” with less marital strife and a greater sense of cohesion.

It is also important to recognize the increased sense of self-esteem that the VSL program brought to members, especially women. The availability of finance has enabled a significant number of group members to conduct their first entrepreneurial activities, and the resulting successful generation of cash has brought them new standing within their families and a greater sense of worth within their communities, resulting in more active participation in community discussions.

In addition to these benefits from VSL loans, it was observed that in the majority of cases, a significant proportion of the accumulated capital was held in reserve as an emergency fund for the community. The team learned of a number of instances in which medical operations had been financed from this reserve and lives had been saved as a result. In one specific case, two VSL groups in one village intended to pool their accumulated capital and purchase a small truck to carry their vegetable produce to markets in Freetown. The team noted that this was entirely feasible and that the combined net worth of the two groups was already sufficient to obtain a loan from commercial sources for such a project.⁴³ The VSL programs are thus able to strengthen both individual and community resources.

FARMER FIELD SCHOOLS

The Farmer Field School (FFS) lies at the heart of the LINKS program both as the main coordination point for all LINK-sponsored activities in the various communities and as an organization and technology training center. Farmer Field Schools have been set up by different NGOS in various communities throughout the country, with varying degrees of success. All the FFS visited during the course of the evaluation appeared to be both successful as groups and effective in transferring a number of different technologies to the communities.

As operated by CORAD members, a FFS will comprise approximately 30 members, both men and women and will have an executive that is normally half men and half women. The group is set up with the assistance of CORAD field staff, although in many cases it would appear that field agents worked with pre-existing groups. This is a sound methodology that avoids the issue of

⁴³ Although the VSL groups themselves also recognised that they would need further assistance in the development of a business plan for such a project to be successful.

groups being set up for the sole purpose of receiving benefits, and promotes sustainability and ownership of group activities.

Important Crops

The most popular crops tried in the FFS in order of priority are lowland rice followed by cassava, vegetable and groundnut. Upland rice featured less prominently in Koinadugu compared with Kailahun and Kono. However, there is growing dominance of low land rice cultivation as against upland rice. This trend has great environmental value as it will tend to protect the forests from slash and burn farming and environmental destruction.

The field agent would work with an FFS directly for a period of one year. During that time, the group would decide on a limited number of agricultural trials that they wished to undertake and the field agent would assist in the setting up and implementation of those trials. Frequently such trials would include seed rate experiments, spacing trials, sowing method trials, variety trials, manuring trials and other simple aspects of agricultural production. The field agent would provide improved seeds as necessary and would ensure that the trials were replicated, properly laid out and well managed. The FFS members would undertake all operations, including the laying out, sowing and subsequent weeding and observation. Results would be obtained at harvest time in the form of final yields.

During the course of the year, the field agent would identify one or two potential facilitators in the group. At the end of the year, these facilitators would be trained to take charge of the group and would be tasked with setting up another two FFSs in adjacent communities. The field agent would then reduce his/her contact with the original FFS to monthly supervision.⁴⁴ Farmer facilitators would each receive a bicycle to assist them in their work, and would make individual arrangements with each community as regards payment for their services. This normally consisted of payment in kind, being group work on the facilitators' own farms.

FFS Experiments	Crops
1). Variety trials	All crops especially Rice, Sweet Potato, Cassava, Vegetable, Maize
2). Appropriate crop combination	Upland rice; Sweet Potato; Cassava, Pigeon Peas; Maize
3). Method and procedure of land preparation	Sweet Potato; Cassava; Rice; Maize, vegetables
4). Plant population and density	All crops
5). Timeliness of weeding	All crops
6). Apical and stem planting techniques	Cassava and Sweet Potato
7). Appropriate and improved nursery practices	Oil Palm, Coffee, Cocoa, Vegetables
8). Economic use of planting materials	Rice; Maize; Cassava; Sweet Potato; various seeds and nursery materials.

The Team observed that the FFS concept as operated by CORAD members, although based around simple experiments, was much broader in its scope and impact than the trials themselves. The experiments form the focal point of the activities, but the results are not necessarily statistically valid, and may even be misleading. However, the trials were carried out with a high degree of precision as regards laying out, seedbed preparation, timeliness, weeding and all other aspects of crop husbandry. These skills were directly passed to all group members and were then carried into their own crop production practices. The experiment served both to maintain members interest and as a vehicle for the demonstration of fundamental agricultural skills. The field agent was also able to pass on simple concepts of Inland Valley Swamp development and

⁴⁴ Although in some cases (e.g. WVSL) the facilitators would not be supervised monthly, but would receive quarterly retraining at central points. This reduced transport costs.

water control, pest control, animation and community development, nutrition and food security, crop marketing and basic business principles during the course of weekly meetings with the group. At the same time, group cohesion was developed and could be carried into other community activities (e.g., group land clearance or group house-building).

The impacts of FFS participation were clearly reported at focus group discussion meetings and could also be observed in participants' own fields and by the level of interest shown by non-participants. It was clear however that the results extended beyond the increases in production that were reported and that overall community benefits were also considerable.

The establishment and growth of the FFS has varied from district to district, from community to community and from NGO to NGO. In Kailahun district, 52 FFS were established under the supervision of CRS in the following chiefdoms during the LINK project period; Upper Bambara, Peje West, Penguia, Njaluahun, Peje Bongre, Yawei. The membership is dominated by youths who constitute about 60% out of a total participants of 1491 for the three years.

In Kono district, 305 FFS were established during 2005 – 2007 under the supervision of World Vision in the following chiefdoms; Fiama, Lei, Gbane Kandor, Kamaindor, Toli, Soa, Sandor. Youth numbers have not been isolated and the women have a greater share of 51.6% from 8891 participants.

In Koinadugu district, 90 FFS were established under the supervision of CARE during 2005 – 2007 in the following chiefdoms; Wara Wara Yagala, Sengbeh, Dembelia Sinkunia, Folosaba Dembelia. Adult males constituted over 50% of the membership and there was a low recorded youth participation at 14% from a total of 2560.

In addition to the effort by CARE in Koinadugu, CRS also established 52 FFS in Diang, Nieni, Mongo and Sulima chiefdoms during the LINK project period. Youths constituted the largest membership at 54% from a total participation of 325.

START-UP GRANTS

The provision of grants to members of the various communities after evaluation training and screening for enterprise development has been a significant element of the overall LINKS program and has complemented the other activities well. Start-up grants have been provided to FFS groups, to peri-urban trading groups and to small processing groups (e.g. soap making groups). All group members are obliged to undertake Making Cents business training. As the name implies, SUGs are normally provided to start new businesses, although in a number of cases, they had been provided to pre-existing groups (especially “osusu” groups). Group members each receive \$41.50 and are assessed after a two-month period. If the grant has been effectively used and the business is progressing a second tranche of \$41.50 is provided. Thereafter, beneficiaries are not eligible for any further grants, but access to Finance Salone can be facilitated if required.

In many cases, the start-up grants had been used for petty trading by women. In most cases where men had received the grants they had collaborated with their wives in trading businesses. In some cases however, women especially had learned new skills and started other businesses such as garra dyeing and soap making either individually or in small groups.

It was clear that the SUGs had made a large impact on beneficiary lifestyles, assisting them to grow small businesses that could generate cash to pay for school fees, increase household food security and pay medical bills.

It was noted that when asked about further needs, no beneficiaries looked for top-up grants. Instead there was an almost universal demand for more training, including business management training in loan application and management.

In terms of the only criteria used to assess the performance of SUGs (i.e. number of businesses surviving after one year), the program was very successful. However, it was noted that the percentage allocation of SUGs to FFS groups fell short of the initial program target of 25%. It is recommended that further attention should be paid to the use of this facility in a rural environment. Since business opportunities in rural areas are fewer and less lucrative than those in urban areas, this may require additional assistance and supervision from field agents to be effective.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING (MAKING CENTS)

Business management training has been provided to almost all participants in SUG schemes, capital grant programs and Finance Salone loanees. It has also been provided to some participants in VSL groups and in FFS groups, although it was not always universal in these groups. The training program consists of a number of modules, of which only the first was commonly used. This consisted of simulations of a number of different scenarios and taught trainees such basic concepts as how to calculate profit (accounting for costs of transport etc), how to allocate resources to savings, reinvestment and consumption, how to undertake fundamental market research and other elements that are essential to good business. Courses were expected to run for a full day, although under some circumstances beneficiaries reported that they had been reduced to between three and four hours, which is clearly inadequate.

The philosophy behind the training was that it should become self sustaining through the training of a limited number of NGO's who would become certified as "Making Cents" trainers and who would charge a fee of \$3.30 for the course. In order to stimulate demand, some LINKS recipients were introduced to the course at a subsidized rate (\$0.67). Most of those who had paid the full rate for the course considered it worthwhile, but indicated that it would take approximately two months of trading to generate the profit required to pay for the training. Others who had not taken the course considered the price excessive, although they indicated that demand would be higher if training was given on credit and they were able to pay in installments. Given the potential for linkages to VSL groups that might guarantee payment, it is suggested that this avenue be explored further.

It was very clear that a large proportion of all LINKS beneficiaries are seeking further business training. Given that only the first module of the "Making Cents" program has been used so far, there is considerable potential for further use of the remaining modules in a future program. Again it is suggested that links to VSL or other groups (e.g. Finance Salone Groups) might be explored to allow such training to be provided on credit and thereby to increase demand and sustainability.

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY TRAINING

Unfortunately this program had only begun in October 2006 and so it was difficult to assess progress or impact. Nevertheless, the program itself will consist of four modules developed by

ARC, each based around a bound and color printed course book, containing materials appropriate to rural life in Sierra Leone. The foundation course consists of an introduction to literacy and numeracy and is designed to teach the student to identify and write letters and numbers, to add and subtract and to read simple sentences. Course 1 – “Cohesive Groups” builds on these skills teaching more complex reading and writing, multiplication, and division, while introducing business concepts such as savings and interest, profit and loss, and group concepts including bylaws, elections, and leadership. Course 2 is in print and Course 3 still under development.

It is clear that the functional literacy groups are making progress in learning and after eight months had achieved useful successes (signing their names, reading signs and identifying currencies or other numerical amounts correctly). However, these skills are not yet those required for sound business. It is difficult to assess how far students will be able to progress within the limited time that remains under the links program and so to identify whether the course has indeed met beneficiary needs.

It would appear that in many ways the situation of the youth with regard to literacy is similar to their situation with regard to fundamental agricultural practices, i.e. they have had little access to the basic principles that would be regarded as fundamental to education or to agriculture respectively. Hence it is possible that a course that emulated the principles of the FFS might prove an effective way of introducing at least the principles of the current Foundation Course (Basic Numeracy and Literacy).

A literacy group run along FFS lines, (whereby one field agent or group facilitator assisted the remainder of the group to work through the foundation exercises) would place emphasis on the most basic principles of literacy and would not require high standards of education amongst the trainers. Such a process would require minimal training of Field Agents in the foundation course materials and principles. Foundation level groups might be formed from existing FFS or VSL groups in rural areas or from Finance Salone or SuG groups in peri-urban areas. It could be easily replicated if only one course book was used (by the trainer) and exercises were copied by group members.

This scenario would allow the more-skilled trainers to concentrate on higher level learning (Courses One, Two, and Three) and might prove a more effective way of disseminating the first steps of literacy than that which is presently on offer.

It is important to recognize that this is a short-term intervention, bringing people to the first stages of literacy and numeracy. Once this had been achieved, beneficiaries would probably require more intense supervision and higher quality materials. However, it is also possible that if such local group initiatives would demonstrate that basic literacy can be imparted with relatively simple training mechanisms so that additional learning might also be possible through such groups.

The fundamental conclusion drawn by the study team was that the literacy course materials are well designed, insightful and focused. However, the logistics of the current training exercise are not designed to meet the needs of a very large illiterate population who all wish to learn as rapidly as possible. While the emphasis to date appears to have been on content, a sharper focus on delivery is now required. This may mean redesigning part or all of the training process to ensure that the necessary coverage of beneficiaries is achieved. If possible, group-learning mechanisms that can be easily replicated, as proposed above, should be piloted, and if successful, introduced on a wide scale as rapidly as possible.

MARKET INFORMATION SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT

The Market Information System (MIS) has been jointly developed by CRS and SFCG. CRS have established a network of more than 30 agents who have been trained to collect price information from a number of periodic markets across the country and to pass this data back to CRS for central cleaning and processing. The compiled information is then passed to SFCG, who can disseminate it both through print media and on weekly radio broadcasts.

The information is the only consistent MIS and has been found useful by a number of different groups including:

- Some government staff who are monitoring national economic trends
- NGO's looking to understand the dynamics of rural economies in Sierra Leone
- Farmers and traders.

The information has been primarily aimed at the last group. In this case, it is used for two main purposes:

- To identify the most profitable markets to which produce might be taken for sale,
- To provide benchmark prices for negotiation with traders who buy directly from villages.

Most farmers do not have the storage capacity that would allow them to use an MIS to decide when to sell their produce. Neither do they yet have the level of household food security that would allow them to switch between different cash crops on the basis of the information provided. Nevertheless, the information does allow them to make decisions that significantly increase the profitability of their farming enterprises. The MIS is highly valued as a result and the majority of farmers interviewed listened for the price information on a regular basis.

PROVISION OF MICROFINANCE

This initiative consists of VSL groups on the one hand (as described above) and of support to Finance Salone on the other. Finance Salone is a micro-finance institution originally developed under the umbrella of ARC (with UNHCR and USAID) in 2001 that was made an independent organization in 2003. Within the LINKS program, Finance Salone operates in three chiefdoms in Kailahun and two in Konno, although it is active elsewhere with other donor support. In this instance, LINKS has provided \$93,000 and \$220,000 as capital to the branches in Kailahun and Konno respectively, together with computers, motorbikes and administrative assistance.

This institution provides small loans to existing businesses, working with groups to utilize peer pressure to achieve a high rate of pay-back. A number of key principles underpin the success of the initiative:

1. Loans are made to groups and group members are jointly responsible for the repayment of loans held by individuals.
2. All groups should comprise at least 70% women.
3. Loans are made available in small amounts increasing over time as each loan is successfully repaid.
4. Businesses graduate to larger loans and smaller groups as they grow.
5. Collateral is not required for the smallest loans, instead it is accumulated as interest and can be repaid when the loan is paid back.
6. Interest rates are held at 2.5%
7. Each business' net worth is initially assessed as "debt capacity" and only those businesses with a debt capacity of \$82 or more are considered for loans.
8. Businesses must have been in operation for at least 6 months in a single area to qualify.
9. All loanees are required to undertake business management training.

To date, the Kailahun branch has \$93,000 on loan to 707 businesses with arrears of \$208. The Konno branch has \$220,000 on loan to roughly 4,000 businesses with nothing in arrears. The total level of non-performance over the last three years is less than one tenth of one percent.

Loans are initially made to “Solidarity Groups” of 15-20 people each. The starter loan size is \$100 per person (\$2,000 per group). This can be repaid over four to twelve months with an average period of six months. After each loan has been successfully repaid by the whole group, a larger loan can be taken out. After four successful borrowing cycles, group members are eligible for \$330 loans, taken out within small groups of five members each (“Club Five” groups), and after four more cycles, Club Five members would become eligible for individually held “Single Enterprise Loans” of just over \$1,000 each. (This last stage has not yet been reached in Kailahun or Konno, but has been piloted in Freetown).

Collateral is deposited with interest at the end of each month and accumulates over time, so that there is no requirement for an initial deposit. The level of collateral deposited is 10% for Solidarity groups and 15% for Club Five members.

Loans were being used for a variety of purposes, although direct agricultural production was not a common use. Trading of non-agricultural goods was the most popular, although some loans were being used for agricultural processing and for commodity trading. A small proportion was also being used to finance service industries such as motorbike taxis, tailoring and telecenters. Generally however, Finance Salone is urban or peri-urban focused and the high demand for loans means that businesses, which can achieve rapid turnover, will be more successful when competing to qualify for a loan than purely agricultural businesses, which by their nature have a lower rate of return and require a longer repayment period.

Most loanees indicated that they had benefited considerably from the training that they had received, but that it had not been enough and that they would prefer a more intensive training course.

Amongst the Finance Salone beneficiaries interviewed, two groups in Kailahun District (both Club 5 groups) reported that they had begun borrowing from Finance Salone more than four years ago, when their individual debt capacity was less than 500,000 Leones (US\$167.00), but had now progressed to individual loans of between one and two million Leones (US\$333 –US\$667) for one group and three million Leones (US\$1,000) for the other (indicating an individual debt capacity of between twice and six times the original level. These traders had worked closely with Finance Salone. They had all been in business before they approach the microfinance institution and traded a range of goods, including dishes and rubber ware, clothes from Guinea, shoes, lace, palm oil, rice, watches, jewellery and cosmetics.

Individual debt capacity is an approximate indicator of net worth, and the increase in this level shows that the cycling of Finance Salone loans had significantly increased the net worth of the individual group members. It can not be automatically assumed that increased business capacity and turnover will lead to increased profit, but the fact that the ten beneficiaries had all worked through at least five loan cycles, repaying them in full and accumulating collateral at the same time, indicates that each of the individual businesses were profitable on the one hand, and had undoubtedly increased in size as a result of the loans provided on the other. There is a strong implication that these two factors combined would result in increased profitability. This cannot be unequivocally demonstrated from the data available, but is very likely.

Beneficiaries also reported that as a result of the loans that they had received they had been able to trade in new and different products. In some instances, cheaper goods, including vegetables had been replaced by watches, jewellery and cosmetics, which were considered to be more expensive, but more profitable.

Unfortunately the 2.5% annual interest charge is inadequate to cover the current level of administrative charges, which were estimated in Konno to amount to at least 13% of the total portfolio value annually. This is significantly higher than commercial bank charges for administration, which would normally range between 2% and 5%. This needs to be addressed if this clearly successful and useful facility is to become sustainable.

CAPITAL GRANT ACTIVITIES

A number of different activities were undertaken under the aegis of capital grant provision. These included garri processing, provision of transport, supply of seeds or planting materials and capital for stock accumulation. In each case, suitable groups were identified and assisted to develop a business activity with support from the LINKS program. Grants ranged from \$17,500 to Fachima Agribusiness Services for the purchase of input supplies (seeds, hoes, fertilizer and other basic inputs) to less than \$1,000 for garri processing equipment. Grants have been provided either as cash or in kind. In each case, initial training in business development and business management was provided to some or all of the beneficiaries in the groups, but in almost all cases it appeared that further supervision and/or further training would be beneficial. In addition, assistance was provided in the registration of cooperatives or new business entities.

As examples of the Capital grant element of the program, the LINKS program has assisted in the improvement of farmers' access to inputs through the establishment of two separate business entities:

- (1) Fachima Agribusiness Services – a partnership between ten FFS groups and five Womens Cooperatives from 12 chiefdoms in Kono District (300 members from FFS and 12,500 members from Five Women's Cooperatives).
- (2) Women Agro-business Enterprise – Kabala
This enterprise is owned by an association of 30 cooperatives, each of 25 members.

To set up the above two enterprises, LINKS contributed the following:

Fachima: Stock to the tune of \$17,500 in the form of Vegetable Seeds; Fertilizer; Pesticides; Tools; Rice Seed and a Tri-Cycle for transportation and distribution purposes. The partnership was responsible for its registration and office hire in Koidu town.

Women Agro-business: \$8,825 in the form of stocks - Vegetable Seeds; Fertilizer; Pesticides; Tools and Rice Seeds. The Women Agri-business was responsible for the registration of the business and the hiring of a store/business center in Kabala.

Both businesses are currently in operation. The first may experience cash flow difficulties and may need further technical assistance to resolve these. The latter already has considerable trading experience and appears set to provide a valuable service to farmers.

One area where capital grants had mixed success was in the financing of garri-processing groups. In the rural areas, these were generally successful, but they appeared to have failed in amongst the peri-urban youth.

The response of the peri-urban youth to the garri processing initiative appears disappointing, but does not necessarily imply that the initiative is fundamentally inappropriate. Indeed, fundamental market considerations of input supply and demand are satisfactory for cassava and garri in most areas, suggesting that if the specific concerns of the peri-urban youth could be met, then garri-processing would still be a valid initiative.

Specifically, the peri-urban youth expressed disappointment with garri-processing because it did not generate the immediate cash returns at a high enough level to meet their daily cash needs for food and lodging. This is almost inevitable in a small processing unit where purchasing power may be limited, turnover will be restricted and cash flow may be irregular. There is no reason why a peri urban group should not generate returns that are enough to meet these needs, but to do so on a regular daily basis means making a paradigm shift in approach to the business.

The difference between a rural garri-processing unit, where own-produce and other sources of income can bridge gaps in cash flow and where accommodation costs are limited and a strictly commercial peri-urban unit, where a guaranteed minimum cash return must be available to each group member each day is considerable. There are four elements of a garri-processing initiative that would need to be put in place for a commercial initiative to be successful.

1. The size of the initiative must be adequate to allow for regular cash payments to each member of the group. This will imply a minimum business size and specifically a minimum volume of working capital that may be considerably larger than those of most existing rural groups.
2. Participants will require more advanced training in individual and business cash flow management, including working with commercial sources of finance if necessary.
3. Participants will require more advanced training in the logistics of purchasing and product marketing.
4. Storage capacity should be such as to allow regular operation of processing facilities throughout the year. Working capital reserves should match this capacity.

These inputs will be required to generate a business that has the capacity and reserves to meet daily cash needs during the leaner periods of the year, and to repay loans and make a profit during the more productive periods.

It is clear that the development of peri-urban youth opportunities is more cash-intensive than parallel initiatives in rural areas. There may be alternative business options such as tele-center development, motorbike taxi services, or other trading initiatives that could also be developed by peri-urban youth, but these are already facilitated by SuG and micro-finance initiatives. Providing increased access to such options for peri-urban youth will undoubtedly require additional LINKS finance.

There is only limited experience to suggest that other processing or trading initiatives (such as oil palm processing, soap making of garra dyeing) might be as effective as garri processing. In the latter case however, the experience of rural groups clearly shows that a market exists for garri, and that it can be profitably produced. Turning this experience (or indeed any of the alternatives listed above) into a sound business in a peri-urban environment will require additional finance and technical assistance above and beyond that provided to rural groups. In the short term, this could be met through hands-on technical assistance, providing field agents to work closely with a group to develop a business plan and to set up and manage an effective business, together with a combination of grant and loan finance, either using existing SUG/micro finance mechanisms or by introducing additional elements such as credit guarantee schemes.

In the longer term, the business might develop in two directions. Based upon the experience of at least two cassava production seasons, the field agents would make a decision as to whether to seek external management, or to allow the group to develop from its own resources. In the first case, the going concern would be sold to a local entrepreneur – either completely or as a partnership. As a condition of sale the business would continue to employ the group members, but the entrepreneur would effectively replace the field agent as the source of management skill and of investment finance. In the second case, the group would continue to manage itself. This might require more intermittent technical assistance as necessary.

It is recommended that the CORAD consortium should consider the first of these two options, and seek to develop a role as an agent, introducing private sector partnership, management or mentorship, as appropriate, into group initiatives. In the long term, small business groups will need to move towards absolute commercialism and CORAD partners can play a key role in helping them to do this by seeking out, vetting and introducing responsible private sector business partners for these emergent businesses.

The concluding recommendation would be that garri-processing need not be rejected per se, as a business opportunity for peri-urban youth. However, any business in a peri-urban environment needs to be more robust in terms of management experience and both physical and financial reserves than its rural counterpart if it is to meet the needs of peri-urban youth.

COMMUNICATIONS

A number of different initiatives have been undertaken under the heading of communications. These are described, with comments, below:

AGRICULTURAL FAIRS

SFCG has successfully coordinated the holding of three agricultural shows (one in each district) so far. The objective of these fairs was to exhibit produce of farmers in order to showcase the impact of the LINKS project on agricultural productivity, while at the same time facilitating dialogue, discussion and experience sharing among agriculture stakeholders.

The impact of the FFS's was clearly demonstrated in these fairs through the exhibits of beneficiaries. This influenced a number of non beneficiary farmers to take an interest in the Farmer Field Schools.

The fairs also established linkages between farmers in the target districts and the Ministry of Agriculture. Farmers became aware of facilities they could access through the Ministry as a result of talks given by Ministry officials during the fairs, and several of them have since been accessing these facilities.

In addition, there are instances where links were established between farmers and traders/business people that have resulted in on-going mutually beneficial relationships.

Despite the overwhelming success of the three fairs held so far, it is very doubtful whether one agricultural fair in a district in 3 years will create the lasting impact that the LINKS project hopes to achieve. Although it is noted that LINKS partners usually organise mini agricultural shows as part of the graduation ceremony of Farmer Field Schools, these are obviously such small scale, that they cannot have comparable impact. The original program description indicates that annual

agricultural or trade fairs will be organized. However, largely due to inadequate budgetary provisions, this has been limited to one in each district for the duration of the project.

NEWSPAPER INSERTS

Four sets of newspaper inserts have been produced so far. The majority of these inserts, approximately 3,000 have been distributed via 5 partner newspapers. The rest have been distributed to LINKS partner organisations, government officials, NGOs and business institutions. While the inserts are impressive in terms of content and layout, it is doubtful whether they have had much impact. In the first place, it proved virtually impossible to find individuals that had seen and read the inserts other than LINKS partners and government officials involved in some way with the project. This could be attributed to the fact that in the more than 2 years of the project's life, only 4 issues of the inserts have been produced. It is noted that the original program description proposed weekly newspaper inserts. This would certainly have been more effective if achieved, however it is understood that the cost of producing colour inserts proved prohibitive, particularly since the project did not originally take this level of expenditure into account.

SFCG employed the strategy of using journalists from the independent media to produce the content of the inserts by taking them on tour of project activities so they could see first hand the impact of the activities. This strategy is questionable, particularly since the publication is clearly identifiable as a CORAD LINKS publication. There is also no indication on the inserts that they were produced by independent journalists. Consequently, while it is acknowledged that an independent perspective generally makes for credibility, this could not have been achieved since the inserts are clearly not independent publications.

If the inserts are expected to project an independent perspective, it may be worth continuing with the strategy of using journalists working in the independent media to produce the stories. However, it may be necessary to change from producing inserts to having stories published in the 5 partner newspapers on a regular basis. Fortunately, at least 2 of these newspapers now have the capacity to produce coloured pages. Even if the publications are restricted to these two papers and the cost of the coloured printing is borne by the project, the expenditure will be much less and the coverage and impact will be greater.

VIDEOS

SFCG has so far produced two videos as part of a series titled "The Road to Food Security". The first one dealt with agricultural productivity in Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu districts, while the second dealt with activities undertaken by the LINKS project, including Farmer Field Schools and small-scale transport solutions. The stated objective of producing these videos is to inform and influence policy makers. It is very doubtful whether the videos produced so far have had any influence on government policy, since the key policy makers in the areas of agriculture and youth have not even seen the videos to date. The strategy of having the videos broadcast on the national TV station, SLBS, and the private TV station, ABC, as a means of reaching the target audience has obviously not worked, despite the fact that they both broadcast the videos several times. There are multiple reasons for this failure.

In the first place, the quality of the videos is not very professional. Although the second video is better than the first, they are both technically flawed and as a result will not hold the attention of an independent audience for long. There are problems with shot framing, consistency of style and clarity of concept, among others.

Secondly, local television viewing in Sierra Leone, is currently very limited, not only by the fact that electricity is a scarce commodity, but also by the fact that programs are very boring. While it is a fact that most policy makers in Freetown do watch local television, the largest viewership is for the national news bulletin. Consequently, the only guaranteed means of capturing the attention of TV viewers is to have a program broadcast adjacent to the news or as part of the news. In order to achieve this, it may be necessary to produce short video clips of maximum 2 – 3 minutes duration and have them broadcast immediately before, during or after the news.

Annex C: Sustainability and Replication

The following annex considers the sustainability of each of the key interventions in terms of both their implementation and their impacts and their potential for replication.

Business Management and Functional Literacy Training.

The implementation of the business management training has been undertaken in the three target districts by nine subcontracted agencies who have been trained and licenced in the dissemination of the “Making Cents’ materials. The Functional Literacy course has been disseminated by two NGOs in Konno and by CARE in Koinadugu. In the majority of cases, the courses have been held on a voucher basis, wherein 80% of the cost has been subsidized by the LINKS project. This is clearly unsustainable and it was anticipated that the demand for non-voucher (i.e. at-cost) training would develop as others came to appreciate the benefits of training from those who had attended subsidized courses. In practice this has not occurred as rapidly as anticipated and although there is considerable demand for both courses, the capacity of the target groups to pay for the training to an extent that would render it commercially sustainable remains questionable. Beneficiaries raised the issue cash flow limitations, and indicated that if the course could be provided on credit, then it might stimulate much greater demand. As yet however, the key elements of training in functional literacy and business management do not appear to be sustainable.

This aspect of the LINKS program deserves closer attention in that the core skills that are provided by the training impact dramatically and sustainably upon the businesses and lives of the beneficiaries and are fundamental to long-term development. While it may be possible to achieve limited progress using FFS and VSL groups, further development using Finance Salone, SUG or Capital Grant interventions all require the basic skills provided through these training interventions, and it cannot be expected that market-orientated activities will develop without them.

The FDGs did report some transfer of “Making Cents” business management skills within family units (generally from wife to husband), but this was limited in extent. Literacy and numeracy programs were not sufficiently advanced for this to be at all noticeable. The team observed that although the mechanism of using subcontracted NGOs to deliver training had been set in place, it had not been able to meet the initial targets set in terms of numbers trained.

It is for these reasons that the evaluation team recommends a greater focus on the mechanisms needed to achieve a wider uptake of the core skills. In contrast to other areas where it is possible to achieve replication through the concentration of resources to develop examples of excellence, functional literacy and business management training requires both materials and skilled trainers (although the level of skill required is not that great). The current intervention supplies both elements, but barriers to replication exist in terms of cost of materials, licensing and availability of skills. A program supplying cheaper materials that can be photocopied, that relies more upon training of trainers to disseminate skills and a core staff of examiners/inspectors who would perform initial training and subsequently remunerate locally-trained trainers according to performance, might achieve greater replication.

Finance Salone

Discussions with the branch financial officers at Finance Salone indicated that insofar as the capital revolved amongst beneficiaries was concerned, the microfinance program was extremely sustainable and non-performing loans amounted to significantly less than one tenth of one percent of the total portfolio value. This compares very positively with the low interest rate of 2.5% per 6 month cycle (5% per annum). However, the annual administrative costs of the scheme in Koidu exceeds \$28,000 (i.e 13% of the portfolio value), while the annual interest earned is of the order of \$11,000, indicating that at the current rates the initiative is not financially sustainable.

The normal cost associated with loan administration would be expected to be less than 5%. Staffing levels are close to a minimum at present and could not feasibly be reduced further so that the high percentage administrative charge results from the low capital volume in circulation. If donor funds were available this could be doubled to achieve economies of scale and reduce administrative costs to 6.5%, but it would still require an increase in interest rates to completely cover the administrative costs.

Given the considerable and sustainable benefits associated with the loans that are provided by the institution, the long-term survival of Finance Salone is a clear priority. In view of the very high interest rates that are sustainably charged by VSL groups (of the order of 120%), the team recommends that consideration be given to increasing the Finance Salone interest rate, if long term financial sustainability is required. The ability of small traders to borrow money and to repay within a short period at 10% interest per month suggests that the primary benefit of existing microfinance initiatives in the target areas is the provision of access to finance rather than its cost and that a doubling of the 2.5 % interest charge is unlikely to impact upon either the demand for Finance Salone services or the ability of clients to repay.

The replication of Finance Salone interventions in other urban/peri-urban environments is potentially limited by the cash flow considerations noted above. However, if long-term financial viability could be ensured (either through increased funding or a change in interest rate), then the sound lending principles and simple procedures of this initiative, coupled with the observed high demand for microfinance strongly suggest that Finance Salone would have a high potential for replication in other areas.

Village Savings and Loan Groups

The group nature of the VSL initiative, together with well defined, simple operational procedures and consequent high rate of return allow VSL groups to be highly sustainable both in terms of implementation and impacts. Once the groups have been established, minimal supervision is required and after an initial period of guidance, it would appear that they can become effectively self-sustaining and grow.

It was observed that VSL groups can indeed outgrow their own business management capacity and reach a stage at which further input might be required to ensure efficient management of accumulated funds. In one case two VSL groups proposed to combine their funds to purchase a truck, but lacked the necessary business planning capacity to assess the viability of their proposed investment. Under such circumstances the capacity of a future program to supply business mentoring services on a demand-driven basis might meet the needs of VSL groups that are moving to the next level of development.

The VSL initiative is highly replicable. Its impacts were seen to generate considerable interest and demand among non-VSL beneficiaries, and its simple structure and procedures require little external input to initiate new groups. The team noted that this was indeed occurring in a number of instances. As noted elsewhere (and reported by beneficiaries) the single limitation to successful replication is the availability of adequate numeracy and literacy skills to ensure complete transparency of operation. However, it is recognized that this is not an absolute limitation, but rather a matter of degree.

Capital Grants Initiatives and Start Up Grants

While the provision of capital grants itself is clearly not a sustainable initiative, the projects assisted through capital grants may well be, depending upon the nature of the projects and those operating them. Thus, one input supply business (the Women's Agro business Enterprise in Kabala) had considerable trading experience and looked capable of expanding sustainably after receiving a capital grant, while in contrast, the similar operation, Fachima Agriservices lacked a business plan and appeared unable to meet the expectations of its members as regards to crop purchasing. It was commonly observed from the different business operations that ongoing supervision for a period of two or three years would be required

to ensure sustainability. The concept of initial training and initial finance may be enough to start a business or expand a small operation, but given the regrettable statistic that 80% of all small businesses in Europe and North America fail within the first five years of operation, it is clear that through the provision of Start-up Grants and Capital Grants, the LINKS project will generate a considerable number of business failures, unless business supervision and additional technical assistance can be provided on an ongoing basis. In this area, more than any other, sustainability will require long-term input and additional technical assistance over a period of up to five years.

The replication of Capital Grants and SUG initiatives will take considerable time, depending upon the success of the business operations started under the program, the availability of external finance and the overall business (enabling) environment. It is not possible to comment beyond this other than to observe that demand for both SUGs and Capital Grants in both the peri-urban and rural environments significantly exceeds availability so that the potential for replication is high.

Farmer Field Schools

The short-term sustainability of Farmer Field Schools is dependent first upon the impact of the original field agent and secondly upon the ability of the group facilitator to motivate members and of group members to repay the group facilitator for his/her services⁴⁵. Provided this arrangement is mutually beneficial then the FFS may be sustained. However, the benefits to the group will diminish fairly rapidly over time as the group absorbs all the information that the facilitator can impart, unless new information can be provided, either through the regular retraining of facilitators, or by field visits to other FFS groups, or by additional extension input from MAFFS.

Replication of FFS groups was not occurring as rapidly as anticipated. Each FFS started by field agents was expected to generate two “second generation” groups supported by trained local farmer facilitators. In practice about 50% of this target had been achieved. It was too early to observe whether or not “third generation” groups could be established. It was noted that the success of the FFS concept lies beyond the results of the simple experiments that are undertaken. Considerable benefits are gained from the implicit transfer of good agricultural practices, group development, business management skills, and planning capacity. These make up an integrated package of concepts that can be imparted by a field agent but which may not be as immediately recognized or transferred by a farmer facilitator. It is possible that the message may lose impact as it is transferred, so that either some form of supervision or some retraining of facilitators is necessary. This is being undertaken for the first generation of farmer facilitators, but resources prohibit such supervision for second-generation facilitators and this will inhibit replication.

Effective farmer field schools at the village level should by definition be temporary in nature. If the training has been effective, beneficiaries will move beyond them in terms of both capacity and need, although the FFS framework might still remain as a vehicle for group work activities. In terms of education however FFS participants will eventually need to move to the next level, possibly to commercial farming demonstration plots, as demonstrated by CARE. Future interventions could build upon the model that CARE is currently developing, which places greater emphasis on profitability, cash generation and increased intensification of production. It is possible that FFS groups that continue over the long-term without evolving away from their current goal of imparting fundamental good agricultural practices will be symptomatic of developmental stagnation.

⁴⁵ FFS Facilitators are provided with a bicycle by the LINKS program but are otherwise unpaid. To compensate for their input, the FFS group will frequently undertake group work on the facilitators farm or will provide other payments in kind (labor or produce).

Communications

The fact that radio stations in the target districts have started producing local agriculture programs is a positive sign for the sustainability of using the medium as a communication tool for agricultural development. However this needs to be strengthened through capacity building in the form of training and logistics support if it is to develop successfully.

The MIS currently being managed by CRS and disseminated through the SFCG radio program and newspaper inserts in its current form is not sustainable beyond the life of the project. Given the critical importance and the profound impact this aspect of the project has had so far, it is essential that maximum effort be exerted to ensure its sustainability.

The newspaper insert in its present form is totally unsustainable. Not only is it expensive, no effort has so far been made to either integrate it into existing media or create a mechanism that will ensure its continuation, albeit in a different form after the project ends. This situation needs to be redressed because the print media is an important tool for information dissemination and awareness-raising, particularly among the business community.

Given the limited sustainability of most of the communications initiatives, potential for replication is low. However, the development of local radio agriculture programs does offer some opportunities that could be developed in a future program.

Annex D: Farmer Field School Sustainability Analysis

CROP PRODUCTION SCHEDULE OF FFS AND THEIR COMMUNITIES – ADAPTED FROM CRS - KAILAHUN

				2005	2006	2007	Total	Total
FFS				25	22	5		
IVS Cultivated @ 2ac	50	44	10	104	56.1 t			
Upland Rice Cultivation	-	-	-	-	-	-		
Cassava Cultivated (2.5 ac @ 2t/ac)			75	66	15	156	312 t	
Vegetables cultivated (0.5 ac x 300kg/ac)		12.5	11	2.5	26	7.8 t		
Oil Palm cultivated	-	Not	Harvested	-				
Coffee cultivated		-	Not	Harvested	-			
Cocoa cultivated		-	Not	Harvested	-			
Groundnut – 1 ac @ 300 50	22	5	77	23.1				
Total Beneficiary		750	660	150	1560			
Total Household with only 3 active workers		250	220	50	520			
IVS @ 2 ac/household (≤ 500	440	100	1040	550.8				
Upland rice @ 4 ac/household (15 bu/ac)		1000	880	200	2080	842.4		
Cassava @ 4ac/househol 1000	880	200	2080	4160t				
Vegetable 0 125 110	25	260	78t					
Groundnut @ 2ac/household @ 300kg/ac		506	440	100	1040	312t		

TOTAL PRODUCTION AND VALUE

Total Paddy (1449.3 tons or 28986 bags) @ Le50,000	=	144930	X Le1000
Total Cassava (4472.6 tons or 89440 bags – Le5000	=	44720	
Total Vegetable 85.8 t or 17/6 bags @ Le200,000	=	34320	
Total Groundnut 334.1 t or 9811 bags @ Le60,000	=	58866	
Total direct and indirect earning from 52 FFS		<u>Le1,587,206,000</u>	
Therefore earning for FFS = Le30,523,192			

Summary Estimate of Gross Income Thru FFS

	2005	2006	2007	Total
CRS – Kailahun (FFS)	24	23	5	
World Vision Kono (FFS)	40	200	65	
CARE Koinadugu (FFS)	30	51	9	
CRS Koinadugu (FFS)	16	12	24	
Total beneficiaries = 499 x 30 = 14970	110	286	103	499
Gross Income @ 30,523,192	33,576	87,296	31,439	152,311

SUSTAINABILITY

Beneficiary population 499 FFS x 30 = 14970 farmers
 1449.3 mt paddy = 820 MT Milled Rice

	Production	Food Eaten	Balance Sold	Price	Value
Rice @ 50kg per head per annum (1/2 normal requirement)	820	700	120	70,000	175,000,000
Cassava @ 100 kg per head per annum	4522	1491	3031	100,000	303,100,000
Vegetables – Consume 10% and sell balance	770	77	693	445,714	308,880,000
Groundnut – Consume 40% at home	333	133	200	1,765,980	353,196,000
Total Sales				=	1,140,176,000

Annex E: Documents Reviewed

BIBLIOGRAPHY ordered in reverse chronology and under alphabetical categories

ANNUAL WORK PLANS

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Submission Date: October 26th, 2006
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Submission Date: December 16th, 2005

BACKGROUND

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- Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping, Food Security, Farm Production, Health and Nutrition Survey 2005; GoSL in Collaboration with UNDP/UNICEF/WHO/FAO; March 2006
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- CARE Program Description LINKS 2004
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- Summary Budget for the LINKS Program CARE Year 3
- CRS LINKS Detailed Budget AWP Year 3
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- ARC Community Reintegration Project Budget for Year 3
- SFCG CORAD Phased Budget (Oct. 2006 – September 2007)
- Final Detailed Budget CRS Year 2
- World Vision Summary budget for Year 2
- ARC Community Reintegration Project Budget for Year 2
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Contact Person: Nick Webber (Country Director)
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INDICATOR PERFORMANCE TRACKING TABLES

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SUCCESS STORIES

- LINKs FY 06 Quarter 4 Performance Report ANNEX 2(a): EXCITING SUCCESS STORIES
- LINKs FY 06 Additional SUCCESS STORIES
- CORAD LINKS Success story Year 2 Quarter 2

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- CORAD LINKS Performance Report Second USG Quarter (January 1 to March 31, 2007) Submission Date: April 30, 2007 Contacts: CARE Nick Webber, Country Director, John Perry, LINKs Coordination & Compliance Manager
- CORAD LINKS Performance Report First USG Quarter (October 1st to December 31, 2006) Submission Date: January 26th, 2007 Contacts: CARE Nick Webber, Country Director, John Perry, LINKs Coordination & Compliance Manager
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- CORAD LINKS Performance Report Second USG Quarter (January 1st to March 31st, 2006) Contacts: CARE Nick Webber, Country Director, John Perry, LINKs Coordination & Compliance Manager
- CORAD LINKS Performance Report First USG Quarter (October 1st to December 31st, 2005) - Submission Date: February 1st, 2006 Contacts: CARE Nick Webber, Country Director, John Perry, LINKs Coordination & Compliance Manager

Annex F: List of People Interviewed

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Organisation</u>
Val Encomio	Program Manager	ARC
Kellie Koroma	Town Chief,	Badala
Henry Kawa	Asst. LINKS Project Manager	CARE
Garth Van't Hul	CARE Deputy Country Director	CARE
Amani M'balé	CARE Youth and Livelihoods Coordinator	CARE
Ekramul Kabir	Chief of Party – CORAD	CARE
Alpha I. Dumbuya	Field Supervisor	CARE
Augustine Gbondo	Field Supervisor	CARE
Richard Goba	Org. Dev. Coordinator	CARE
Sorie I Koroma	Org. Dev. Coordinator	CARE
Tamba Dalton Kassoh	Org. Dev. Coordinator	CARE
John Perry	Outgoing Chief of Party CORAD	CARE
Oscar Maroto	Agricultural Program Manager	CRS
Nicole S. Balliette	Head of Programs	CRS
Anthony Foday	Agricultural Officer	CRS Koinadugu
Leonard Bailor	Area Manager	CRS Koinadugu
Tamba Kargbo	Food Officer	CRS Koinadugu
Christian Fomba	LINKS Officer	CRS Koinadugu
Jane Hobson	Social Development Adviser	DFID
Momodu Koroma	Chiefdom Speaker,	Diang Chiefdom
Sheku Turay	Court Clerk	Diang Chiefdom
P.C. Alhaji Sheku Daboh	Paramount Chief	Diang Chiefdom
Mathias Reusing	Rural Development Advisor	European Commission
Cyril Lahai	Deputy Representative	FAO
Karlheinz Eyrich	Project Manager	GTZ
A.B. Swaray	District Agricultural Officer	Kailahun
Edward K. Foryoh	Chiefdom Speaker & Acting. Paramount Chief	Kissi Bendu Chiefdom
Fallah Jusu	Konio Section Chief	Kissi Bendu Chiefdom
Tommy Tengbeh	Principal	Kissi Bendu Sec. School
David F. Turay	Chairman	Koinadugu District Council
Alhassan H. Jalloh	Chairman Development Committee	Koinadugu District Council
Abubakar Daramy	Chief Administrator	Koinadugu District Council
Alex F. Conteh	Dep. Chair, Koinadugu Dist. Council	Koinadugu District Council
Omaru Jalloh	Dep. Chief Administrator	Koinadugu District Council
Chernor Jalloh	NaCSA Rep.,	Koinadugu District Council

Job T. Koademba	Produce buyer	Kono
James T. Ellie	Chair, Agricultural Committee	Kono District Council
David Sandi	Deputy Chair	Kono District Council
Mohamed Sheriff	Director. of Agric.	Kono District Council
Joseph Cornell	Regional Agricultural Representative East	MAFFS
I.M. Kabbah	Secretary	Makona River Union
Bockarie Marah	Chairman	Maraya Farmers Association
Dr.Sama Mondeh	Minister	Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
Dr. Dennis Bright	Minister	Ministry of Youth and Sport
Alhaji Umaru Akim Conteh	Youth Officer,	MOYS Koinadugu
Husham Sesay	Youth Officer	MOYS Kono
Sheku C. Kpose	Councillor	Peje West
Yankuba F. Moigua	Councillor,	Peje West
Chief Paul Kawoh	Chiefdom Speaker, Pejewa	Pejewa
Pa Musa Gbofio	PC Representative	Pejewa
Chief Gassimu	Town Chief, Pejewa	Pejewa
Steven Babawo	Chiefdom Speaker	Pendembu
Philip Conteh	Director of Agriculture	Pujehun District
M.S. Koroma	Zonal Agricultural Representative	Pujehun District
Sheku Gondor	Councillor	Pujehun District Council
Mr. Bianke	Cocoa trader	Segbwema
Abdul Rahman Tarawallie	LINKS Coordinator	SFCG
Juana B Bhonopha	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	SFCG
Ibrahim Moigua	Studio Rep. Kono	SFCG Talking Drum
Mr. Alimamy Othimo Bangura	Station Manager	SLBS FM90.2, Kono
Sahr Joseph Sebba	Dep. Station Manager, SLBS Kono	SLBS Kono
Meg Audette	Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager	World Vision
A. Tom Roberts	LINKS Coordinator	WVSL
Fred Goba	Monitoring and Evaluation Officer	WVSL
Myles Harrison	National Director	WVSL
David Lahai	Agricultural Coordinator	WVSL Kono
Joseph Mustapha	Manager	WVSL Kono
Sylvester Mallah	MED Officer	WVSL Kono
Sammy Jaiah	Technical Development Officer	WVSL Kono

Annex G: Methodology

Within Sierra Leone it was expected that different areas would have different problems and constraints calling for a range of different interventions. This required an analytical approach that takes an overview of the different interventions, while at the same time looking at specific impacts where relevant. The approach of the Evaluation Team has been to make a preliminary assessment of the different types of initiatives undertaken by the three Cooperating Sponsors. These have been categorised as:

- Strengthening Farmer Field Schools
- Downstream Processing
- Promotion of Input Supply mechanisms
- Promotion of Output marketing
- Microfinance/Savings Group Development
- Market Information Systems Development
- Other Business Development
- Support to Post Harvest Processing and Storage Activities
- Social Mobilisation (Group Strengthening and Governance)

Overarching these initiatives are elements of interaction with District development plans, provision of functional literacy and considerations of gender equity and governance and communications.

The Evaluation Team worked with the Consortium in a participatory manner. Together they developed a work plan and itinerary to allow each of these different initiatives to be visited and assessed. The Team shared the proposed methods with CORAD. The Evaluation Team visited each of the three Districts (Kailahun, Kono and Koinadugu) and each of the Cooperating Sponsors within each district according to the attached work plan. Different types of activities were assessed in different areas; all types of interventions were assessed during the course of the visit.

Using the methodology detailed below, the team conducted an assessment of impacts at both the beneficiary level and at the implementation level. Using focus discussion groups (FGDs) in the first case and guided interviews in the second to draw out key issues for analysis. During the course of the field trip, the team held discussions with beneficiary groups, cooperating sponsor staff, District Government officials and extension agents and non-project beneficiaries.⁴⁶

In addition to the above, the Evaluation Team visited and collected secondary data from the Cooperating Sponsors, USAID, other Donors and Government Offices, both before and after the visit to the field. The secondary data has been used to provide the background information necessary for a comprehensive understanding of the program and to corroborate findings made in the field.

Negative impacts, concerns and constraints were properly expressed in this evaluation. However, the underlying approach emphasized potential areas of success for replication in other areas, rather than to develop a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis of interventions based upon a limited assessment. The team recognised that some interventions were less successful due to specific circumstances, correctable constraints or individual management deficiencies rather than inherent limitations of the intervention

⁴⁶ The latter category will consist of at least one farmer field school in each district that has not been part of the LINKS project, together with traders and others whose livelihoods may have been indirectly affected by LINKS activities.

itself. Negative conclusions, in this regard are of limited value and may be modified in future years. Conversely, the identification of early positive impacts will be of immediate benefit to other programs and can be considered useful results.

Negative conclusions must in some cases be considered open-ended, while the majority of positive conclusions can be considered concrete and to have predictive value. This evaluation will therefore be most useful by highlighting positive benefits, where they truly exist and to the extent that this is possible. The approach used both in interviews and in analysis sought to identify positive impacts for further development.

Methodology for Field Visits

The field study used two specific methodologies to evaluate livelihood interventions. The first methodology consisted of structured interviews using detailed checklists to obtain general information, both on the overall environment in which programs have been implemented and on the specific interventions themselves. A copy of the checklist of questions that will be used for data collection in the field is attached. It is not expected that all questions will be asked in each case. Rather a specific set of questions may be used, drawn from the overall list according to their relevance in each specific situation.

The second methodology utilised an appreciative enquiry or ‘assets- based approach.’ The appreciative inquiry (AI) approach: sought to discover successes in beneficiaries’ lives prior to LINKS; build upon community successes; identify areas in which LINKs might have provided useful assistance; facilitate a process whereby participants understand and identify their ownership and skills for the successes and differentiate how external interventions facilitate that process; and finally, identify relevant future interventions that build upon existing and latent strengths. The approach focuses on the “best of what is” instead of focusing on problems. (See Box).

Focus discussion groups were selected that involved a cross section of beneficiaries disaggregated where possible by age and gender regarding the relevance, impact and sustainability of the different livelihood initiatives. The discussion groups were drawn from the groups being assessed at the time (ie. from farmer field schools or from credit and savings groups) and were conducted using interpreters.

In this evaluation, the main elements of such an approach consisted of a set of questions asking:

“What outstanding successes can you (as a group) identify during the last three years -irrespective of their being within or outside of project activities?”

“Are there common characteristics among these successes? What are they? Can they be used in other activities to achieve success?”

“Was the LINKS program helpful in developing these successes?”

If so – “which aspects of the project were particularly helpful and why?”

“How do you see yourself in 5 years (regarding particular activity)? How will you achieve this? “

“What could the LINKS project do in the future to assist you in this development?”

In each case, subsidiary questions were asked to provide ancillary or background information, but the key aspects of allowing beneficiaries to identify their own successes without reference to the program, introducing the program as only a supporting element to their development and looking for the community’s own plans for future development without reference to the program, before introducing the

program as one possible means of future support are maintained throughout all discussions. Specific LINKS activities will define the focus of the overall inquiry. Related technical questions will be framed within the context of the AI approach.

The philosophy behind such an approach is that more relevant and accurate information can be elucidated through an open-ended emphasis upon positive aspects of community development, and that such a discussion can help beneficiaries to develop conceptually beyond their current circumstances to see options for their own future development. These aspects can be particularly useful both in assessing the relevance and effectiveness of existing interventions and in suggesting avenues for further development programs.

The Evaluation Team noted that initially the focus groups seemed concerned with all their problems and lacks and emphasized what a difference LINKS made in their lives. However, adherence to AI changed the dynamic of the dialogue. By the end of the conversations most of the focus groups were able to detail how they could achieve certain goals without external supports and then went on to specify requests for outside assistance that would build their own capacities. However, it must be noted that most groups struggled with visualizing a dream three to five years in the future. Most had humble dreams revolving around improvements in their daily lives. Young men and women had the most expansive dreams, e.g. being international traders, owning their own businesses and having hired help.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is based on the principle that “in every society, organization, or group, something works” and “The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.”

The following four steps outline the key elements of the AI approach.

- *Discover*
Searching for the best of what is: Appreciating that which gives life Identifying strengths, resources, assets, values, and wishes for the future.
- *Dream*
Envision the ideal of what might be; envision impact: Given the strengths, resources, assets, values and wishes identified in the previous stage, what is possible in the future?
- *Design*
Co-construct the future; reach consensus on what should be. Designing the systems and processes that will carry the Dream forward to the future.
- *Deliver or Do*
Experience what can be. Implement action that builds upon the strengths, resources, assets, and values of the past and present, and leads toward the wishes for the future.

Problem Focused Approach to Development	Appreciative Approach to Development
Identification of problem	Appreciating & valuing the best of “what is”
Analysis of causes	Envisioning “what might be”
Analysis of possible solutions	Dialoguing “what should be”
Action planning to treat problem	Innovating “what will be”

Field Itinerary

TO CRS PROJECT SITES IN KAILAHUN DISTRICT		
DATE/TIME	SITE (location & type of group)	DETAILS
CRS - DAY 1 Monday 28/05 KAILAHUN DISTRICT		
8:30	Meet CRS staff (CRS office Kenema)	
9:15	Depart for field sites	
11:15	Arrive at Pendembu (U. Bambara Chiefdom) Protocols	Pendembu is the chiefdom headquarters town (mezzo level)
11:30	Focus group discussion	Micro-enterprise development Agro-processing Farmer field school MIS
13:30	Lunch	
14:00	Interviews	District Council Chairman or representative Paramount Chief District Director Agriculture or MAFS zonal representative Min. of Youths district representative
14:45	Walkabout	
15:15	Depart for Segbwema	
16:15	Interviews with traders	Cacao company collecting agent Independent village cacao collector Local cacao trader Local product examiner
17:00	Depart for Kenema	
18:00	Arrive at Kenema. Dinner & Overnight in Kenema	

DATE/TIME	SITE (location & type of group)	DETAILS
CRS - DAY 2 Tuesday 29/05 KAILAHUN DISTRICT		
7:30	Depart for field sites	
9:15	Arrive at Pejewa (Peje West Chiefdom) Protocols	
9:30	Focus group discussion	Micro-enterprise development Agro-processing Farmer field school MIS
11:30	Visit FFS site	Women's vegetable garden
12:00	Interviews	District Councilor or representative Paramount Chief's representative MAFS zonal representative Min. of Youths councilor
12:45	Lunch	
13:15	Walkabout	
13:45	Depart for Bunumbu	
14:15	Interviews with traders	Cacao traders (if possible) Groundnut traders Rice traders
15:00	Depart for Kenema	
17:30	Interviews with traders in Kenema	Cacao city agents (if available)
18:30	Dinner Overnight in Kenema	
TO ARC PROJECT SITES IN KAILAHUN AND KONODISTRICTS		
ARC - DAY 1 Wednesday 30/05 KAILAHUN DISTRICT		
	Daru	MED activities
ARC - DAY 2 Thursday 31/05 KONO DISTRICT		
	Kono	MED activities
TO WORLD VISION PROJECT SITES IN KONO DISTRICT		
DATE/TIME	SITE (location & type of group)	DETAILS
World Vision - DAY 1 Thursday 01/06 KONO DISTRICT		
June 1, 2007	Koidu, Fachima Agribusiness Services	Input supply/Strengthening FFS & Coops
	Koidu, Young Women's Group	Business Development
	Koidu,	Business Development
World Vision - DAY 2 Friday 02/06 KONO DISTRICT		
June 2	Fiama/Waiima, Bassama Women's Business Group	Business Development
	Wusikongo, Garri Processing Group	Agro-processing
	Fiama, Dobeneh FFS Cluster	Strengthening FFS/Farmer Groups
	Waiima, Women's Garri Processing Group	Agro-processing/Strengthening farmer groups
	Cocoa FFS	Strengthening Farmer Groups
June 3 TRAVEL TO KOINADUGU DISTRICT -- Night stay at CARE Guest House Kabala		

TO CRS PROJECT SITES IN KOINADUGU DISTRICT		
DATE/TIME	SITE (location & type of group)	DETAILS
CRS - DAY 3 Monday 04/06 KOINADUGU DISTRICT		
8:15	Meet CRS staff (CRS office Kabala)	
9:00	Depart for field sites	
9:45	Arrive at Bendukoro (Diang Chiefdom) Protocols	
10:00	Focus group discussion	Micro-enterprise development Agro-processing Farmer field school MIS
12:00	Visit FFS site	Women's vegetable garden
12:30	Walkabout	
13:30	Lunch	
14:00	Depart for Badala	
15:00	Interviews	District Councilor Paramount Chief Youths chiefdom representative MAFS zonal representative
16:00	Interview with Badala group	
17:00	Depart for Kabala	
18:30	Arrive CARE Guesthouse -Kabala	

TO CARE PROJECT SITES IN KOINADUGU DISTRICT			
DATE	TIME	SITE (location & type of group)	DETAILS
CARE- DAY 1 Tuesday 05/06 KOINADUGU DISTRICT CARE Kabala Contact: Henry Kawa, Acting PM/LINKs (076) 697-049			
5/6/07	7:30-8:00 am	Breakfast @ Guesthouse	CARE Admin
	8:00-8:15 am	Arrive CARE office - Kabala	
	8:30-9:30 am	Meeting with CARE staff (LINKS Team)	General entry meeting with CARE staff
	9:30-9:35 am	Depart CARE office for MoYS office-Kabala ¹	To be accompanied by CRS Kabala Staff
	9:35-10:35 am	MoYS office –Kabala	Meet with the Ministry of Youths & Sports District Officer
	10:35-10:40 am	Depart MoYS office for the District Council office - Kabala	
	10:40-11:40 am	Arrive District Council office ²	Discussion with district council representatives
	11:40-11:50 am	Depart District council office for the Irish Potato site	
	11:50-1:50 pm	Arrive at Irish Potato site at Kathombo II ³	Meet & Discuss with women undertaking demonstration of Irish potato planting
	1:50- 1:55 pm	Depart site for Kathombo II Guesthouse	
	1:55-2:55 pm	Arrive Kathombo II Guesthouse/Lunch	CARE Admin
	2:55-3:10 pm	Depart Guesthouse for Kamaseh Garri Processing site ⁴	
	3:10- 5:10 pm	Arrive Kamaseh at Youth Garri processing site.	FGD with youths carrying out cassava processing as a livelihood
	5:10 – 5:20 pm	Depart Kamaseh for Kabala township	.
	5:20-6:20 pm	Arrive Kabala township – Yogomaia Barri	Meet with LINKS supported grantees (Traders) for FGD

	6:20-7:00 pm	Walk about Kabala township	
	7:00 –7:15 pm	Retire to guesthouse	
	7:15-8:00 pm	Arrive Guesthouse	Dinner
CARE- DAY 2 Wednesday 06/06 KOINADUGU DISTRICT			
	8:00-8:30 am	Depart Guesthouse for Koromasilaya	
	8:30-10:30 am	Arrive Koromasilaya ⁵	FGD with existing VS&L in Koromasilaya
	10:30-11:30	Koromasilaya	Discussion with the Village Development Committee.
	11:30-12:30 pm	Koromasilaya	FGD with non LINKS project Participants
	12:30-1:30 pm	Koromasilaya/Packed Lunch	CARE Admin
	1:30- 2:30 pm	Walk about Koromasilaya	
	2:30-3:30 pm	Depart Koromasilaya for Manna II	
	3:30-5:30 pm	Arrive Manna II ⁶	FGD with LINKS supported Youth group
	5:30-6:00 pm	Walk about Manna II	
	6:00-7:30 pm	Travel back to Kabala	
CARE- DAY 3 Thursday 07/06 KOINADUGU DISTRICT			
	8:30- 9:30 pm	Depart Guesthouse for Yormadugu	
	9:30-11:30 pm	Arrive Yormadugu ⁷	FGD with FFS participants
	11:30- 12:30 pm	Walk about Yormadugu	
	12:30-1:30 pm	Yormadugu	Packed Lunch
	1:30-2:00 pm	Travel to Bambukoro II	
	2:00-4:00 pm	Bambukoro II ⁸	FGD with Literacy Class
	4:00-5:00 pm	Bambukoro II	Discussion with non project staff
	5:00-6:00 pm	Walk about Bambukoro Community	
	6:00 –7:00 pm	Travel to Kabala town	Retire to the Guesthouse

CARE- DAY 4 Friday 08/06 KOINADUGU DISTRICT			
	8:00-8:30 am	Depart Guesthouse for Heremakono	
	8:30-10:00 am	Heremakono ⁹	Observe Village Savings and Loan in Operation
	10:00-11:00 am	Walk about Heremakono	Free discussions with community people in the village
	11:00- 11:30 am	Depart Heremakono for CARE office	
	11:30 – 1:00 pm	Debriefing at CARE office	
	1:00-2:00 pm	Guesthouse	Lunch
	2:00- 6:00pm	Travel Back to Freetown	

Itinerary Notes (for CARE activities in Koinadugu)

- 1 – Ministry of Youths and Sports (MoYS) is a partner in the implementation of the LINKS program in the three districts; CORAD has rehabilitated the district youth offices in Koinadugu, Kailahun and Kono to complement and support youth activities in these districts.
- 2 - District Councils- LINKS is closely working with district councils to complement the effort of council in the development strides of the district. In the area of sustainability LINKS work closely with the council to fulfill their dreams.
- 3 – Irish Potato Demonstration and testing. The Research & Development unit of CCU is helping KUSALAKOH women’s group to undertake the growing of Irish Potato and to explore the cultivation of this crop in Koinadugu district. Two groups of 25 each combined to demonstrate this initiative. The group comprise of all women with a single man who serves as secretary.
4. Kamaseh Marginalized Youth Group- this is group of 30 marginalized youths who are undertaking Garri processing, Farmer Field Schools to make up their livelihoods.
5. In Koromasilaya, CARE has various interventions, LINKS supported this community with Village Savings and Loan and Literacy. There are other CARE projects in this community.
6. Manna II – Another youth group of 20 supported by LINKS, Manna II environment is predominantly a cattle rearing community, these youths undertook commercial production of Groundnut and have procured Work Oxen from the grant received from LINKS.
7. Yormadugu – In this community a farmer facilitator was trained by LINKS in Farmer Field School methodology, this farmer facilitator with no supervision from CARE LINKS staff has mobilized his community to practice the methodology.
8. Literacy – 30 project participants are undertaking Literacy classes. It is worth observing the enthusiasm project participants have in learning to read and write.
9. Heremakono – This is a village savings and loan group in operation, an opportunity to observe the community ownership of this innovative high impact micro finance approach.

Checklist of Questions

FIELD VISITS

All focus group and other interviews will utilize the following process: (1) AI Qs for discovery; (2) Crosscutting Qs regarding gender and governance; (3) Activity specific Qs; and (4) AI Dream and Design Qs. While the interviewer is expected to appropriately mix these steps and Qs as needed, it is important to begin with Discovery and end with Dream and Design.

(1) AI Qs for Discovery:

“What outstanding successes can you (as a group) identify during the last three years -irrespective of their being within or outside of project activities?”

Please give details of different self-help activities started by men and/or women and nature of activity.

“What were the factors that led to these successes?” Are there common characteristics among these successes? What are they? Can they be used in other activities to succeed?

“Was the LINKS program helpful in developing these successes?”

If so – “which aspects of the project were particularly helpful and why?”

(2.A) Crosscutting Qs Regarding Gender:

What specific strategies and/or processes were implemented to engage women? How did women access the LINKS activities?

Are there any indications that women are now controlling their resources, e.g. income? Give examples.

Are there any indications that women's status has improved in their individual households, the community or larger public as a result of their participation in the activities? Please give examples.

(2. B) Regarding Governance:

Have any of the groups begun to advocate their interests with chief, ward or district level officials? How so? What interests?

Have any of the groups become engaged with the emerging District Development planning process? How so?

Have any of the groups begun to form alliances among like groups or affiliated with civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to influence government responsiveness at the local level? [What Groups, which levels of governments, what kinds of government response?]

(3) Qs for Activities

(3.A) Targeting

- How was targeting of beneficiaries? Was the community & ward administration actively involved in this targeting?
- What percentage of the targeted beneficiaries in the ward are now benefiting from LINKS interventions? How many of the direct beneficiaries of training and other activities are women & female headed households?
- Did the LINKS activity consult with your community with regard to preferences for activities? Were there different preferences given by men and women? What were those? How was the final decision for support taken?
- Were you involved in discussing the details of the technical support? Were both men and women involved? Were the poorer members also active in making decisions? What decisions were you involved in? What was finally decided?
- Did you get adequate technical support? Did both women and men request services? Give examples
- Who is providing voluntary labor? Is it coming from all the households? Are the well-to-do providing as well as poorer villagers? How many are men and how many women?
- What sorts of strategies did the activity employ overcome barriers women might face regarding their participation in consultation, implementation, monitoring or access to resources and project benefits?

(3.B) Innovation

- What innovative activities have been introduced in the ward that were not there before? How did the CS do an analysis of the potential of the activity?
- How many beneficiaries (disaggregate by gender) have been taken on exposure visits & study tours to see new ideas and innovation? What is the impression of the CS and those exposed about such visits & tours?
- How are good practices and lessons being learnt being shared within the district and outside, to target beneficiaries and beyond them?
- What new crops or livestock have been introduced in the ward? Was an adequate suitability analysis undertaken before the introduction?
- Are the new technologies introduced in the ward easily replaceable? Are they available locally and at affordable rates? Have the beneficiaries been trained in how to maintain and repair the technologies? (disaggregate by gender)
- Has there been any improvement in the grading and packaging of produce?
- Through what mechanisms has the group or individual beneficiaries been able to reduce transportation costs in connection with marketing?
- Since implementation began, what other activities have been identified which can be implemented but which were not included in the original LINKS program?

(3.C) Savings Groups

- How many members does the group have by gender?
- What is the level of savings of the group? Are the amounts of savings in the group funds known to all members? What is the method of sharing financial information amongst the group? How much does each member have to deposit in the savings every month?

- How many groups have been able to get matching grants from the CS, if the giving of matching grants is one of the activities? What are the eligibility criteria for getting matching grants?
- Are meetings of the group regularly held? Are the meetings properly documented? Are financial accounts up-to-date and transparent?
- Does the group have proper byelaws and a management structure? What is the process of elections within the group?
- Is planning within the group being undertaken on a regular basis? What are the future plans of the group?
- If the group undertakes lending, how many members have taken loans, for what purpose and of what amounts? Is there any service charge or interest rate on the loans? What is the recovery rate?
- Have groups been adequately trained in how to keep credit records?
- Is there a group fund in existence with reserves to repair any group-level machinery or technologies? If so, how does that fund operate?
- In gender mixed groups - How many women hold office? Describe how men engage in decision making – describe how women engage in decision making - do the men and women ever have different priorities – How is this resolved?

(3.D) Linkages

- How closely has the District/Council/Ward administration been involved in facilitating the program to be initiated and then after that in its implementation & replication?
- How many times did the District or Ward authorities visit your Village? What did they do here? Were you satisfied with the way they worked with you?
- Were you involved in discussing the details of the technical support? Were both men and women involved? Were the poorer members also active in making decisions? What decisions were you involved in? What was finally decided?
- Do you have confidence in those authorities, technicians, or NGOs who helped you? Why, and why not?
- Did the District or Ward help your committee monitor or maintain the activities?
- Did the District or Ward consult with your community with regard to preferences for activities? Were there different preferences given by men and women? What were those? How was the final decision for support taken?
- How do you coordinate with Wards? Districts? Chiefs? Traditional authorities? What difficulties have you faced in carrying out coordination?
- Have villagers been able to forge linkages with government extension & research institutes at the ward level which will persist after the project ends? What are the hindrances being faced in forging linkages?
- How many villagers or groups have been able to link up with markets for input supply or output disposal? How many of such linkages will persist after project ends? What are the hindrances being faced in forging linkages?
 - What is the mechanism by which the beneficiaries can get updated information on prices from the market? What other information is provided by the market because of the project?
 - Have villagers developed linkages with other private sector agencies within or outside the ward or district? Will these linkages persist after the project ends? What are the hindrances being faced in forging linkages?

(3.E) Cooperating Sponsor

- Is the number of beneficiaries per field worker of the CS reasonable? Are there issues relating to mobility? Is adequate follow-up of activities being undertaken?
- Are targets being kept, and if not, why not?
- Does the CS undertake regular planning & review at the field level? Are such proceedings documented and shared?

(3.F) Impact and Effectiveness

- Are households making progress in achieving food security:
 - Increasing household incomes/food production,
 - Increasing resiliency
 - Adopting/learning new skills that reinforce resiliency and provide opportunities for diversified livelihood options
 - Increased marketing of produce
- Which approaches are having the most impact in this regard?

- Were any implementation methods less effective because of the short amount of lead time? Which approaches dealt best with the short lead time?
- What are the varying social and economic effects of the various projects on individuals, communities, gender groups, age groups, and local institutions?
- Which approaches seemed preferred by beneficiaries? Why?
- What are the key policy or institutional constraints that limit the effectiveness of adopting interventions?
- Is there increased water availability for irrigation at the farm/household level? Will this increase withstand future moderate shocks?
- What are the future plans of the beneficiaries? What other activities does he/she intend to undertake in the near future to further support household livelihood?
- Is your community empowered to sign co-management or other kinds of agreements regarding natural resource use and land use? Are both men and women signing these documents?

(3.G) Sustainability

- Are the impacts of the livelihoods recovery projects likely to continue after USAID funding is withdrawn?
 - Will the improved productivity, increased income potential be sustained through moderate shocks?
 - Have beneficiaries developed skills and experience which better enable them to engage in the economy and/or benefit from other interventions or service delivery provided by the government or financed by other donors?
- Are some approaches more sustainable than others?
- How well are livelihood programs linked into demand driven private sector economic opportunities?
- Did some wards benefit from longer term development programs in previous years (other development assistance) as compared to wards that have only been under assistance for two or fewer years with livelihood interventions.

(3.H) Complimentarity

- How critical is the complimentarity of LINKS and other livelihood or food security programming? How well coordinated are USAID, government, and other donor funded livelihood interventions synergized?
- What are the linkages with other NGO interventions and how critical are these to successful diversification of beneficiary.

(3.I) Replication

- How many non-targeted households or individuals in the ward have adopted an activity after observing its success amongst target beneficiaries?
- How many people have been trained in an activity by beneficiaries who were directly trained by LINKS?

(3.J) Specific Media and Communication Questions to Beneficiaries

- What makes you decide where to sell your produce? How do you get information about commodity prices in the market?
- Do you know about the LINKS radio programme?
- When is it broadcast?
- Do you listen to it?
- Does the radio programme address issues that are relevant to you?
- Give examples
- If there are issues you want addressed or views you want to express, is there a mechanism in place for you to have access to the programme?
- Have there been instances where the radio programme changed the way you were doing something?
 - give examples
- Do you normally discuss things you have heard on the radio programme with your friends?
- Are there other ways you think information could be passed on to you that will make it easier for you to market our products that is not being done now?

(3.K) Agricultural Activities

Food Security

- How much of your crops are you selling? How much is being exported?
- How have your children's meals changed since being involved with LINKS?

Crop Production

- How has your levels of production and yield of the key crops (rice; cassava; commercial vegetables; oil palm; coffee and cocoa) changed since engaging in the LINKS activity?
- What have you done to develop your crop area during the LINKS project?

Input Supplies

- What types and levels of supplies of planting materials - rice seeds, cassava cuttings, vegetable seeds, seedlings of oil palm, coffee and cocoa - are you purchasing? How much are you purchasing? What of these are difficult to purchase. Why is it difficult? Which are easy to purchase? Why are they easy?
- What types and quantities of fertilizers and pesticides are you purchasing? How much are you purchasing? What of these are difficult to purchase. Why is it difficult? Which are easy to purchase? Why are they easy?

Technology Transfer

- Describe the new production technologies utilized and the impact the created in each case

(4) AI Qs for Dream and Design:

“How do you intend (as a group) to develop these successes further?” How do you see yourself in 5 years (regarding particular activity)? How will you achieve this? “What could the LINKS project do in the future to assist you in this development?”

Annex H: Scope of Work

C.3 SCOPE OF WORK

The contractor's technical proposal, submitted to USAID-Guinea on March 12, 2007 and its document containing responses to mission's feedback, dated April 02, 2007 are hereby attached to this Task Order to serve as the Mission approved implementation method of Sierra Leone LINKS evaluation.

The following tasks descriptions have been proposed in the Statement of Work (SOW) as an acceptable plan to carry out this evaluation:

A. Develop a detailed work plan for USAID/Sierra Leone's review. The plan shall:

- Present a detailed description of the evaluation methodology to be used, including sample size and coverage, methodology site selection criteria, and information sources.
- Describe how the evaluation team intends to work with USAID/SL and its various partners including the Ministries of Agriculture and Food Security, and Youth and Sports, the Consortium of implementing partners, local authorities at district, local NGOs; micro-finance institutions operating in the target districts; agricultural input and output suppliers; and key beneficiary farmer representatives.
- Elaborate the process of stakeholders input into the entire evaluation including the evaluation plan and draft and final reports.

B. Present an illustrative analysis that includes:

- (a) the impact of LINKS various activities on the beneficiaries;
- (b) How well the LINKS program has addressed cross cutting issues such as gender and rural/urban areas;
- (c) Impact of LINKS activities on USAID/Sierra Leone's strategy of enhanced democratic governance;
- (d) Assessment of the capacity-building activities and their impact on sectoral strategic planning, management, and decision-making;
- (e) Impact of program activities on the Sierra Leone government's overall agriculture policy;
- (f) Impact and long-term sustainability of the farmer field schools, marketing associations, and lending groups within a democratic context;
- (g) An assessment of the level of coordination/synergies promoted among CORAD members implementing the program; and among CORAD and other stakeholders including the Ministries of Agriculture and Food Security, Youth and Sports, and Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs;
- (h) Degree at which each consortium member of the LINKS program has contributed towards the achievements of the program goals and objectives;
- (i) An assessment of the extent to which LINKS has created livelihood opportunities for youth in the agricultural sector;
- (j) An evaluation of the impact of LINKS Micro Enterprise Program on the beneficiary's quality of life;
- (k) An assessment of the extent at which LINKS has created livelihood opportunities for youth and women; and
- (l) How well the budget allocation and expenditures reflect/match the activities implemented by the Consortium.

C. Evaluate the strategies, models, and approaches used in these activities and their appropriateness and validity given the context and target populations. This should include an analysis of the

effectiveness of USAID/Sierra Leone’s grassroots/civil society-strengthening approach. Illustrative analysis shall include;

- (a) The degree at which the Consortium succeeded in the LINKS Program building upon gains in the Development Relief Program;
- (b) An indication of the “set” of interventions having the most impact including whether the current activities adequately address the IRs and or the ‘root’ causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone;
- (c) How well the Program’s PMP adequately captures the nature and essence of what the LINKS Program is trying to achieve;
- (d) Whether the agribusiness/income generation as a conflict prevention hypothesis made sense in the current context;
- (e) Which components of the program, if any, have significantly increased household incomes and for which target group;
- (f) An indication of the agricultural and related opportunities in the program that have significantly increased incomes;
- (g) The main opportunities in the districts in which the most number of youth have been engaged;
- (h) Lessons learned in consideration of the program’s relationship to the Development Relief Program (DRP) ;
- (i) How successful the adoption of agricultural technologies has been to the beneficiary farmers and lessons learned;
- (j) Whether the shift in program emphasis from reintegration to agriculture and income generation has been successful without adversely disrupting the current program activities; and
- (k) What has and has not worked.