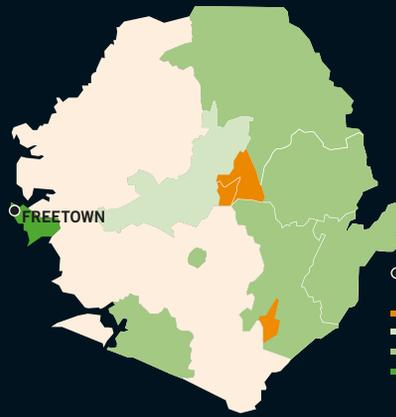


COUNTRY CASE STUDY



- Capital/Welthungerhilfe and Concern country office
- Case study project area
- Concern programme area
- Welthungerhilfe programme area
- Welthungerhilfe and Concern programme area

SIERRA LEONE: EMPOWERMENT AND TRAINING FOR EQUAL NUTRITION

Despite making progress in recent decades, the West African state of Sierra Leone continues to bear a significant burden of hunger. Even prior to the devastating Ebola epidemic from 2014 to 2016, the country's status according to the Global Hunger Index (GHI) was 'alarming', while the most recent data from the 2017 GHI show that alarming levels of hunger continue to persist (von Grebmer et al. 2017). This situation is compounded by the impact of different forms of inequality, including geography, gender, socio-economic status and access to services. Tackling undernutrition effectively therefore requires approaches that address inequality across many different dimensions and spheres.



Launched in Sierra Leone in 2013 by Welthungerhilfe and Concern Worldwide, LANN (Linking Agriculture and Natural Resource Management towards Nutrition Security) is a multi-sectoral, nutrition-sensitive approach that recognises the links between hunger and inequality in a community and tackles both through the more targeted use of locally available resources. The programme focuses on those aspects of daily life that ultimately have an impact on the nutritional status of a household. This includes nutrition and care for mothers and children, household hygiene practices, access to improved water and sanitation facilities, diversified agriculture, and sustainable natural resource management. In Sierra Leone, this is implemented in Kenema and Tonkolili districts, which are home to marginalised rural communities living near forests that have limited access to economic opportunities. Working with 51 women's groups in 40 communities, the programme has enabled around 1,400 women and their households (approx. 11,589 persons) to be reached.

At the heart of this work is the identification and understanding of inequality and how it sustains and even exacerbates malnutrition levels. By addressing inequality at various levels – e.g. increasing knowledge, promoting changes in household behavioural patterns, and working on broader community issues of access to and the use of natural resources – LANN is able to facilitate sustained behavioural changes and address the structural causes of malnutrition.

Addressing Hunger and Inequality at Household Level

Decisions about feeding practices for infants and young children (as well as which member of the household eats what in a more general sense) have an effect on the nutritional well-being of every family member. Recognising the power of gender and social norms, the programme works with women

and men – in different ways and in different spaces – and provides a range of training initiatives on a variety of topics, such as the special nutritional needs of women and children, childcare practices, exclusive breastfeeding, and the management of household resources and tasks. The results of the first phase of the programme were significant and wide-ranging:

- The percentage of husbands who provided money for food increased from 70% to 83%
- The proportion of husbands who collected wild food and planned meals together with their spouses increased from 25% to 50%
- The number of children breastfed immediately or within one hour after their birth rose from 60% to 94%

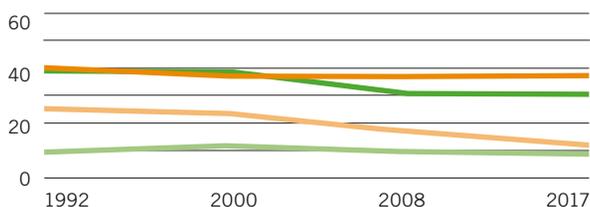
Sawadatu, a member of a LANN women's group, reflects how her situation has improved since she and her husband started participating in the LANN training sessions: "It was really tough for me. I would be cooking while the child on my back would be crying. I also had to do the laundry and many other things at the same time." Her husband Yemoh, who participated in the LANN initiative and community sessions, says, "We were taught how to support our wives. They should not be treated like slaves." Although his friends mocked him and tried to discourage him from supporting his wife, he ignored them. "Now I am used to it. Even when she is away, I take care of the home and children by myself."

Other changes in behaviour can be observed in areas such as child feeding, where deep-rooted taboos have now started to be challenged. Nasoko and her husband Mohammed are members of the Masiaka community in Tonkolili. They explained how there is a strong belief in parts of Sierra Leone that if children eat meat, big fish, eggs or chicken, they become more susceptible to witchcraft. As Nasoko explains, "After cooking, my husband and I would eat all the meat and big fish and give the children plain soup to eat. My children were not healthy, but we never thought that depriving them of these nutritional foods was a key reason for their malnutrition." The programme has changed things for Nasoko, Mohammed and their children. "Although it was not easy for me to accept at first," explains Mohammed, "I started eating with my four children and allowed them to eat meat and fish. This also brought my children closer to me."

Overall, the percentage of households in which the father received the best parts of the fish and meat during mealtimes fell from more than 50% to just 20%, indicating a considerable improvement in the allocation of nutritious food to women and children (Schindecker 2016).

GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX TRENDS FOR SIERRA LEONE

While child mortality rates have reduced, minimal progress has been made in the other three GHI indicators since 2008.



- Proportion of population that is undernourished (%)
- Prevalence of wasting in children under five years (%)
- Prevalence of stunting in children under five years (%)
- Under-five mortality rate (%)



Yemoh and **Sawadatu** with their youngest daughter, **Mariama**, Maconteh Sampha community, Tonkolili district, June 2017

Empowering and Educating at Community Level

LANN supported the socio-economic empowerment of women through Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), enabling them to independently access and control cash and making them less dependent on men. Furthermore, it meant they were able to prioritize the purchase of items intended to improve health and nutrition. Having the power to choose enables these women to reinvest their savings into productive assets and nutrition-sensitive activities, such as expanding backyard gardens or constructing improved latrines for their households.

Musu T. Koroma, a member of the Tegloma women's group in Joi community, asserts how LANN has made her less dependent on her husband, enabled her to use resources to meet day-to-day needs, and even make investments for the future: "Although my husband and I are farmers and I also do petty trading, we were entangled in debt and not earning enough to take care of our children. When the VSLA was introduced to our community, we received training in basic financial management, bookkeeping and record-keeping, and ways in which to track our expenditure. Our group can now draw on funds totalling SLL 20 million (EUR 3,000). Through LANN I have become more self-reliant."

LANN promotes nutritious crop diversity and empowers women to improve their produce management practices while simultaneously reducing their reliance on men for access to land and agricultural inputs. The women were provided with seeds and tools in order to increase the produc-

tion and consumption of nutritious crops such as vegetables and legumes. A seed bank system for members of the women's group was established to support subsistence households which had no savings and which had consumed their seeds intended to be saved for the next planting season (due to poor harvests during the Ebola outbreak). The aim of the bank is to break the perpetual cycle of food insecurity. Furthermore, LANN strengthened the resilience of local communities by promoting increased awareness of a wider range of nutritious food sources. One such example is wild food that grows in local forests – as well as improving dietary diversity, this helps women and families cope during lean periods.

These activities, combined with nutrition education, led to an overall improvement in household nutrition. Household dietary diversity scores (HDDS) increased from 6.2 to 7.44 (out of 12 food groups), while the individual dietary diversity score (IDDS) of children between 6 and 23 months of age increased from 3.44 to 4.26 (out of 7 food groups).

Securing Rights to Natural Resources for Communities

If rural food sources and nutritional security are to be safeguarded, it is essential to ensure that local communities have a right to natural resources (e.g. farmland and forests) along with the chance to manage them in a sustainable manner. In recent years, foreign investors have started to acquire land on a large scale in Sierra Leone, often leaving communities with limited access to the space and resources they require

for food production. The customary tenure system places the most productive land in the hands of powerful family lineages. These families increasingly cement their ownership with the cultivation of long-term cash crops, resulting in a class of rural subsistence farmers with limited control over good quality land. These farmers then either have to lease marginal land or work as agricultural labourers.

LANN works with its target communities to analyse the availability of their own natural resources both for sustainable use and to create a basis for negotiation with investors. By mapping and planning participatory land use, communities are able to organise the sustainable use of their natural resources for food production and the generation of income while taking the poorest subsistence farmers into account. LANN develops a concept for community-based forest management, where communities – with an emphasis on female leadership – take more control over their forest-based resources in agreement with the government. In the context of national food security, LANN therefore ensures the promotion of the Voluntary Guidelines for the Responsible Governance of Tenure (VGGT), a FAO-supported process of promoting community-based forestry. It also supports the Right to Food movement's advocacy efforts in Sierra Leone to strengthen community land ownership via land policy reform.

The Future of LANN: a Model for Inclusive Development Towards Sustainable Nutrition Security

LANN has proven to be a successful model for providing integrated, yet low-cost nutrition programmes that link behavioural change, gender, agriculture and WASH at the level of the beneficiary. In the context of Sierra Leone, it forms an effective basis for sustainable local development. This is because it demonstrates the significant strides that can be taken towards nutrition security when the most vulnerable members of households and communities are given a voice and control over the resources required for their own development. Furthermore, LANN seeks the involvement of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security (MAFFS) and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) to ensure that evidence gained and the lessons learned are continuously shared with policymakers, and that the track record of success up to now continues in the future.

A package of resources providing guidance on LANN programming is available free of charge for interested stakeholders, partners and practitioners. For further information, please contact sectorsupport@welthungerhilfe.de

For more information about Concern's work in Sierra Leone, including LANN and other programmes, please visit: <https://www.concern.net/insights>

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Bangura (35) with her one-year-

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wild foods in a forest near their
village in Tonkolili district.
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