

Agro Links

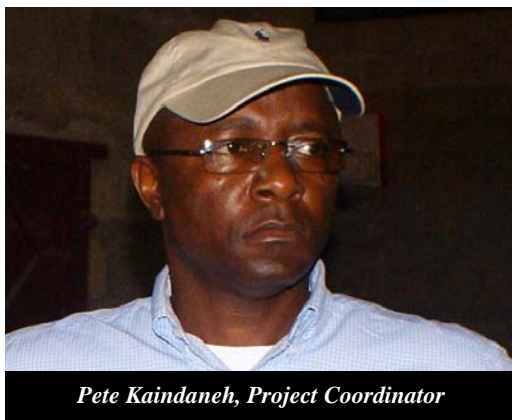
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NEWSLETTER OF THE SIERRA LEONE RURAL AND PRIVATE SECTOR DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Working to overcome the difficulties of selling farm produce in value added forms at home and abroad

Restarting Well

Starting with hell but restarting well is what has become of the 30-million US dollar Government of Sierra Leone Rural and Private Sector Development Project, proving right the Quality at Entry principle for projects funded by the World Bank.



Pete Kaindaneh, Project Coordinator



Charles Annor-Frempong, Task Team Leader

The long delayed project which has been restructured and is bound to contribute substantially in transforming the country's war torn and impoverished rural economy has now started on a much stronger footing than ever, thanks to the Implementation Support Mission (ISM) of October 2009. At a pre-mission briefing, the World Bank Task Team Leader of the project, Charles Annor-Frempong (top right), told the mission team comprised of World Bank staff, FAO experts and Government officials that "all has been set to make the first disbursement of matching grants to beneficiaries in the field and to commence procurement of contracts for feeder roads. But before doing so we have the responsibility of making reality

checks on the processes and procedures followed so far and the preparedness and capacity of the project team and their implementing partners and the challenges in sustaining the activities we are about to fund. This action is most appropriate at this earliest stage of implementing the project because it puts us all in a readiness mode to nip foreseeable problems in the bud".

Peter Kaindaneh (top left) who coordinates the project on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone said "it is a project that basically provides support to specific initiatives that promote domestic marketing and export of agricultural products through both value addition and constraint removal

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Reference Links

Click here to learn more about the Rural and Private Sector Dev Project

Click here to learn more about the Quality at Entry principle

Quotes from the Project Beneficiaries in the field

"The good news about sound knowledge of the road to fortune before your journey begins is that you know where to run and where to slow down"

"It is important to know about the dangers of drowning before jumping into the river than to experience the danger whilst swimming"

"Never insult the crocodile until you cross the river"

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activities. The agriculture crisis in Sierra Leone is not merely about boosting farm production but is much more about the difficulties in selling farm produce in value added forms at home and abroad. If we can address this bottleneck, it will have a number of ripple effects, including boosting farm production, rural employment and export-led economic growth”.

The Sierra Leone Rural and Private Sector Development Project (RPSDP) was designed to address this challenge. The primary objective of the project is to remove constraints to agricultural productivity and to the marketing of agricultural produce domestically and internationally via export. The thirty million-dollar grant was approved by the Bank on May 15 2007 in middle of a fierce election campaign in Sierra Leone which witnessed a change of government on September 17 2007. Afterwards, there was a protracted delay in commencing project implementation for more than a year, due to several reasons, including the unclear responsibilities assigned to the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Trade. The World Bank Board approved a restructured package that addressed the institutional arrangement on August 5, 2009.

The combined Government and World Bank mission of October 2009 was therefore the first post-restructuring supervision mission

aimed at following up on the status of project implementation and reaching an agreement with the government on a 6-month action plan that will eventually improve the rating of the project from unsatisfactory to satisfactory. With this sense of care, the mission spotted a number of ongoing and foreseeable implementation challenges with the matching grant component of the project that were promptly addressed through precise best practice recommendations, thus proving the usefulness of the *quality at entry* principle which is an

Among the poorer ones, the mission noted inadequate business enterprise development orientation among the applicants and their low appreciation in the inter-connectivity of different parts of the value chain.

Due to these findings, the need was stressed for the project team to immediately initiate training at community level for service providers such as teachers, extension workers and other development workers in proposal writing and business plan development and to assist them and the beneficiaries in the business planning process. The

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important assurance benchmark in the World Bank. For example, the project implementation unit was found to have received matching grants requests from a total of 174 farmer based organizations out of which 75 were approved to undertake the supply of storage and drying floors, and the supply of equipment for processing of cassava, rice and palm fruits. Testing for quality, the mission reviewed a sample of the applications and assessed the preparedness of the applicants for implementation. The finding was that there was wide variation in the quality of the grant proposals ranging from excellent to poor.

business plan is expected to include an assessment of available production potential of the agricultural commodities being produced by the beneficiaries and the demand as well as source of market for the processed product, noting that key financial outcomes and the potential profitability of farming and processing be central to the analysis. The mission recommended the use of the production potentials of the requesting groups to estimate the capacity requirements for the processing equipment and machinery they are requesting for. The project implementation

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Female Cassava Agro-processors in Pujehun Visited by the Mission

team was urged to ensure that linkages between producers and processors are established through contracts. The contracts should include flexible mechanisms of fixing and selling prices throughout the contract's life. To avoid dilution of effort and to put into practice the concept of value chain, the mission recommended that the project team initially focus on ensuring that the 75 approved groups are nurtured into well established business entities with a functioning supply chain for the three commodities, cassava, palm oil and rice. This will become the pilot upon which lessons learnt will inform support to new and emerging groups.

Another interesting finding by the mission with respect to

feeder roads was that the district councils and their community members have previously used and are conversant with the labour based methods in the rehabilitation of feeder roads and are familiar with the use of force accounts in contracts. Capacities also exist at the Districts for implementing development projects using the rapid results initiative. The mission therefore recommended that as much as possible feeder roads construction should be labour based with the rapid results initiative employed in the construction of drying floors, storage facilities at the community levels. The mission also recommended that the procurement of contracts for feeder roads be done by the local councils with the support of the

Sierra Leone Roads Authority (SLRA) and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA). To ensure commitment in contract management after procurement, the mission recommended that local councils sign formal contracts with SLRA and NaCSA at agreed fees.

In addition to unearthing and addressing the monitoring and evaluation challenges facing the project, the mission also reviewed the communication strategy of the project which seek to address the accountability, participatory, visibility, learning and knowledge sharing concerns which were inherent in the implementation challenges identified in the field. The mission expressed satisfaction that provisions were

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Agricultural Produce (Cocoa, Cassava and Palm Fruits) from Kailahun Exhibited in Kabala

made and actions initiated by the project management team to ensure that communication support is rendered to the project activities in the field in a systematic and structured way through the development of a communication strategy aligned to the development objectives and performance indicators of the individual components of the project and that addresses the general sociopolitical environment within which the project operate. Attaching high premium on communication as a quality assurance benchmark is a rare mission practice in Sierra Leone.

In any case, the above experience are among the several mission findings, recommendations and practice that show the importance of leaving no stone unturned in missions, including communication, and of the need for rigorous supervision at the earliest stages of project implementation. As one community elder, Momoh Massaquoi, in the village of Boajibu put it *“it is important to know about the dangers of drowning before jumping into the river than to experience the danger whilst swimming”*.

Another female community leader, Jenneh Fawundu, in Pujehun said *“the good news about sound knowledge of the road to fortune before your journey begins is that you know where to run and where to slow down”*. Still another beneficiary in Kenema, Hawa Dassama, warned *“don’t insult the crocodile until you cross the river”*. Whichever ways these proverbs are interpreted, they send the central message that it important to be to be enduring, cautious, candid, careful and thorough, which are all elements of *quality-at-entry*.

END