



**Change stories from the Agricultural Value
Change Development Project (AVDP)**

Sierra Leone

Partnership for rural transformation

Rural poverty is widespread in Sierra Leone. Three quarters of the population live in poverty, and a quarter cannot afford a basic diet. Poor housing and health, limited access to clean water and very low incomes are commonplace, especially among woman-headed households, landless young people and small-scale farmers. As a result, productivity is low.

Improving agriculture is the priority for reducing poverty. Farmers need better access to land, credit, inputs and technologies. The absence of modern processing equipment limits opportunities for adding production value and inadequate roads and transportation hinder farmers' access to markets.

Since 1979, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has partnered with the Government of Sierra Leone to combat hunger and rural poverty. To date, IFAD has invested US\$171.25 million in nine rural projects and programmes in the country, benefiting 547,500 households.

Since emerging from an 11-year civil war – 1991 to 2002 – the country has focused its efforts on rebuilding its governance and economy with the help of international donors, including IFAD. However, the country has faced a number of unpredictable crises: the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease (EVD) in 2014, the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the impact of the war in Ukraine in 2022.

Even during the most difficult of times, IFAD has never let down Sierra Leone. For example, during Ebola, when many institutions closed or downsized their operations, IFAD-supported community banks and financial services associations, known as village banks, remained the sole providers of banking and financial services in most areas of the country. More recently, the Rural Poor Stimulus Facility (RPSF), implemented through the Agricultural Value Chain Development Project (AVDP), has helped mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of small-scale farmers and other rural people across the country.





Existing challenges for women to access and control land

- ❖ **Small fields to cultivate**
- ❖ **Land fragmentation** limits
 - production and productivity
 - agricultural transformation
 - gender equality opportunities
- ❖ **Lack of land access and ownership by women.** Under customary law women cannot manage a couple's property nor make economic decisions.
- ❖ **Patrilineal rural communities:** Land ownership and access is severely curtailed by the way land is inherited and owned
- ❖ Land belongs to the community or government. **Women can be given the right to use land if they obtain the consent of the husband**

The project's strategy & initiatives to overcome those challenges

- ❖ **Targeting beneficiary selection and profiling checklist** for each of the project value chain crop (oil palm, cocoa, rice and vegetables), including a **targeted percentage criteria of 40% women** per community, per value chain crop.
- ❖ **Community engagement with authorities and landowners** for each value chain to gain their consent to sign **land lease agreement document**.
- ❖ **Land lease document**, allow women to **use land (IVS) for a period of 10 years or more** and promote **permanent ownership by women for perennial crops - oil palm or cocoa -**
- ❖ Functional **farmer field school weekly trainings**, enhancing extension services delivery, and also strengthening beneficiaries engagement
- ❖ **GALS and Nutrition education** through the farmer field school on-farm weekly training, gearing towards their mindset in various inequalities within their community, households, and at their FFS
- ❖ **Regular community engagement**, on targeting, and gender issues





PRELIMINARY RESULTS: Gender transformative outcomes

Permanent ownership

Women signed land agreements in their own name with landowners and other key stakeholders(Landowners, Director District Agriculture Office, Town Chief or any other higher Authority) for permanent ownership of 01 hectare of cocoa or oil palm farm - 49% achieved against a project target of 40%.

Decision-making

On farming activities (e.g. under brushing, daily monitoring, harvesting, processing, and marketing) **It depends on them, and not determined by their spouse!**

Women land utilization

For IVS rice production and vegetable (bulb onions) is **64% achieved, against a project target of 40%**

- ❖ **Women beneficiaries for cocoa and oil palm have signed land agreement documents in their own name with landowners and other key stakeholders** (Landowners, Director District Agriculture Office, Town Chief or any other higher Authority) for **permanent ownership** of 01hectare of cocoa or oil palm farm.(49% achieved against a project target of 40%)
- ❖ **Women land utilization from 2019 – 2022 for IVS rice production and vegetable** (bulb onions) is 64% achieved, against a project target of 40%
- ❖ Adoption of **climate smart practices** - intercropped cocoa or oil palm with plantain, gliriciadia, timber tree, pineapple suckers, cassava cutting, rice and groundnut. These are all short variety crops, serve as **quick response income for women.**
- ❖ **Decision-making** concerning their farming activities such as under brushing, daily monitoring, even at the time of harvesting, processing, and marketing depend highly on them, and not determined by their spouse.
- ❖ The **farmer field school** approach made an effective extension service delivery to women beneficiaries across all value chain crops of the project



PRELIMINARY RESULTS: successful approaches

Climate smart practices

Intercropped cocoa or oil palm with plantain, gliriciadia, timber tree, pineapple suckers, cassava cutting, rice and groundnut. These are all short variety crops, serve as **quick response income for women.**

Youth contractors' model approach

50% of female youth contractors in each value chain receive capacity building a monthly stipend of Le.500, and also own 01 hectare of oil palm or cocoa, and 0.8 hectare of IVS rice developed plot

Farmer field school approach

Effective extension service delivery to women beneficiaries across all value chain crops of the project

- ❖ Adoption of **climate smart practices** - intercropped cocoa or oil palm with plantain, gliriciadia, timber tree, pineapple suckers, cassava cutting, rice and groundnut. These are all short variety crops, serve as **quick response income for women.**
- ❖ **Youth contractors model approach for oil palm, cocoa, and IVS rice production**, - 50% of female youth contractors in each value chain activities receiving capacity building trainings in different themes, receiving a monthly stipend of Le.500, and also own 01 hectare of oil palm or cocoa, and 0.8 hectare of IVS rice developed plot
- ❖ The **farmer field school** approach made an effective extension service delivery to women beneficiaries across all value chain crops of the project

Challenges that still remain to be addressed

- ❖ In case of divorce, separation, or death of the spouse, many women getting the land through their spouse have lost their plantation
- ❖ Widows, single mothers, divorces finds it difficult for under brushing of their plantation sometime paid labour and the labourers end up using the money and not doing the work
- ❖ Long time challenge women of all categories will face is harvesting of their plantation, as they might lack labour.
- ❖ Women access to credit remain a challenge, and the rural financial institutions have no provision to offer credit for agriculture especially for permanent crops (oil palm and cocoa)



ANNEX 1: PRELIMINARY RESULTS IN TERMS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES

Value Chain Crop	Year	Target Beneficiary	Women Beneficiary	Percentage
Oil Palm	2019-2021	3,000	1,524	50.8
Cocoa	2019-2021	1,500	723	48.2
Oil palm and Cocoa Women landowners with signed land documents		4,500	2,247	49.5
New Oil Palm and Cocoa Beneficiaries				
Oil Palm	2022-2023	2,000	958	47.9
Cocoa	2022-2023	1,500	708	47.2
Oil palm and Cocoa Women beneficiaries newly selected Supporting on going		3,500	1,666	47.6
Grand total of women oil palm and cocoa beneficiaries by 2023 will have signed land documents for ownership and control of their farms	2019-2023	8,000	3,913	48.9

ANNEX 2: CONT. PRELIMINARY RESULTS IN TERMS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE OUTCOMES

Value Chain Crop	Year	Target Beneficiary	Women Beneficiary	Percentage
IVS Rice Production	2019-2022	1508	743	49%
Vegetable (Bulb Onions) Production	2020-2021	737	573	78%
Grand total of women IVS rice production and vegetable (onions) beneficiaries supported and utilizing the land	2019 - 2022	2245	1316	64%

Aminata Kamara is 41 years old and lives in Rowal village with her husband and five children. She is a farmer and member of the Tamaraneh women's group selected by the RPSF to receive support to start large-scale onion production on a five-hectare plot of village land.

"No other development project ever offered us so much. And the RPSF hasn't asked anything of us in return for their support," told Aminata.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Aminata and her husband grew rice and vegetables on their own two hectares of land, selling what little they didn't consume themselves. With roads blocked and markets closed during the lockdown, Aminata and her family faced difficult challenges. During this time, her brother drowned while attempting to transport commodities from neighbouring Guinea. Aminata and her husband adopted and are now raising the three children he left behind.

RPSF provided inputs to help the women in Aminata's group start commercial onion production. The results have been life-changing. With her share of the profits from the first onion harvest, Aminata started a petty trading business selling household goods, which she has grown little by little. She proudly pays school fees for seven of her eight children and sends her oldest to university, where he is studying to become a teacher.



"I am proud to be a businesswoman and remain committed to the onion production that made my success possible. I will use my profits to send my children to university so they will never face the hard life challenges that I have had to overcome."

Aminata Kamara

Agricultural mechanization for sustainable development

The RPSF has helped small-scale producers – in particular women, persons with disabilities and young people – not only to recover from the economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but to actually increase their production and productivity. Access to machinery greatly reduces the drudgery of labour-intensive activities and can help control harvest waste.

Mabinty Sillah is 19 years old. The AVDP trained her to use the mini power tiller the RPSF provided to the women's group in her community. She learned to till the soil more efficiently, weed the onion and vegetable field, pump water for irrigation and harvest the crops. Mabinty has mastered manoeuvring the small tractor in tight spaces and along rough dirt tracks, making transporting products from the fields to homes, processing centres and markets much easier.

"COVID-19 brought both good and bad.

Thanks to the mini power tiller, the pandemic's darkness turned into a bright opportunity for me. Now I can provide a useful service to my community."

Mabinty Sillah





Post-harvest food waste is a challenge faced in many countries. The RPSF provided women's groups across the country with curing and drying machines, along with back-up generators to run them, so that they could process onions for prolonged shelf-life. This value-added activity decreases food loss, allowing for greater marketing flexibility that follows demand and price fluctuations. In turn, the women earn more and are empowered to increase their production.

Mary Nabie Kamara is a member of a women's group that benefited from RPSF support. Together with 30 other women onion producer groups, they used their own funds to build a warehouse where they installed the onion dryer machine provided by the RPSF, and process, bag and store their cured onions while waiting for the best time to sell.

"Before, we were forced to sell all our onions quickly and at a low price because they were perishable, and we didn't have a safe way to store them."

Mary Nabie Kamara



Social inclusion that leaves no one behind

The RPSF supported the Government of Sierra Leone's Quick Action Economic Response Programme to mitigate COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges faced by rural communities. The project focused on enhancing vegetable and groundnut value chains, helping the most marginalized people boost their income-generating activities and strengthen food security.

Abu Koroma is 42 years old and the father of four children. For Abu and other persons with disabilities in his community, it was difficult to make ends meet. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he used to beg in the streets to supplement the periodic financial assistance he received from the government. During the lockdown, Abu could no longer go out to beg for money to feed his family. Daily life became even more challenging.

With the RPSF, the AVDP encouraged persons with disabilities in his community to organize. They established a group with 25 members and selected Abu to be their chairman. The RPSF provided vegetable seeds, tools and other agricultural inputs, together with a labour fund to help the group pay dayworkers for tasks they could not do themselves. The AVDP also trained the group in agricultural best practices, including how to use pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers.

Using their new knowledge, the group hired members from their own community to help them prepare a 2.5-hectare plot of land and started a commercial farming business. With the seeds they received from the RPSF, they grew a variety of vegetables to sell at the market, keeping enough for their own consumption.

With their earnings from selling the first season of vegetables, the group diversified and started to cultivate an additional 2.5-hectare plot of groundnuts, which is a lucrative cash crop. With the profits they have earned from selling groundnuts, they re-invested in vegetable seeds for the next growing season. Although the RPSF project has ended, Abu and the group have plans not only to sustain their new activity, but to expand their business.



"When the RPSF came to us, my first thought was, 'How am I going to do farming?' Now, I am so happy to have a livelihood that allows me to make money instead of begging in the street. The RPSF opened a big door for me and changed my way of life forever."



Mariama Bi Jalloh is 29 years old and a university graduate in business administration. She is the chairwoman of the Forward Women with Disability Organization (ForWDO) that advocates for women with disabilities. Persons with disabilities face many obstacles in her community, but Mariama is adamant in her efforts to meet the challenges and to create opportunities for the women in her group. Before the COVID-19 pandemic changed everything, ForWDO operated several income-generating activities at a small commercial centre constructed by the German Leprosy Relief Association. Some of the women were also doing agriculture. Their activities came to a complete halt as pandemic-related lockdown restrictions were put in place.

The RPSF identified the women of ForWDO as being among the most negatively impacted by the crisis. The project supplied the group's 22 women members, as well as three men who provide physical labour, with seeds, fertilizer and other inputs needed to produce vegetables. The RPSF also provided a fund for paying dayworkers and renting farm machinery. They quickly realized the results when the vegetables were harvested and sold, with food and income for themselves and their households. With the money they earned, the group invested in rice production, and is now waiting for the next dry season to plant vegetables again.

"I am confident that with agriculture we will make the money we need to pull a lot of women with disabilities – the most vulnerable in our community – out of poverty. We want to show the world that disability is not inability."


Mariama Bi Jalloh

Fanta Janneh is 35 years old and the mother of four children. She is the chairwoman of the Kenenday women's group. Before COVID-19, the group of 22 members, which has since grown to 30 members (including five men who support with physical labour), did small-scale vegetable production and grew some groundnuts, mostly for their own consumption. During the pandemic-related lockdown, roads were blocked and markets closed, and the women were no longer able to sell their vegetables. With no income, they were slipping back into extreme poverty.

The RPSF provided the women with the inputs they needed to move from small-scale to large-scale groundnut cultivation. Already from the second planting season, the women increased their cultivation from five to seven hectares. They grow vegetables during the dry season and groundnuts during the rainy season, and are making good money.

Using their savings, the women expanded the village elementary school. Their decision came in response to an increasingly common trend of teenage pregnancy. Before the classrooms were built, girls aged 13-15 had to travel five kilometres each day to the nearest village to school. Now, they can attend classes in their own village under the women's watchful eye. The incidence of teenage pregnancy has already drastically dropped in the village.





"Thanks to the RPSF,
we have a growing
business and are
making money, which
has allowed us to build
a school for our girls
and pay two teachers'
salaries. Our slogan
'women power, men
support' is now more
relevant than ever."

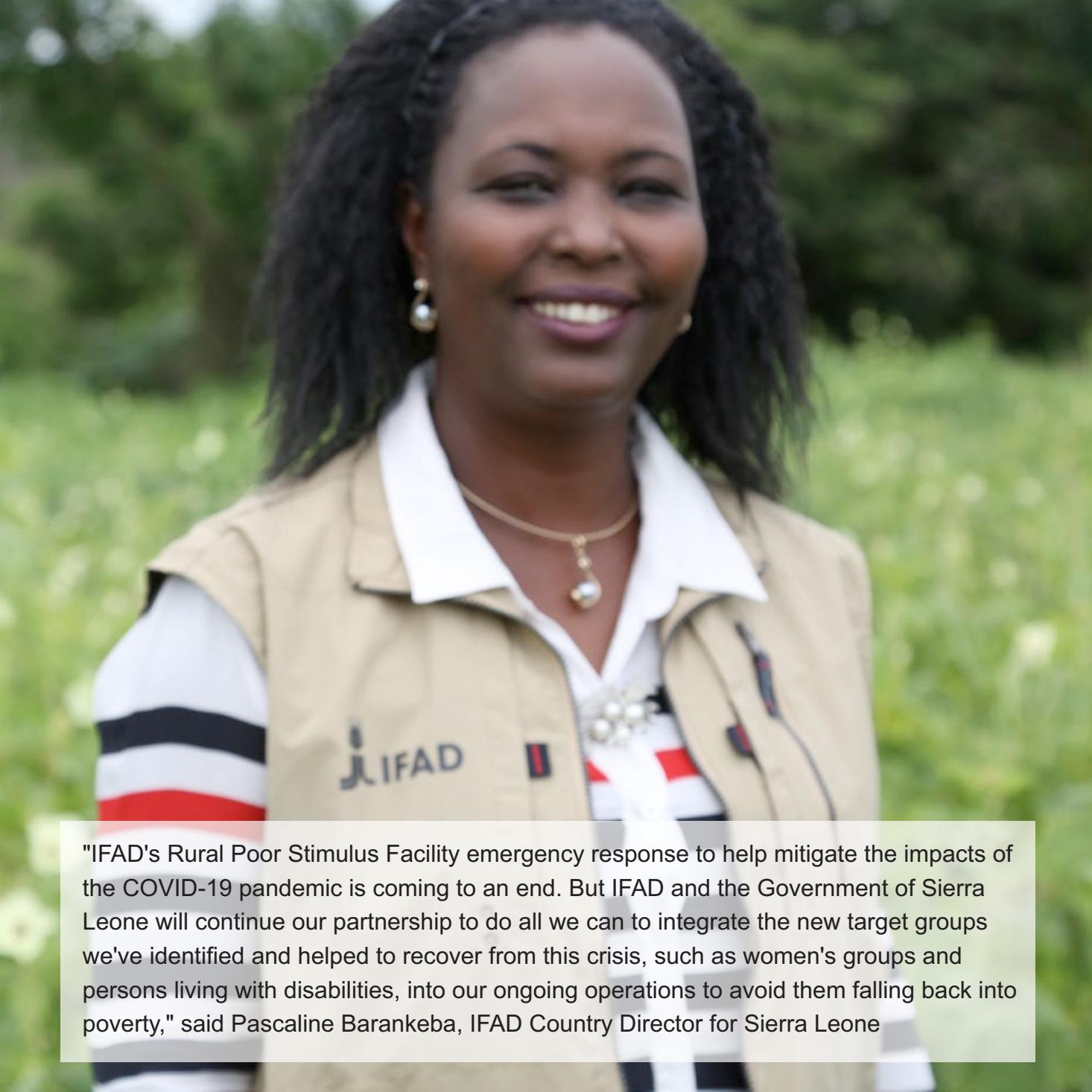
Fanta Janneh

Stories of Change – Produced by the AVDP IEC Unit

Contact: Abu Bakarr Conteh – Head of IEC

23 Torwama Road Bo

Phone: +23276866778 Email: abubakarr008@gmail.com



"IFAD's Rural Poor Stimulus Facility emergency response to help mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic is coming to an end. But IFAD and the Government of Sierra Leone will continue our partnership to do all we can to integrate the new target groups we've identified and helped to recover from this crisis, such as women's groups and persons living with disabilities, into our ongoing operations to avoid them falling back into poverty," said Pascaline Barankeba, IFAD Country Director for Sierra Leone