



*Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry
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HIDDEN FACE OF THE COMMUNITY BANKS



**Slashing off Sierra Leone's
Rice Import in 5 years**

**Peter Penfold says
"Prof. Jones is the World's Best Minister"**

**RCPRP:
"Bringing the Gold Fruits into
Koinadugu"**



**An Article from Jesmed F. Suma.
A must read piece for stakehold-
ers in agriculture**



**How Former British High Commis-
sioner in Sierra Leone, Kombrabai
Peter Penfold describes Sierra
Leone's Agriculture Minister**



**It will surely help raise the
income of farmers in this
district.**

The Hidden Face of the Community Banks

The reward of hard work is more work, my Professor always says. And in every society there are people who as Barack Obama puts it 'the silent heroes.' They do the dirty jobs, unnoticed by the wider world. They find pleasure not in fame but in doing their task. Ibrahim Sillah is one of these, whose hidden face in the Community Bank I wish to illuminate in this piece.

Ibrahim Sillah is the current Community Bank Officer attached to the Apex Bank (SL) Limited. His task among many other things include rescuing distressed Community Banks, wherever and whenever it happens.

In retrospect of his early days in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, International Fund for Agricultural Development's Rural Finance programme, the former all-rounder Community Bank manager, described his days and operations at the Sandor Community Bank in the Kono District as his turning point. "Sandor was a challenging area, which no one wished to be sent there. But the lots fell on me and I was appointed the first manager of Sandor Community Bank. Upon arrival at Sandor, we started questioning the rationale behind the establishment of a bank at such location.



A model of the typical RFCIP Community Bank

By then, the place (Kayima) was not only small in size but also very remote coupled with its rough terrains and with no means of communication. It was a total disconnect with the wider world. Thus, it was a moment for 'either the best or nothing.' But I chose the best," Sillah explained.

What could have been the motivation behind his success at that extraordinary moment? "We had a mission that we were there to achieve. It was a test to our commitments and the confidence reposed on us. We should not disappoint the Project (especially when most critics had openly affirmed that, we were not going to succeed). Poised to deny credence to all our critics, we gave our best, sacrificing what others could not survive without to ensure that we achieve our goals. Finally, with hard work and determination, we succeeded. And because of that success, my terms of reference changed. Changed from that man overseeing the day to day operations of one Community bank to that of a fire fighter," he said.

From a Bank manager to Fire/Fraud fighter. From Sandor Community, Sillah has always been at the service of the Apex Bank (formerly Technical Assistant Agency) on critical assignments including rescuing distressed Community banks, recovering bad debts, uncovering financial malpractices and restructuring fragile institutions, to name a few.

Some of the institutions he has helped rescue over the years include the Segbwema Community Bank in the Kailahun district, the Masimera Community Bank at Lunsar in the Port Loko district, the Kabala Community Bank in the Koinadugu district, and the list continues.

Inside De Farm has been following Manager Ibrahim Sillah all these years and has found it necessary to publish this piece in recognition of the hard work of this unassuming young gentleman - a silent hero, 'the hidden treasure' of the Community Banks in Sierra Leone.

From The Field



“Prof. Monty Jones is the best Minister in the World...” Says Peter Penfold

By: Contact Tracer

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The Former British High Commissioner in Sierra Leone, Komrabai Peter Penfold, has described Sierra Leone's Agriculture Minister, Professor Monty Jones, as the best in the world. Speaking at the commissioning of Lion Mountain Agro Limited in Bo City, Peter Komrabai Penfold on behalf of the Board thanked the company for the initiative. He said they have been planning their activities some years ago. He recalled when he talked with President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma and one thing that came up is that agriculture is key in the nation's development. "I am happy that President Koroma has appointed the best minister of agriculture in the world," he said.

The company, he said fully share his dream and ambition to make Sierra Leone become food self-sufficient. He assured that they will encourage others to follow the same path, and called on the people to share the happiness they are getting from the rice with others.

The company has provided a small mill machine for farmers to mill their rice at free of cost. It has two machines producing ten tonnes and two tonnes.

The commissioning came at a time the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security is currently working towards achieving the dream of His Excellency, President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, to make agriculture become a business-centered sector that drives economic growth and ensure that enough food is available for the nation.

Lion Mountain Agro Limited is an agricultural company operating in Bo District since September, 2014, under a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Sierra Leone, and possesses a certificate of collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture in Bo District.

It has a standing land lease agreement with five chiefdoms for a total land area of 16, 400 hectares for mechanized rice production in Bo District.

The company in August, 2015, obtained an initial funding from its donors for a monthly milling operation of 300mt on a monthly budget of \$120, 000 for two years duration effective September, 2014.

Professor Monty Patrick Jones had the opportunity to commission a rice mill company, Lion Mountain Agro Limited in Bo City on Friday, 26th February, 2016. The company has added value to the locally produce rice with quality packaging for local consumption. Apart from the normal 50kilogram packaged rice, Lion Mountain also has five cups and ten cups of rice well packaged for those who could not afford to buy in large quantity.

Former Vice President under the Tejan Kabbah regime, Dr. Albert Joe Demby said they saw the need for Sierra Leoneans to be well fed with locally produced rice, which was why the company was formed. "Providing quality rice is our own form of contribution towards the development of the nation," he said, and added that with the cooperation of the local people, especially farmers, the company hopes to continue in that positive direction.

The Minister of Agriculture, Prof. Monty Patrick Jones, said agriculture is the engine for economic growth and has contributed greatly to employment in the country. Rice, he said is key in agriculture as a staple food that is cultivated across the country. He pointed out that Sierra Leoneans consume rice more than other countries in Africa. "Government cannot continue spending over \$135million annually to import rice, of which the country has all it takes to produce and export," he said, and added that Lion Mountain is here to provide jobs for mostly

From Page 3

“Prof. Monty Jones is the best Minister in the World...” says Peter Penfold

young people, reduce poverty and improve the lives of farmers. Buying rice from farmers, he said will help them greatly and will inject more money into the country's economy to improve the wellbeing of the people.

"We don't want to see people hungry. I am happy that you have added value to rice," Prof. Jones said. He assured of government's support towards the company's good effort in making rice available in the local market.

"The rice we produce here is of high quality than the imported. It has more nutrients than the imported," says the Minister, noting further that the composition of the proteins is good. "We are going to flood this county with rice this year. We must eat what we grow. We want to develop healthy citizens," he assured, and concluded by stating that farmers should produce more, sell more and keep the money in the bank.

He commended them for putting NERICA rice in the market and invited all to feel free to eat it at all times.

Speaker after speaker commended the company for a job well done and admonished farmers not to hesitate to sell the rice to the company as very soon shops will be opened in their localities to sell the product.

Voice from the Farm



Bringing the Gold Fruit into Koinadugu District

Bringing home the Gold is the greatest dream for every athlete. As not all that shine is Gold, so also, not all Gold will shine. However, Gold is Gold, either be it dug or harvested.

Koinadugu is said to be blessed with unique vegetation/ecology and various natural resources/minerals including Gold. If so, then what is the rationale of “bringing the gold fruits” into a gold rich district? What is a Gold fruit and how could it be harvested?

Bringing the Gold Fruits

For Warren Alimamy Kargbo, Head of the MAFFS/IFAD Koinadugu District Programme Coordination Unit, these plants are going to change the lives of farmers positively in the district.

“With the introduction of four hundred (400) hectares in eight (8) chiefdoms in Koinadugu district alone, it will surely help raise the income of farmers in this district. This is so, as they will no longer rely on wild plants that could not yield better fruits,” the Project’s Tree Crop man of that district said.

The ‘Gold Plant/fruit’ Kargbo is referring to here, is the improved variety of Oil palm cloned and raised in the Njala University. The rationale behind its establishment in the district is in line with the RCPRP’s mandate to rehabilitate hectares of tree crops in its operational districts – Kenema, Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu districts.

According to the project’s Tree Crop man, the eastern districts under this project have benefitted a lot, based on their ecological advantages coupled with the diversity of tree crops in that part of the country. However, the least beneficiary district among these was Koinadugu. “Considering the fact that wild oil palm plants could be found in almost every chiefdom in the district, it indicates that this improved variety could do better,” Kargbo said.

When the news about the project’s intention to establish oil palm nurseries and plantations in the district broke out, farmers in the district received it with great relief. With the identification of clusters/locations and beneficiaries over, the people of koinadugu are all set to see the planting of the first improved variety of oil palm plantation in their district, with courtesy from the RCPRP.

The Farm History



Rice Cultivation History

Culled from

Oryza sativa was domesticated from the wild grass *Oryza rufipogon* roughly 10,000–14,000 years ago. The two main subspecies of rice – indica (prevalent in tropical regions) and japonica (prevalent in the subtropical and temperate regions of East Asia) – are not believed to have been derived from independent domestication events. Another cultivated species, *O. glaberrima*, was domesticated much later in West Africa. Recent genetic evidence shows that all forms of Asian rice, both indica and japonica, come from a single domestication event that occurred 8,200–13,500 years ago in the Pearl River valley region of China. In China, extensive archeological evidence points to the middle Yangtze and upper Huai rivers as the two earliest places of *O. sativa* cultivation in the country. Rice and farming implements dating back at least 8,000 years have been found. Cultivation spread down these rivers over the following 2,000 years.

Puddling the soil – turning it to mud to break it down and prevent too much water percolating away – and transplanting seedlings were likely refined in China. Both operations became integral parts of rice farming and remain widely practiced to this day. With the development of puddling and transplanting, rice became truly domesticated. Movement to western India and south to Sri Lanka was also accomplished very early. Rice was a major crop in Sri Lanka as early as 1000 B.C. The crop may well have been introduced to Greece and the neighboring areas of the Mediterranean by returning members of Alexander the Great's expedition to India around 344–324 B.C. From a center in Greece and Sicily, rice spread gradually throughout southern Europe and to a few locations in northern Africa. As a result of Europe's great Age of Exploration, new lands to the west became available for exploitation. Rice cultivation was introduced to the New World by early European settlers. The Portuguese carried it to Brazil and the Spanish introduced its cultivation to several locations in Central and South America. The first record for North America dates from 1685, when the crop was produced on the coastal lowlands and islands of what is now South Carolina. It is thought that slaves from West Africa who were transported to the Carolinas in the mid-18th century introduced the complex agricultural technology needed to grow rice. Their labor then insured a flourishing rice industry. By the 20th century, rice was produced in California's Sacramento Valley. The introduction into California corresponded almost exactly with the timing of the first successful crop in Australia's New South Wales.

Africa & the Wider World

African rice has been cultivated for 3500 years. Between 1500 and 800 BC, *Oryza glaberrima* propagated from its original centre, the Niger River delta, and extended to Senegal. However, it never developed far from its original region. Its cultivation even declined in favour of the Asian species, which was introduced to East Africa early in the common era and spread westward. African rice helped Africa conquer its famine of 1203.

Rest of the world

Middle East

Rice was grown in some areas of southern Iraq. With the rise of Islam it moved north to Nisibin, the southern shores of the Caspian Sea and then beyond the Muslim world into the valley of Volga. In Egypt, rice is mainly grown in the Nile Delta. In Palestine, rice came to be grown in the Jordan Valley. Rice is also grown in Yemen.

Europe

The Moors brought Asiatic rice to the Iberian Peninsula in the 10th century. Records indicate it was grown in Valencia and Majorca. In Majorca, rice cultivation seems to have stopped after the Christian conquest, although historians are not certain.

Muslims also brought rice to Sicily, where it was an important crop long before it is noted in the plain of Pisa (1468) or in the Lombard plain (1475), where its cultivation was promoted by Ludovico Sforza, Duke of Milan, and demonstrated in his model farms. After the 15th century, rice spread throughout Italy and then France, later propagating to all the continents during the age of European exploration. The Ottomans introduced rice to the Balkans.

Caribbean and Latin America

Rice is not native to the Americas but was introduced to Latin America and the Caribbean by European colonizers at an early date with Spanish colonizers introducing Asian rice to Mexico in the 1520s at Veracruz and the Portuguese and their African slaves introducing it at about the same time to Colonial Brazil. Recent scholarship suggests that enslaved Africans played an active role in the establishment of rice in the New World and that African rice was an important crop from an early period. Varieties of rice and bean dishes that were a staple dish along the peoples of West Africa remained a staple among their descendants subjected to slavery in the Spanish New World colonies, Brazil and elsewhere in the Americas.

The Native Americans of what is now the Eastern United States may have practiced extensive agriculture with forms of wild rice. (References to wild rice in the Americas are to the unrelated *Zizania palustris*.)

Climate Change Education



35 facts about Climate Change

Climate change is not limited for study to scientist and researchers alone. Today even the common man wants to be extremely aware of the climate change effects and contribute the best way he can to save himself and the earth at large. Here is what you can learn all about climate change – from facts to prevention.

What is Climate Change

Due to combustion of fossil fuels, the concentration of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere has been increasing alarmingly. All these gases have been present in the atmosphere to keep this planet warm for the existence of human life. Since last few decades and mostly due to industrial revolution, the presence of these gases in the atmosphere has accumulated steadily resulting in enhanced greenhouse effect.

As a result, world's average surface temperature has increased by around 0.6 degrees Celsius over last 100 years. The changing climate patterns have already made significant impact on our planet. Melting of polar ice caps, change in rainfall patterns, increase in frequency of hurricanes, storms are few of the adverse effects of climate change.

Scientists predicted that due to ongoing activities contributing to global warming, the average global temperature could increase between 1.4 and 6 degrees Celsius in the 21st century.

Below are 35 facts about climate change

Fact 1: The global temperature on an average has increased by 0.6 to 1 degree Celsius till the 20th century.

Fact 2: The United States constitutes 5% of the world population and contributes to 22% of world's carbon emission.

Fact 3: Around 15% of the carbon released in the environment is due to deforestation and change in use of land.

Fact 4: The golden Toad is the first species to go extinct due to climate change.

Fact 5: Vehicles like cars and truck contribute to 20% of carbon emissions in the United States.

Fact 6: Air conditions and heating elements consume 50% of electricity in America.

Fact 7: Hurricanes, droughts and coral deaths are few of the natural disasters caused due to climate change.

Fact 8: Climate change enhances the spread of pests that causes life threatening diseases like dengue, malaria, Lyme disease etc.

Fact 9: The hottest years have been experienced since 1990 till 1997. The warmest years have been from 2005-2010.

Fact 10: The number of climate change related incidents have increase four fold between 1980 and 2010.

Fact 11: Land use change and deforestation contributes to 15% of carbon emission every year.

Fact 12: The climate change scenario was much stable before the industrial revolution and has been rapidly changing since then. Today the reality is that climate change is going to get worse than yesterday.

Fact 13: A separate budget of US\$ 40 million has been allotted for climate change research since 1990.

Fact 14: Due to the greenhouse effect, the average temperature of the earth is 15 degrees rather than -18 degrees without the greenhouse effect.

Fact 15: Carbon dioxide constitutes only 3.6 % of total greenhouse gases out of which 0.12% is attributed to human activities.

Fact 16: Carbon dioxide is not the only contributing gas towards climate change. Other gases like methane and nitrous oxide are far more dangerous than carbon dioxide alone.

Fact 17: The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a leading body fighting against climate change. This body is a political organization however and not a scientific body.

Fact 18: The Kyoto Protocol, an organization formed to analyze and fight against climate change will cost more than 100 trillion dollars thus making developing and underdeveloped communities to participate.

Fact 19: According to World Food Program (WFP.org), by 2015, the number of people affected by climate change disasters could reach 375 million per year.

Fact 20: Over the last 50 years, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increase by 30% due to burning of fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions like carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and other gases, trapping more heat in the lower atmosphere.

Fact 21: The rising temperatures will cause more deaths not due to natural reasons but as a result of overheating and rapid spread of deadly diseases.

Fact 22: Classic examples of climate change can be seen by the damages caused due to heavy rains and disasters like Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Fact 23: Above 600000 deaths occur worldwide every year due to climate change. 95% of these deaths take place in developing countries.

Fact 24: Climate change can have serious health impacts such as heat stress, extreme cold which can cause major deaths due to heart diseases.

Fact 25: In 2003, around 70,000 deaths have occurred in Europe alone due to diseases caused by rising temperatures.

Fact 26: Pollen and aeroallergen high levels also lead to rising temperature. This can cause asthma which effects 300 million people worldwide.

Fact 27: Climate change is rapidly causing coastal flooding and displacement of people. Floods further cause major damages by injuring and killing people. They can even cause deadly diseases by spreading infection and vector borne diseases.

Fact 28: Due to water shortages, the transportation of water will cause it to contaminate and make it even more deadly by spreading diseases.

Fact 29: Malaria, diarrhoea and malnutrition are water borne diseases that have caused more than three million deaths since 2005, one third of these deaths are in Africa.

Fact 30: Steps to reduce greenhouse gases can help save the negative health impacts. Promoting safe public transportation and active activities like walking or use public transport can help reduce carbon emissions. This can also help to cut down traffic, air pollution and thereby reducing cardiovascular diseases.

Fact 31: Various countries have taken steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This has led to positive health effects. Promoting green transportation and car pooling can help to reduce carbon emissions and improve public health.

Fact 32: Depending upon the carbon emissions, a rise in temperature from 1.1 degree up to 6.4 degree is expected by the end of this century.

Fact 33: Over the next 20 years, global warming is expected to increase by 0.2 degree per decade.

Fact 34: The effects of climate change can have a disastrous impact on our planet Earth. High temperatures, loss of wild-life species, increase in sea level, changes in rainfall patterns, heat waves, stronger storms, wildfires and shrinking of arctic ice are few of the dangerous effects of climate change.

Fact 35: According to a recent report by Oxfam, climate change could push food prices by 50-60 percent more by 2030.

Our Staple Food



Slashing off Sierra Leone's Rice Import in five (5) years

By: Jesmed F. Suma (BRIMCOConsulting.com)

Annual rice consumption in Sierra Leone – among the region's highest per capita – amounts to some 550,000 metric tons. While self-sufficient in rice in the 1950s, and a rice exporter as recently as in the 1970s, Sierra Leone now imports 30 percent of this staple food. Our climate is generally favourable toward agriculture, and our 5.4 million hectares of Bolilands, mangroves, inland valley swamps, and riverine grasslands are very suitable for growing rice. Yet only one-fourth of these fertile, diverse lowlands are under cultivation.

One reason for this is that special concessions now enjoyed by rice importers give them advantage over rice growers which discourages private investment in local rice production. In any case, as noted in my recent article on poverty, importing rice is problematic because it drains our foreign exchange reserves, swells our balance of payment deficit, and leads to inflation.

What, then, can we do to remedy this situation? In the past, policymakers concentrated subsidies around the production level of the food chain. In this way they neglected, and even excluded from government assistance programs those who grow, process, package, transport and distribute rice. I, on the other hand, am persuaded that what is needed is a multi-pronged solution that encourages a culture of entrepreneurship – a subject too often missing in policy discussions about economic development. It is after all the entrepreneurial spirit that seeks to create new, innovative, and competitive businesses, without which there can be no sustainable economic growth. A case in point is the vivid income disparities between ordinary Sierra Leoneans and their expatriate counterparts: these are most often merely a reflection of the foreigners' greater sense of enterprise.

THE SOLUTION:

I would like to see Njala University embody the motto, “Building Sierra Leone through Agriculture, Science and Education,” and become a regional centre of learning and innovation for the agricultural sector. It could do this by leading the way toward defining market-based approaches for carrying out the cost-benefit analysis needed to design effective incentives (or deterrents) for participation at critical points along the food production chain. It could also play a central role in building a framework for collaboration between entrepreneurs and policymakers committed to the rational planning and initiation of appropriate new agribusiness models. In comparison, the government's role should be limited to promoting, facilitating and supporting the production and marketing of such collaboration and its by-products, as follows:

Strengthen locally-owned agribusiness:

The first step should be to identify local agribusinesses that are successfully growing rice, cassava, millet, and other food crops on a commercial scale; and whose ownership is at least 55 percent Sierra Leonean. The second step is to bring the identified companies together to come up with a system for determining their eligibility for soft government loans that match their current capital investment in rice production. (Because our goal is food security, ethanol producers should not be eligible for participation.) Companies like Arul, Marika Enterprises, and the poultry farm owned by a Sierra Leonean returnee from the United Kingdom has already invested in the rice growing business. Such companies, if they can document three years of viability and meet certain conditions, should be recognized, encouraged, and supported.

Slashing off Sierra Leone's Rice Import



Each participating company should agree to double its rate of production in exchange for a corresponding increase in investment loans, for a maximum of \$200,000, to be disbursed in increments of \$50,000. The promise of disbursements should serve as an incentive to qualify for each installment payment, which should be made only when the relevant conditions have been met. Participating companies should also agree to set appropriate target objectives for production, employment, loan repayment, and taxation and submit quarterly reports for audit. Loans should be processed and managed by reputable commercial banks for whom the opportunity to hold interest-free deposits of agricultural development funds should serve as an incentive to make timely disbursements to qualified agribusinesses and to respect agreed-upon interest rate ceilings. Without fluctuations in the inflation rate premium (commonly a large percentage of nominal interest rates for loans), participating banks may impose default and maturity date premiums, as well as transaction and loan monitoring costs, which should significantly lower interest rates from approximately 20 percent to below seven percent. Participating banks should be responsible for the process of underwriting loans, and for ensuring that they are paid back in full and in a timely manner. By halving the default risk premium, the government should be able to choose to provide additional guarantees for at least 50 percent of each loan, subject to annual review, which should further bring down interest rates. Government policy should limit rice orders for the police, military, and other public agencies to local producers. This should encourage local producers to increase their inventory.

Introduce incentives to grow rice:

Some of this may presumably already be in place. All equipment and supplies used in rice cultivation and production should have duty waivers and all rice producers should receive tax concessions, e.g., a five-year corporate tax holiday. The government should sponsor and assign field technicians to provide hands-on guidance to agribusinesses in promoting, developing, producing, and marketing their products.

Encourage rice importers to invest in local rice production:

A government plan should be developed to curb rice imports within five years. The plan should limit the granting of licenses so that no more than two importers are operating in the country at any given time. Eligible importers should have agreed to invest increasing percentages of their annual profits in the cultivation of rice in Sierra Leone (e.g., from 25 in Year One to 75 percent in Year Five). If importers meet the above criterion, their licenses should be renewed for one year. If they do not, they should pay a fine that is equivalent to the estimated percentage of the profit for that term; and risk losing their license. (As I learned during my experience with Sumatu International, rice importers – some of whom import three or four shipments each year – each typically clear at least \$500,000 for every 12,500 metric tons they deliver. As in Guinea and Nigeria, where I am told that foreigners are either banned or discouraged from importing rice, Sierra Leone should issue import licenses only to nationals. After an importer has held a license for one year, they should forfeit half of their duty concessions and be required to pay hitherto waived government fees. Annual measurement of expected gradual increases in local rice production should guide decreases in import quotas.

Foster local cooperation, create Agric Economic Clusters:

In order to make up for past policies that, as noted earlier, defined too narrowly who could receive government assistance and support programs, I propose the creation of agricultural economic clusters – groups of closely-related, complementary businesses operating along the food production chain within a particular region. Such clusters, because they would include rice growers, suppliers of rice inputs (like seeds and fertilizers), millers, transporters, and market sellers, should be included in national agricultural development programs; and cluster members should be eligible for soft revolving loans. As a complement to the clusters, I also propose the creation of an Agribusiness Enterprise Training Program at Njala University. This should be an intensive, comprehensive course lasting between three and six months, which would introduce young students to the study of agro-economics, the use of economics methodology to implement decisions made by agricultural producers, domestic and international food product packaging and marketing; planning and launching an agribusiness; and the development of secondary products from ordinary foodstuffs which meet international standards.

Our Staple Food

Slashing off Sierra Leone's Rice Import in five (5) years

Program graduates should be assigned to coordinate agribusiness cluster activities; liaise within among cluster businesses; identify local resources and help develop innovative approaches for reducing costs; and help banks supervise and monitor loan disbursements and repayment, which should certainly improve loan repayment rates. In addition to monthly stipends, these cluster field agents should receive quarterly bonuses, but only if they fulfill specific performance requirements, including submitting weekly reports. While I am concerned about the work ethic of young Sierra Leoneans, I do believe that such an arrangement should provide an incentive for young field agents to work hard and reach useful career objectives. Within five years of completing the program, graduates should be ready to use the experience they have gained as cluster field agents and to begin functioning as independent agribusiness operators or consultants. Clusters should prove to be a driving force for local collaboration, which in turn should encourage entrepreneurship and prove effective in spurring both participating businesses to become more competitive and productive and cluster regions to experience a growth in the rate of new business formation. Being broad-based and inclusive, clusters should also foster new ways of thinking about economics and they should inspire local efforts to achieve economies of scale as a central value of our development planning. No less importantly, the cluster ethos should popularize new development approaches conducive to the more efficient use of existing resources and a resulting improvement in export performances.

Stimulate economic innovation and build infrastructure:

The most urgent tasks are thus: 1) locate and repair or replace depleted infrastructures, especially secondary roads, which are inhibiting farming communities' access to each other and to local markets; 2) come up with a formula for gauging which agricultural communities should receive priority attention, based on estimates of their potential contribution to the national economy; 3) explore and evaluate the possibility of cultivating improved, high-yield varieties of rice, and of adopting new farming methods; 4) select potential sites to serve as strategic market centres in each agricultural economic cluster, for the purpose of sharing crop storage and rice milling facilities; and 5) identify water resources available to each cluster, for use in irrigation and other agricultural development schemes. In the interest of sustainability, chiefs should be involved in and be held responsible for every one of the above activities from planning to completion; and all construction and cultivation tasks should be allotted to village-based contractors as part of a fair bidding process. Before successful bidders are able to lease the site in question, they should undergo training on how to run these market centres as businesses; and they should agree to pay monthly rent to the government after a period of grace, with an option to buy (the charging of rental fees, even if these are negligible, should foster a sense of ownership and therefore responsibility for government-owned assets). Property should be withdrawn from any lessee who fails to maintain it or to make timely payments. We should however expect that if farmers consider that cluster services are useful they will be motivated to pay for them. What is most important is to allow market forces time to regulate economic activities, and to ensure efficiency and sustainability.

One valuable consequence of the programs I have suggested here should be that as loans are repaid, the government will find that it has accumulated moneys that it can eventually place into a revolving fund for use in scaling up relevant activities in different parts of the country and in other sectors.

About the Author

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Our Photo Gallery

Women farmers in Daru displaying their harvest and calling on government for support



RFCIP stretching its arms to the disabled. With grant from the Nimikor Community bank, street begging is a thing of a past to these persons with disability in Kono



The Chairman of 'Moigbaema' IVS farmers at Tikonkoh Village in Kailahun District commends the RCPRP Program Coordinator for donating a mini Rice Mill



INSIDE DE FARM

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