

Consortium for Rehabilitation and Development (CORAD)

CARE Sierra Leone (Lead Member), Catholic Relief Services, and World Vision Sierra Leone
with the American Refugee Committee and Search for Common Ground



Promoting Linkages for Livelihood Security And Economic Development- The LINKS Program



Performance Report

Fourth USG Quarter (July 1 to September 30, 2007) and
Annual Report (October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007)

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II. GLOSSARY

| Acronym/Abbreviation | Meaning |
|----------------------|---|
| AoW | Area of Work |
| ARC | American Refugee Committee |
| AWP | Annual Work Plan |
| CARE | CARE Sierra Leone |
| C-BAN | Community Biodiversity Action Network |
| CCU | Coordination and Compliance Unit |
| CORAD | Consortium for Relief and Development |
| CRS | Catholic Relief Services |
| DRP | Developmental Relief Program |
| FARDA | Friends of African Relief and Development |
| FFS | Farmer Field Schools |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| GoSL | Government of Sierra Leone |
| IPTT | Indicator Performance Tracking Table |
| IR | Intermediate Result |
| LINKS | Promoting Linkages for Livelihood Security and Economic Development |
| LOA | Life of Activity |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MAFS | Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security |
| MCT | Making Cents Training |
| MED | Micro Enterprise Development |
| MFI | Micro Finance Institution |
| MOU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MOYS | Ministry of Youth and Sports |
| MRU | Mano River Union |
| NARI | National Agricultural Research Institutes |
| NERICA | New Rice for Africa |
| NGO | Non Governmental Organization |
| NMJD | Network Movement for Justice and Development |
| PAR | Portfolio At Risk |
| S&L | Savings and Literacy |
| SBE | Small Business Enterprise |
| SFCG | Search for Common Ground |
| SLADEA | Sierra Leone Adult Education Association |
| SMY | Socially Marginalized Youths |
| SO | Strategic Objective |
| SRI | System of Rice Intensification |
| STS | Small Transport Solution |
| SUG | Start Up Grant |
| TA | Technical Assistance |
| US | United States |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| USG | United States Government |
| VANCIL | VANCIL Consultancy Services |
| VSCG | Voluntary Savings and Credit Group |
| VS&L | Village Savings and Literacy Groups |
| WABE | Women Agro-Business Enterprise |
| WVSL | World Vision Sierra Leone |

III. INTRODUCTION

The consolidation of peace, security and stability continue to be the focus of the government of Sierra Leone and the donor community. This is so because economic stability of the country is directly related to effective governance and positive growth in the internal and external markets. Sierra Leone has progressed positively slowly following the cessation of the decade-long civil war that led to the devastation of lives and property, and economic destabilization. Continued peace, stability, and economic growth in Sierra Leone contribute to regional political stability and reintegration into the global market place. The current development activities focus on enhancing and maintaining economic stability, leveraging resources to reduce food and nutrition insecurity and, providing sustainable public services. The need for democratic governance to achieve a broad-based growth through expansion of economic opportunities cannot be overemphasized.

The Promoting Linkages for Livelihood Security and Economic Development (LINKS) Program is intended to facilitate more rapid integration of communities into dynamic rural economies in which inputs flow to communities and products are more easily marketed. The program is specifically designed to broaden the range and increase the productivity of livelihood activities at the community level, as well as to link productive communities more integrally into regional and national market systems. The LINKS strategy builds on the achievements of the Developmental Relief Program (DRP) at the community level and attempts to integrate these communities into regional and national markets. The LINKS program has also broaden economic opportunities for these target communities through stimulating production and productivity levels in agriculture. Two broad program objectives (POs) contribute to USAID's Strategic Objective (SO) by creating an enabling environment for rapid and sustainable economic growth through the reintegration of war-torn populations into dynamic local economies. LINKS expands economic opportunities and increases the ability of resource-poor households and marginalized youths to improve their livelihoods and rebuild communities that will not revert to conflict and violence. PO 1 supports capacity building activities that enhance innovations that eventually lead to market-led production and diversification (IR 1.1); establish and expand micro-enterprises (IR 1.2) and; increase livelihood opportunities for youth in rural communities (IR 1.3). PO 2 reintegrates target communities into dynamic local economies by increasing access to agricultural inputs and output markets (IR 2.1) and expands livelihood opportunities for youth at the mezzo level (IR 2.4).

The focus of the program is primarily on expanding productivity and improving livelihoods at the community level, and at the *mezzo* level, eliminating obstacles or filling niches to improve the flow of inputs and outputs. The term inputs refers not just to physical inputs for agriculture, but also to labor, capital, information and services for both farm and non-farm production. The LINKS Program therefore has two program objectives: to increase production and build economies at the community level through micro-enterprise development and market-led agricultural innovation, and to integrate these communities into regional and national markets through increased flow of inputs to, and outputs from, the communities. A third cross-cutting objective is to ensure that a critical segment of the population, marginalized youth, are integrated into these dynamic rural economies.

During FY 07, CORAD made substantial progress towards LOA targets, and exceeded a number of FY 07 targets. For FY 07, 23 targets were met, while only 11 remained unmet. To a large extent, the 11 unmet targets are a result of the fact that CORAD's substantial progress in previous fiscal years meant that LOA targets had already been largely achieved: 22 LOA targets have been reached, and several others are over 90 percent finished. One of the significant

successes from this FY was the reestablishment of input supply shops in Koinadugu and Kono. Another was that CORAD was able to find an answer to the question of Small Transport Solutions that worked on most terrain. Although the imported tricycles could not be manufactured locally, they have nonetheless proven very successful when paired with the capital grants. Youth also continue to engage with activities such as the FFS and micro-lending, and experiments piloted by FFS continue to positively impact agricultural production in rural areas.

The second half of FY 07 proved challenging due to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections. Not only did localized incidents of insecurity lead to limited movement of CORAD staff, but also elected leaders and community members were unavailable to take part in activities for 2-3 months. This delayed the implementation of certain activities.

The road network leading to and within the CORAD operational area poses a major challenge to operations. It also has consequences for the growth and sustainability of agricultural productivity and business development in those areas that are farther away from the district headquarter towns. Impact on productivity could lead to the decline in gains made through the use of improved production and management practices. Groups finding it difficult to market additional production output could reduce or totally abandon market oriented production as market access continues to be difficult. Restricted access to markets as a result of poor road networks could also impact the growth and development of savings as groups further away from the banks in the district headquarter town will experience difficulty in accessing additional funds to expand their business operation.

IV. CONTEXT MONITORING/RISK & ASSUMPTIONS TRACKING

4.1 Incidents of Localized Insecurity

There was a resurgence of localized incidents of violence prior to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections (August 8th) and run offs (September 6th) in several CORAD operational areas, mainly in the form of clashes between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the All Peoples Congress (APC). This caused CORAD partners to recall staff from the field and back to the regional sub-offices for a period of time during the months of August and September. These disruptions delayed work in general, but most especially the collection of price information from local markets. In Koidu, Kono District, there were frequent clashes between the supporters of political parties rendering the operational area unsafe for staff movement. This affected the achievements of the target set for the fourth quarter.

4.2 Threats from Regional Turbulence

Though Guinea experienced serious instability in February 2007 which led to a new government, the neighboring countries of Guinea and Liberia remained peaceful allaying the fear of spill over effect of insecurity into Sierra Leone. The borders remained calm with cross boarder movements enhanced without harassments. CORAD staff and beneficiaries did not experience threats in carrying out their activities along these border towns.

After the Liberian election in Quarter Three, relative calm returned to the Mano River Union (MRU) states but this relative calm was tested when the Unions went on strike in Guinea. With the settlement of the demands of the striking unions calm returned to Guinea and the threat subsided. The Yenga border negotiation between the governments of Sierra Leone and Guinea still remain unresolved.

None of these activities threatened production activities or the LINKS implementation process. All CORAD partners constantly monitor surge along border chiefdoms within their areas of work, and report changes on a monthly basis. These reports are fed to senior leadership of the five agencies, and on to the CORAD Steering Committee.

The opening of the Koindu International Market that attracts traders from across Guinea, Liberia and Cotê d'Ivoire improved the security situation along the southeastern corridor between Guinea and Sierra Leone. The Mano River Bridge between Liberia and Sierra Leone that was closed during the war in Liberia and Sierra Leone was also recently re-opened to traffic. Both these developments indicate renewed confidence and continuing stability, and will contribute to trans-border trade between the MRU States (which could in turn result in increased returns to producers and traders involved in the activity).

4.3 Delays in Decision Making by GoSL

The continuous absence of the MoYS Officer in CORAD Operational Districts continues to be a major obstacle in the implementation of youth activities. Although they have been appointed, they are not available to participate in CORAD activities. Participation of the MoYS Officer in LINKS was minimal as they have concentrated more on other Ministry activities, specifically sporting activities. The renovation and supplies of equipments to the Youth Offices in District Headquarter towns were completed in FY 07, but because of the Officers' continuous absence, some CORAD partners have taken the step to secure capital equipment such as generators on their premises for safety.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) has the mandate to act as implementing partner in the FFS approach, but to date it has proved to have low operational capacity.

CORAD is cognizant of the limited resources available to MAFS, and has attempted to coordinate and assist in different ways. This problem has not impeded implementation on the part of the CORAD LINKS partners; however, efforts are ongoing to ensure that this does not impact the sustainability of agricultural activities.

4.4 Support or Lack Thereof from GoSL for LINKS

Local authorities (LAs) have been very supportive of the LINKS project and project. Staff continues to engage both LAs and community leaders in the implementation of project activities. Involvement of LAs and community opinion leaders in the selection of youth and farmer groups has contributed to the successful completion of a number of activities, including the distribution of agricultural tricycles and the agro-processing equipment.

4.5 Negative Impact of Government Price Controls

In FY 07, GoSL lifted controls on cross border trade of traditional commodities such as rice and palm oil. The Seed Project was recently granted permission to export over 2,000 tons of seed rice to Liberia, and it was also observed that there was no official statement on the transshipment of rice and palm oil across the borders during the dry season. Prices for these commodities responded to market forces without the usual price hikes.

4.6 Extreme Climate Conditions

Generally speaking, Sierra Leone is subject to extreme climate conditions in the form of intense heat and torrential tropical rains during the rainy season (April to September). This means that annually the extremely poor infrastructure (particularly the road network) is rendered impassible in rural areas—a situation that not only impacts the day-to-day life of community members in remote areas, but also negatively impacts the ability of CORAD partners to access such locales. The weather conditions also negatively impact activities such as the FFS in that meeting attendance drops sharply off during the months of heavy rain. Transport conditions for local products to the markets are difficult as a number of farm-to-market roads become impassable, and even foot traffic is difficult. All of causes significant fluctuations in earning power and serious constraints for groups and individuals seeking to engage in commercial farming.

The FY 07 Rainy Season proved particularly heavy in most of the Operational Area. The performance of some crops, especially cereals, was affected by the heavy rain during the planting and harvesting season. Germination rates declined and portions of some upland farms were washed away. Although not significant, it will impact the quantity of cereals harvested at the end of the cropping season. In Koinadugu, the dry season lasted longer than usual, which had serious effects on the yield of dry season crops planted in lowlands, such as groundnuts and Irish Potatoes. In addition, it also resulted in water shortages, meaning that farmers were unable to see significant benefit from the drip irrigation system provided through the project (as there was not sufficient water to make the system operational). This protracted dry spell was followed by heavy rains that flooded the inland valley swamps (IVS), making IVS rice difficult to cultivate. It also meant that the appropriate weather conditions for planting IVS rice coincided with the Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, which further delayed planting and could thus have a long-term effect on soil moisture retention for the long duration

The delay in the onset of the rains coupled with the electioneering period delayed rice planting in the low lands which could have long term effect on soil moisture retention for long duration rice crop planted in the low lands.

4.7 Other Factors Affecting Project Performance

Although Line Authorities (LAs) have rendered their support to the LINKS implementation process, the issue of representation at coordination meetings continues to affect some CORAD partner agencies (a situation compounded by the increased political activities due to the elections). Regular attendance and consistency in representation would improve collaborative efforts and enhance the LAs understanding of the key objectives and outcomes of the LINKS project. CORAD believes that this would also improve issues surrounding the ownership of community assets such as agro-processing equipment and small transport solutions. CORAD believes that a better understanding of the project design and documents as well as regular participation in coordination meetings would improve the situation. To date, issues are resolved at informal meetings and discussions outside of the coordination meetings.

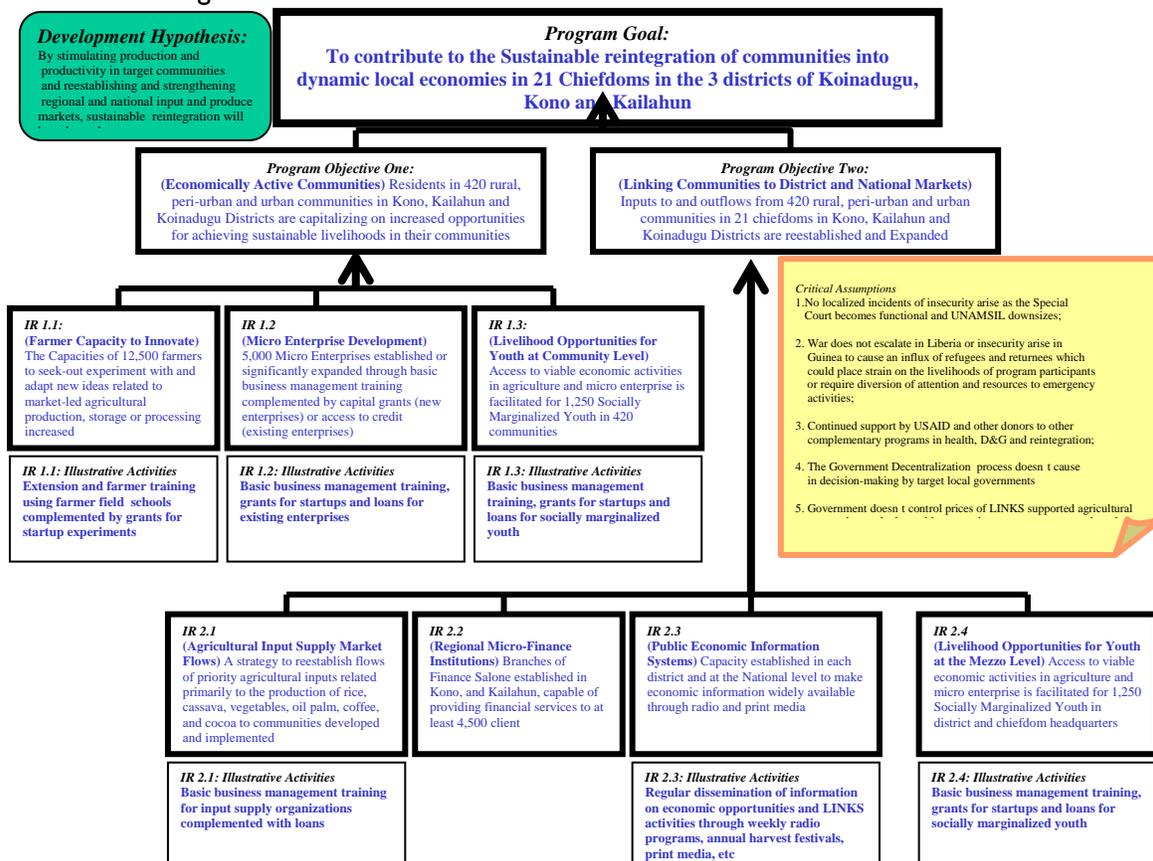
The delay in the approval of the no cost extension for the UNDP component funding has had a negative impact on the implementation and performance of LINKS during the first quarter of year three, with the implementation of some of the youth activities and follow up work on the value chain activities has been affected. Once the extension was granted, CORAD members were able to re-program activities into subsequent quarters, meaning that annual and LOA targets were largely achieved.

With the program coming to an end, high staff turn over was experienced, which affected implementation of activities. Four staff of CARE LINKS left the Program during the year to join other CARE projects (two moved to LEAD) and other NGOs. This caused some delays in project monitoring and evaluation activities, although all have now been replaced.

V. PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AGAINST OBJECTIVES

5.1 Program Results Framework

The LINKS program directly supports USAID/Sierra Leone Program’s *SO 1*; “Reintegration process of war-torn populations advanced”. Accordingly, our goal is “sustainable reintegration of communities into dynamic local economies in 21 chiefdoms in the three districts of Kailahun, Koinadugu and Kono”. Two program objectives (PO) will contribute to the LINKS program goal. The first PO will ensure that “residents in 420 rural, peri-urban and urban communities in 21 chiefdoms in Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu districts are capitalizing on increased opportunities for achieving sustainable livelihoods in their communities. Through the second PO “Inputs to and output flows from 420 rural, peri-urban and urban communities in 18 chiefdoms of Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu districts will be reestablished and expanded.” The LINKS program goal and objectives are strategically linked and supportive of U.S. Mission’s priority interests in Sierra Leone—consolidation of peace, security and stability—through economic growth, humanitarian response and democratic governance.



5.2 Program Objective 1

Residents in rural, peri-urban and urban communities in 420 rural, peri-urban, and urban communities in 21 Chiefdoms in Kono, Kailahun, and Koinadugu Districts are capitalizing on increased opportunities for achieving sustainable livelihoods in their communities.

In order to facilitate re-integration of communities into dynamic rural economies, CORAD has sought to address the problem of food and economic insecurity. This has been achieved through participatory planning, mobilization of local resources and collective decision-making to build the

capacities of program participants. Activities under this objective executed during FY 2007 included the establishment of Farmer Field Schools, supporting the commercial production of adopted crops in outstanding farmer field schools, encouraging Village Savings and Loan (VS&L) participants to conduct action audit, supporting youths with capital grants to expand on their micro enterprise and farming activities. During this fiscal year vulnerable communities and socially marginalized youths were targeted, this has contributed to promoting both community cohesion and social re-integration.

During this fiscal year CORAD achieved 104 percent of its annual target for number of communities supported, with a total of 130 out of 124 planned communities reached. Partners have also achieved 122 percent of their target of 80 agricultural production groups functioning, with 182 groups currently in operation.

5.3 Intermediate Result 1.1

The capacities of 3,450 farmers to seek-out experiment with and adapt new ideas related to market-led agricultural production, storage and processing increased.

1.1.1 Farmers participating in a 4-month series of learning sessions through farmer field schools
 During FY 07, 105 FFS were established, an achievement made possible through the use of community facilitators who functioned much closer to the communities. During this FY, 2,220 individuals completed a four month learning cycle through the FFS. As demonstrated in the following table, 66 percent of participants were youth and 56 percent were female.

| | Ages 15-35 | Aged Over 35 | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Male | 639 | 345 | 984 |
| Female | 837 | 399 | 1,236 |
| Total | 1,476 | 744 | 2,220 |

In terms of youth to adult composition in the groups, the ratio is 2 to 1 was achieved and is in line with the project objective of targeting SMYs at the community level to ensure that livelihood opportunities of youth are strengthened and supported. The ratio of male to female membership in this group is 1 to 1.3; considering that 70 percent of the farm tasks are completed by female farmers (GoSL, 2003), targeting more female youth farmers with improved and appropriate technologies will ensure a higher rate of adoption of these technologies. FFS members report that their rates of adoption and dissemination in FFS communities are on the increase, contributing to improved household security. These claims notwithstanding, there is need for follow-up assessments of these reports by FFS members to ascertain the impact of the training and experimentation on the focal communities.

The FFS trainings were mainly conducted by farmer facilitators in collaboration with the CORAD field agents. The farmers, through participatory planning, managed to identify and promote best practices so that high yields are obtainable and food and economic in security are overcome. Two learning cycles were completed during this reporting period. The two cycles of 4 months learning dialogue were completed starting with low land planting of groundnut and vegetables followed by inland valley swamp cultivation.

Currently, 1,329 individuals are enrolled in the FFS, and are slated to finish their four month learning cycle in the next quarter. In keeping with CORAD's emphasis on the involvement of

women and youth, 64 percent are female, and 80 percent are youth. The following table provides a full breakdown of those currently enrolled:

| | Ages 15-35 | Aged Over 35 | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Male | 322 | 152 | 474 |
| Female | 736 | 119 | 855 |
| Total | 1,058 | 271 | 1,329 |

1.1.2 Farmer field schools continued to undertake experiments

At least 75 percent of the farmer groups currently functioning are carrying out a minimum of four different experiments. There has been little variation in the types of experiments performed by the schools because of the limitations of the farmer facilitators and extension agents in translating problems to experiments. A workshop session held in the third quarter of the reporting period sought to expand the skills of both community facilitators and extension agents. This additional training will ensure that community facilitators received adequate training in basic agricultural processes and practices that diversify the experiments. The experiments conducted in CORAD-supported FY 07 are:

| Type of Experiment | Crops Studied |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Varietal Trial | Rice (upland & IVS), Sweet Potato and Cassava |
| Varietal Trial | Groundnut |
| Effect of land preparation on yield | Groundnut |
| Planting Methods | Groundnut |
| Use of Manure (different intensities) | Commercial vegetables |
| Planting densities | Commercial vegetables. |
| Effect of land preparation on yield | Sweet Potato and Cassava |
| Plant population & performance | Rice, (SRI), Cassava, & sweet potato |
| Planting methods | Rice (SRI), Sweet potato and cassava |

Field information from harvest data in Quarter I indicates that the FFS are obtaining results from their experimental plots that answer some of their production problems. For example, yield data from experimental plots indicate that ROK3 produced more grain by weight i.e. 20 percent more than Nerica 1 but took 164 days to reach maturity. When harvested the moisture content (MC) was on average 2 percent above that of Nerica 1 requiring additional drying by the farmer. ROK3 produced more tillers per plant (14 tillers per plant) under sole and 7 tillers per plant under mixed crop/intercropping conditions and thus the higher yield. Nerica 1 on the other reached 50 percent flowering stage and 50 percent maturity under both sole and mixed crop conditions two months earlier than ROK3 an advantage FFS participants did not fail to recognize and concluded that both varieties had unique features and advantages that is good for them.

Although the Nerica yield was lower by 20 percent they argued that the extra 2 month made available because of the early harvest of Nerica could be engaged in other activities. It also meant early food for the household, reducing the hunger season with early harvest and this was acceptable to most of the FFS participants. Harvesting Nerica at lower moisture content means less time on additional drying of the crop too, saving valuable labour time. The prospect of cultivating sole upland farms is unrealistic to participants considering that traditionally they intercrop their farms with up to 15 or more crops that are necessary for the farm households'

subsistence. The preference therefore shifted to both rice varieties under mixed or intercropped conditions. Some even argued that they could cultivate both varieties on the same upland farm and reap the benefits of both varieties.

Complementing the farmers' innovation process is the provision of technical support to groups to (a) develop action plans outlining future plans to incorporate the improved technologies that are tested and (b) the strengthen groups to ensure sustainability. This is important as LINKS is nearing close-out and there is need to ensure continuity and sustainability of these groups. Linking established and functioning groups to external sources of support to strengthen them for business development has started will continue till the end of the project.

Results obtained indicate that the use of manure in different intensities on traditional vegetable crops such as okra and eggplant perform better than "imported" crops like tomato and onions. More specifically, the use of green manure proved to be a critical factor to obtain favorable yields; a resultant recommendation is to further strengthen the practice of establishing compost heaps in all FFS groups.

Additionally, CORAD partnered with the Saint Joseph Father's Agricultural Project (SJAP) to introduce the system of rice intensification (SRI) in an effort to reduce costs from seed inputs and increase production. This system has been successfully implemented in Madagascar and other African countries. Initial results indicate a significant increase in the number of tillers obtained per plant as compared to the traditional method; it is expected that this will also result in increased outputs at harvest time.

Finally, in collaboration with the FAO-MAFS Special Program for Food Security (SPFS), CORAD established a pilot irrigation site in Koinadugu District to demonstrate the use of the human-powered treadle pump. As a result, a total of three FFS groups, located in Sulima chiefdom and composed mostly of women, directly benefited from the use of this appropriate technology. The School of Technology from Njala University (NU) provided technical support for the installation and use of the irrigation equipment (the final result of this pilot experience is presented in Annex 3). The results indicate a significant improvement in the use of time and labor due to increased water availability. This is especially important in the case of women, for whom the available amount of time for income generation is small due to numerous household reproductive chores.

During this fiscal year, farmer's selected only three crops for experimentation, these included groundnuts, vegetables and inland valley swamp rice. Farmers in the FFS incorporated the groundnut straw during Ploughing in the inland valley swamps (green maturing) so as to increase the nutrient capacity of the soil for the second crop. Overall, the program managed to achieve the target of 4 experiments per FFS as they selected a range of crops to work with. The second cycle of learning focused on best cultivation practices such as varietal trials, row planting in comparison with random planting for rice, plant population and fertilization as against organic manure for vegetables. The other crops focused on best management practices.

The groundnut trials had poor yields due to a combination of factors; at the time of land preparation and planting, there was a long dry spell which contributed to lack of adequate moisture for plant growth, another factor for the poor yields was due to the continuous rains experienced a month to harvest which flooded most of the lowlands making it difficult for the pods to have filled grains. Farmers now consider dry season groundnut planting as inappropriate and time wasting since yields have been very poor for the past two years.

Harvesting of the Irish Potato has been completed, the yields were encouraging but the rate of tuber rot was high. The smaller tubers preserved for the next cultivation were all damaged because of the high humidity experienced during storage. The women harvested up to 30 bags of 25 Kg each. The larger tubers were sold to customers in Freetown and Bumbuna towns. The proceeds from the sale of the Irish Potato have been used to secure more seeds from Guinea (Labe) for the dry season cultivation. Experimentation for the late season crop (October-December) of Irish Potato is in progress.

1.1.3 Capital grants disbursed for agricultural start-up activities

The provision of capital grants for agricultural start-up activities is to address constraints to on-farm productivity such as access to inputs and improved technologies as well as access to markets. During the year, several groups benefited from the distribution of tricycles, animals, and agro-processing equipment worth US\$54,357. A total of 1,536 individuals have benefited from start-up capital provided in FY 07. As noted in the following table, there was a strong majority of females and youth in the recipients.

| | Ages 15-35 | Ages over 35 | Total |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Male | 429 | 305 | 734 |
| Female | 505 | 297 | 802 |
| Total | 934 | 602 | 1,536 |

The FFS engaged in small ruminants activities received capital to purchase an initial stock consisting of sheep (one male, five female) and goats (one male, five female). The group has signed an MOU agreeing to share any proceeds financial and in kind equally among their members. In the case of the oxen, each of the two FFS participant groups have received capital to purchase two pairs of animals per group as well as farming equipment (harrows, ploughs). Each group selected four of their members to undergo an intensive 40-day training on the proper handling of the animals. The groups have by-laws in place to guide the future use of the oxen, as well as distribution of any proceeds

Eight tricycles were distributed to groups at the community and mezzo level in Kono District. CORAD partner WVSL, the agency providing TA for small transport solutions, reported in the last quarterly report efforts to register and license the tricycles where unsuccessful as the Sierra Leone Road Transport Authority was unsure of the classification of the tricycles. CORAD decided to identify community groups and qualify them for receipt of the tricycles as capital grants based on their ability to commit funds to register, insure and license the vehicles. Qualified groups were then requested to proceed with the vehicle registration process at the local SLRTA office. Each group spent around Le 500,000 (\$167 US) for insurance, registration and license. Four of the groups have already received their plates and the vehicles are plying the routes in their respective communities transporting agricultural products from the farm to market.

5.4 Intermediate Result 1.2

5,000 micro enterprises established or significantly expanded through basic business management training complemented by capital grants (new enterprises) or access to credit (existing enterprises).

Microenterprise contributes to aggregate employment, production, and national income and to the promotion of entrepreneurial talent, resilience, and flexibility in confronting a dynamic global economy. It is also an important vehicle for the poor to escape poverty through market-driven, productive activities. Either as owners, or as workers, their livelihood is directly linked to this important sector of the economy. The success of economic stabilization depends on broadening the distribution of the benefits of economic growth to include poor. Key to the achievement of these goals is the development of this sector of the economy as well as improving the competitiveness of the rural economies.

Microenterprises lack access to nonfinancial services, including marketing, training in basic business skills such as bookkeeping, and technology transfer. Moreover, the lack of organization of the microenterprise sector makes it more costly to provide services to these businesses. Infrastructural problems as well as the lack of an enabling business environment increase the attrition rate of these enterprises. They are also constrained on the deposit side as most are financed through the owners' and family members' savings, but minimum deposit requirements, limited liquidity; high transaction costs, inconvenient banking locations and the entrepreneurs' unfamiliarity with banking institutions limit their access to and use of formal savings mechanisms.

CORAD members embarked on several activities aimed at reducing the constraint facing rural entrepreneurs and building capacity to enhance the entrepreneurial mindset of the target beneficiaries. Under the guidance of partner ARC, CORAD facilitated access to Making Cents Training, a basic business training service through local partners (Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), the Kono Women's' Multipurpose Cooperative, FARDA in Kailahun District, and CORD and YRTEP in Koinadugu, and Chido) through a voucher system. In addition, CORAD provided start-up grants to improve the performance of new and existing business, and the competitiveness and resilience of these businesses.

1.2.1 LINKS beneficiaries participated in business training through vouchers provided by the program
 A total of 2,433 individuals participated in voucher trainings during FY 2007, with participants ranging from FFS members to traders in agricultural produce, petty traders, small table business traders, cookery, bread baking, gara-tie dyeing, ataya and livestock business. MC clients were mainly trained in basic business skills/techniques and record keeping. Clients who undertake MC training acquire basic skills of identifying viable economic activities that have potential to generate income. In the case of the FFS, participants benefiting from the training pass on their skills to other members of the school during training days when special topics are covered. This training is reinforced by the Farmer Facilitators who also benefit from the training. The MED Field Coordinator for ARC as the technical lead for MED, who is a qualified trainer in the MC methodology, provides technical support to groups with large memberships to ensure that the quality and technical content of the training is maintained. As a result of this process, CORAD was able to cover more clients in larger groups while keeping the cost of training at the minimum.

| | Ages 15-35 | Aged Over 35 | Total |
|---------------|------------|--------------|--------------|
| Male | 882 | 130 | 1,012 |
| Female | 1,005 | 416 | 1,421 |

| | | | |
|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| Total | 1,887 | 546 | 2,433 |
|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|

1.2.2 Business training was undertaken through a non-voucher system promoted by the program
 The environment for non-voucher trainings that is, the market for fee-based, cost-recovery training (not subsidized by LINKS) has proved difficult to market in Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, a few local partners such as Friends of African Relief and Development (FARDA) in Kailahun Chibuzar Human Resource and Development Organization (CHIDO) in Kono have made considerable efforts to promote Making Cents trainings. During FY 07, 313 people were trained, which represented 8.9 percent of the annual target of 3,500. The local partner charged 10,000 leones to all participants, which covered the cost for the initial Making Cents training module. Youth accounted for over 62 percent trained, as detailed in the table below.

| | Ages 15-35 | Ages > 35 | Total |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Male | 56 | 33 | 89 |
| Female | 141 | 83 | 224 |
| Total | 197 | 116 | 313 |

1.2.3 Loans were disbursed to targeted clients

The LINKS-supported Finance Salone MFI continued its excellent performance in serving the capital needs of small-scale entrepreneurs in both Kailahun and Kono districts. For this reporting period, Finance Salone disbursed a total of 5,090 loans valued at \$955,840 US.¹ This far exceeds the target of 1,246 loans. As noted in the table below, 68 percent of all loan recipients were youth, and 66 percent were female.

| | Ages 15-35 | Ages over 35 | Total |
|---------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| Male | 1,246 | 496 | 1,742 |
| Female | 2,256 | 1,092 | 3,348 |
| Total | 3,502 | 1,588 | 5,090 |

Please refer to Annex Three for the Finance Salone Quarterly Status Report.

1.2.4 Men and women continue to participate in savings groups

The FY 07 target for this activity was 5,220 men and women participating in savings groups. Of this, CORAD members were able to achieve 5,790, or 110 percent. These individuals comprise 82 savings groups. Thirty-eight groups have not yet accomplished their savings goals, and so have opted to continue. The groups currently have no savings account with any bank but are being encouraged to deposit their money in a savings box. Total membership of the groups comprises 586 and 404 youth female and male members respectively between 15 and 35 years. About 37% of the remaining membership is above the age of 35.

1.2.5 Men and women participating in literacy groups

Due to an overwhelming level of interest, CORAD has far exceeded targets for the literacy and numeracy groups. Currently 4,110 men and women are participating in literacy groups, which

¹ Figure is calculated based on the prevailing USD to leone exchange rate at the time of disbursement.

represents 117 percent of the FY 07 target of 3,500. Women account for no less than 60 percent of all participants.

Literacy group activities focus on the development of basic numeracy and reading skills after which participants progress to the second level activity which includes materials related to basic business practices. Men and women participating in literacy-related activities, referred to in LINKS as the savings and literacy program (S&L), continued their training activities at their various community sites throughout operational districts. Overall, participants have made significant progress in basic reading, writing and numeracy. Some groups have even started applying some of the concepts in “Course 1: Cohesive Groups” by contributing on average 1,000 leones per week. A few female participants have even started applying some of their newfound skills by keeping records while running their businesses. Participants are highly motivated, as indicated in part by an attendance rate of 80 percent. Most groups have progressed beyond Course 1: ‘Cohesive Groups’ and are now anticipating Course 2: ‘Business for Profit.’

Though the enthusiasm amongst participants still remains high, class participation and attendance are diminishing due to several factors: (1) tedious farm work, participants staying for longer hours on farms and have little time and energy left to attend evening classes; (2) lack of remuneration has also led to the de-motivation of the facilitators teaching classes on a regular basis, (3) GTZ, FRC and SLADEA, are giving significant incentives and providing transport facilities for facilitators to teach in their literacy classes. This is having an adverse effect on CORAD’s literacy classes as it is the CORAD trained facilitators who are now providing services to these organizations. This issue will be addressed during upcoming Steering Committee meetings.

1.2.6 Average savings accumulated per annum per savings group

In spite of the fact that some savings groups only began activities in the third quarter, CORAD partners report that groups have accumulated an average savings of \$325 US, or 108 percent of the FY 07 target of \$298.

1.2.7 Capital grants were disbursed for startup of micro enterprises

A total of \$37,553 US was disbursed as capital grants to start up micro enterprises. Among the activities funded through the start-up grants are tailoring, hair dressing, dress making, soap making, petty trading/table market and gara sales.

| | Ages 15-35 | Ages over 35 | Total |
|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Male | 802 | 83 | 885 |
| Female | 604 | 253 | 857 |
| Total | 1,406 | 336 | 1,742 |

5.5 Intermediate Result 1.3

Access to viable economic activities in agriculture or micro enterprise is facilitated for 1,250 socially marginalized youth in 420 communities.

Youth continue to be the focus of CORAD activities at both community and mezzo level. Job opportunities in the area of agro-processing, small business enterprise and small transports targeted young women and men. The program not only supports youth to actively participate in agriculture activities but also enhances youth reintegration with community and local institutions.

SMYs have participated in the cultivation of various crops, and some youth groups have also benefited from the “Making Cents” training and from the SUG activity. Discussions with youth groups confirmed that they would like to access improved technologies in rice hullers, cassava grater machines if capital grants for the purchase of these items were available.

The program has contributed to the improvement of the social status of youth in the operational communities. For example, some youth groups have been provided improved cassava processing equipment and training in gari production and their success has attracted other youth from the mines to engage in agricultural production. Other groups have received small transport solutions and basic management training and are currently engaged in the transportation of farm products from the farm gate to the market improving the income streams to households in the focal communities.

1.3.1 Youth completed learning dialogues related to livelihood opportunities analysis

The LOA target for this activity was achieved in FY 2006.

Dialogues were conducted for socially marginalized youths at the community level (villages and small settlements) and the mezzo level district headquarter towns and large urban towns within the District to facilitate access to viable economic activities in agriculture or microenterprise. The dialogues were held in 7 communities in Kailahun District, 7 communities in Kono district and 7 communities in Koinadugu district with a total of 1,275 youths taking part (59 percent over the target of 800 youth). Overall, 43 percent of the participants were female and 57 percent were male.

1.3.2 Socially marginalized youth continued to be members of FFS

A large proportion of the youth in rural communities continue to participate in the FFS because of the alternative it offers them in improving the food security status and the dignity, although the LOA target for this activity has been reached. Groups like the Fama Yenga and the Komandu Youth FFS have attracted other youths from the mine fields. Youth actively participate in the community facilitation process, providing technical support in the establishment of FFS in their communities.

1.3.3 Loans were disbursed to socially marginalized youths in communities for micro-enterprise and agricultural activities

During FY 07, only 88 youth at the community level received loans from Finance Salone. This is because Finance Salone’s current strategy focuses almost exclusively on the mezzo level.

1.3.4 Capital grants were disbursed to socially marginalized youth for agricultural start up activities

A total of \$30,000 was disbursed by CORAD agencies to SMYs (either as members of recipient groups or as individuals) within focal communities. This represents 98 percent of the USD target; however, the difference is due to the exchange loss due to the low trading value of the dollar against international currencies. Achievement of this target can be attributed the processes employed by field teams, and the collaboration of the community leadership and youths groups. Also, continued dialogue and technical support has ensured that grants are effectively used for the purpose intended. Capital grants were either given in the form of equipment (agro-processing equipment and small transport solutions/agricultural tricycles), of funds to strengthen such businesses as soap making, cigarette box making, oxen, or various forms of agro-processing. The following table illustrates the gender breakdown among the SMYs, and demonstrates that 53 percent of recipients are female.

| Ages 15-35 | |
|---------------|--------------|
| Male | 479 |
| Female | 540 |
| Total | 1,019 |

Almost all the SMYs are members of the literacy classes. The project has managed to create renewed hope and self-reliance for most of the marginalized since they are receiving livelihood skills training (business management, new agricultural techniques, literacy and numeracy and cassava processing).

5.6 Program Objective 2

Inputs to and output flows from 420 rural, peri-urban and urban communities in 18 Chiefdoms of Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu Districts are reestablished and expanded.

Under this program objective, LINKS consortium partners are implementing focused interventions to re-establish the flow of inputs and agricultural produce between communities, regional and national markets. To achieve this objective, CORAD has supported the opening of input shops in the three districts to make available agricultural inputs to farmers and also to create linkages for the marketable surpluses to be sold to regional and national markets. During this quarter, 230 livelihood opportunities were created for socially marginalized youth.

The sustainable reintegration of beneficiaries into dynamic local economies cannot be achieved by only increasing production and productivity levels. To sustain this growth in productivity and output productive communities must be linked with viable input and produce markets. Under Program Objective 2, CORAD implemented a set of focused interventions that aims at reestablishing the flow of inputs and agricultural produce between communities, mezzo and national levels. Out of the 18 PO and IR indicators listed under Program Objective 2, CORAD met or exceeded annual targets for all indicators, has already met or exceeded LOA targets for 13. This is in spite of challenges previously noted with the implementation of certain activities, such as the Small Transport Solutions and newspaper inserts (discussed in greater detail below).

5.7 Intermediate Result 2.1

A strategy to reestablish flows of priority agricultural inputs and marketable produce related primarily to the production of rice, cassava, vegetables, oil palm, coffee and cocoa to communities developed and implemented.

2.1.1 Input supply and marketing analysis were completed for each commodity with obstacles and leverage points (input supply)

The concern for food security and youth job opportunities are important issues in the LINKS program. For example, while food production in Kono District has improved in the two and a half years since the implementation of the program, it is still well below the potential of the target communities because of low farm productivity (average yields for rice and cassava are estimated at 1 and 5 tons per hectare and post harvest losses estimated at 40 percent). In an effort to address seasonal food scarcity and improve agricultural competitiveness and rural incomes, LINKS has sought to improve access to improved agricultural inputs/technologies for production and processing, and access to markets.

The establishment of the farm input shop in Koidu ongoing efforts to establish an input shop in Koinadugu will also contribute to the provision of affordably priced improved agricultural inputs to both targeted chiefdoms and other nearby areas. Similarly, the provision of mechanized cassava processing equipment, rice hullers (400 kg/hour), irrigation equipment and tricycles to youth seeks to (a) address the concerns of ensuring food security and creating jobs, agro-processing and marketing, (b) make efficient use of increased production, and (c) diversify and increase household incomes.

CORAD partner WVSL will convene a workshop in the next quarter to bring agricultural input providers and farmers' groups together to enhance the evolving relationship between the input shops and the private sector. This workshop was originally planned for the fourth quarter of FY 07, but was postponed due to difficulties in implementing such a workshop due to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections that dominated from July-September. The workshop will also help the private sector understand the type of services required by producers and emphasize the importance of market information in the development of agricultural business services. Discussions will also focus on the role of ICT in market information and how service providers and users can benefit from it.

2.1.2 Input supply and marketing analysis completed for each commodity with obstacles and leverage points (Marketing analysis) identified

The LOA target for this intermediate result was completed in FY06. As a follow up to the recommendations from these reports, CORAD field staff designed a training component on basic agro-marketing for FFS groups implementing agro-enterprise activities. This module is now included in the standard FFS curriculum, and is designed to equip farmers with basic business skills and the capacity to plan their agricultural activities in such a way as to take maximum advantage of available market opportunities. The establishment of farm input shops in Koinadugu and Koidu was the recommended viable solution to the observed constraint in the input market. A value chain workshop was planned for August but had to be postponed because of the national elections. This workshop will discuss the integration of the input shops into the national market and propose a private sector alliance to ensure the sustainability of the shops.

In addition, CORAD partner CRS used the results obtained in the different sub-sector analyses reports to start pilot programs using the farmer field school approach for the re-introduction of oxen as draft power, the semi-intensive production of small ruminants (goats and sheep) and the use of low-cost appropriate technology for the small-scale agro-processing of cassava and groundnuts.

2.1.3 Organizations with capacities for input supply or marketing expanded or strengthened (output)

During FY 07 reporting period, 5 output suppliers were trained by CORAD in LINKS operational districts of Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu. Trainings on organizational development² were given to organizations in the three districts, but without financial support. As such organizations were not found to be enthusiastic about participating in further training. The organizations are requesting financial support to convert the trainings into real gains. Even though linkages have been established, no financial support has yet been given to these trained organizations by the banks and MFIs.

2.1.4 Organizations with capacities for input supply or marketing expanded or strengthened (input)

During FY 07, three input supply organizations were trained and otherwise engaged in capacity building activities. The input supply organization in Koinadugu –Women Agro Business Enterprise (WABE) received support from both CORAD to establish an input shop, providing the much valuable agricultural seeds and tools to farmers in Koinadugu. WABE continued to provide valuable services to the entire district with affordable agricultural inputs. The greatest problem faced by this particular input shop is the procurement of imported vegetable seeds. The group cannot afford to buy from Holland at this particular moment because of limited seed capital. Also the expiring dates for vegetable seeds do not go over a six months period especially

² Covering the following topics: basic business management, leadership qualities/skills, organizational development-group dynamics, stores management, association fund development, marketing information and advertisement, budgeting, basic concepts in monitoring and evaluation.

for hybrid seeds. Through this input shop, FAO has been able to re-establish their contact with the group. FAO intends to create linkages between the vegetable dealers in Holland and the group. During a focus group discussion it was realized that the group actually needs further training in funds management, how to seek/solicit funds and marketing.

A major obstacle facing organizations (agricultural input/output shop suppliers and local manufacturers) who received capacity building training (training in management, funds management etc.) is lack of financing to go into business. CORAD facilitated an introduction to local Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) to help remedy the situation. The Rural Banks in Segbwema, Rokel Commercial Bank, Union Trust Bank and Finance Salone in Daru and Koidu were approached by the abovementioned organizations. Unfortunately rural MFIs are reluctant to finance the manufacturers and the Input/Output shop supplies as generally known, agricultural credit has had lackluster success. Work to address this issue will be ongoing in the next quarter.

Farmers were actively involved in the 2007 Presidential and Parliamentary campaign process, which had adverse effect on the sale of agricultural inputs.

2.1.5 Manufacturers with capacities increased for manufacturing small scale transport vehicles

Two local manufacture organizations were trained during FY 07 on organizational development topics. These local manufacturers cannot be further trained because CORAD partner WVSL (the lead agency on the Small Transport Solutions) concluded that the design best suited to conditions in the Operational Area was the Chinese tricycles, which cannot be made locally. However, modalities have been worked out on the strategies and methods of acquiring the tricycles by the project participants. Project participants have expressed interest in the tricycles and their applications are being processed for further action. With the availability of the imported tricycles, plans are underway to train youths in the maintenance and repairs of these machines. With support from CORAD, training of these youths will take place in the Chinese Marketing Center in Cline Town, Freetown.

Three deserving applicants will soon be selected and issued the tricycles. Interest was boosted through radio discussions. Discussions started with CCF/SMT, a microfinance institution in Koinadugu, in order to set up a loan system to finance the acquisition of the tricycles for more people.

The imported tricycles; however, are on display in Koinadugu District, and interest in them was boosted through radio discussions. In addition, as noted above, tricycles were disbursed in Kono to qualified groups as capital grants.

5.8 Intermediate Result 2.2

Branches of Finance Salone established in Kono and Kailahun capable of providing services to at least 4,500 clients.

2.2.1 Branch for Finance Salone established and functioning

Two branches of Finance Salone have already been established under LINKs. Both branches continue to serve small business clients in chiefdoms located in Kailahun and Kono districts. These chiefdoms are primarily urban, and lending is concentrated in large daily markets characterized by numerous business stall owners. Kono branch currently services

approximately 2,200 clients managed by four Credit Officers and one Branch Manager. Operations in Kailahun service approximately 770 clients serviced by two Credit Officers and one Supervisor. The LOA target for this activity has thus been achieved. Moreover, each branch relies on micro-finance database systems to track its portfolio performance and client information.

2.2.2 Finance Salone continues to disburse loans at a strong pace

Finance Salone continues to support the needs of the small business community and effectively exhibit its own financial and operational viability. A total of 5,150 loans were disbursed between the two branches with the bulk of the lending conducted at the Kono branch. Both branches continue to achieve high repayment rates of not less than 93% with the Kono branch achieving between 98 and 100 per cent.

2.2.3 Average portfolio at risk remains encouraging

Finance Salone continues to effectively manage the percentage of its loan portfolio under arrears. This metric is captured in the portfolio at risk (PAR) indicator that measures the level of risk attributed to the number (or percentage) of loans not repaid beyond 30 days. For Finance Salone, its PAR has consistently fallen well below the LINKs target of less than 4%, and for this quarter a combined average of 0.80% was achieved.

5.9 Intermediate Result 2.3

Capacity established in each district and at the national level to make economic information widely available through radio and print.

2.3.1 Radio programs used to disseminate public economic information

In FY 07, LINKS partner SFCG has produced a total of 52 regular weekly national radion programs to disseminated economic information. Each program is 30 minutes in length, and has been aired on nine radio stations. These programs are packaged in different segments that address various topics. For example, during the fourth quarter, discussions on the following topics ran during programs:

- ❑ Farmers in Kono and Koinadugu districts shared success stories on their benefits from the LINKS project like: garri processing machines, mailing machines, small scale transport machines and many farming skills.
- ❑ Discussion with CORAD partner CRS on agroenterprise selection to help farmers and traders maximize profit.
- ❑ Information system flow on farm products through our radio programs helps farmers and businesspeople in Koinadugu and Kono as expressed by farmers and traders.
- ❑ How the newly established Fachima Agro–Business Shop is run and what farmers have benefited so far from the shop in Kono district.
- ❑ The Paramount Chief in Luawa Chiefdom Kailahun District shares success stories about his involvement in agriculture to promote food security in his chiefdom, which served as example for other Paramount Chiefs in other chiefdoms.
- ❑ Literacy and savings programs continue to help farmers and business people in Kailahun, Kono and Koinadugu.
- ❑ Discussion with CORAD partner CRS representatives and Bombali district women traders on the relationship between farmers and traders in the buying and selling of farm produce.

- ❑ Launching of the LEAD program in Kono district. This program was to continue the activities of the LINKS project. Issues were based on how the people felt about the project and pledged their support and cooperation to the new project for sustainability and development.
- ❑ Success stories from beneficiaries of the LINKS project in Kailahun and Koinadugu districts who are presently engage in agro-marketing and business management as they have realized a lot of profits from those activities.
- ❑ Program on Paramount Chiefs involvement in agriculture to serve as example for their citizens in the promotion of food security in Kailahun district. Also, market prices information flow helps farmers and business people in their activities in Kailahun district.
- ❑ Conduct of Adult Literacy Classes for different community people by trained community facilitators in Kono and Koinadugu districts to help farmers and traders in their business. The achievements, challenges and future plans of the Kono District women multipurpose cooperative in Kono District.

It should be noted that no discussions took place during the weeks of the Presidential Elections and Run-off.

The following table shows the radio stations that air these broadcasts:

| Radio Station | Location |
|-----------------|----------|
| Radio Moa | Kailahun |
| SLBS | Kono |
| Radio Democracy | Freetown |
| Radio BBN | Freetown |
| Radio Maria | Makeni |
| Radio Mankneh | Makeni |
| SLBS | Makeni |
| Radio KISS 104 | Bo |
| SLBS | Bo |
| Radio Bintumani | Kabala |

In addition to the national radio broadcasts, all the target districts of Kono, Kailahun and Koinadugu have radio stations that provide airtime for local agriculture programs. CORAD partner SFCG has been working with local producers in these stations to enrich content and style, as well as include CORAD partner issues. During this FY, local radio programs in the targeted districts focused on such key topics as:

- ❑ Assessment of the food security pledge in Kono District
- ❑ Production, processing and handling of permanent crops for marketing by the produce Inspector of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food security (Kailahun)
- ❑ Relevance of market prices as supplied by the LINKS program to production of farm commodities and panelists included the District Director of Agriculture and Senior Extension Officer (Kailahun)
- ❑ The processing of permanent crops (Cocoa) for quality grade
- ❑ marketing challenges faced by vegetable farmers especially in Freetown
- ❑ Availability of fertilizer and pesticides
- ❑ Poor road network and how it affects the timely arrival of produce at market
- ❑ Preservation techniques
- ❑ The achievements and shortcomings of the Ministry of Agriculture and the role of Councils in contributing to this achievement

2.3.2 Agricultural and trade fairs used to disseminate public economic information

The third and final Agriculture show of the LINKS project was held from December 18 to 20 in Kailahun Town Field in Kailahun town. The theme selected for the show was “Promoting Agriculture for Food Security.” Various committees were formed to take responsibility for different aspects in the preparation for the show. Planning meetings were held every Thursdays, starting October, in the District Council Conference Hall in Kailahun.

The show not only highlighted agricultural and trade-related organizations and other stakeholders, but also showcased cultural displays and agricultural productions. Both nights of the show, people were entertained until the early morning hours with popular music and stage drama. The first day of the show was dedicated to arrival of the farmers and their exhibits; putting the security machinery into place, electrical wiring of the field, testing the public address system and setting up the booths by participating organizations (including the LINKS partners, NGOs CBOs, MAFS, commercial booths) and final preparation for opening of the show on 19th December 2006. The second day was reserved for the official opening of ceremonies including:

- ❑ Introduction of chairman and dignitaries
- ❑ Keynote addresses from donor representatives and the Ministry of Agriculture
- ❑ Presentation outlining the rationale for the show by LINKS Coordinator,
- ❑ Official opening of the show by the Kailahun District Director of Agriculture
- ❑ A tour for dignitaries of the exhibits and various booths.
- ❑ Drama and cultural performance from the chiefdoms and Save the Children UK

The third day started with a procession which included:

- ❑ The District Council Chairman
- ❑ Representatives of NGOs and government ministries
- ❑ All farmers present for the show who brought exhibits
- ❑ Farmer Field School Graduates
- ❑ Ashobie groups
- ❑ Representatives from all the chiefdoms
- ❑ The Save the Children UK Children’s Club in Kailahun



Agricultural products displayed at the agricultural fair

After the procession, the farmers were dispersed to their various chiefdom booths and the Farmers Field School graduates were led to the VIP pavilion where various speeches were made, and they were presented with Certificates by CORAD. This was followed by the performance of various cultural and drama groups.

The highlight of the agricultural show was the presentation of prizes for the exhibits brought to the show and the performances. In the evening there was brief entertainment by the Steady Bongo and the Cultural Heroes, and departure of farmers to their various chiefdoms. Preliminary feedback from all stakeholders on this activity has been positive.

2.3.3 Written inserts appear in 5 national newspapers

Two 4-page written inserts was produced during this FY. One targeted youths in Kailahun and Kono District, and the other focused on how the information around agriculture livelihood provided by the LINKS consortium has contributed to enhancing the productivity as well as earnings of farmers. A total of 2,000 copies were printed and distributed to relevant institutions, government ministries and departments and circulated through six national newspapers: New Citizen, The Democrat, The News, Sa Lone Times, Awoko, and The Concord Times. It has proven more expensive than anticipated to print and circulate the inserts, meaning that only 15 percent of the FY 07 target was achieved.

2.3.4 National-level agricultural market information compiled and distributed

During this FY, CORAD submitted a total of 26 bi-weekly price reports to LINKS partner SFCG for national and local radio broadcasts. These reports are collected from a total of 16 daily markets and 16 periodic markets in seven of the 13 national districts, including Freetown. The data used in the reports corresponds to the average of three observations per product per market.

Additionally, CORAD member CRS engaged with the Rural and Private Sector Development Project (RPSDP) World Bank team to develop a country-wide proposal for a market information system based on the model used for LINKS. This complements the sustainability strategy of eventually handing over this segment of project activities to MAFS.

5.10 Intermediate Result 2.4

Access to viable economic activities in agriculture or micro enterprise is facilitated for socially marginalized youth in district and chiefdom headquarters.

2.4.1 Youths complete learning dialogues focusing on livelihood opportunities

The LOA target for this activity was achieved in FY 06. A total of 1,275 socially marginalized youth from 21 communities at the micro level (villages and small settlements), and 1,337 socially marginalized youths in 13 communities at the mezzo level participated in these dialogues. Overall 45 % of the participants were female and 55% were male

2.4.2 Loans disbursed to socially marginalized youth in Chiefdom or District headquarters for agriculture activities or micro enterprises

Finance Salone continued its support of economic opportunities for youth-operated business and agricultural activities. In Kailahun, 624 youth received loans and 2,790 received loans through the Kono branch, totaling 3,414 loans for both branches.

2.4.3 Capital grants disbursed to socially marginalized urban youth for startup of agriculture activities or enterprises

CORAD partner WVSL, as technical lead for the agricultural input supply, tested several prototypes of Small Transport Solutions that would match the terrain where partner agencies operated. Fifteen vehicles were purchased initially and transferred to partner agencies for use in the respective areas. The UNDP funding component of the LINKS program was used to purchase these vehicles. During the FY, eight of these vehicles were distributed to FFS groups and youth groups at the mezzo level, at a total value of \$24,700 US. CORAD partner CRS took a different approach to the capital grants. A total of 20 marginalized youth were approved to receive agricultural start up grants at the micro level during the period. Each client received a total grant value of Le 250,000 to expand or strengthen their business.

The following table indicates the gender breakdown of capital grants beneficiaries:

| | Ages 15-35 |
|--------------|------------|
| Male | 126 |
| Female | 94 |
| Total | 220 |

VI. OBSERVED IMPACT(S) TO DATE

As CORAD nears the end of the LINKS program, the positive impact had by the project becomes more and more apparent. In addition to the Final Evaluation conducted by USAID during this FY (the results of which are discussed in Section IX, “Monitoring and Evaluation”), CORAD partners have noted a number of observed impacts in the course of their regular work and interactions with LINKS communities.

For example, the participation of farmers in the establishment of the FFS has enabled them to evaluate crop performance and determine the preferred varieties to select and grow. This has not only raise the ownership among FFS participants, but also facilitated skill building that has enhanced the adoption process and provided farmers with the information they need to make informed decisions. The high yield from the Nerica varieties and the high performance of rice under the SRI trial plots has also been noted by partners as a positive impact from FFS activities. Capital grants in the form of motorized cassava processing equipment have stimulated economic activities in the communities, and enhanced job creation and other livelihood opportunities for youths, women and children.

CORAD has also been successful in the promotion of market-led production activities and the use of appropriate agro-processing technologies with farmer field school groups. Participating communities have experienced an increase in quality of processing and time efficiency. Experiments show that that by using the cassava processing equipment, participants are able to process garri valued at approximately Le 146,000 per month. Before the LINKS intervention, project beneficiaries were not able to process garri and could only sell fresh cassava (and only when in demand by the market). By producing and selling garri, the income of the average member household has increased by at least 100 percent. The access to agro-processing also facilitated access to local markets by increasing the acceptability (color, texture, taste) of garri as compared to that produced by traditional methods, increasing economic activity at the local level. However, it should be noted that some farmers continue to express concerns about the labor required to operate the manual processing equipment. This is especially true in areas where other NGOs have distributed free mechanized machines, a technology that is not appropriate or feasible for most rural farmer groups.

There is general consensus that the equipment provided by CORAD decreases the time previously allocated by households to labor for processing and farming activities. This is especially significant in the case of the irrigation technology used by women’s groups in commercial vegetable gardens. The increased availability of water has decreased the amount of work involved in carrying water to the fields, freeing up time and energy for other important activities.

The possession of capital assets has promoted unity, trust and a stronger community approach to development work among the participating groups, all of which has helped participants to strengthen their livelihoods. As mentioned above, most of the CORAD-sponsored groups have been able to establish informal lending activities, with an average savings of Le 240,000 per group, as well as additional income-generating activities, such as the production of soap, commercial vegetables and swamp rice.

CORAD has also contributed to increased economic activity at micro and mezzo levels through the capital grants disbursed for startup of agriculture activities or micro-enterprises. The positive outlook for the future expressed by the clients during the final evaluation is consistent with the high percentage (90 percent) of clients willing to apply for a loan if available, and the

increased varieties and quantities of their stocks. Finally, clients learned the importance of keeping records. Although the MCT emphasizes this tool, clients at first did not treat it seriously. However, with close monitoring and guidance provided by CORAD staff, clients began to understand the importance of keeping good records. It should be noted that a major constraint to the uptake of this activity is the low levels of literacy among project participants, especially women. However, most have learned to overcome this constraint, for example by having literate family members keep the records for them, and even by working to improve their own reading and writing skills.

A greater number of VS&Ls have shared out. The methodology being simple and transparent has increased the enthusiasm and interest of communities thereby leading to the replication of this product by communities on their own. Community members are highly interested in the methodology due to the significant asset gained from being members of the savings groups.

Agricultural lending has increased youth participation in both marketing and agricultural production activities. Also diversification in livelihood opportunities has increased in that youths are now involved in the buying and selling of small ruminants, which earns them bi-weekly income.

Finance Salone is succeeding in expanding capital access to small business owners and strengthening its own institutional capacity to sustain itself operationally and financially. Its success in helping small business owners has been measured in the number of loans it has disbursed throughout LINKs operating areas. Finance Salone has disbursed over 10,000 loans throughout the life of LINKs. Youth continue to be key beneficiaries as Finance Salone's overall portfolio is comprised of over 60 percent youth clients.

LINKs has been successful in piloting the Savings and Literacy program as a vehicle to facilitate better understanding and integration of essential group savings principles, business management and more importantly introducing basic literacy and numeracy to rural community participants. Tangible indicators of the impact of this program have been demonstrated in some participants' new found ability to write their names and read simple sentences. More intangible impacts have been noted in the renewed confidence, especially of women, to conduct themselves in public and handle their everyday business dealings.

VII. LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

6.1 What is working?

The FFS methodology has shown that farmers have embraced the idea of working with community facilitators (other farmers serving as facilitators in the community). This methodology emphasizes the need to use locally available resources and promotes research based on indigenous knowledge systems so that farmers realize that they need to apply local solutions to local problems. Apart from merely allowing farmers to be trained by local farmers, the FFS has enhanced peace and harmony in the communities, and increased the participation of socially marginalized youths and women, who in the past have been excluded from participation in decision making in their communities.

The establishment of the Fachima Agro-business Services Ltd has given farmers a sense of hope, as they see themselves as business men and women rather than just farmers. Having control over the resources they so badly need to improve farming in their communities has given them a new sense of responsibility in decision making and their new role in influencing decision that affects their livelihoods. In addition, support to the input shop in Koinadugu has eased the burden on women traveling to Freetown to procure vegetable seeds and fertilizer. Farmers are assured of viable seeds in their agricultural farming exercise within their districts.

The provision of tricycles has influenced the way beneficiaries do business. They now have access to a vehicle that moves their products from the farm gate to the market, flexibility they never experienced before. It has reduced transactions costs significantly and enhanced collectively marketing in the beneficiary communities.

The input shops have created a soft and quick response avenue for farmers in need of agricultural inputs. Access to viable agricultural inputs at the right time does not only expand productivity but also eases the problem of acquisition whenever needed. Additionally, the input shops buy commodities from farmers during harvest creating cash flow and sale to them whenever the need arises. Purity and seed preference are guaranteed during this business transaction.

Literacy learning methodology has allowed women and youths, who did not have the opportunity of gaining formal education, to learn to document their contributions in their respective savings group. The lack of incentive to facilitators has slightly eroded the initial enthusiasm learners started with.

The Making Cents (MC) training has increased awareness amongst women in undertaking business activities. Petty traders mostly women have the confidence that their business skills and record keeping will improve as long as they undertake this training.

The S&L program is highly successful in expanding the outreach of capacity building (literacy), business development and financial resources to rural communities in Sierra Leone. The approach of the S&L is to assist persons who live beyond the urban centers, who otherwise are not physically proximate to access basic services such as education or financial institutions such as banks. The S&L program brings both social and economic development to these remote communities.

Anecdotal evidence gathered by CORAD partners shows that the dissemination of agricultural market price information is having a positive impact among farmers. They now make informed decisions in selling their agricultural products, hence realizing the benefits of their labour. Some

farmers now even bring their products to urban markets to sell, instead of waiting for middlemen to buy from them at the farm gate.

The social cohesion created by the FFS approach, VS&L and Literacy learning methodologies have allowed youths to work as a group to sell labour and have income for their individual uses. Also allows them to work as a group for members within the group.

Finance Salone loan products are tailored to the needs of small business owners up to a certain level of capitalization. The loans are manageable for the clients and the terms favorable.

6.2 What is not working?

Supervision is a key success factor for the S&L program. Although the VS&L have shown strong success, self replicating groups do not follow the methodology as prescribed. Consequently the quality of the VSL product among these groups is low.

Mobilization of resources among FFS groups has continued to challenge the consortium. Although most groups now have bank accounts, regular savings has not been achieved due to lack of appreciation of the value of savings especially where resources are still low. A large number of groups still keep the savings in homes due to the distance to the nearest banks, and it is difficult to determine the amount of funds held over. There is; however, a new momentum building up with the establishment of the savings and literacy groups. It was observed that within three months of commencing their savings activity, 26 savings saved approximately \$2,600 US.

6.3 Outstanding Successes and Publicity for Successes

The LINKS partners have experienced success with the gathering of pricing data and the dissemination of this information through the media. This success is attributed to the consistency in the price collection methodology that allows detailed analysis of markets, and price information is being used by a variety of actors. CORAD now possesses a very detailed database of economic information which is available to any organization for market research. Extracts from the database have been published through the LINKS newspaper inserts. Furthermore, CORAD partner CRS has worked extensively with the Rural and Private Sector Development Project (RPSDP) of the World Bank team to develop a country-wide proposal for a market information system based on this model.

The input shops do not only make available the much need agricultural inputs, but also buys from farmers what they grow. This aspect rebuilds farmer's confidence in agriculture as a business and not just for subsistence. Timely availability of seeds and other necessary inputs helps increase productivity making a greater number of farmers stay in agricultural businesses.

Another positive development was working with socially marginalized youths at chiefdom level. Youths have now increased their social cohesion and have realized the benefit of working as a group. Youth social cohesion has not been as successful at the district headquarter towns.

Finance Salone represents the flagship program for small-scale business development and support within LINKS. Its scale and innovative approach to micro-finance positions itself to be a prime leader in supporting the growth of small businesses in Sierra Leone. Its performance and success is recognized throughout the small business community in the towns where its branches exist.

The capacity of the local radio producers continue to be strengthened. During the reporting period, the producers in Koinadugu and Kailahun single handedly designed and broadcasted 2 such programmes that scored high marks. This then underscore the point that the issue of sustainability is holding. Although CORAD has faced some challenges with coordinating with MAFS on elements such as the FFS, their participation in radio discussions continues to be strong. In particular, the District Director of Agriculture worked closely with CORAD partner SFCG.

CORAD has had incredible success with the establishment of FFS. Through the FFS, CORAD has been able to integrate socially marginalized youths into their communities. Farmers have also adapting improved practices from their experiments and non-FFS farmers are also adapting some of these new practices. Working with the communities and allowing them to take ownership of the activities has contributed significantly to CORAD's achievement. Allowing groups to self select and self manage their affairs with little or no interference from the field agents improved trust between the field agents and FFS participants and enhanced group management.

Village Savings and Loan groups and Literacy/Numeracy classes continues to be the major success of LINKS as demonstrated by program beneficiaries. The methodology has been widely accepted by communities as it is clearly indicated by the numerous emerging groups from communities and the reestablishment of new groups after sharing out. The concrete indicators that the VSL has had in communities, helps in rebuilding their livelihoods and strengthening community cohesion.

6.4 Least Successful Elements

Expanding lending activities beyond urban perimeters continue to represent a limiting factor in the development of the agricultural sector. This is not necessarily reflective of a failure of Finance Salone's efforts to target agricultural producers, but reflects its strategy to focus its lending activities to first achieve scale, reach and profitability in more densely populated areas. Then later it will eventually expand outwards and possibly start accommodating loan products suited to farmers.

The S&L program is highly dependent on the commitment of the lead facilitators to conduct the trainings for their community members. In many cases, the facilitator views his or her role as that of a salaried employee requiring recompense for his or her services. This is not the philosophy underlying the S&L program as the facilitators are considered community volunteers elected by their group members to conduct these trainings. Though facilitators receive a small stipend (Le 50,000 per month), many of them have complained about the sum offered. This has resulted in facilitator turnover. Turnover of facilitators has not solely been attributed to grievances over compensation. Facilitators have left their groups for new jobs or simply relocating to news towns.

CORAD has had challenges with communication and coordination. Meeting with stakeholders at the mezzo level has not been as successful as desired and this affected coordination and reporting issues. Some understanding was recently reached with the local authorities and line ministries in the district with regard to the ownership of the process and the local council now calls meeting but representation in the last two meetings has been poor as lower ranking officers have been attending the meetings. These officers fail to report to the principal office holders creating an information vacuum. The current political environment with the forthcoming elections perhaps explains the non-attendance of the key officers.

6.5 Other Lessons Learned

Though a pilot program, the S&L program needed a significant period of time for curriculum and materials development. Now that the pilot has been completed, the next logical step would be make revisions based on lessons learned, and to assess the long-term impact. Another lesson learned has been the attention and oversight, or lack thereof in certain cases. Given the status as a pilot program, the S&L, needs the benefit of more oversight on the part of implementing partners. Visits by ARC staff have revealed that S&L groups have not been visited by their supporting organizations. As many of these S&L groups are rather new to 'formal' training in basic literacy, structured savings models or principles of basic business principles, supervisory support has been a crucial component in ensuring that the basic knowledge gained through the initial trainings is understood and the methodology conducted properly. This highlights the importance of supervision.

The production of newspaper inserts has proven more time consuming, than anticipated, particularly given that to ensure sustainability, CORAD partner SFCG decided to partner with local newspaper houses. Although the idea was to help build local capacity and develop a cadre of newspaper journalists to work on agriculture and livelihood issues, the newspaper houses also depend on these staffs for their regular publications. Therefore moving the journalists from Freetown to the areas of operation for periods of up to a week has affected their daily publications and meant that CORAD had to negotiate strenuously for their release.

The creation and implementation of a suitable record keeping system for VS&Ls when working with a highly illiterate population is problematic, but without it there is no way to determine profits accurately. CORAD continues to work on innovative solutions for this problem.

VIII. COORDINATION ISSUES

During this fiscal year and inspired by the start of the new LEAD program, a number of CORAD Working Groups met and finalized their Terms of Reference. In many cases, Working Groups were meeting on an ad hoc basis, but have now finalized their roles and responsibilities, and will be meeting with greater frequency. CORAD feels that this will encourage greater learning and discussion on best practices across the consortium.

Exchange visits have been planned for the end of the growing season given the busy schedule of FFS members – tending household farms as well as FFS experimentation. They will thus resume next quarter to foster cross fertilization of ideas, strategies and practices.

CORAD partner CRS has continued its working relationships with MAFS, Njala University, Seed Multiplication Unit, Institute of Agricultural Research, and local partners such as The Saint Joseph's Fathers in Lunsar. These strategic alliances have facilitated access to training, appropriate technology for agro-processing, improved seeds and best practices in agricultural production.

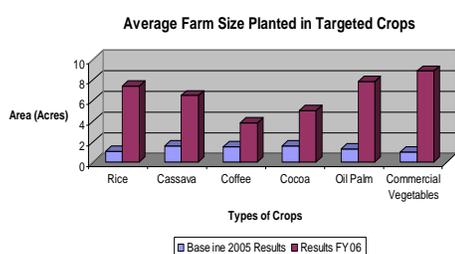
CORAD partner ARC continues to liaise with CORAD partners and local organizations to facilitate strategic alliances. Past efforts have included establishing linkages with Finance Salone in Kono, local Making Cents training partners, and trade associations to link business trainings with loan clients. ARC staff members have also conducted trainings on behalf of CORAD members (World Vision) in business development.

IX. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In the first quarter of FY 2007, CORAD produced data on the five Mission Level Indicators (MLIs) required for FY 2006.³ Data was gathered through several household questionnaires on the indicators:

- % of program beneficiaries seeking market information
- Average farm size planted in selected crops
- % of USAID supported businesses still operational after one year
- Number of experiments per Farmer Field School
- Average value of assets generated by USAID-supported microenterprises

Overall, results marked the progress made by CORAD since the start of program implementation. The 2005 LINKS Baseline survey found that 45 percent of households in LINKS operational areas were seeking and using market information. The 2006 MLI survey found that more than 90 percent were doing so. The average farm size planted in selected crops had also significantly increased, as demonstrated by the chart below:



More than 90 percent of USAID-supported businesses were still operational after one year, although some had scaled down or changed focus from their initial outset. The MLI survey found that an average of 2.12 experiments were being conducted at FFS that were ideas obtained from the LINKS program.

Also in FY 2007, USAID undertook an evaluation of the LINKS program. The original plan called for this evaluation to be conducted jointly with CORAD's own Final Evaluation, but the questions surrounding the possibility of an extension for LINKS led to the decision to post-pone the CORAD portion of the evaluation until the next fiscal year. The evaluation team found that agricultural production had improved on the FFS, but that overall production levels remained low. They also found that the functional literacy groups had positively impacted literacy levels, although it is too early to say how this will impact business management capacities. The team also found that the Making Cents training had an immediate positive impact on business management, particularly when coupled with program elements such as Start Up Grants, VS&Ls, and loans provided through Finance Salone. CORAD was very pleased with the strong evaluation results noted, and looks forward to conducting the complimentary quantitative evaluation in the coming fiscal year.

During FY 2007, CORAD took some significant steps to enhance the quality of its M&E systems. In request to queries from partner agencies, the definitions for major program indicators were reviewed, and more information was provided where necessary for clarity. CORAD also reviewed and revised the structure of quarterly field visits through which staff from the Coordination and Compliance and M&E Units validate compliance and monitoring at the field level. The newly revamped Compliance and Monitoring Visits (CMVs) have a similar Terms of Reference to previously, but CORAD has introduced a scorecard instrument that provides easy-to-action visual results. The CMV scorecard is in part based on USAID's Data Quality Assessment (DQA) process, to ensure that the information provided by CORAD is accurate and reliable. CORAD has also reviewed the monitoring forms used by partner agencies for LINKS, and has begun the process to introduce greater standardization, to facilitate quality management by the M&E Unit.

³ Data was gathered in FY 2006, but analysis was not completed until November.

CORAD member CARE has also undertaken two special studies that look at the impacts that LINKS has had in their targeted communities. The first is a study of livelihoods in communities served in Koinadugu District. The second also looks at livelihoods, but focuses more on the VS&L groups started through LINKS. Both studies gathered both qualitative and quantitative data; results are under analysis and will be shared soon.

Although significant M&E work has been undertaken, there is confusion on some key points regarding USAID's expectations. The protracted dialogue regarding the extension has meant that CORAD is not clear on the expected timing of the Final Evaluation; a questions further complicated by the need to maintain seasonality on some of the main indicators. The new Foreign Assistance processes that USAID is rolling out have also significantly changed the reporting mechanisms for local missions, meaning that it is not clear whether it is still necessary for CORAD to undertake to measure the Mission Level Indicators. CORAD has worked with USAID to find answers to these questions, but nonetheless looks forward to receiving guidance.

X. ADMINISTRATION AND OPERATIONAL INFORMATION

During this year, the LINKS partners have experienced notable staff turnover, even at the senior level. New staff recruited during this FY include a new Chief of Party, new M&E Manager, and new CRS Country Representative. At lower levels, the staff turnover was particularly due to the uncertainties regarding when the program will end. In all cases, recruitment is either completed for the vacated position or is underway. Staff experience and knowledge has been sufficient to carry out program objectives and no long-term negative impacts are anticipated.

The road conditions in the focal chiefdoms remain a major constraint especially during the rainy season. It is not so much that there are no roads close to the operational communities—in fact most communities have roads, but the quality of the existing road infrastructure is substandard. Most of the roads are impassable during the rains for approximately three months of the year. This affects supervision of the Farmer led FFS. Notwithstanding, CORAD recalls Farmer Facilitators on average quarterly for refresher training to ensure quality is maintained. Facilitators meet in nearby locations to reduce costs and hold meetings with field agents on key emerging issues in the field. Field Agents try to maintain a constant dialogue with the Farmer Facilitators whenever this is possible followed by occasional visits to the FFS experimentation sites.

The price of fabrication supplies and steel products have increased by about 25%, which may affect prices of processing equipment. This could be because of shortage of steel products, resulting from the slow down of imports as a result of the coming elections and also world market prices.

XI. ACTIVITIES AND TARGETS PLANNED FOR THE NEXT QUARTER

It should be noted that it is difficult to properly define activities and targets for the next quarter as the LINKS program is currently slated to end in November and an extension (until March or perhaps as late as September) has not yet been approved. Thus, these activities are based only on the current lifespan of LINKS, and may be significantly altered in consultation with USAID.

- ▣ Graduation of 31 FFS groups.
- ▣ Disbursement of capital grants for agricultural activities
- ▣ Collection and dissemination of economic information.
- ▣ Continue to work in partnership with CCF/SMT for the agricultural lending
- ▣ Monitor the Literacy and Numeracy Classes
- ▣ Work with Chinese tricycles owners to monitor cost/profit returns in the use of the tricycles.
- ▣ Monitor the activities of socially marginalized youths.
- ▣ Continue to monitor the activities of the input shops.
- ▣ Continue to work with the remaining 12 VS&LA until they share out (Action Audit)
- ▣ Establish a framework for activities to be implemented in the LINKS extension.
- ▣ Disseminate input prices at community, mezzo and national levels in collaboration with TDS.
- ▣ Monitor small business groups and FFS savings accounts.
- ▣ Monitoring of agro-processing equipment and strengthen management capability of groups.
- ▣ Follow-up on cocoa & coffee quality improvements in growing Chiefdoms in Kono.
- ▣ Organize training of mechanics on tricycles on cost share basis
- ▣ Organize training for Fachima Agro-business Services Ltd
- ▣ Organize workshop – “Working the Market Chain”
- ▣ Phase out activities (should the expansion and extension not be approved).

XII. ANNEXES

1. Annex One: Indicators of Performance Tracking Table

Please refer to attached Excel spreadsheet.

2. Annex Two: Success Stories

FARMING A BUSINESS AND NOT JUST FINDING FOOD

I am Amadu S. Kamara. I live in Sambaseneya, about 21 kilometers from Kabala, the district headquarter town of Koinadugu District. I am married with eight children: five are attending school, the remaining three are with me in the village. I am a member of Sambasineya Farmer Field School. I am a farmer from birth. I have been practicing indigenous agricultural practices in my farming. I joined FFS group to see if I could learn new ideas and techniques in farming, a dream I thought to be impossible until now when I have seen a real difference.

Our FFS group was involved in planting cassava on ridges and doing rice varietal trails—an experimentation I keenly observed and participated in. After the cassava trials, I took one of the high yielding varieties to my personal farm for further investigation. I obtained a loan from our village savings and loans (VS&L group), and hired labour to cultivate five acres of cassava where I carried out all the agronomic practices learnt. I was able to harvest 300 bags of cassava, which I sold at Le 20,000 per bag. After selling, I realized that I made enough profit to send my children from the village schools to schools in Kabala. I am proud that my children are now attending schools in the district headquarter town, which makes them bold and highly inquisitive. Another major asset acquired from the sale of this cassava was that I could buy of five bundles of corrugated iron sheets to roof my thatched house in the village. Changing my rooftop to corrugated iron is a real dream I never thought would happen in my life.

My wife and children have seen that investing in agriculture will turn our life round and make us live with respect and dignity.

-Amadu Kamara

My wife and children have seen that investing in agriculture will turn our life round and make us live with respect and dignity. I am very great full to the LINKS program.

IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS: KOIDU CARPENTRY

Members of Koidu carpentry workshop in Koidu town in the eastern province of Sierra Leone hail from Bo in the south of the country. These young men fled from the country to Guinea during the rebel war. On their return after the war, they decided to settle in Koidu, Kono District as they had lost their houses and some members of their families. The group leader, Ibrahim Sesay says that:

“We felt it will be better for us to stay in Kono and work for now, because if we went back now our hearts will be more troubled than they are now”.

So even though times were difficult, they started work on a small scale with little or no tools. Ibrahim further said,

“With the timely intervention of the LINKS program, a lot of people came to know about us since we were able to buy tools and materials that helped us to show what we were capable of doing. Today, we are able to take care of the new families formed and the workshop even though there is still a lot to be done in terms of improving the workshop”.

The assistant leader was also noted,

“We have impressed people so much so that , even [CORAD partners] now contract us to do a lot of carpentry work for them, we are really very grateful as our sufferings had been placed at our back. With time and the healing of our wounds, we will decide to go home.”



SAVING LIVES AND IMPROVING MATERNAL HEALTH USING A SMALL TRANSPORT SOLUTION

There is a clear association between infant, child, and maternal mortality and the distance that people must travel to access healthcare facilities. This is particularly troubling as more than 60 percent of the people in Kono District live more than 10 km from a health care facility. Factors conducive to good maternal and child health such as antenatal and postpartum care, birth in the presence of a skilled attendant, and the availability of emergency obstetric services are compromised by limited, inappropriate, expensive transport services and distance to referral health services. Furthermore, the poor handling and positioning of patients, particularly pregnant women, during transportation can lead to critical secondary injuries.

The people of Lei chiefdom in Kono district breathed a sigh of relief upon learning about the LINKS small transport solution teams. The Kissi Town, Pekuya FFS requested a small transport solution to address their farm to market transportation constraints. The vehicle was provided after the group had registered, insured and licensed the vehicle using their savings.

On the 16th of June 2007, less than a week after receiving the tricycle, they were asked to help with transportation of an extended delivery case. Sia Mani had been in labor for five days at the chiefdom health centre in Siam, about 70km from Koidu. The nurse in charge of the health centre realizing that she could not handle this case made a referral to the Koidu government hospital.

As there was no other means of transportation the tricycle was used to get Sia Mani to Koidu Hospital where an emergency operation was carried out that saved the life of both mother and child.



The husband Komba Mani remarked “had it not been for the availability of the tricycle provided through the LINKS program, I would have lost my wife and child.”

“Now I can talk to my son by mobile phone”

My name is Amara Kamara, born in Songaia Ballia Village in Yataya Section, Wara-Wara Yagala Chiefdom, Koinadugu District, Northern Province of Sierra Leone. I am aged 45 years and married with four children.

I never went to school, but knowing the importance of formal education, I am struggling to send my children to school. The eldest child is in the United States of America. Whenever my child in the US wants to talk to me through the cell phone he sent for me, I found it very difficult to respond to his call because I don't understand the writing on the cell phone. The only way to talk to him is to seek assistance from somebody else. Whenever I want to talk to my son, someone has to facilitate the process. The disadvantage was that I had no [opportunity for private conversation] with my son.

I am also the chairman of our Village Development Committee (VDC). Whenever there is a document for signing on behalf of the community, I had to use my thumbprint because I did not know how to sign my name. More often than not I felt ashamed for not being able to sign my name and for having to use my thumbprint. I spent hours thinking about how to improve myself in the community and stop thumbprinting, so as to make a difference between me and the rest of the community members. After hours of thinking, my final question was how can I achieve my objective?

As God would have it, [CORAD] LINKS program came to our community and introduced adult literacy and numeracy program. At first we looked at it as something not important, but after attending two classes, we realized the worth of the program and encouraged the facilitator to increase the frequency of our meeting times and his energy in facilitation. The group promised working in his farm as a means of compensation for the extra time.

After three months we completed the first phase of the learning program. From this point onwards, I started to read short stories with my primary school children. In addition to that, I can now read and write my name and can even sign it without the help of anyone. I can also write figures from one to twenty.

Over and above all, I can now sign my name, call my son through my cell phone and respond to his call without the assistance of anyone. I can write dates to remember important events and my secrets remained my personal affairs.

May God Bless the LINKS Program.

IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS – BASSAMA WOMEN’S BUSINESS GROUP, FIAMA CHIEFDOM.

For the Bassama Women’s Business Group (BWBG) in Waima, Fiama Chiefdom, eking out a living was a challenge after they returned from the refugee camps. They depended on small market gardens which were inadequate and could barely meet the daily cash requirements for their households. According to the Chairwoman Finda Alpha...

“Life took a different turn when we were sensitized into forming a self-selected group and were fortunate to receive the “Making Cents” training to improve our basic business management skills and qualify for a start-up grant of Le750,000! We utilized this money to strengthening our original business activities. We then realized that by pooling our resources we could even do better and make more profit. We decided to form two groups, one group trading in an agricultural product - plantains and the other in plastic goods. This move helped us to plan and implement our business better. We realized an increase in profit and in a short period were able to save Le340,000 with the Union Trust Bank in Koidu. In addition to this amount, we have another Le700,000 invested in the two main activities which attract interest on a monthly basis until the whole amount is repaid in 2 months.”



1: Trading in plastic goods

The training and the access to the start-up grant had a profound effect on Finda Alpha who expressed her appreciation to the LINKS program.

“The LINKS program has enabled us to upgrade our business skills, which has led to an increase in our daily income, improved our living standards, and helped us build a better future for our children.” She added, “Our success is a result of total commitment and accountability of the members to the group. We now can go to bed without wondering whether we will eat the next day or if we can afford to send our children to school, all thanks to the LINKS program.”

Empowering women farmers: the use of simple irrigation technology in Koinadugu

Commercial vegetable production is an important revenue seeking activity for communities in Koinadugu District. The agro-climatic conditions present in the zone give it a comparative advantage for the production of vegetables that otherwise must be imported. One of the key factors that has limited farmers from working with vegetables is seed availability. During the last three to four years, CORAD-supported farmer field school groups have experimented with a range of vegetable crops. Through the LINKS program, farmer groups have been able to experiment with “imported” crops such as cabbage, sweet pepper and tomatoes. However, the best results, both in terms of production and market opportunity, have been obtained with more “traditional” and resilient crops, such as okra, hot pepper and eggplant.

A second limiting factor identified by FFS participants is access to irrigation. During the last months of FY 2006, the FAO-MAFS Special Program for Food Security (SPFS) donated one manual powered irrigation pump to CORAD. Since the treadle pump is a new technology for Sierra Leone, CORAD established a collaboration agreement with the Department of Agricultural Engineering at Njala University (NU) to set up a demonstration site and assess the feasibility of this technology. The interest from participating communities was overwhelming: the demand clearly exceeded the offer! Through a series of meetings and focus group discussions, project participants and the CORAD field agent agreed that three FFS groups would team up in one site to pilot the irrigation equipment. A total of 90 participants, most of them women, selected a suitable site and spent approximately 100 days participating in the regular FFS curriculum, as well as receiving training on the installation, use and maintenance of the treadle pump technology. The main results obtained from this pilot experience reveal a significant decrease in the time spent by women in collecting and hauling water for their crops. Although there are no significant differences in terms of yield (as compared to similar plots in other parts of the district), there is undoubtedly a great advantage, especially for women, who are alleviated from the drudgery of manual irrigation and can afford more time to do other things, such as



taking care of their children.

Use of the FFS approach to reintroduce livestock and animal draft power in Koinadugu District

It is widely accepted that livestock plays an important role in the household economy and food security of poor rural farmers worldwide. Families with animals tend to have higher incomes than other households in the same village. Sierra Leone is said to have had a sizable number of livestock before the war, but during the ten-year conflict most animals were either slaughtered or died from neglect. Some development agencies are currently attempting to increase the number of animals per household, through a variety of strategies.

As a follow up to the CORAD rapid market appraisal and livestock sub-sector analysis conducted, partner CRS started a pilot program using the farmer field school approach for the re-introduction of oxen as draft power, and for the semi-intensive production of small ruminants (goats and sheep). These activities can provide households with alternative methods for increasing their income, as well as their access to protein (through meat and milk). The CRS assessment indicated that kids and lambs tend to grow very slowly under the traditional farming system prevalent in Sierra Leone. Farmers do not (regularly) provide extra feeding, and they lack the knowledge and resources to keep animals healthy. These adverse production conditions extend gestation and weaning periods, which in turn delay reproduction.



A total of four FFS groups benefited from access to grants to purchase an initial stock consisting of sheep and goats (one male and five females per herd). Likewise, two more groups accessed capital to procure a pair of oxen each. A total of 180 participants received training in the design of appropriate field activities for semi – intensive livestock production and oxen handling. Farmers have been trained in the selection of the best animals, the detection, prophylaxis and treatment of diseases, and the design of production/feeding systems using locally available resources.

The true impact of this intervention will only be felt after a longer-term period, especially with regard to the goats and sheep. However, the positive effects of the training are being demonstrated through the high degree of organization and care with which the farmers are currently treating their animals. In addition, labor has already been saved by the oxen groups, which are using their animals to plough fields, a scene that has, since the start of the war, been extremely rare.

3. Annex Three: Finance Salone Quarterly Report

Please refer to attached Excel spreadsheet.