

## 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

End of Project (June 1, 2004 to October 31, 2008)

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## II. GLOSARY

Acronym/Abbreviation	Meaning
AoW	Area of Work
ARC	American Refugee Committee
CARE	CARE Sierra Leone
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
CCU	Coordination and Compliance Unit
CE	Cost Extension
CORAD	Consortium for Relief and Development
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DRP	Developmental Relief Program
EOP	End of Project (Report)
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
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
IVS	Inland Valley Swamp Rice
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
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
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
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
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 was 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 was 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 built 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 also broadened economic opportunities for these target communities through stimulating production and productivity levels in agriculture. Two broad program objectives (POs) contributed 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 expanded 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 supported 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 was 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 had 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 was to ensure that a critical segment of the population, marginalized youth, are integrated into these dynamic rural economies.

Farming being the most predominant activity in the Area of Work (AoW), farmers were highly interested in seeking new ideas and adopting them thereby helping strengthen the farming sector and hence promoting food security and improving the living standards of a greater farming population of the district. The FFS approach yielded the desired effect as attested to by farmers during routine monitoring and in focus group discussions during the mid-term and final

reviews. Beneficiaries sighted that:- traditional methods of broadcasting seeds and transplanting more than 4-5 seedlings per hill resulted to low yields and waste of planting materials. The ultimate response to this technology was to reduce number of seedlings from 5 to between 2 and 3 per hill. This has significantly improved yields per acre and has maximized productivity. Some farmers reported an estimated increase in yield by up to 40%. Amongst the techniques adopted are optimum plant population, adequate spacing, planting on ridges or mounds, high yielding and fast growing rice variety (NERICA), pre and post harvest losses management and traditional pest control mechanisms.

During the implementation of the program, it was observed that farmers were subjecting their land resources to some counterproductive agronomic practices. As a result, there has been an increasing trend of soil degradation that will ultimately lead to low productivity in the years to come. Four conservation demonstration plots were instituted in the four chiefdoms (one per chiefdom) at strategic communities to create awareness for better agronomic practices.

Radio discussions were aired at local radio stations to inform farmers of the availability and access to viable agricultural inputs and to inform farmers the prices of farm commodities. In this way farmers were kept abreast with the prices of local farm produce at community, district and national levels which ultimately guided them to sell their produce at profitable prices; hence promoting increase in income, productivity, food security and standard of living.

Out of the 35 IR and PO indicators in the Indicators of Performance Tracking Table, 26 were achieved and 9 were not achieved. Out of those nine, two related to cancelled activities related to the Small Transport Solutions (STS). Other indicators that were significant under-achieved include the production of newspaper inserts (26.7 percent of the LOA achieved), non-voucher trainings (22.7 percent achieved), number of businesses assisted in District headquarter towns (60 percent of the LOA achieved), and the number of farmers benefitting from the agricultural lending pilot (12.6 percent achieved). Other indicators were marginally under-achieved (i.e. between 8 and 25 percent).

## IV. IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY



*Mohammed Conteh got rice seed from the FFS after a bumper harvest following material and technical support from CARE. He hired labour with money borrowed from the VS&L club in 2007. He increased his farm acreage four times and says yield per acre has increased by an estimated 40 percent since he is practicing optimum population and weeding his farm. Quarrels, which used to be often in his house, are no more and love has increased amongst family members since he can now afford school fees for all his children, feed them well, and take care of health care.*

### 4.1 Impacts in Key Project Areas

From the inception of LINKS until the present time, CORAD has been privileged to witness a number of significant changes in the communities in which it worked. These changes are summarized in the sections below.

#### *4.1.1 Agricultural Marketing and Agribusiness*

Though pre and post harvest training was introduced latter in the program, adoption of pre and post harvest management practices is being observed. Farmers are beginning to replicate the simple storage facilities piloted by the program. These stores reduce loss by preserving food and keeping away pest through smoke, helping to dry food to the right moisture to avoid rotting, keeping away rats and safe guarding against spillage. Farmers are increasingly practicing pest control mechanisms such as use of traditionally made pesticides and fencing to keep away rodents.

Vegetable farming is one of the key income generating activities in Koinadugu district which is the main supplier of vegetables in Sierra Leone. Farmers used to go to Freetown, Guinea and Liberia to obtain seeds and other necessary inputs for vegetable production. The input shops established in Kabala and Kono have helped bring the inputs closer to the people thus saving them the expense of having to travel far in search of the inputs. Timely availability and ease of access of seeds and other agricultural inputs has had significant impact in increasing agricultural productivity especially the production of vegetables, thus not only contributing to food security but also helping farmers to stay in agri-business. Actual increase in productivity has not been established but it can be seen from the increase in vegetable farms all over the district including Kabala town. The input shop does not only make available the much need agricultural inputs but also buys from farmers what they grow thus creating cash flow. This aspect rebuilds farmer's confidence in agriculture as a business and not just for subsistence. The shops carried out

awareness-raising through local radio creating awareness amongst the farmers of the availability of agricultural inputs that could be acquired on loan. The response for demand for vegetable seeds was overwhelming such that the shop is always owed a lot of money.

Tricycles which were provided in selected strategic communities in Kabala town are helping farmers to transport their goods to the markets, thus saving them the long hours they used to walk to the market carrying heavy luggage.



*Hawa Kaba (rear middle, in head scarf) says she used to walk from Laboya village to the community market in Dogolia, which is 12 miles away, carrying her farm produce for sale. She could only carry 12kgs at a time. She used to start her journey at six am so as to be in the market by 12:00. and had to start her journey back home by 3 p.m. so as to get home before dark, whether her goods were sold or not. It was most disheartening if she had to carry the goods back home. She says she would be so fatigued by the time she got home that she would not be able to go to the farm the following day. Now with the tricycle she pairs up with friends and pays only Le 3,000 for herself and her goods. She has been able to sell all her maize produce in one month. She adds that now she has more time to spend on the farm and is increasing acreage because she knows she will be able to take all her produce to the market.*

One of the main problems facing farmers in the LINKS Areas of Work (AoW) had been the difficulty of accessing the market with their farm produce. This had been partly due to bad road network and lack of market information for the produce from the various farms. As a result, farmers have been selling their produce at the farm gate where they got very little or no return for the hard labor exerted in their farms. With the implementation of the LINKS program, farmers were provided with the means of collecting and sharing marketing information through agribusiness and marketing associations. Each association received a cell phone with 1,000 credit units so that they could keep track of market prices. This marketing information enabled the farmers to have a broad knowledge of where they can sell and buy their goods for maximum profit. It also enabled them to have better bargaining power thereby preventing loss to the middle men.



*Work oxen has helped increase acreage in Koinadugu District. Additionally, they provide income for the youths. Fatmata Marah in Musaia was able to cultivate 10 acres of land within 3 days by use of the oxen. She would not have achieved this if she were to hire manual labor, because it takes too long to mobilize the people (especially at a time when every one is attending to their own farm) who again take too long to do the cultivation manually and it is expensive.*

#### *4.1.2 Micro-enterprise development at the community/micro level*

Village Savings and Loans, agricultural lending, Literacy and Numeracy and business development were a major success of the LINKS program, as demonstrated by program beneficiaries. Rural community acceptance of the VS&L is not only within the LINKS operational chiefdoms but has spread into neighboring chiefdoms where it is being practiced by self emerging groups. For example, to-date 15 groups had emerged in Koinadugu from groups formed by LINKS. The fact that VS&L is self-replicating indicates that the methodology is sustainable. This is further evidenced by the fact that some groups do not want to share out and continue to accumulate their savings long after maturity, whilst those that share out start a new circle immediately after each action audit.

Savings capital is generated and utilized in communities, an innovative approach the communities highly appreciate. There has been a remarkable improvement in the lives of the VS&L participants as a result of benefits realized such as loan facility, business expansion, economic independence and social fairness especially for women. VS&L members have further expounded onto the knowledge gained and have come up with similar methodologies. For example, one group in Sarakoh of 12 members has members contribute two bags of rice each to one member at harvest time, which they keep and sell at a time of scarcity and then put up bigger houses with corrugated iron.



*Mohamed Mansaray( with his son), has been able replace the thatch on his roof with corrugated iron, after selling rice received from group members an idea borrowed from VS&L*

Adult Literacy and Numeracy is one of the most successful and sustainable elements of the LINKS program. The learners whose initial reading and writing skills were rated 0 % are now rated by their facilitators at an average of 95-90 % reading and writing skills based on their course contents. The learners are now proud of being able to read and write their names, identify numbers on vehicles and house addresses, use mobile phones and assess the performance of their children in school. They now appreciate the importance of education and are determined to see their children reach the highest level of education. It has also helped some of them to be able to record their businesses, give correct change and determine their profit margins.

Based on the above benefits, the learners have opted to provide incentives for their facilitators to continue the learning process after LINKS phases out; hence a sustainable impact has been created.

Making cents training complimented by start up grants has been sighted as an intervention that has been very successful. Regular monitoring and end of program evaluation showed that trainees appreciate and practice what they learnt to a substantial degree. It was observed that most beneficiaries have increased their merchandise and/or diversified their products, they do market survey before buying goods, they display their goods in places where they can easily be spotted and that they spread risks, amongst other business skills acquired. As such there has been an increase in profit<sup>1</sup> consequently a positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries. Business women testified in a forum group discussion that their lives have changed significantly in that they are now helping their male counterparts in taking care of domestic needs (school uniforms & books, health Care, home dressing and equipping their kitchens). Many say that the social fabric between wives and husbands has been cemented because of the productive functions they now undertake in the homes. Physical observations of business activities undertaken by these clients and interviews with them have shown an overwhelming progress in their livelihoods. Clients whose initial business amount was less than Le 200,000 are joyful to say that they now have a base of over Le 1,000,000.

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<sup>1</sup> An internal evaluation carried out in August 2008 showed that more than 90% of the beneficiaries reported an increase in profit.



*'If CORAD had not come to my aid with the making cents training and start-up grant, I would still be in the miserable condition I used to be', said one female beneficiary, Kadiatu Kamara of Sinkunia. 'I am a widow with three school going children without anybody to help me. She used to make soap and sell, but she was not making much money out of it. Now she is selling assorted goods and her profit has risen to about Le 450,000 per month. This business is my husband and everything. God bless CARE' she lamented.*

Many similar testimonies prevail in the lives of many business development women beneficiaries. Thus the business development intervention has created a sustainable impact in the lives of target beneficiaries

#### *4.1.3 Micro-enterprise development at the District/mezzo level*

At mezzo level micro-enterprise development has had the same impact as it has at the micro level whereby beneficiaries report better management of their businesses following training and increased value of merchandise<sup>2</sup> made possible by the SUG. Accordingly their living standards have improved.

Dusu Jawara of Musaia (Follosaba Dembelia chieftdom headquarter) used to sell palm oil and rice which she used to buy in villages as far as 6 miles. She could only afford to buy 25kgs of rice and 20 litres of palm oil due to financial and transportation constraints. This she sold at the weekly market and made a profit of only le 25,000 per week, (Le 100,000 per month). After receiving MC training and SUG Jawara decided to start selling motorbike spare parts and assorted items such as cigarettes, soap, mosquito coils, batteries etc which she buys from Guinea. She decided on these items because they were on high demand, people always asked for them. Before, she used to sell her produce at the back of the house but now displays them at the front after being taught in the training that goods should be displayed where they can easily be spotted. After this new switch, she was able to make a profit of le 300,000 in the first month and 400, 000 in the third months. Being a single mother she is now relieved of the stress of taking care of herself and her son who is doing his fourth year in primary school.

In addition, due to the support of the LINKS program, Finance Salone has succeeded 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

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<sup>2</sup> Traders either increase their stock or switch to stock that is of high value and gives more profit.

be key beneficiaries as Finance Salone's overall portfolio is comprised of over 60 percent youth clients.

#### 4.1.4 Integration of youth



*Youth in Dogolia preparing mound for the planting of cassava. They have discovered that planting on mounds or ridges and good spacing yields more and bigger cassava and makes it easy to weed and to harvest (2007)*

Youth in Kono district suffered gravely during the 11 year old rebel war. Some of them were actively involved in the fighting whilst some were used as laborers in carting out looted properties. As a result, majority of the youths dropped out of school and other learning institutions. Some also lost their lives and others fled to neighboring countries and other districts within the country. Those who survived and returned back home took mining as the only source of livelihood.

Through the implementation of the LINKS program, dialogues were held with the youths in the various operational communities. The purpose of the dialogue was to sensitize the youths on the benefits of working together as groups, sensitizing them about the livelihood opportunities that existed in the LINKS program as well as gauging the livelihood potentials available in the communities. As a result of the dialogue, youths in the operational communities established groups and engaged in various activities that tapped into the livelihood opportunities in the LINKS program

With the commercialization of farming activities through FFS implemented by the LINKS program, the few youths in the rural communities engaged in the FFS activities realized substantive benefits incomparable to those in the mining sector. As a result, a significant drift of youths was realized from the mining sector to the FFSs. Large Number of youths were also involved in the micro enterprise development activities (including VSL&A, Micro grants and small businesses) facilitated by the program. Komba Sessie once a miner who joined Nasongbeh FFS at Fensedu, Sandor Chiefdom had this to say, "I wasted three fruitless years working in the mines after the war. The LINKS project has re-united me with my own community through the FFS. My income level has improved through the sales of agricultural products and access to SUG for small business activities." Tamba Allieu, another youth from the mining added, "I came to realize some years ago that farming pays more than mining, so I left mining and returned to Manjama to farm. CORAD partner World Vision has been helping us since 1996. Now they has introduced

us to FFS. We are learning to do agriculture in the way that will bring much benefit to us. Another activity we are undertaking is to reach out to the other youths who are natives of Manjama and are still in mining to convince them to join us to do farming.”

The micro enterprise development support given to the SMY has had significant impact in that the members are now involved in farming and business activities that have helped alleviate their levels of living and social standing. This has an indirect impact on peace since these youths are no longer idle. It has also led to good cohesion amongst the group members. Agricultural lending particularly to rural youths (men & women) has engaged them in serious agricultural production and income generation activities. Since CARE established support to these youth groups no records of lawlessness, disputes and poor financial transactions were observed. The youths have realized that through the income generating activities they undertake, they have become economically stable, less dependent on families for basic needs such as clothing and food. They also have realized that employment is not the only means to economic ability.



*Youth processing millet harvested from their FFS farm. They used to grow rice in their individual/parents farms. CARE supported in growing millet and provided them with seeds. They realized that this fetches more money and, therefore, have decided to grow it on a large scale in their group farm and in their individual farms. Suleiman Sajoh (in the red shirt in the photo) used to start his day at 9:00 am with a big mug of poyo (palm wine). He would then end it blacked out on the brew. He did not care much about dressing because he couldn't afford any descent clothes and did not even bother to keep the tattered one he had clean, because he could not afford soap and he was always busy with the poyo. His life has taken a big turn from the time he joined the youth group. He starts his day at 6:00 on the FFS farm, takes time to have lunch, attends to his own farm in the evening and ends his day with a bath and a good evening meal. He only drinks poyo on Saturdays for socialization with friends. He is grateful that he realized just in time that he was wasting his life, thanks to the LINKS intervention.*

#### 4.1.5 Integration of women

LINKS adopted an approach where gender issues were streamlined in all interventions. Group formation, leadership and beneficiary identification was done with high level of gender sensitivity. For instance the program gave premium to women in the business management; about 82 percent of the trainees were females. All sensitization sessions involved encouragement of women to fully participate in the activities and to take up leadership roles. Special sensitization

meetings on gender issues were held in forums in all the four chiefdoms. A result of this effort has been increased esteem amongst women and active participation by women. All groups LINKS worked with had women in leadership positions and all women participated in decision making. Literacy and economic empowerment has also contributed to the elevation of the women's esteem and courage. The culture of staying behind men and clapping when they talk is gradually being eroded. Women can now mix with men and speak before them, which was a rare case before the LINKS intervention due to religious and cultural beliefs.

Rebecca Kamara, Chairperson of the group Women In Need of Development in Kono District said, "I am thankful to the LINKS project for providing us with working capital to undertake our bakery activity and a tricycle to facilitate the movement of our bread from the bakery to the markets which has greatly improved our livelihood. We have a healthy bank account and we are currently planning to purchase sets of processing equipment. We are now a force to reckon with in terms of decision making in the district."

#### 4.2 Evidence of Sustainability

CORAD believes that its strong commitment to program quality and field-led interventions has resulted in a high degree of sustainability of the interventions undertaken, maximizing the impacts detailed above in Section 4.1. The following table summarizes what CORAD views as the main evidence of sustainability to-date of the key LINKS interventions. (It should be noted that this analysis on the part of CORAD corresponds to the analysis conducted by two external evaluation teams, one employed by USAID (FY 07) and one employed by CORAD (FY 08).

Program Area	Likelihood of Sustainability			Comments
	Low	Medium	High	
<b>Agricultural Productivity</b>			X	The FFS methodology has built-in sustainability since it relies on praxis to change farmers' thinking regarding agricultural production—once they see for themselves the benefits of certain practices and techniques, a major barrier to adoption is removed. There is also high possibility for multiplication as FFS are facilitated by community members (farmer-led FFS). Another positive effect of the FFS is that it facilitated communal farming that enhanced resource mobilization.
<b>Agricultural Marketing and agribusiness</b>		X		CORAD views the agribusiness/ marketing associations that have been formed in Koinadugu and Kono as especially sustainable as the groups are now operating independently of the LINKS project and utilizing market information to maximize profits. However, the poor road network has hindered market access, and not all groups have yet adopted the maintenance culture necessary to maximize the benefits of agro-processing equipment.
<b>MED, micro-level</b>			X	Start up grants and working capitals were provided for small business groups and Marketing Associations at community level. The monies provided were used by the recipient groups to improve on their individual/group businesses. The groups/marketing associations were also provided with business management training that enabled them to improve on their marketing strategies that earned them very high profit margin. As a result, most of the groups have opened bank accounts on which they will fall on the exit of the LINKS program; thus creating room for sustainability. The business management training also built the capacity of the cocoa Marketing Associations how to effectively manage the 4 Ps of marketing (production, price, place and publicity). The working capital provided for these groups empowered them to buy directly from their fellow farmers thereby eliminating the middlemen.
<b>MED, mezzo-level</b>		X		Groups at mezzo level (major towns) also received start up grants and working capital to be able to engage in various businesses and improve their livelihood. However about 15 percent of the groups have defunct and abandoned their enterprises. The major reasons for this seem to be that youth find a comparative advantage in “quick win” enterprises such as mining that will provide them with a ready source of cash (as opposed to slow growth enterprises such as petty trading. It should be noted; however, that several youth groups have not only maintained their enterprises, but also have taken the additional steps of opening bank accounts and expanding into other areas of their chosen area of business.
<b>Integration of youth</b>			X	LINKS applied a participatory sensitization dialogue approach with targeted youths for their total involvement and sustainability of planned interventions. CORAD provided

Program Area	Likelihood of Sustainability			Comments
	Low	Medium	High	
				technical guidelines and encouraged the youths to come up with their desired livelihood opportunities. With support from CORAD, these self-identified livelihood opportunities such as income generating commercial activities are being implemented. For example, establishment of savings account with the Kabala Community Bank for safekeeping of incomes generated has been effected to counter any attempt to misuse money. Additionally, the youths were sensitized and trained on gender and governance issues to ensure their ability to govern their groups and to manage their activities effectively. Further, they were helped to draw up constitutions that would govern their groups. Besides the groups are showing high motivation due to the benefits derived from their activities. These factors will ensure sustainability of this intervention.
<b>Integration of women</b>			X	Women have constituted approximately 68 percent of LINKS target beneficiaries. These women have been empowered economically and some have had their literacy level boosted through literacy and numeracy classes, which has enabled many women to be more self-sufficient and less dependent on their husbands. The governance training and youth dialogue workshops held by the program promoted the level of participation of women in decision making processes on issues that affects the communities, and the boost in self esteem and courage compounded with the fact that communities have been sensitized on gender issues will ensure sustainability of women’s integration. In addition, LINKS supported a women’s group known as WABE with a female membership of 750. Throughout the life span of LINKS, WABE was able to manage its activities ranging from input shop, cultivation of vegetables and other economic crops, commercial activities and leadership challenges.

### 4.3 Beneficiary Profiles

**Mrs. Mary Benya**, chairlady of Dorbeneh FFS cluster when interviewed on the impact of LINKS program on the group, and gave the following response, “We have achieved unity, common understanding through the establishment of an Input Shop in collaboration with the women’s cooperative in Koidu Town. Through agrobusiness, the group have made a profit of Le 500,000, which is now lodged at the Rokel Commercial Bank, and some seed money in the tune of Le810,000 as rotating fund for business.



“From the improved farming skills and knowledge gained through the farmer field school concept, we have been able to maximize our productivity and income base to attend to our family needs. Added to this, our group has also been able to cultivate a five acre upland rice farm. The vegetative growth performance of the rice is encouraging, hoping that we will have a bumper harvest. The cassava processing group for which I am the chairlady have also been able to make a profit of Le1,300,000, which is currently deposited in our bank account in Koidu. With the installation of the solar dryer in our community our vegetable proceeds will start to earn us more income that we have never realized. Our success lies in the amalgamation of the Farmer Field Schools into clusters which had gone to further strengthen us, more especially in accessing funds from the bank.

“Personally, my skills and knowledge in agricultural productivity had increased considerably. I have always applied my improved technologies to earn myself more income, which had helped me and my husband take care of our family responsibilities. Through this, we have been able to construct a three bed-room house costing Le 2,800,000. The house is presently been used by our children who are attending school in Koidu.”

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**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. 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.

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.

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**Hawa Fomba**, a proud vegetable gardener, from Bayama village, in Kissi Tongi chiefdom Kailahun district is one of the project participants in Agbomuma FFS. During the FFS graduation ceremony she explained how she has realized an increase in yield in her vegetable production as a result of CORAD's intervention. She further explained that before CORAD's intervention, she used to grow her vegetable crops randomly and apply no compost manure. With the knowledge gained from her attendance at the FFS, she planted her vegetables in rows and used compost manure as she now knows how to prepare compost. Hawa no longer depends on external loans to pay her children's school fees as she had realized more income and intends to expand her acres of land to grow more vegetables. She also intends to continue using wider spacing, row planting and the use of compost manure. She was thankful to CRS in improving her skills and knowledge.



Hawa Fomba  
LINKS FFS graduation ceremony  
Baidu, Kissi Tongi C/dom  
8/10/08.

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**Lengehgoro community** is situated in Diang chiefdom along the Kabala Makeni highway. Poultry in rural Sierra Leone is usually taken care of by women and in most cases these birds are the first assets owned by rural women, not only for financial gains but also for social reasons. When the birds are mature they are used as presents for close family members and strangers/visitors and this is considered to be very important. However, local poultry also plays a significant role in providing resources for the rural poor providing poultry keepers the means to settle financial obligations such as school fees, buying food in the lean/hungry season, through the sale of their stock.

In January, women of Lengehgoro community received a LINKS capital grant in the form of poultry. The start stock was 20 pullets and 2 improved cockerels. The poultry house was built using local material. In only 9 months the size of the poultry stock has increased from 22 to 154 birds (7 times the original stock in 9 months). As a result of this huge increase, the group, on their own initiative, have built an additional poultry house. The project provided feed for the

birds for only six months and the group are now making their own financial contributions to buy feed in Lunsar. Another success is that this methodology of keeping poultry inside is new and yet has been adopted well by the communities. It is easier to manage poultry using this methodology and also is very productive.

The reasons for the group's success is that that the group understands to have healthy poultry the poultry house must be clean and the poultry regularly fed. To overcome this, the secretary of the group has developed a cleaning and feeding rooster posted at their meeting place. Each member of the group also makes both financial and food contributions to take care of the growing poultry. The group also has strong byelaws which creates and promotes group cohesion, promotes accountability and discipline.



Additional poultry house  
Lengehgoro, Diang Chiefdom  
16/09/08

Alkalia Youth Organization (AYO) is an agricultural organization based in Alkalia in Nieni chiefdom. The main focus of the organization is the production of cassava. The cassava is used both in the production of Gari and the tubers are also sold raw to the inhabitants of the chiefdom in the lean/hungry season. Presently, the group has a fifteen acre plantation which is about three miles away from Alkalia. Transportation had always been a problem for this group until they received the tricycle from LINKS project.

Through the LINKS programme, this group acquired a hand-operated gari grating machine. Production was slowed down due to transport constraints but since the advent of the tricycle in the community AYO has stepped up production. The road conditions in Nieni chiefdom are characterized as the worst in Koinadugu district or probably in the whole of Sierra Leone. AYO was able to transport and distribute cassava worth over \$1,350 USD to various communities in Nieni chiefdom. AYO has set up a separate fund for



Members of AYO group with their STS  
Alkalia, Nieni Chiefdom  
16/09/08

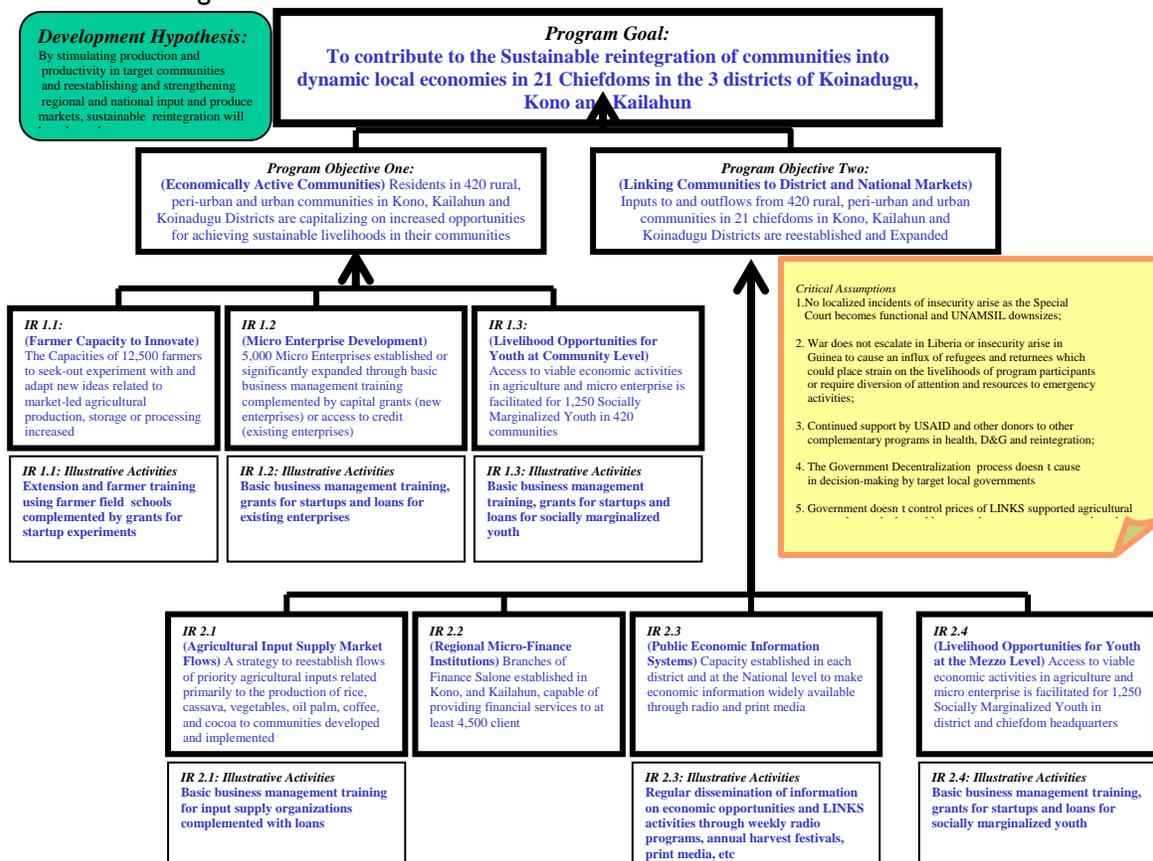
the purchase of spare parts and a motorised gari machine. AYO is also using the equipment to transport materials and youth to various feeder roads for rehabilitation. This has improved the road conditions to some extent.

The success of the group is based on the fact that the group perform daily and routine maintenance on the equipment (regularly change oil, use new and genuine parts to replace worn-out ones). Through training they have also been taught to maintain accurate financial records and the groups strong byelaws has helped create and promotes group cohesion, accountability and discipline.

## 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 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.

Through the farmer field school methodology, the program was able to increase productivity by increasing yield per acre, increasing acreage and reducing pre and post harvest losses. The program also helped farmer field school members to restock small ruminants, thus boosting their economic base and their nutritional status. Agro processing equipment was provided to targeted communities where rice production is high with an aim of reducing labor on women thus allowing them time to attend to their farms and consequently increasing production. In addition this has allowed improvement in the health of the women due to reduction in fatigue and stress whilst generating income for beneficiary groups. Rice milling machines now allow communities to produce and process surplus food for sell, it also serves as a source of income. During the course of program implementation, it was observed that the current agricultural practices are subjecting the soil to degradation, thus threatening agricultural sustainability. In this regard the program set up agro conservation demonstration plots during the extension period to educate farmers on agro-conservation practices. Inter district exchange visits were organized for youths and farmer's representatives to exchange ideas and enrich their knowledge base. Farmers have started capitalizing on this gained knowledge-base to increase productivity and further diversify production and use their land sustainably. As part of the exit strategy, CORAD in collaboration with MAFS federated the FFS so as to mobilize resources for increased agricultural productivity and marketing and advocating for services due to them.

The VS&Ls established have contributed immensely towards reintegration of families and communities and also contributed to the expansion of businesses leading to economic empowerment especially of women. The scheme helped to provide emergency health services to community members in critical cases thus helping to save lives. Through the scheme educational support was provided for primary and tertiary institutions for the sons and daughters of VS&L beneficiaries. VS&L has also enhanced labor output in the agricultural sector thereby fostering food productivity. Based on the benefits realized, the groups reorganized after their action audit and a number of self replicating groups have emerged. Following this impact on the lives of the poor, CORAD partner CARE has decided to mainstream VS&L in all its projects.

During the project's life span 12,366 clients underwent business management training using the Making Cents methodology (either provided directly by the project or provided as subsidized training by local NGOs). This training equipped the clients with enough business skills that helped them to enhance their businesses. From these trainees, CORAD partners selected the recipients of start of grants who received a total of \$661,765 under LINKS for agricultural or micro-enterprises. The training and the start up grants have shown substantial achievement. It was observed that most beneficiaries have increased their merchandised and/or diversified their produce, others have started cross border business, they do market survey before buying goods, they display their goods in places where they can easily be spotted and that they spread risks, amongst other business skills acquired. As such there has been an increase in profit consequently a positive impact on the lives of the beneficiaries. Business women testified in a forum group discussions that their lives have changed significantly in that they are now helping their male counterparts in taking care of domestic needs (school uniforms & books, health care,

clothing, buying utensils etc). Many say that the social fabric between wives and husbands has been cemented because of the productive functions they now undertake in the homes.

The Literacy and Numeracy classes have created an inspiring impact in the lives of target communities as they now appreciate the fact that education is the backbone to development. Clients who had on plan to send their children to school are being motivated to educate their children. In effect, the project is contributing towards reducing illiteracy rate in the Area of Work (AoW). The literacy and numeracy has also contributed to the expansion of businesses amongst target clients in that beneficiaries are able to work out correct change and to keep records. The clients of the Literacy and Numeracy classes have opted to pay the facilitators when LINKS phases out in their respective community which is a clear indication of sustainability.

Over the life of LINKS, CORAD achieved 161.7 percent of its target for number of communities supported, with a total of 679 compared to 420 planned communities reached. Partners have also achieved 85.4 percent of their target of 596 agricultural production groups functioning out of a planned total of 698.

### 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.

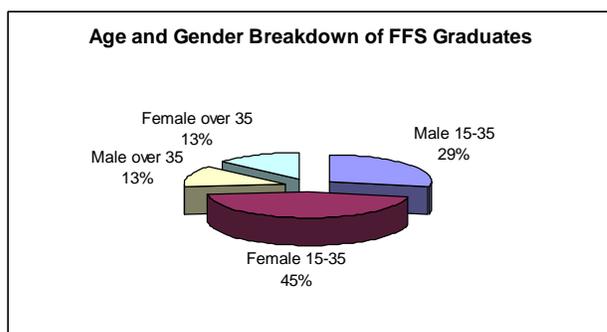
As noted, above, CORAD is pleased to report significant progress in terms of farmers adapting new ideas to support agribusiness and a market-oriented approach to agriculture. For instance, farmers are capitalizing on increased opportunities as they gradually envision themselves as business people and increase their presence in the market. They collectively market their farm products with limited intervention of the traditional market intermediaries. Marketing activities have recently been enhanced through the provision of tricycles which have directly impacted market relationships. They now use their new small transport systems (STS) to convey their products to the market. Previously, their inability to move farm products from the farm to the market influenced the price formation process as they continued to be “price takers” instead of “price setters”. Further development and support in terms of processing equipments and working capital have been provided to significantly benefit farmers; thus and contributing to sustainable livelihoods.

#### *1.1.1 Farmers participating in a 4-month series of learning sessions through farmer field schools*

Over life of the program, CORAD established 562 Farmer Field Schools with farmers from 679 communities. This exceeded the number of communities supported by 61.7 percent of the target of 420, in spite of being only 85.4 percent of the planned 680 agricultural groups formed. This is because although CORAD was successful in forming FFS, constraints of capacity and movement have led to difficulties with forming agribusiness groups. Thus, it is noteworthy that CORAD has successfully formed 34 Marketing and Agribusinesses Associations, with a membership of 360 farmers each.

CORAD has worked through these FFS to train a total of 12,964 farmers, as shown in the table below. A total of 58 percent of these were female, and 74 percent were youth. This figure represents 101.4 percent of the LOA target of 12,770 farmers trained.

	Ages 15-35	Ages over 35	Total
<b>Male</b>	3,716	1,709	<b>5,425</b>
<b>Female</b>	5,775	1,746	<b>7,521</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,491</b>	<b>3,455</b>	<b>12,946</b>



This achievement was made possible through the use of community facilitators who functioned much closer to the communities. According to the LINKS Final Evaluation, among communities with FFS, over 80% or more know about the FFS and want to be a part of the group while in communities without FFS the level of knowledge of the FFS is lower, estimated at 60%. Nonetheless, the rate of conversion from knowing about the

FFS and trying ideas from the FFS kept increasing through out the life of the program.

Throughout the LINKS project, CORAD has documented a number of lessons learned about the FFS:

- ◆ Communal farming can contribute significantly to community peace building, trust, unity, security, resource mobilization and development.
- ◆ Pre & post harvest losses were highly significant before CARE LINKS intervention leading to early food insecurity in the households.
- ◆ Improved farming practices are viable measures worth supporting to fight hunger and poverty in the district.
- ◆ Farmers are very receptive to new ideas which help to increase productivity.
- ◆ Although the adoption of new farming practices is higher in FFS than using other methodologies, it is still challenging to encourage farmers to adopt labor intensive practices.

### 1.1.2 Farmer field schools continued to undertake experiments

The experiments were related to the problems identified by farmers and they included the following: varietal trials, appropriate crop combination, land preparation, seed rate, time of weeding, apical versus basal methods of planting cassava and sweet potato. Identification and selection of experiments were participatory using the ‘ten seed technique’ or proportional pilling. This gives participants the opportunity of presenting opinions in a democratic manner that is inclusive in identifying problems and selecting the related experiments that need to be conducted to address the identified and prioritized constraints. Planting materials used in these experiments were sourced by farmers themselves either from their previous stock of seeds and planting materials provided by CORAD (seed bank) or from other farmers’ groups in the communities. During the initial FFS training the participants were trained on how to lay out randomized field plots using local materials like bush ropes and sticks. Using this basic agronomic design, FFS experimentation adds scientific value as the experiments can be replicated and the results comparable across ecology for verification. As targeted, all FFS that were still running demonstration plots conducted at least four experiments during the final year of the project, with some conducting significantly more.

Experiments focus on two ecologies, Upland and IVS. The crop focus continues to be the key crops promoted by CORAD: rice, groundnut, cassava, and commercial vegetables.

Type of Experiment	Crops Studied
Varietal Trial	Rice (upland & IVS), Sweet Potato, Groundnut, and Cassava
Effect of land preparation on yield	Sweet Potato, Commercial Vegetables, and Cassava
Plant population & performance	Rice, Cassava, Groundnut, and sweet potato
Planting methods	Rice, Sweet potato, Groundnut, and cassava
SRI (system of rice intensification)	IVS Rice
Apical and basal material & yield	Cassava and sweet potato

Chemical fertilization and organic manure had no significant impact due to the inherent nutrient capability of Koinadugu soils for vegetable production. The yields of all vegetables planted were promising and good. The only notable impediment is pest and disease control which might be addressed by the newly established plant health clinic in the district.

CORAD funded an Irish potato initiative for the Kusalakoh group in 2007. The group planted five acres of Irish Potato, and yields were appreciably high. The group decided to expand the acreage of this crop so that more farmers in the district would adopt this premium and highly profitable crop. As such, the extension phase of the LINKS project supported the expansion of the crop. The initial vegetative growth was promising; however, a month after, diseases infested the farm and wiped out the entire crop. The Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR) was invited to investigate the devastating damage. The results revealed fungal, bacteria and nematode attack. The crop remains to be a very big challenge to the women's group. The research institute has shown interest in working with the crop but funding is a limiting factor.

Field information from harvest data in FY07 indicated that the FFS obtained results from their experimental plots that answered some of their production problems. For example, yield data from experimental plots (See Table below) indicated that ROK3 produced more grain by weight i.e. 20% more than Nerica 1 but took 164 days to reach maturity. When harvested the moisture content (MC) was on average 2% 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% flowering stage and 50% 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% they argued that the extra 2 month made available because of the early harvest of Nerica could be engaging 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.

Date of sowing	Treatment	Crop variety	Days to 50% flowering	Days to 50% maturity	No. tillers per plant (5 plants)	Avg. Grain Yield/ Plot	Yield Kg/Ha	Yield Bu. Per acre
17/6/06	Sole	ROK 3	122	164	14.3	4.0	1,215	19.4
17/6/06	Sole	Nerica 1	81	108	2.3	3.1	975	15.6
17/6/06	Mixed	ROK3	122	164	7.3	3.5	1,080	17.3
17/6/06	Mixed	Nerica 1	81	108	2.0	2.4	765	12.2

Harvesting Nerica at lower moisture content means less time on additional drying of the crop too, saving valuable labor time. The prospect of cultivating sole upland farms was 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 was the provision of technical support to groups to (a) develop action plans outlining future plans to incorporate the improved technologies that were tested and (b) strengthened groups to ensure sustainability. This was ever so important as LINKS closes-out and there was 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 started and continued till the end of the project.

In addition to the field experiments farmers' conducted, they undertook an Agro-eco-system Analysis (AESAs). AESA is an approach employed by extension functionaries and farmers to analyse field situations with regards to pests, natural enemies, soil conditions, plant health, the influence of climatic factors and their interrelationship for growing healthy crop. Such a critical analysis of the field situations helped in taking appropriate decisions on management practices. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the output from a typical AESA. Key parameters were observed and provided farmers important information about the growth characteristics of the varieties being tested and their resistance to disease.

Crop	Plot no./ rep.	Plant height (cm)	Length of leaf (cm)	Width of leaf (cm)	No. of leaf	No. of dead leaves	No. of diseased leaves	No. of branches/ tillers	Length of root (cm)
Mowadu	R3T1	61	50	1.2	5	2	1	2	2.1
Nerica I	R3T2	45	38.7	1	4	1	2	2	2
Inchido	R3T3	66	51	1.6	5	1	1	3	2.1
Nerica 4	R3T4	62	32	1	4	1	1	2	2

### 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 LINKS, 11,462 individuals (the majority of whom belong to FFS or VS&L groups) benefited from the distribution of tricycles, animals, and agro-processing equipment worth US \$322,162. This dollar amount represents 342.7 percent of the LOA target; this was possible because CORAD was able to allocate certain funds from other activities towards supplementing the budget for capital grants.

Groups also received technical training on animal husbandry as well as business management training alongside the capital grant disbursement. Each group had to contribute labour and local materials for the construction of the sheds to house the small ruminants. CORAD encouraged participants to procure locally. As well as ensuring that farmers use materials they could easily access in future for both commercial production and replication, local procurement facilitated cash flow within the communities.

As noted in the following table, a strong majority of individuals benefitting from the agricultural capital grants were female.

	Ages 15-35	Ages over 35	Total
<b>Male</b>	4,625	1,606	<b>6,231</b>
<b>Female</b>	4,297	1,404	<b>5,701</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,922</b>	<b>3,010</b>	<b>11,932</b>

#### 1.1.4 Agricultural lending pilot program benefiting farmers

The agricultural lending pilot program began in FY 07, with the first disbursement of funds to 176 farmers, worth about \$29,333. Each farmer received a loan in the amount of \$167. After the first round of loans was repaid, CCF (the agency implementing this lending pilot on behalf of CORAD) qualified another round of loan recipients from the original pool of 176 farmers. Thus, during this quarter, CORAD, through CCF, disbursed loans to 152 clients worth \$47,008. This is an increase of \$17,675 compared to the \$29,333 disbursed during the first disbursement. The increase is due to money raised as interest and risk money withheld during initial loan disbursement. Loan repayment continues to be impressive at 100%. The full age and gender breakdown of loan recipients from this quarter is given in the table below; 59.2% of recipients were female, while 57.9% were youth.

	Ages 15-35	Aged Over 35	Total
<b>Male</b>	60	28	<b>88</b>
<b>Female</b>	72	15	<b>88</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>176</b>

It is worth noting that although 328 loans have been disbursed to-date (with a total value of \$76,341), as the second round of loans disbursed during this quarter targeted the same farmers, the number of farmers benefitting from the pilot remains at 176. This figure represents only 12.6% of the LOA target of 1,400 farmers, due to the difficulty in finding a suitable organization to implement the pilot.

Focus group discussion held in communities where agricultural loans were disbursed revealed that clients appreciate the agricultural loan more than the normal micro credit loans because of the repayment period. The agricultural loans have helped increase the income base of the clients which has led to the improvement of the lives of the beneficiaries. There has been expansion in businesses, accumulation of household assets, and expansion of farm acreage in crop cultivation. The loans have also contributed towards promoting support to education and health of families.

#### 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.

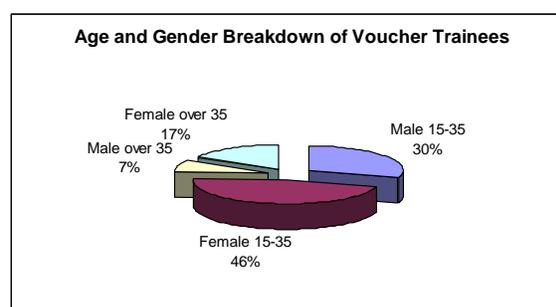
CORAD members embarked on several activities aimed at reducing the constraint facing rural entrepreneurs and building capacity to enhance the entrepreneurial mindset of the target beneficiaries. Under the guidance of partner ARC, CORAD facilitated access to Making Cents Training, a basic business training 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*

The lack of business skills among small businesses accounts for the poor performance and lack of growth in the sub-sector. To overcome this constraint and develop the entrepreneurial mindset of the target beneficiaries, CORAD provided business training services (Making Cents Training) through the various agencies as well as local partners such as Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) and the Kono Women's Multipurpose Cooperative, Chido through a voucher system. As shown in the table below, a total of 11,068 people completed the business training through vouchers, which represents 149.2 percent of the LOA target. Of these, 63 percent were women and 76 percent were youth.

	Ages 15-35	Aged Over 35	Total
<b>Male</b>	3,312	821	<b>4,133</b>
<b>Female</b>	5,079	1,856	<b>6,935</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,391</b>	<b>2,677</b>	<b>11,068</b>

Clients who undertake MC training acquire basic skills of identifying viable economic activities that have potential to generate income. The selected clients for the MC training ranged from petty traders, small business traders involved in cookery, bread baking, livestock business, farm product selling. The training was core funded by the LINKS project providing 80 percent of the total costs with the beneficiaries providing 20 percent.



The training has equipped clients with skills in carrying out business planning, market surveys, record keeping, risk management and selection of businesses that have quick turnover. The outcome has been increased profits that have created an impact in the lives of target clients such as economic independence, accumulation of household assets, nutrition promotion, education and health care.

*1.2.2 Business training was undertaken through a non-voucher system promoted by the program*

All Making Cents Training partners were committed to hosting at least two non-voucher trainings per month. Non-voucher trainings represented the goal of CORAD to introduce market driven activities that contribute to business development and promote organizational sustainability. Clients paid a cost-recovery, non-subsidized rate in leones from 2,000 to 10,000 depending cost recovery rates/actual course content offered by local training organizations.

Strength in the marketing abilities of some organizations combined with the total market space for fee based training have factored into the success rate of the higher number of non-voucher trainings performed by some local organizations. Achieved numbers of 820 non-vouchers trainings out of target of 720 indicate notable success for all participating partners for the end of year 2 implementation.

The environment for non-voucher trainings that is, the market for fee-based, cost-recovery training (not subsidized by LINKS) 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 LINKS, 1,133 people were trained, representing 22.7 percent of the LOA target of 5,000 people.

*1.2.3 Loans were disbursed to targeted clients*

Over the life of LINKS, Finance Salone had disbursed 9,844 loans in Kailahun and Kono Districts, valued at \$1,517,000 US. Of the loan recipients, 6,467 were women (accounting for 65.6 percent of the total recipients). Youth also represented a significant client base of Finance Salone as they accounted for 70.1% of loans disbursed, or 6,900 loans.

	Ages 15-35	Ages over 35	Total
<b>Male</b>	2,366	1,011	<b>3,377</b>
<b>Female</b>	4,534	1,933	<b>6,467</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,900</b>	<b>2,944</b>	<b>9,844</b>

*1.2.4 Men and women continue to participate in savings groups*

Before the implementation of the VS&L methodology, CORAD partner CARE, the technical lead for youth and MED, hired the services of a consultant (Huge Allen) to carry out a training of Trainers (TOT) workshop. During this training, LINKS staff were taught the VS&L methodology and the collection of data for the MIS. After the TOT training the methodology was pre-tested followed by implementation. The VS&L groups were provided with the materials and eight learning sessions carried out before the actual savings commenced. Most of the FFS participants who were members of the VS&L acquired loans to cultivate commercial farms as away of adopting the technologies from the experimentation in the various schools. The secretaries from all the VS&L groups were constantly updated with the methodology in a series

of refresher trainings. The communities developed strategic loan repayment mechanisms for all their members. The VS&L groups also required guarantors for non-members requesting for loans, these guarantors must be paid-up and clean record members before loans are issued to a non-member. These regulations helped to minimize default in loan repayment.

The LOA target for this activity was 8,000 men and women participating in savings groups. Of this, CORAD members were able to achieve 11,130, or 139.1 percent.

#### *1.2.5 Men and women participating in literacy groups*

CORAD partner ARC has developed the Savings and Literacy program to support the implementation of new and existing saving schemes activities in LINKs operating districts. The goal of the program is to use 'functional literacy' as a vehicle to facilitate the improved management of these groups and promote better business practices. The methodology for the program is based on the Eclectic Technique (Freirean Approach), which involves the use of composite (problem) picture, picture code (solution picture) and words for learning to read and write.<sup>3</sup>

During the final quarter of FY 06, ARC completed the development of the pre-literacy, cohesive groups and the instructional and development manuals. Some of the materials were pre-tested during the month of August to gauge the ability of the learner to recognize the images presented in the materials and to evaluate the level of difficulty of the lessons when taught to the learners. Adjustments were made to the materials to reflect the context and level of understanding of the learners.

Facilitators' training of trainers took place at the end of FY 06 and FY 07. Three organizations participated: World Vision, CHIDO and National Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD). A total of 85 persons took part in the training, which lasted for six days and covered topics such as adult learning and communication. The participants also had a chance to role play as facilitators in order to practice the teaching techniques and reinforce the training materials.

Due to an overwhelming level of interest, CORAD has exceeded targets for the literacy and numeracy groups. A total of 8,676 men and women participated in literacy groups, which represents 108.5 percent of the LOA target of 8,000. Women account for no less than 60 percent of all participants.

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 was high, class participation and attendance tended to diminish throughout the literacy courses 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

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<sup>3</sup> DaCruz, Noel. 'Draft proposal for the Development of Savings and Literacy Curriculum for the LINKs Program.' 2006

and providing transport facilities for facilitators to teach in their literacy classes. This had an adverse effect on CORAD’s literacy classes as it is the CORAD trained facilitators who are now providing services to these organizations.

*1.2.6 Average savings accumulated per annum per savings group*

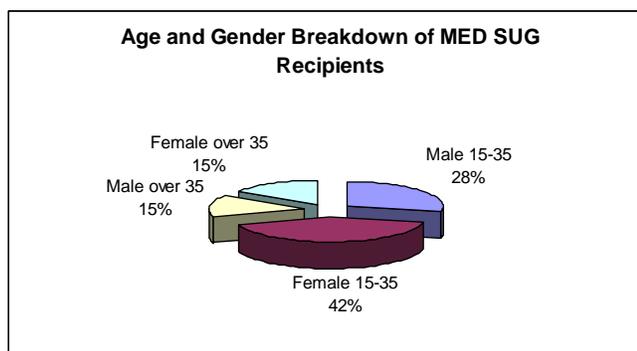
In spite of the fact that some savings groups only began activities in the third quarter, CORAD partners report that groups have accumulated an average savings of \$205 US, or 102.3 percent of the LOA target of \$200.

*1.2.7 Capital grants were disbursed for startup of micro enterprises*

A total of \$339,603 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, agro-processing equipment, work oxen, and gara sales. The grants were meant to establish and expand individual and group businesses so that the recipient beneficiaries will address their livelihood constraints. Below is the age and gender breakdown of the targeted beneficiaries.

	Ages 15-35	Ages over 35	Total
<b>Male</b>	1,731	895	<b>2,627</b>
<b>Female</b>	2,548	944	<b>3,552</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,279</b>	<b>1,839</b>	<b>6,179</b>

For new clients the process began with sensitization activities conducted by project staff for potential youth and MED clients, after which interested individuals and groups submitted applications. As part of the follow up process, CORAD partners conducted mid-term interviews (two months after initial disbursement) and final evaluations (two months after second disbursement) with technical support. All grantees were interviewed and their businesses were evaluated in situ.



Initial results indicated that 20 percent of grantees changed their business from the time they received their grant, indicating some degree of adaptability to new conditions very likely dictated by the farming season. The midterm interviews and final evaluations also made it possible to assess the initial impact of the MCT. It was found that more than 90 percent of clients were regularly collecting and registering data from their transactions. Some grantees were able to develop weekly business plans to guide their investment decisions. All grantees are visited at least once per month by CORAD field staff, and clients have acknowledged that this intense monitoring is very useful in improving their accounting skills.

In some instances the group uses the grant to loan out to a smaller group of 2 to 3 individuals. A small interest is charged on the loan which is paid back in 2-weekly cycles and saved in the group’s bank account. The additional revenue is accumulated and recycled by the group or used

as a sort of mutual insurance in the event of an external shock. The fund growth over the revue period - a total of Le2.97 million or \$990, was accrued in June by the SBEs. This build up of capital will encourage sustainable operation that will ensure continuity and resilience of the group. There is a decline in the amount of interest collected in the months after July which is understandable as households are under pressure for food at this time of the year.

Amid this success, however two groups are reported to have misappropriated the grants allocated to them. The situation was been investigated and the names of defaulters were submitted to other FFS groups and in the respective chiefdom(s). The tribal authorities and the local government authorities have been briefed and the members of the groups are being sought for further explanation as to reason for their action.

### 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 have been the focus of CORAD activities at both community and mezzo level, with an emphasis placed on job opportunities in the area of agro-processing, small business enterprise and small transports targeted young women and men. The program not only supported youth to actively participate in agriculture activities, but also enhanced youth reintegration with community and local institutions.

SMYs participated in the cultivation of various crops, and some youth groups 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 contributed to the improvement of the social status of youth in the operational communities. For example, some youth groups were 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 received Small Transport Solutions (STS) 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*

During the life of LINKS, learning dialogues were conducted for 1,413 SMYs at the community or micro level, which represents 94.2 of the LOA target of 1,500. During the dialogue sections, major constraints to economic, social integration and development were identified. Amongst these were poverty, unemployment lack of social abilities and lack of access to financial services.

The dialogue sessions provided youths with tools to efficiently communicate through open discussions that allowed youth within beneficiary communities to meet, exchange ideas and experiences on the different livelihood opportunities offered by the project to envision concrete solutions to the imbalances in resources. Youth dialogues created an opportunity for youth voices to be heard and also enable them to be actively engaged in setting agendas relating to individual decisions about livelihood opportunities. Given the opportunities to discuss their livelihoods, they consider issues within their own socio-cultural context identify, prioritize their

problems, define their capacities and strength and mobilize resources for collective gain. In Kono the Business Development Center established within WVSL provided technical assistance that helped youths established and link networks of authorities and other relevant institutions in the livelihood areas identified which enabled capacity building, awareness raising and mutual understanding of the problems and constraints link to current opportunities and solutions to overcome them.

Ages 15-35	
<b>Male</b>	821
<b>Female</b>	592
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,413</b>

### 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. As shown in the table below, a total of 1,209 SMYs participated in the Farmer Field Schools over the life of LINKS, representing 140.6 percent of the LOA target of 860.

Ages 15-35	
<b>Male</b>	3,716
<b>Female</b>	5,775
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,491</b>

The number of youth who participated in the FFS increased steadily and the FFS established by farmer facilitators and CORAD field staff reflect this upward movement. The major focus had been to encourage youth from rural communities to return to agriculture as an alternative livelihood activity. Several groups attracted other youth from the mines back to the rural communities. The youth actively participated during project planning and significantly contributed labor during the implementation of the FFS. The majority of these socially marginalized youth never received any formal education as a result of the war. For those in the community this LINKS project has not only allowed them to acquire basic farming skills but provided an opportunity for them to contribute towards economic development. Those in the urban areas not only gained skills, but are now realizing income through marketing of farm produce and marketing of processed goods.

CORAD was focused on the reintegration of communities into dynamic local economies as it continued to broaden economic opportunities in the beneficiary communities. Expansion in production of the target crops will led to increase in employment opportunities through the multiplier effect impacting demand for goods and services. Capacities of the new and existing enterprises were strengthened and their ability to access business and financial services enhanced.

In some areas where mining for diamonds has been the preoccupation for many youth, the project has been attracting youths from the mines as they observed that their colleagues who

are participating in alternative (agricultural and MED activities) have a more steady income. The youths explained that “income from farming is guaranteed unlike mining which long on hope.”



*Youth preparing land for transplanting rice seed using IVS the community of Mafanta, Koinadugu District.*

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

Over the life of LINKS, a total of 1,013 youth at the micro level received loans from Finance Salone, in spite of the fact that their strategy focuses on District Headquarter towns (to facilitate follow up on outstanding loans by loan officers). This figure represents 202.6 percent of the LOA target.

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

Over the life of LINKS, a total of \$134,512 was disbursed by CORAD agencies to SMYs (either as members of recipient groups or as individuals) within focal communities. This represents 74.2 percent of the USD target; however, this figure is affected by exchange gains and losses caused by the extreme currency fluctuations during the third and fourth years of the project. As shown in the table below, a total of 5,085 benefitted from these loans, of which slightly more than one in two (51.3 percent) were female.

Ages 15-35	
<b>Male</b>	2,477
<b>Female</b>	2,608
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,085</b>

These small start-up grants help groups gain business experience as well as build their capital base. They were monitored for the first three months and their performance assessed to ensure adherence to the guidelines of the in the memorandum of understanding. Each group was given technical support and advice on setting up bank accounts and on the benefits of a revolving fund.

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.

## 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. 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.

During LINKS, 927 livelihood opportunities were created for socially marginalized youth, the majority of which were in District Headquarter towns. However, 35 of these jobs were created in Freetown, where CORAD partner CRS oversaw the rehabilitation of the JFK Building on the campus of Fourah Bay College. Renovation included painting both inside and outside the building, electrical rewiring, plumbing, tiling as well as the replacement of many of the doors, toilets, wash basins and windows and doors. The JFK building has now been handed back to the university and has been fully operational since the official opening on 21 November 2008. It is worth noting that in addition to housing classrooms and offices of the Social Sciences Department of the college, the building also houses the Sierra Leone National Archives.

## 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.

In FY 06, Action for Enterprise (AFE), was contracted to conduct a Value Chain Analysis (VCA) of agricultural inputs completed the analysis and identified vegetable seeds and fertilizers as the inputs that will drive the input market and enhance the use of improved inputs in the crop sub-

sector. Given the range of agricultural inputs targeted by the program viz. rice, oil palm, vegetables, coffee, cacao and cassava there was need to determine which input market would make the most impact given the time frame of the LINKS program. Among the several criteria used to prioritize the various inputs were;

1. Potential to impact the maximum number of farmers in the target districts;
2. Sufficient incentives for farmers to use or adopt the input;
3. Availability of the input, and;
4. Presence of lead-firms who could improve the commercial viability of the input market.

The vegetable seed and fertilizer markets were selected for further analysis because they offered the most opportunities for the sector. For example, the fertilizer market crosses multiple agriculture value chains and has a broad customer base of large and small farming operations. Therefore improving this market will result in significant gains in terms of economies of scale of operation and reduction in transactions costs for all market actors including the farmers.

The seed-rice input market was not selected because most of the market actors depend on government and NGO contracts and more importantly, it lacked active participation of key market actors who could improve the commercial viability of that segment of the input market. From the focused group discussion held with farmers and market players, it emerged that farmers were not motivated to buy improved seed rice because it was not profitable for them given the availability of cheap imported rice. Follow up workshops on “Working the Value Chain” served to engage farmers in discussions as key market players.

As a follow up action, CORAD established two farm input shops in Koidu (Fachima Agribusiness Services Limited) and Kabala (Women’s Agribusiness Enterprise, or WABE). These shops have contributed to the provision of affordably priced improved agricultural inputs to both targeted chiefdoms and other nearby areas. However, CORAD realized that due to the difficult road network in



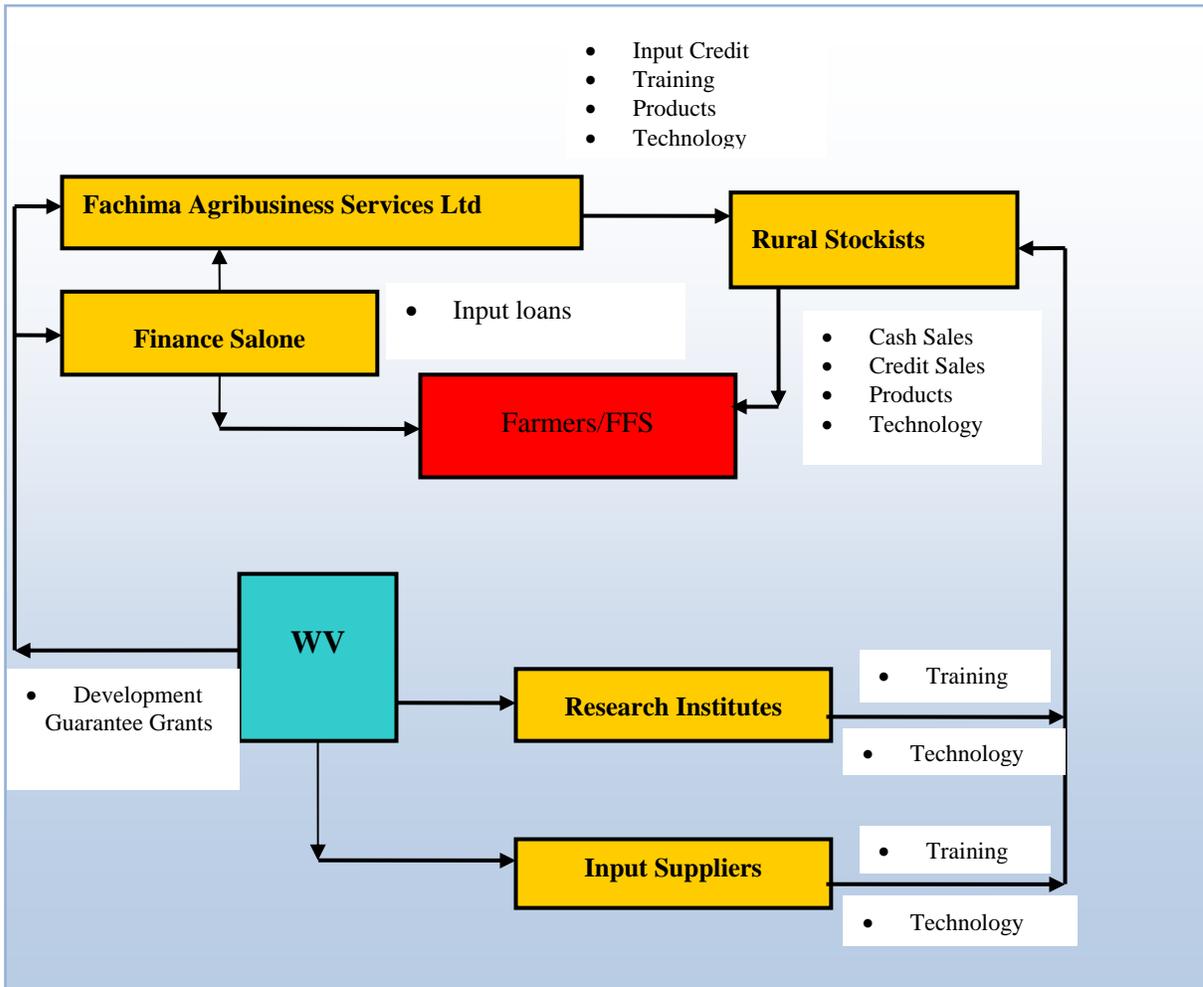
**FAS' new business premises**

operational communities, some farmers find it difficult to access the services of the input supply shops. In order to address this issue, CORAD collaborated with MAFS and identified strategic locations within the operational chiefdoms for rural stockists who can serve as a link between their communities and the Input shops to bring services closer to the communities.



**Agricultural inputs on display at an input shop**

Figure 1: Model of the rural stockist program



The input supply shops have already had a marked impact on agricultural activities in the two Districts. For example, during FY 08, Fachima provided 34 Marketing Associations in Kono with improved NERICA LI, NERICA LI9 and ROK3 seeds (Nerica LI 3,000 Kg, LI9 3,040 Kg, and ROK3 2,730 Kg) for this planting season on loan. The payment of the loan at end of harvest should go into the identified rural input stores (rural stockists), where the communities will continue to run the stores with improved seeds. FAS will collect a negotiated 25% interest in kind from the rural stores and Market Associations that benefit from the seed loan at the end of harvest season. Furthermore, CORAD worked with Fachima to undertake an audit of its business in the last year paving the way for the raising of capital through selling of shares.

Field observations reveal that there is enthusiasm for growth and development among Marketing Associations. However, their ability to manage change towards transformational development that allow commercial and sustainable entrepreneurial is low. Promoting behavior change cannot be achieved overnight. Effective behavior change requires experiential learning, followed by technical support to reinforce experiences. CORAD is using the community radio stations, community-based meetings, and local debates to raise awareness in communities on micro enterprise activities.

CORAD also continued to work with the 34 FFS clusters transforming them into limited liability companies (LLC). The adoption of the LLC business model is to ensure the transformation of producers' group into legally registered businesses empowered to access additional funds to expand their core business either through commercially lending or the sale of goods to members or other producer groups.

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

CORAD conducted sub-sector analyses for palm oil, cacao, groundnuts, and livestock. Each link in the value chain was evaluated from the point of view of profit and competitiveness. Each report includes an analysis of the interaction between farmers and traders for the relevant sub-sector, as well as the identification of key leverage points and potential areas for intervention. Each sub-sector report includes various strategies that can be directed at farmers and traders.

Two significant follow up exercises were conducted. CORAD provided training in "Rapid Market Appraisal" (RMA) to a total of 21 field staff from the partners and local implementing agencies. The workshop strengthened the knowledge and capacity of CORAD members in conducting rapid market appraisals (RMA), including product selection, supply chain analysis, data analysis, and the development of an intervention proposal for potential agro-enterprises in SL. CORAD field staff designed a training component on basic agro-marketing for FFS groups implementing agro-enterprise activities. This module was subsequently 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.

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

During the second year of implementation, training of input and output suppliers continued after an assessment and the identification of the niches/gaps in the flow of input/outputs to communities. The aggregated farmer field schools are presently undertaking commercial production of much needed seed items in their respective aggregated locations. In a focus group discussion with these farmers, it was revealed that since their economic base is weak, they would first start with production followed with buying and supplying of the much-needed inputs to their schools. The farmer field schools participants were trained in FFS principles and methodology; making cents business training, leadership roles and responsibilities, project writing and how to source funds from either MFIs or donors.

CORAD carried out organizational capacity building for 10 output suppliers. These were mainly output suppliers that were engaged in the marketing of agricultural produce. Out of this 4 were trained in Koinadugu, 3 in Kono, and 3 in Kailahun. Linkage were made with wholesalers in Freetown and a series of meetings held with the wholesalers. Organizations trained were, however, not able to make use of the training because of lack of adequate funds to expand their small businesses. Out of the 4 trained in Koinadugu, only Women Agro Business Enterprise (WABE) carried out output activities due to the joint support received from both CARE and WVSL. WABE was able to buy from farmers and sell to both international and local CBOs dealing in agricultural inputs.

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

A total of 13 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 for hybrid seeds. Through this input shop, FAO was 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.

#### *2.1.5 Manufacturers with capacities increased for manufacturing small scale transport vehicles*

Many people in CORAD's operational areas have poor access from their communities to other villages and market centres in the country. Recent reports indicated that it is not so much that there is no road close to people's communities; in fact most rural communities have a road, but the quality of the existing roads is the real problem. Most of the roads are impassable during the rains, with a median of 3 months impassable.



**Pushcart prototype design**

Against this background, 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. The objective of this activity was to provide farmer groups appropriate means of transporting their harvested crops from the farm gate to nearby rural/assembly markets. Four models of small transport solutions have been developed (Bicycle trailer, Honda Motorcycle trailer (3-wheel), Honda Motorcycle Trailer (4 wheel-hitched) and the pushcart. These have

been field-tested and recommendations made for possible amendments. The amendments are still being considered and therefore no prototype has been recommended to any trained local manufacturer.

The tests have highlighted weakness of the various designs and ways that they can be improved to be made more cost effective and easier to use in the field. During the tests there were positive examples of how this technology can be effectively used by groups including the Progressive Women's Group who generated an average of Le100,000 using the push cart to move loads around Koidu town. Similarly, the Manjama Women's FFS used the push cart on market days only i.e. 4 days a month averaging an income of Le140,000 per month. At a

sustained level of use the over a 12 month period, these groups would pay for the push cart and have approximately Le800,000 to reinvest or pay themselves. Applied in this way the push cart has the potential to improve the lives of the people in the rural communities who do not have the technical know-how to manage more sophisticated small transport systems.

However, after the prototypes were tested, it was decided that they did not provide the load capacity required and were not sturdy enough given the terrain in the different geographical locations of the project. The agricultural tricycle replaced the locally manufactured motor cycle prototypes as the vehicle of choice.

The distribution of tricycles had impacted the communities in more ways than expected. In addition to transporting farm produce to markets, these small transport solutions have played a significant role in saving lives of pregnant women in the rural communities. Once considered a major constraint during emergency, communities are relieved that they can access these vehicles to transport their sick to the nearby health clinics without problems. On the commercial side of operations, the roads have been a major challenge; notwithstanding, some groups have made progress towards setting up management committees that look after the day to day operations of the tricycles.



**Imported tri-cycle design**

Due to the terrible conditions of the roads, the tricycles have been getting frequent breakdowns leading to very little return. Almost all of the tricycles distributed to groups are out of use as the groups find it difficult to access and purchase spare parts. Profitability analysis and the rate of return on investment cannot be conducted at the end of the program but early indications were promising, as indicated in the data collected in FY07 below:

Chiefdom	Group	Days of Operation	Amount Collected (le)	Total Fuel cost (le/gal)	Repairs & Maint.	Operator's Wages	Net deposited (le)
<b>Lei</b>	Pekuya FFS	5	168.8	206,000	63,300	30,000	96,700
<b>Lower Sandor</b>	Bangambaya FFS	4	58	240,000	52,000	30,000	158,000
<b>Gbense</b>	Fachima Ag. Input	3	30	90,000	32,500	30,000	90,000
<b>Soa</b>	WOPA	6.5	20.8	500,000	65,000	30,000	268,000

The push cart has been the most successful of the pilots and was recommended for use in urban towns where the terrain is less challenging – i.e. with gradients less than 5%. In the first six months of operations the cart was operated for 91 days collecting a gross revenue of Le1.23 million, paying out Le 444,000 in operating costs made up mostly of wages. Net returns for this period was Le 786,000. For the period January to September 2007, a net of LI.32 was realized or Le2.55 over. Recovering the initial cost plus interest leaves the operators with Le1.77 million. The group operating the push cart is considering purchasing a second cart, and have already invested Le 460,000 in a vegetable garden. The proceeds from the garden was used to open other businesses in order accrue more money to be able to meet the cost of the second cart.

Year	Month	Days of Operation	# of trips/ month	Distance covered/ month	Amount collected / month	Running Costs	Residual (Net Profit)
2006	June-Dec	91	226	750	1,230,500	444,000	786,000
2007	Jan-Sept	199	464	1,915	2,520,000	1,204,000	1,316,000
<b>TOTAL</b>			290	690	3,720,500	1,648,000	2,102,000

CORAD partner CARE facilitated training of 9 organizations (3 per district) to undertake the fabrication of small transport vehicles. These were supposed to replicate a prototype tricycle. However, CORAD was not able to come up with a suitable local prototype due to the difficult terrain in the districts. This was substituted with Chinese tricycles that the local manufacturers could not replicate. This factor compounded with the fact that the manufactures were not supported with start up grants made it impossible for the local manufacturers to fabricate any small transport vehicle. The above mentioned organizations were trained in input and out supply. The training was aimed at building capacity of the organization to carry out input and out put supply and marketing chain. It was envisaged that these organizations would receive loans from micro finance institutions. The project linked them with Micro finance institutions such as Finance Salone in Koidu and Kailahun but bureaucracies required for acquiring funds made it impossible for them to access the funds. Thus they were not able to implement the initiative.

### 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.

CORAD has supported the flow of finance capital into rural districts through the establishment of Finance Salone, micro-finance institutions (MFIs). For the LOA, two branches of Finance Salone were to be established in two districts.

#### 2.2.1 Branch for Finance Salone established and functioning

Two branches of Finance Salone were established under LINKs, although some small delays were noted with the opening of the Kailahun branch. 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. As of the end of FY 07 (i.e. the end of the sub-agreement with CORAD partner ARC), Kono branch was servicing approximately 2,200 clients managed by four Credit Officers and one Branch Manager. At that point, operations in Kailahun were servicing 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. As of the end of FY 07, a total of 10,234 loans had been 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 percent 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

Over the life of LINKS, CORAD partner SFCG has produced a total of 148 regular weekly national radio programs to disseminated economic information, representing 154.2 percent of the LOA target of 96. 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, such as:

- ❑ 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.

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 LINKS, 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

Over the life of LINKS, a total of 8 agricultural and trade fairs were completed (one in Kono, four in Kailahun, and three in Koinadugu), representing 266.7 percent of the LOA target of 3. This target was exceeded because CORAD found these activities to be not only a cost-effective way of promoting new techniques and disseminating information, but also an opportunity for farmers to celebrate accomplishments. The fairs also created a mechanism to bring together input and outputs suppliers with



Agricultural products displayed at the agricultural fair

farmers. A typical fair included in excess of 100 people.

In collaboration with MAFS, CORAD also participated in the commemoration of World Food Day celebrations in Tokolili District. The program attracted hundreds of thousands of both government authorities, MAFFS authorities, local and international non-governmental organizations and other dignitaries. The keynote address and official opening was delivered by the president H.E. Dr Enerst Bai Koroma, which was followed by inspection of produce and distribution of prizes.

### *2.3.3 Written inserts appear in 5 national newspapers*

Over the life of LINKS, four 4-page written inserts was produced during this FY. The insert targeted, amongst others, the literate and reading public in the three-implementation districts but was also more specifically targeted at policy makers (both at the national and local level) and the business community. The inserts are designed to raise issues that trigger discussions but also to share success and challenges around the country.

While 15 inserts were originally planned, the costs were underestimated and it was decided that color printing would have a much greater impact when presenting especially for agricultural issues, which is why only 26.7 percent of the LOA target was achieved. However between 2,000 and 3,000 copies of the inserts 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*

Over the life of LINKS, CORAD submitted a total of 99 bi-weekly price reports 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 for three observations per market.

CORAD also trained staff from the Planning, Evaluation, Monitoring and Statistics Division (PEMSD) of the Ministry of Agriculture (MAFS) to conduct market surveys in Freetown. CORAD and PEMS D have regularly collaborated in surveying wholesale (daily) markets in the Freetown area. This activity is designed to strengthen local capacity so as to make it possible to transfer the Market Information system (MIS) to the government by the time the LINKS project closes.

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*

During the LINKS implementing period, learning dialogues were conducted for 1,357 SMYs at mezzo level, representing 109 percent of the LOA target. As shown in the table below, 45.8 percent of the participants in these dialogue sessions were women, which indicates the way in which the LINKS project was able to break down traditional barriers to the participation of women and female youth.

	Ages 15-35
Male	736
Female	621
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,357</b>

During the dialogue sections, major constraints to economic, social integration and development were identified. Amongst these were poverty, unemployment lack of social abilities and lack of access to financial services.

*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 total, 6,040 loans were disbursed to youth from the Kailahun and Kono branches, with the majority being disbursed in Kono as that branch was established first. Nevertheless, as of the end of FY 07 when CORAD's partnership with Finance Salone formally ended, 624 loans were disbursed to youth in Kailahun, or 18 percent of the total loans distributed in that fiscal year.

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

CORAD encouraged participation of the youths in agricultural activities in order to promote household and community food security. This was also aimed at reducing youth rural-urban migration that could lead to increase in crime rate, and food insecurity in the rural areas. Thus, over the life of LINKS, capital grants valuing \$139,724 total were disbursed to youth groups. The actual items distributed included small ruminants, agro-processing equipment (such as gari processing machines, rice hullers, and palm nut crackers), seeds and tools, and Small Transport Solutions.

During monitoring and supervision of the youths' activities, CORAD partner CARE observed an average increase of 40 percent in the cultivation of various food crops in Koinadugu District. The youths are also gainfully engaged in various micro-enterprise activities that have enhanced their economic self-reliance and reduction in family dependence. It is worth noting that a number of youth who had dropped out of school because of economic reasons have now gone back to school with self-support.

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

	Ages 15-35
Male	217
Female	416
<b>Total</b>	<b>633</b>

## **VI. LESSONS LEARNED DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD**

### 6.1 Administrative and Operational Issues

LINKS experienced some staff turnover, particularly in the last year of implementation. This did not however negatively impact the implementation process. Recruitment for vacant positions; position of Youth Livelihood Officer and Field Coordinator was completed. The Field Coordinator position combined the role of the Extension Coordinator and the Organizational Development Officer).

The road conditions in the focal chiefdoms remained a major constraints 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 the real problem. Most of the roads are impassable during the rains, with a median of 3 months. It affects supervision of the Farmer led FFS. Notwithstanding, CORAD recalled 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 maintained a constant dialogue with the Farmer Facilitators whenever this is possible followed by occasional visits to the FFS experimentation sites.

Rising prices especially of fabrication supplies – steel products have increased by about 25% and affected prices of processing equipment. This was due to shortage of steel products resulting from the slowdown of imports as a result of the parliamentary and presidential elections and also world market prices. Escalation of prices of goods especially rice in 2008 affected the amount of seed provided to SMYs and consequently this affected acreage.

### 6.2 Security

CARE LINKS successfully implemented its activities without any disturbance from these two countries that could affect the program activities despite inherent political issues in the two countries. Liberia remained calm throughout the period, while Guinea experienced some turbulence in 2007, with the population threatening to carry out strikes. 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.

In FY 07, there was a resurgence of localized incidents of violence prior to the Presidential and Parliamentary elections (August 8<sup>th</sup>) and run offs (September 6<sup>th</sup>) 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. However, after the election the situation returned to normal. UNAMSIL downsizing did not in anyway affected program implementation, and all regions reported as calm with no signs of unrest.

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).

### 6.3 Governmental Relations

The program maintained a very high level of trust and integrity between the stakeholders, ward committee members and the beneficiaries. The local authorities such as Paramount Chiefs, Section Chiefs and the Town Chiefs were very supportive of the LINKS activities in their localities. Also Government structures such as the District Council, Ward Committee representatives and Line Ministries offered similar support, with the exception of the MOYS. The continuous absence of the MoYS Officer in CORAD Operational Districts was a major obstacle in the implementation of youth activities. Although they were appointed, they were 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 attempted to coordinate and assist in different ways. This problem did not impeded implementation on the part of the CORAD LINKS partners; however.

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.

### 6.4 Commodity Factors

No price controls were enacted by the government of Sierra Leone during the reporting period. This led to an inflammatory trend in the country with an escalation in the price of fuel leading to an increase in operation costs of vehicles, motorbikes and generators. In the final year of the project 2008 there was a drastic increase in the price of milled rice making people disgruntle and creating room for mixed feelings amongst the citizens of the country. This led to an increase in the cost of labor and that of rice seed, which in turn led to reduced acreage of farmers

especially those who rely heavily on hired labor. Therefore there is need for continued support to farmers to increase production even more if food security is to be achieved.

### 6.5 Environmental Factors

The weather conditions during the life of the program had been fluctuating which negatively affected FFS activities. In FY07 especially, the rainfall was erratic, with Kono District experiencing heavier than average rainfall, and Koinadugu District experiencing delays in the start of the rainy season. In Kono this resulted in reduced attendance of FFS members at meetings and increased difficulty of movement for people and goods between chiefdoms and markets. All of this greatly affected their earning power during the period. The performance of some crops especially cereals was affected by the heavy down pour of rain during the planting and harvesting seasons. Germination rates declined and portions of some upland farms were washed away. In Koinadugu the delay in the rains delayed the planting of upland rice, thus stretching the hungry season. In 2008, the rains came earlier than usual in Koinadugu, which affected the burning<sup>4</sup> of uplands thus leading to reduced acreage of upland rice. 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.

### 6.6 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 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

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<sup>4</sup> Burning as a way of land preparation and reduction of labour cost is widely practised in Sierra Leone.

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 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 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.

#### 6.7 Least Successful Elements

Some CORAD partners had challenges with the savings aspect of the VSL&A. Over the life of the program, the established savings groups saved very little and therefore could not start loan payment. Additionally, coordination meeting with stakeholders especially at mezzo level was a

challenge 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 for all authorities and NGOs to attend. The attendance of authorities is gradually improving.

The LINKS strategy that appears to be least successful is the development of small transport solutions. No local prototype that could be easily fabricated was developed; as such the imported tricycles were adopted. The power tillers had mechanical problems that could not be resolved because the spare parts are not available. A lesson learned from this was that it is essential to start first with manufacturers regarding the manufacture of affordable spare parts.

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.

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.

#### 6.8 Other Lessons Learned

WV needs to work intensively with FFS groups/marketing associations to not only improve crop management practices, but also to be better organized and professionally conduct their business. Promoting behavior change cannot be achieved overnight, particularly among adults, young men and women considering that they are revisiting their modus operandi over years of farming. Effective behavior change requires experiential learning - learning by doing, followed by technical support to reinforce experiences. Community facilitators have proved useful in enhancing the adoption of GAPs by working with farmers and communities and linking up with the field agents for technical backstopping. However fewer technologies have been adopted and applied by farmers. This could be related to the risk aversion that resource-poor farmers have come to be known for. The LINKS Extension program at this stage has helped farmers visualize how improved technologies and practices will reduce costs while increasing yields. FFS and marketing associations are now confident that investments in labor and inputs will be pay off through increased farm incomes, i.e. sales and profits. This has enabled the farmer groups to mobilize financial resources needed to continue to invest in farm production, processing and marketing. Furthermore building and strengthening FFS' market information systems and linking them to mezzoo and national level markets will enhance sustainability with opportunities and resources to make smart production and marketing decisions.

CORAD recognized the need to identify most of the potential constraints that exist in the agricultural input value chain and how these constraints affect all the different actors along the chain. At the value chain stakeholders workshop, farmers groups recognized the need to develop the ability to recognize and manage problems with forecasting demand for inputs and aggregating input demand to attract supplier attention. Discussions around this issue elicited

different potential solutions to address this constraint with a general consensus on the rural stockiest training and link to public and private providers of services and agricultural inputs.

Encouraging the local radios to devise sustainable ways to maintain the local agriculture radio programs is a constant challenge as the local radios focus on revenue generating programs as opposed to community programming that is free.

Agricultural fairs and shows have been absent in LINKs targeted the districts for over 20 years. Encouraging local communities to revive, design and implement annual agriculture fairs after a long break takes a lot of time and mobilization that is cost intensive but well worth the investment and support provided by LINKs as evidenced by the high levels of attendance at fairs so far held in Kabala and Koinadugu.

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 newspapers 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.

## VII. COORDINATION ISSUES

Since the inception of LINKS, CORAD partners have built upon their prior working relationships under the DRP to effectively coordinate the consortium's activities. Entities such as the Coordination and Compliance Unit (CCU) and the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit have assisted the Chief of Party in effectively tracking and documenting the activities under LINKS, promising practices, and success stories. Technical Working Groups have facilitated the dissemination of information and the sharing of technical information between partners. Although the TORs for these working groups have been reviewed and revised as needed, the concept of inter-agency working groups has been a positive experience for the LINKS partners, and one that CORAD continues to utilize under the Title II Livelihood Enhancement and Asset Development (LEAD) project.

One key relationship that has contributed to the overall success of the LINKS project is between CORAD partner CRS and 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 CARE also allied with the Institute of Agricultural Research on the cultivation and promotion of the Irish Potato production in Koinadugu. In particular, the institute investigated the diseases that were negatively impacting the cultivation of this crop; the institute is in the process of seeking funding to carry out more research on this crop to assist farmers in coming up with solutions to the disease and pest problem.

At the close of LINKS, CORAD partners worked with their communities to ensure that all stakeholders understood that the LINKS program was coming to an end, and to shore up the mechanisms that had been put into place to ensure the sustainability of the key project structures and capacities. Close out ceremonies have occurred in all operational chiefdoms; in several places, such as in "the three Kissis" in eastern Kailahun District, these were linked to FFS graduation ceremonies to provide an opportunity for CORAD stakeholders, local leaders, and community members an opportunity to celebrate the gains of the LINKS project. These ceremonies were an occasion to celebrate as well as emphasize the roles of different groups in ensuring sustainability.

Close out activities taking place in communities were supplemented by radio broadcasts in the last months of the project that highlighted program activities, achievements, and impacts and informed community members of the end of LINKS. Particularly successful beneficiaries were also provided with the opportunity to give their testimonials regarding how activities such as VS&Ls had positively impacted their lives.

## VIII. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### 8.1 Improvements in Monitoring

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 validated compliance and monitoring at the field level. The revamped Compliance and Monitoring Visits (CMVs) had a similar Terms of Reference to previously, but CORAD introduced a scorecard instrument that provides easy-to-action visual results. The CMV scorecard was in part based on USAID's Data Quality Assessment (DQA) process, to ensure that the information provided by CORAD is accurate and reliable. CORAD also reviewed the monitoring forms used by partner agencies for LINKS, and introduced greater standardization, to facilitate quality management by the M&E Unit. The lessons learned from the monitoring and evaluation of LINKS have been applied to the LEAD project as well.

### 8.2 USAID's Final Evaluation (2007)

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 postpone 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.

### 8.3 CORAD's Final Evaluation (2008)

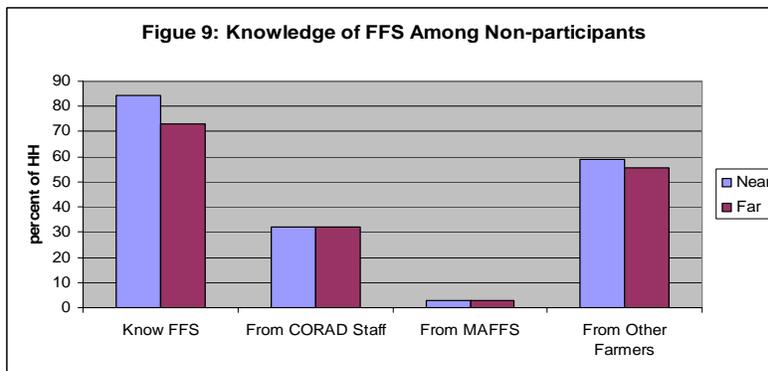
These results were supplemented by CORAD's own Final Evaluation, which took place between May and July 2008 (report released in September 2008). This evaluation, conducted by Enterprise Development Services, was released in two parts. The first part focused solely on issues around agricultural productivity and the Farmer Field Schools in particular, while the second part focused more on the MED portion of LINKS.

The FFS Assessment was particularly significant because it attempted to delve into the true impact of the FFS by determining whether distance was a significant factor in terms of sharing information and lessons learned between FFS members and other farmers. As shown in Figure 9<sup>5</sup> below, more than 80 percent of those near to an FFS were aware of the FFS, and the majority (60 percent) had heard about the FFS from other farmers. Even among those far away from the FFS (defined as more than 25 km), this picture still holds true. When asked what non-participating farmers thought the FFS does, close to 100 percent said that it improved farming and nearly 40 percent said it improved livestock. Nearly three quarters (70 percent) of non-members had visited FFS plots and more than half (63 percent) had tried something from the FFS plot on their own farms.<sup>6</sup> This last piece of information is particularly significant for LINKS, as it demonstrates that the ripple effect of the FFS may be greater than previously supposed.

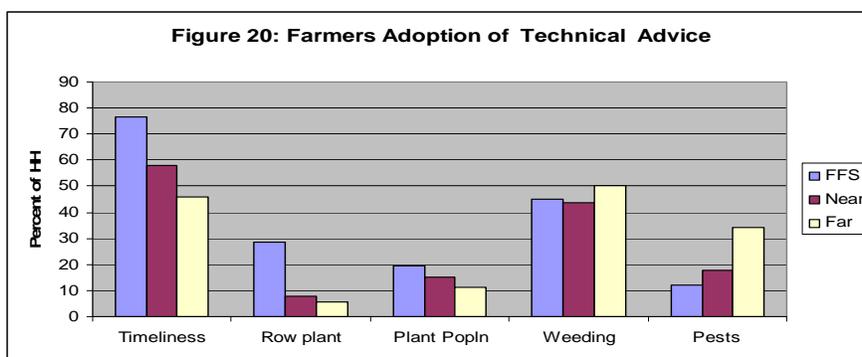
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<sup>5</sup> Numbering is from original report and does not correspond to this EOP Report submission.

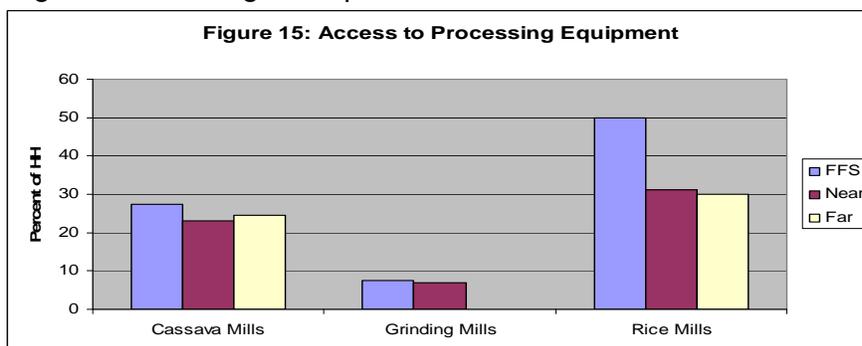
<sup>6</sup> Enterprise Development Services, "Farmer Field School Assessment Report," June 2008, page 11.



Farmers were also found to be adopting technical advice on their plots. As shown in Figure 20, more than 75% of farmers in FFS and between 45-60% of non-FFS members improved the timeliness of their cultivation activities. Yet as noted by EDS, this does not mean that farmers are wholly convinced: “However, the levels of adoption of two of the other key cultural practices – row planting and plant populations, are much lower (20-30% for participants and less than 10% for non-participants), clearly indicating that most farmers are not convinced that the additional labour demand of the interventions is worth the increased yields obtained because of the practices.”<sup>7</sup>



However, not all initiatives under LINKS had the strong positive impact that was desired. Farmers in FFS were not found to have significantly improved access to processing equipment, as shown in Figure 15, with a slight exception for rice mills.



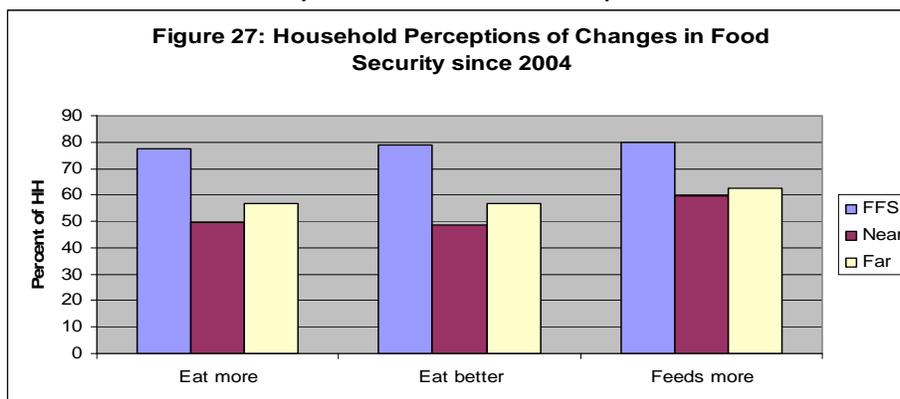
According to the FFS Assessment Report, there is no statistically significant evidence that the FFS has influenced farmers to increase their farm size as there is no statistical difference

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 17.

between FFS members and non-FFS members. However, there is clear evidence that the crop yield of selected crops has increased. Quoting from the FFS Assessment Report:

While FFS participants have reported yield increases of 62-82% in their principal crop fields, and non-participants who know of the FFS and have adopted the practices have achieved average yield increases generally above 50%, non-participants with no knowledge and contacts with the FFS have only recorded yield increases of 10-15% since 2004. Thus, the FFS have had a major impact on crop productivity in the communities, and the impact has not been restricted only to participants in the FFS.<sup>8</sup>

This heartening evidence reinforced CORAD’s belief in the strength of the FFS model; however, EDS notes that the battle for food security is not yet won. Although, as shown in Figure 27 below, farmers do think that their household eats more and better food and feeds more people, they nonetheless continue to worry about their food security.



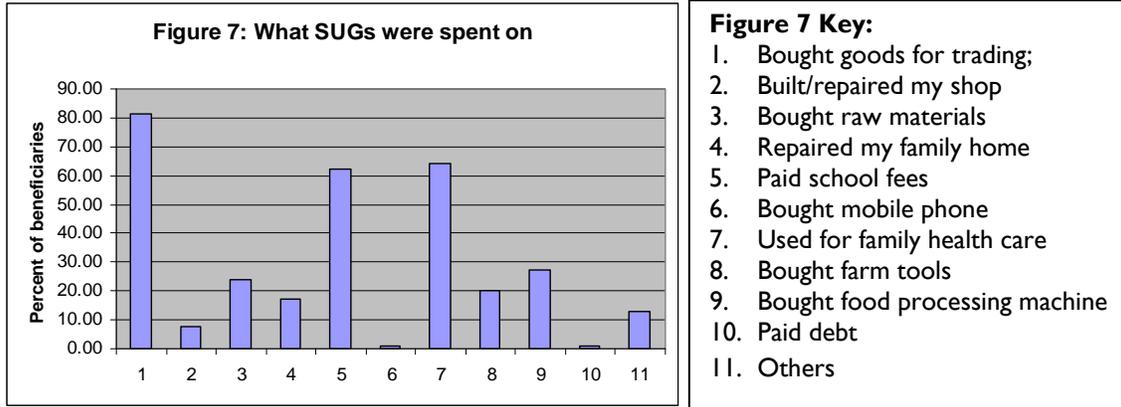
In terms of MED, EDS discovered that the majority of business management trainees found the training useful for running their businesses, citing such benefits as teaching them how to plan for their businesses and keep records, how to deal with customers, and about the importance of savings. However, only 11 percent of respondents noted that the training had helped them to understand the importance of operating bank accounts, and only one percent mentioned that it helped them to appreciate better the importance of dealing with banks. As EDS notes, “Considering the need to encourage savings mobilization in the economy and the use of banking facilities by entrepreneurs, even in the informal sector, more emphasis needs to be put on these two aspects of business practices/skills for entrepreneurs at all levels.”<sup>9</sup> Record keeping was similarly problematic: 2.5 percent of trainees kept records before the trainings, compared to 5 percent afterwards. Although this does indicate that the trainings doubled the number of people keeping records, the final percentage of people undertaking this important step is still direly low.

Looking at the Start Up Grants, the Final Evaluation found that four out of five people (81 percent) surveyed had indeed applied these funds to starting businesses, as shown in Figure 7 below. However, the survey made clear that nothing happens in a vacuum; people cannot utilize funds as intended unless there is governmental support in such key sectors as health care and education. A total of 62 percent of respondents had spent part of the funds received on school fees; 64 percent had spent funds on health care. While it is significant that the majority did

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 21.

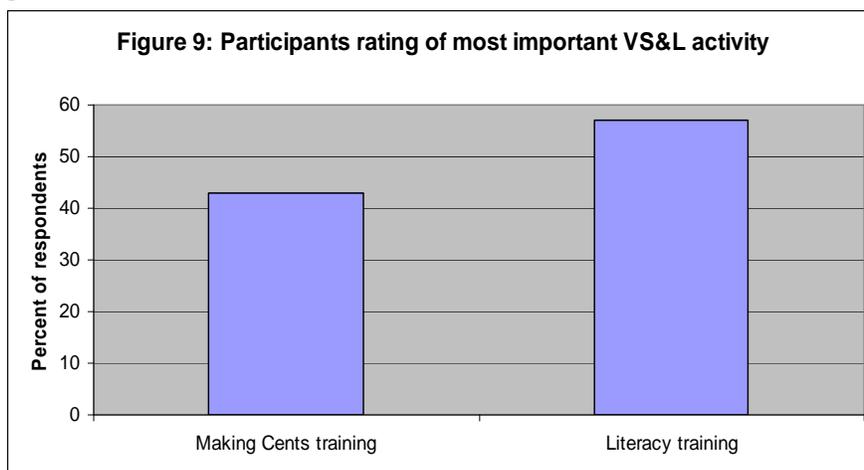
<sup>9</sup> Enterprise Development Services, “LINKS Final Evaluation Report,” September 2008. Page 9.

spend the funds as intended, some grantees may not have been able to reap the full benefit from their grants due to other financial commitments.



EDS also found that Finance Salone is a strong micro-finance institution (MFI) with sound business practices: their granting schemes reward successful grant holders and their MIS contributes to successful monitoring of loan recipients. Although Finance Salone is offering competitive terms, their outreach is currently limited to urban areas and their peri-urban surroundings. This last point has significantly reduced the impact that Finance Salone has had in the LINKS operational areas. EDS also found that although Finance Salone had exceeded the number of loans disbursed, repeat lending to the same recipients meant that they had not met the quota of distributing loans to at least 6,000 people, reaching only 2,377 recipients.

In terms of the VS&L activities, the Final Evaluation noted that people were generally satisfied with these activities, but were not satisfied that not all VS&L members received start up grants. The majority of beneficiaries regarded the literacy aspects as the most significant activity that had “opened their eyes,” although the Making Cents Training was noted by a strong minority, as shown in Figure 9.<sup>10</sup>



On the whole, these two evaluations provide excellent evidence of the progress made in key areas by the LINKS project, as well as areas still to be addressed by future projects. The full reports have already been presented to the local USAID mission, and are otherwise available upon request from CORAD.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

## **XII. ANNEXES**

### **I. Annex One: Indicators of Performance Tracking Table**

*Please refer to attached Excel spreadsheet.*