

**A PILOT PROJECT ON THE COMMERCIALIZATION AND
PROMOTION OF GINGER PRODUCED BY LOW-INCOME
COMMUNITIES IN SIERRA LEONE**

**A paper contributed by the
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CASE STUDY: PILOT PROJECT ON THE COMMERCIALIZATION AND PROMOTION OF GINGER PRODUCED BY LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Background

Ginger has been grown in Sierra Leone for decades and was one of the major crops of the country since the early 1950s and up to the late 1970s. However, ginger production fell drastically because of continuous civil war, poor production techniques, and a market shift in preference for South East Asian ginger varieties.

Despite these and other difficulties, the Government of Sierra Leone, determined to reduce poverty and increase export-led economic growth, identified ginger as a potential export product worthy of investment and export promotion on the basis of successful trials and analyses. It was in this context that the Sierra Leone Export Development and Investment Corporation (SLEDIC), on behalf of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and, its implementing agency, the International Trade Centre (ITC) undertook a ginger production Pilot Project in 1997.

The aim of the project is to develop the production and export of ginger within Sierra Leone. In order to achieve this aim, improved ginger seed varieties from Thailand were procured and planted by Sierra Leone farmers and UNDP/ITC personnel were providing technical training. Success of the project was prevented only 4 weeks after its inception by an upsurge in Sierra Leone's 11-year civil conflict (1991 – 2002). UNDP/ITC personnel were forced to evacuate Sierra Leone and the project was thereafter abandoned.

In 2002, the civil war ended and a majority of farmers gradually resettled and resumed farming activities at a limited production levels. Since, the civil war had destroyed 45% of the state infrastructure and 66% of private enterprises – there was therefore a grave need for the massive rehabilitation of all sectors and in particular the agricultural sector which employs a significant percentage of women and youth in Agro-food processing small scale industries.

The Government of Sierra Leone successfully requested a donation of improved, high-yielding ginger seeds from the Government of the People's Republic of China. Accordingly, in 2003 the Chinese government, under a special grant to Sierra Leone provided 53.3 metric tons (MT) of the improved variety of ginger. The Government attempted to replicate the 1997 project by distributing the donated Chinese variety and providing various training and field demonstrations. Unfortunately, because of bad agricultural practices and inexperience with the improved variety, the harvest of this attempt was relatively poor.

Against this background, in October 2003, the Ministry of Trade and Industry again successfully secured the technical assistance of ITC to participate in developing a programme aimed at re-launching the production and export of ginger. ITC quickly responded to the clear capacity building needs of Sierra Leone and designed the proposed project in the context of ITC's Export-led Poverty Reduction Programme (EPRP). EPRP is an ITC programme that is implemented in several countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America with the aim of helping small-scale farmers to be able to better sell their products to foreign markets by linking them with domestic exporting companies.

Partners

The ginger farmers, now in excess of 11,000, are key partners to the ginger production and export project and are responsible for the cultivation, production and sale of export quality ginger to contractually bound private sector entities, as well as other buying agents.

The local private sector exporters serve as the crucial link to a direct and ready international ginger market. At this time, the exporters are Dalcon International and another private company formed under the auspices of the Cotton Tree Foundation (Cotton Tree), a community based local NGO, with vast

experience in ginger cultivation as well as other agricultural products with potential for value adding and export.

The Government of Sierra Leone plays an important role in designing and formulating policies geared towards creating a national export awareness and facilitating increased production of export crops. SLEDIC acts as the hosting agency for the project and closely monitors and evaluates the implementation and progress of the project in close collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food Security (MAFFS). MAFFS generally represents the farmers' interests through, inter alia, farming inputs distribution, land preparation, assisting in farmer mobilization, training and selection of agronomists and extension workers, and coordination of all training sessions, for both current and potential farmers and technical personnel.

Finally, the ITC supports the project from inception to implementation. It provides technical and financial input, procures technical services such as consultants, market outlets and intelligence and follows-up the progress and success thereof.

Project Implementation

The role of the Government of Sierra Leone:

- Sensitization and mobilization of ginger farmers. This entails a comprehensive national export awareness programme designed to inform and educate farmers on the economic importance and profitability of developing products for export.
- Acquisition, transportation and distribution of improved variety ginger seeds.
- Monitoring of ginger cultivation and production. Monitoring is co-jointly supervised by SLEDIC and MAFFS, utilizing extension field agents of the Agriculture Ministry stationed in project locations. Extension workers and field agents monitor farms and advice on land preparation, selection of suitable planting material, sowing, weeding, pest and disease control, harvesting techniques and storage.
- Evaluation of ginger cultivation and production. Evaluation relates to:
 1. Soil suitability and preparation – is soil friable, loamy, with desired mulch mix/compost/vermin compost
 2. Ridge height and width – are ridges of uniform height, width, free of sticks, stones and other impediments
 3. Sprouting and growth – are sprouting percentages, rhizome height and leaf girth consistent with the particular variety
 4. Shade - are shades sufficient to the degree of sunlight, percentage of plants destroyed by sunburn, are plants strong and healthy.
 5. Waterlogging – suitability of drainage to prevent excess water causing rhizome rot and development of aflatoxins
 6. Disease and pest control – incidence of borers and pests/diseases
 7. Harvest and storage – are harvest with no wound scares, non fibrous

The role of the Private Sector:

- The private sector is essentially exporters, buying agents, who purchase ginger harvest at farm gate with ready cash. The private sector occasionally pre finances farmers with cash, farm tools, food items and other necessities which may include recycled packaging materials (jute bags, cartons), hanging scales for on-site weighing to determine weight and price.
- The private sector may have a contractual agreement with farmers or a joint venture that guarantees a better price. The private sector conducts refresher training on all aspects from land preparation to post harvest processes and in some cases provides additional rootstock for farmers.
- The farmers grow their crops with good hygiene methods avoiding use of chemical fertilizers, sow and harvest in time, controls weeds and pests to derive the best possible price for the product.

ITC's technical assistance and capacity building contribution:

- Financing and facilitating expert-led training and workshops on export quality ginger production
- Financing and facilitating visits to Sierra Leone by international spice consultants who give relevant advice and recommendations on improving the ginger production project
- Financing the provision of extension services
- Sponsoring an ITC international spice consultant-led India study tour for 2 Sierra Leone consultants
- Supply of necessary equipment for ginger project and its management (e.g. Hanging scales, drying floors, bikes, mobile phones, etc)

Impact and Benefits

The first and most apparent impact is the resumption of economic activity that ensures income to the farmers with a potential of improved standing of living and community development with improved production. The ultimate desired impact is job creation, self-reliance and poverty alleviation. Within 2-3 seasons farmers will with improved incomes, have better homes, improved health and offer better education to their children.

Exports

The project is very cost effective vis-à-vis its impact and turn around time. The national average reflected a yield of 4:1 and in certain areas there was even 6:1 and 8:1 yield as at January 2006. With this yield, within only 3 years, Sierra Leonean farmers were able to successfully cultivate and export ginger to international markets through local exporters, namely Cotton Tree and Dalcon International. In May 2006, the first export of about 22 tons, or 2 containers, were shipped (local and improved variety) to the Netherlands and the UK.

Increased Farmer Motivation

Because of the good product selection, farmers are much more motivated to cultivate export quality ginger as they have now received an income from the sale of their cultivation for the first time in a long while. Evidence of this enthusiasm can be found in the fact that the improved variety cannot be found anywhere in the local markets as all the farmers are eager to export it all and reserve the good rootstock for replanting.

Job Creation

The project benefits over 10,000 farmers, and has created 150 new jobs for processors, 30 new jobs for foremen, loaders, transporters, etc. Women, who make up 66% of the total agricultural force, have been the primary beneficiaries of this project as they are carrying out many of the new jobs such as ginger scraping and drying. Pre-shipment expenses have also generated income for the Government through ports charges, shipping companies and even the media, which has given extensive coverage to Sierra Leone's re-entry into ginger export market.

Ginger of Good Export Quality

Successful export after only 3 years of cultivation was also accompanied by favourable preliminary tests of the first ginger export and samples. In fact, enquiries have also been made to SLEDIC from 11 potential importer countries including Germany, Holland, Nigeria, the UK and India. Tests indicate that the exported ginger is healthy and of good quality; free of aflatoxins; and within the prescribed reference parameters in all other areas of the European Spice Association standards. Additionally, the local variety has been confirmed to have higher oil content and therefore suitable for oil and oleoresin extraction.

Capacity building

The ITC technical support has developed capacity within SLEDIC, the Ministry of Agriculture and the farmers. For example, the India study tour increased awareness about market possibilities for the local variety of ginger – which is easily sourced and cultivated in acreages of more than 5 times the present acreage of the improved variety. Also, the mobile phones and bikes provided by ITC, has made data

collection and dissemination, as well as project monitoring and evaluation much easier and timely particularly in the rainy season when typically no data or monitoring was being previously carried out.

Outlook

Further seed acquisition and full capacity cultivation

Currently, ginger cultivation is limited by the availability of seeds. Only 6,500 acres out of a possible 30,000 acres in Moyamba and Kambia are currently under cultivation. Accordingly, it is planned that by the middle of 2007, at least 50 tons of seeds will be secured which will then lead to full capacity cultivation within 5 to 7 years.

Further Post-harvest training

SLEDIC has expressed that the project and ITC's intervention have been so successful, that the capacity of the farmers are at sustainable levels with regard to pre-harvest knowledge and expertise. Accordingly, only post-harvest training is further required by the farmers, who would benefit from additional training on the processes involved in converting the harvest to export quality ginger.

Technical Cooperation among developing countries

With a view to encouraging technical cooperation among developing countries, EPRP observers of the Kenyan Export-led Poverty Reduction programme (EPRP) chilli and the Sierra Leonean ginger projects will exchange places with a view to observing, learning and replicating the project models in their respective countries. In this regard, there will be particular emphasis placed on whether the 'social enterprise' (or 'community development') training applied in Kenya will be useful to the farmers from Sierra Leone.

South-South Cooperation

Linkages have been established between the Kenya Chilli programme and the Sierra Leone ginger project. This linkage strategy by ITC appears to have interesting possibilities for the future.

Competition aside, this linkage between Kenya and Sierra Leone has the potential for increased intra-African trade, regional integration and generally enhance South-South cooperation. Kenya Airways now operate a direct flight to Freetown. This alone will enhance Sierra Leone's participation in trade fairs and exhibitions in Kenya and vice versa.

Favourable budget consideration

The success of the project has been well received by the Government of Sierra Leone and has even been incorporated into the National Food Security Programme. It is therefore expected that request for government budget support by SLEDIC would receive favourable and timely consideration.