



SARD-SC

Support to Agricultural Research for Development of Strategic Crops in Africa

Special Newsletter

On gender outcome harvesting in Sierra Leone



SARD-SC project: changing lives and giving women a voice in Sierra Leone

The SARD-SC project conducted a ten-day gender outcomes harvesting in Sierra Leone recently to assess how the project has contributed to economic and social empowerment of women organized around cassava processing units and how this achievement reinforced complementarities between men and women engaged in cassava value chain as equal partners. It was also to assess how the beneficiaries of project interventions have brought about social developmental outcomes.

Agriculture is the main stay of the country and economy, with a subsistence farming system. A larger number of the farmers are women, who constitute 70 percent of the labor force in cultivation, harvesting, food production, processing, and marketing. Cassava is the staple food. It is essential for food security and serves as a source of income for farmers. Since the war ended in 2002, IITA and other development agencies have contributed their quota to develop the country's agriculture and economy following the ravages of the war.



A group of cassava processors

The SARD-SC project, since its inception in 2012, has also been contributing to the development of the value chain of cassava, through technical backstopping and the introduction of new innovations and technology such as improved quality of cassava stems to farmers, training and capacity development of people on better agronomic practices, and construction of four processing centers in the four districts of Sierra Leone.

However, four years after, there is a need to examine the project's scorecard in Sierra Leone. How the project is reducing poverty in households and contributing to enhancing food security is a pertinent question. A more imperative question is the impact the project is making on poverty reduction, generation of income controlled by women and translation of this into household food and nutritional security, asset building and investment on social developmental goals for the wellbeing of future generations. To find answers to this question and many more, Dr Amare Tegbaru, the SARD-SC Gender Specialist, led a team of the project staff on a ten-day gender outcome and harvesting mission to Sierra Leone. The team comprised Dr. Marie Yomeni, Cassava Commodity Specialist; Dr. Paul Dontsop Nguezet, Project Impact Economist; Bode Olaoluwa, Audio-Visual Manager; Adebola Adewole, Project Communication Officer; Amato Masirika, Mr Slyvanus Fannah, Demby Mamakor, and Mr. Lansana Sesay from SLARI.



Coconut gari produced by women cassava processors

Dr Tegbaru said the gender outcome harvesting mission was to assess the

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A processor standing with Dr. Paul Donsop, Project Impact Economist

impact of the project in all its ramifications on the extent it has helped to reduce poverty among women cassava processors, and how the introduction of new agricultural innovations and technology by the project, in collaboration with partners, has increased their productivity and consequently contributed to enhancing food security and income, changing gender roles, and decision making. "We want to see the outcomes and early impact of the project on women cassava processors and their livelihoods, uncover the underrecognized roles of women in agricultural production that goes beyond rural subsistence, and provide robust evidence of their important contributions in cassava value chains in particular as: (1) farm owners and managers of processing (units) factories; (2) processors and product developers; (3) marketers of cassava products; and (4) leaders and investors in community developments. For this we have to visit a number of places—cassava processing centers built and equipped by IITA and SARD-SC project, and UPoCA sites."

The team traversed the length and breadth of the Sierra Leone visiting cassava processing centers and UPoCA sites, and holding focal group discussions and interviews in Makeni, Bo district, Magbenyani, Kaptema and Sanyadelu, in the north, south, and eastern part of the country. The impact of the project can be seen in the all the cassava centers visited in the resourcefulness of the women to add value to cassava crops thereby generating new and innovative cassava products introduced to their market. "This could not have been possible, said Dr. Yomeni, without the capacity development training given to the women by the project." The project has taught them how to add value to cassava crops. In this country,

cassava used to be processed into only a few traditional foods such fufu and gari, but with the introduction of new technology, the women are now processing cassava into starch and HQCF, coconut gari, flour, odorless fufu, mushrooms from cassava peels, and sundry other products.

Interestingly, cassava processing has taken on a toga of a country-wide industry for women in Sierra Leone; many of these centers have women working, operating equipment, and carrying out the whole gamut of cassava processing of peeling, washing, grating, pressing, sieving, frying, and drying. Cassava cultivation and processing is taken very seriously in the country because it is a very lucrative business. Therefore, the women are organized into groups or cooperatives in their communities, with individuals taking up specified different roles but working assiduously and communally to

realize the same goal of self-reliance, food security, and improved income.

The ten-day mission took the team to many processing centers in all the districts of the country. Interviews were held with the women on their cassava cultivation to processing and the marketing of cassava products which have become a good source of income for them. The first visit took the team to Makeni in the northern part of the country where there was a strong association of women cassava processors known as the Starch Women's Group also known as Tamaraneh Starch Processors.

The association, consisting of 35 members, is based in Makeni Town and was established in 2013. Led by Kadiatu Koroma, the group specializes in processing cassava to starch which is a lucrative business, fetching them good money which some of them have used to build modest houses. Fatimah Fornah, a member of the group and the grater of the group with a small grating machine, could not hide her joy as a result of improved income for grating for the group. Her income, Fornah said, had increased to 60000 Lyons a day from 2000. For Fornah and others, the SARD-SC project has been a life changing experience.

Everywhere the team went, they were received and welcomed with singing and dancing. The women processors showed their appreciation to the team and the IITA/SARD-SC project for its contribution to enhancing their income and consequently improving their standard of living. Their improved status in the community has earned them respect and a voice in their respective homes; they are no longer dependent on their husbands for money.



Fatimah Fornah, Tamaraneh starch processors' cassava root grinder

INTERVIEW

The mission has uncovered the under-recognised roles of women in agriculture - Dr. Tegbaru

Dr Amare Tegbaru, SARD-SC Project Gender Specialist, shares his views on the gender outcome harvesting mission of the project in Sierra Leone.



Dr Amare Tegbaru

What is the gender outcome mission about?

This is the mission that the DG Dr Nteranya Sanginga assigned us to come to Sierra Leone and document by reviewing the outcomes or early impact of the SARD-SC project that superseded the former UPOCA project. We were to assess the project in all its ramifications on the extent it has helped to reduce poverty among women cassava processors and how the introduction of new agricultural innovations and technology by the project, in collaboration with partners, has increased their productivity and consequently contributed to enhancing food security and income, thus changing gender roles and decision making.

What does the mission set out to achieve?

The mission has actually achieved what it set out to achieve. The ten-day mission that took the team to many processing centers in all the districts of the country has provided robust evidences of change in the lives of women cassava processors and their livelihoods. It has uncovered the under-recognized roles of women in agricultural production that goes beyond rural subsistence and provided tangible and measurable indicators of how the project and its partners have contributed to empowering women as farm owners and managers of processing (units) factories; processors and product developers;

marketers of cassava products; leaders; and investors in community developments. The mission has made a focused documentation on women's (without excluding men) participation in the cassava value chain and what the IITA/SARD-SC project has contributed to the training and capacity building, product development and farm management, value addition processing, and how they have established their own independent cassava-processing unit, invested their incomes on assets, schools, and community development.

Don't you think the increasing empowerment of women may generate issues between men and their wives?

In fact, in almost all the different communities we visited with cassava processing centers where women are in the majority, what we actually heard was that despite increased income, there is still mutual respect between husband and wife. We also interviewed some key men in the centers on how they see their wives' improved status of financial independence. The consensus of opinion was that they are very happy to see that their women are now empowered financially. It is not about creating any disharmony in families; what we are trying to do is to ensure that men and women respect each other and also respect what each other does. Now we see more women bringing more money to the family. It has, in a way, in fact empowered the men. We have tried to be careful so that IITA and its partners engage men in the dialog to support women's participation in technology development and adoption. We also encourage the women to work closely with men as a way of complementing each other.

How can you assess the working relationship between the women and men in the centers?

Without making any generalizations, I will like to refer to the interviews we conducted with the few men in the processing centers who told us that "they are happy working with the women," unlike the men who have the problem of ego and jealousy. The men interviewed said "women respect the knowledge they share with them which helps them to be productive." So these are some of the evidences documented on changing the perception of men, including redefinition of roles which we saw in the processing centers that can be positively attributed to evidences of change in gender relations. The complementarity of roles rather than rivalry, we saw, actually cements friendship; balance and harmony grow as men and women work together in the community.

What does this gender harvest activity mean to IITA overall gender strategies?

To IITA, when we talk about empowering women, addressing gender gaps and issues of disparity between men and women—in terms of access to knowledge, income, decision making—it is not just a rhetoric or a politically correct statement. We are going to generate solid evidence that IITA is going to be proud of, documenting how both men and women have benefited, especially how women have been empowered through the various technologies introduced and our intervention. The donor will also see the value of its investment; we are going to document and produce a video which IITA or the director-general will give to AfDB saying "this is the value of your money" so that we can justify now if it wants to scale out or bring more investment and expand its impact. Thank you.



SARD-SC team with local fabricator of cassava processing equipment



CASSAVA

Cassava, a money spinning and life-changing crop

Like in every society in Africa, women, especially, are trapped in poverty, partly due to persistent norms of social exclusion (MAFFS 2010).Little wonder, they are the most vulnerable to any upheaval in their lives, be it personal, familial or social, suffering untold hardship in a society that has already consigned them to the unenviable lower rungs of the social ladder, as the poorest of the poor. That is the more reason why many governments and organizations make conscious efforts to ensure that women are empowered for financial self-reliance in a bid to reduce poverty among them.

In line with the bid, the IITA/SARD-SC project's intervention in the area of establishing processing centers in Sierra Leone, among other things, seeks to ensure nutrition and food security in many Regional Membership Countries (RMCs) of the African Development Bank. After some years of intervention in Sierra Leone, it was time to conduct a gender outcome harvesting mission as a way to document the outcomes or early impact of the cassava value chain of the SARD-SC project. The mission focused on women organized around cassava processing centers. Hence, the team led by Dr Amare Tegbaru, Project Gender Specialist, traversed the length and breadth of the country, visiting project built or assisted cassava processing centers to assess the project in all ramifications on the extent it has helped to reduce poverty among women cassava processors. And also how the introduction of new agricultural innovations and technology by the project in collaboration with partners has increased their productivity and consequently contributed to enhancing food security and



cassava roots

income, changing gender roles and decision making. The ten-day mission took us to six cassava processing centers located in the north, south, and eastern part of the country.

The study was conducted in three of the four regions of Sierra Leone, and places visited were Bo district, Kailahun, and Pujehun, (south), Kanema (east), and Makeni (North). The methodology used was Focus Group Discussion and individual (key informant) interview. The sample covered 60 individual women drawn from six women groups (different age groups, level of participation, and specific roles). Only six processing centers were selected for data collection based on their operation without interruption since they were established.

Importance of cassava as a crop of hope

In Sierra Leone, even though rice has always been the major food of the people, cassava is now the second staple food after

rice. Cassava is regarded as the “second diamond.” This is as a result of the activities of IITA, the SARD-SC project, and other international partners which have elevated the crop from obscurity to national prominence. Cassava has become a money spinning crop for the people, especially the women whose means of livelihood now depend on processing it into different products. Madam Agnes Mamigbane, widow and leader of the Magbeyani Women Processors, located in Bo district, says cassava gives hope to widows who are in a critical condition. Articulating the importance of cassava, Magbeyani says: “Rice was my husband, but dead. Cassava is my boyfriend who can give me so many things.”



Agnes Mamigbane

“Rice was my husband, but dead. Cassava is my boyfriend who can give me so many things.”



Products of the Tamaraneh Starch processors

The situation is the same for Memuna Slivalie, a processor, who describes cassava as “a crop of hope,” that is, a crop which gave her hope in her times of despair. Having lost her husband at a young age to Ebola, and with four children to feed with no means of livelihood, she said “cassava restored my hope in life.” “Cassava is such a money spinning crop; I make money from

selling the leaves and roots, and make eba and fufu in my small restaurant. I also plant it and I am able to send my children to school. One has just finished WASC, and is planning to attend Njala University”.

Cassava’s prominence in the country arose from the value addition that has been

facilitated by several trainings, capacity development, and technical backstopping of the women by the IITA/SARD-SC project and other partners like UPoCA , over the years. The most important cassava-based products in the country include: gari, starch, High Quality Cassava Flour (HQCF), fufu, and cassava chips.



Memuna Slivalie



A man assisting the women to press the cassava mash



Gari packaged into 25 kg bag



Focus group discussion in Kpatema

Visit to Six Processing Centers

The team's visit to the processing centers was quite an eye opener. It showed how far-reaching the impact and activities of the project have been in the area of adding value to cassava crops which have gone a long way to turn around the lives of the ordinary women and improve nutrition and food security in the country. Starting off at Makeni, up to the northern part of the country, the women are organized into strong associations as farmers, cassava processors, and traders of their products. The Tamaraneh Women Starch Processors based in Makeni, process cassava into high quality starch and cassava flour which they sell to people outside Makeni. This association was formed in 2013 with 35 members and with Kadiatu Koroma as the chairperson. The membership of the association is as diffused as one can imagine comprising a teacher, machine operator, secretary, treasurer, marketer, farmers, and a host of others.

Another group is the Muamia Women Association located in Koribondo. The leader, Madam Hawa Bio, superintends over 30 women who process cassava into HQCF, starch, fufu, and a new innovative product called "coconut gari" "IITA is building on what UPoCA has done for us in this factory, SARD-SC had given a lot of equipment, and the project has helped so much. Our operation is mechanized, we have machine sealers for our products and they have taught us how make other new products from cassava such as chin-chin, biscuits, cakes, and mushrooms." Bio said.

The Magbeyani Women Development Association in Bo District, comprised 50 members; 40 women and 10 men whose

roles are distinct and yet complementary for the benefit of the factory where they plant cassava and process it into gari. They



Processing center in Kpatema



Processing center in Sandeyallu



Hope village processing center, Makeni

collectively own large acres of cassava farm along with their individual acres. The cassava processing center in Kpatema, led by Sister Bernadette, a Nigerian Reverend Sister, though built by the Catholic Mission has been a long-time recipient of the project's technical and agricultural technologies just like the others. Sister Bernadette said her greatest joy was to gather the local women into the association for their personal and collective development. The highly elated sister announced to the team that the assistance of IITA to the processing center

had enabled the team to win a prize in Ireland and they are now proud owners of 49 acres of cassava farm.

The last cassava processing center visited is in the northern part of Sierra Leone, Makeni. It was built by an international organization and is administered by Dr Jonathan Bert, an American. He retired recently from the US government "as a research scientist now I am the CEO and President of Hope Village Public Charity working here in Sierra Leone. We came here to find a

way to reduce poverty among the people by establishing this cassava processing center as an empowerment tool for women because cassava can be harvested year round, that means jobs can be provided year round and that is our goal. Again, we need enough money to carry out programs in the community to improve the schools and the roads; this factory is our way of achieving both goals."



Reverend Sister Bernadette and Neomi Bundu



Dr Jonathan Bert

This is the biggest center with a large number of people working as processors. The center enjoys technical support from IITA/SARD-SC, SLARI, and other partners.



Workers in the processing center in Hope Village

Adoption of SARD-SC innovation technologies impacting women's lives

Introduction of high-yielding cassava varieties

Since the intervention of the project in the country, the project has transformed the cultivation of cassava crops and added value to the crops through the introduction of high-yielding cassava varieties and new agricultural innovations and technologies. In Sierra Leone, the only way the people knew how to eat cassava was through boiling and traditional fufu. However, with the establishment of processing centers and training of the women processors accompanied with technical backstopping, a lot of new products through value addition have been introduced to the country. Gari, which is one of the major products of cassava in Nigeria, has become a staple food in Sierra Leone, after rice.

Korma Koroma, leader of Tangeia Women Association, Sandeyallu, said: "IITA/SARD-SC project has done many things for us, before we used to boil cassava to eat and sometimes as fufu, but now IITA has taught us many things especially gari processing. We now make custard, cakes, and bread from cassava flour and many other things."



Korma Koroma

For Hawa Bio of the Muamia Women Association, she affirmed that she and her group have benefitted a lot from the project, having being taught how to make gari, starch, and mushroom from cassava peels. "Using our own initiative, we now produce coconut gari, blended with soybean, sugar, and



Hawa Bio

coconut which sells very well in banks, offices, schools in Bo district and Freetown, and neighboring countries like Guinea and Liberia."

The women have learned how to process cassava hygienically in a clean environment. For the Magbeyani women, they pointed to the establishment of the processing center as one of the major benefits of the IITA and SARD-SC project. Madame Magbeyani said "they provided the factory for our cassava processing; the factory is fully equipped with machines for easy work, and this has really encouraged us to embark on the cassava business. They also imparted knowledge through various trainings and workshops, and took us to other communities to learn how they grow cassava. The mushroom training was not left out. SARD-SC has imparted knowledge in us that we shall continue use in order to sustain this center.

Training of women on agronomic practices.

Apart from the series of training and workshops the women have benefited from, they also harped on the donation of improved cassava stems to them and the agronomic practices learned from the IITA and SARD-SC project which gives them good cassava yield. They practically demonstrated to the team how they have been taught to plant cassava in rows, spacing, weed control, harvesting, and the reduction of postharvest losses. Madame Bio

said they had jettisoned their former haphazard way of planting, and "we have been able to multiply and plant new varieties given to us by the project; we know when and how to plant and weed. We now have a good knowledge about farming"

The women cannot but be proud and appreciative of the institute's strides in their lives. "The women are proud of IITA because of what they have benefited from the organization and project. Now IITA is like a god to them. Through the lyrics of their songs, they praise IITA for all it has done for them. IITA has introduced improved varieties of cassava to the women, which gives them good yield. They, too, have about 50 acres of cassava farm. We taught them good agronomic practices, spacing in planting and techniques of processing cassava into flour," says Dr. Marie Yomeni, SARD-SC Cassava Commodity Specialist."



Marie Yomeni

"IITA/SARD-SC project has done many things for us, before we used to boil cassava to eat and sometimes as fufu, but now IITA has taught us many things especially gari processing. We now make custard, cakes, and bread from cassava flour and many other things."

IITA/SARD-SC transforming lives

The various interventions of IITA and the SARD-SC project are transforming the lives of the women cassava processors in ways beyond their imagination and wildest dreams. Women who hitherto, had no tangible means of livelihood or at best were small time farmers and impoverished, through being members

of the various processing centers backstopped by IITA are now salary earners. Their lives are changed for the better, because there is a ready market for cassava products within the country. Madam Bio said staff of World Vision readily buy their HQCF, gari, fufu flour. In fact, she is exploring ways of

exporting the coconut gari to America. She informed the team that the Deputy Minister of Agriculture in Sierra Leone had linked the group to a person who resides in America about the possibility of being a point man for them. A sample has been sent for testing, but they were waiting for feedback.



Primary school financially supported by the Muama women cassava processors in Kuribundo



Pupils of the school



House built by Kadijatu Koroma, head of Tamarankeh Starch processors association



Mamasouka Kalloko, a member of the Tamarankeh starch processors association poses in front of her uncompleted building

Sound bites from the women

Issatu Kallon, member of Muamia Women Processors

I have gained a lot of benefits from the factory. I have my own land on which I want to build a house for my children and husband to live in. Even though I do not have a responsible husband, I am able to feed twelve family members through the money I make from the factory. The coordinator chose me as the controller of the factory, I control the making of coconut gari with my colleagues, I also control the fufu and flour production. This gives me pride because it is a product from my hard work, I work late into the night and my boss likes someone who works hard. Life was not easy before the SARD-SC project came. Now things are very easy for me as I make at least 200,000 Lyons within two months apart from my salary. My life is easy now so I take things easy.



Issatu Kallon

Madame Agnes Mamigbane, chairperson of Magbeyane Women Processors

We made a lot of money in 2009 when we sold our first cassava cuttings donated to us by IITA. My love for cassava cuttings started from the profits. In fact now I can't do without planting cassava. If you take me to America, USA, Germany or any African countries without cassava I will come back to Sierra Leone. If not, my life will be short because cassava is now part of me. Rice was my husband, but now dead. Cassava is my boyfriend which can give me so many things. I have two children in the university and I also have a land filled with cassava waiting for harvesting. I pay the factory workers all from the proceeds of the cassava processing center. I also go out to teach people how to make quality gari. The frying bay makes our work fast that was why we built a bigger one. The one we

have before slowed our production. The only things we want the project to help us with are toilets and offices for the factory.



Agnes Mamigbane

Christiana Mbaganli

My work as a cassava processor in this factory provides money for me to feed my family and pay medical and school fees for my children. I have also been able to support my husband at home on the aspect of feeding my children who now like gari more than rice. The Muama women group operates "a local banking system" "we have a box in which we save a certain percentage of our money every month. Out of this money, we can borrow for any emergency or need and then we pay back. This helps us a lot.



Christiana Mbaganli

Jattu James—a processor

The center has helped me a lot; after making the gari we sell it, this is where I get money for my children's school fees, feeding, my personal use, and to support my husband. In this community, since the gari business

started, everybody is busy, we no longer fight each other. My life has changed for good ever since I joined the group because before, I did not have any say in the home. I didn't know anything and had no money of my own. Because I work and have an income now, my opinions count and I am taken more seriously and respected by my husband. We now do things together which has really brought peace to my family.



Jattu James

Kadijatu Koroma, Tamaraneh women starch processors

I gain a lot from cassava processing. Besides sending my kids to school and providing food for the home, I have high level of interaction with the members of the association and today I am proud to present myself as the leader of the group and this is because of the good works I am doing in the group. I have no regret in engaging in this value chain.

I have been able to build a house, the money for the house was from processing cassava and sale of the products—high quality cassava flour and starch. Cassava is everything to me in this world, everything I have been able to achieve in this world comes from the value chain business.



Kadijatu Koroma

Issattu Ngobu, member of Tangeia association.

Before the project I used to work for other people for only 5000 Lyons (US\$1). Now I make enough money to train my three children, feed, and send them to school. I lost my husband to Ebola. I am doing as well as women whose husbands are still alive. They cannot challenge me because I can as well do what they are doing. I can feed my children and pay their school fees. Even when they do not have rice in the house, I make gari for them so they will not sleep hungry. I am very happy because I haven't faced any financial embarrassment since the project started. The only problem we have now is when the equipment has problems but because of the training the SARD-SC project has given us I now have my own cassava farm where I grow the IITA improved cassava variety.



Issattu Ngobu

From the testimonies of the women, it is obvious that the IITA and SARD-SC project has helped to empower them and consequently improved their income generation capacity to the extent that they are now economically self-reliant. This has earned them a voice and respect in their homes.

In his assessment of the gender harvest mission, Dr Tegbaru said "The ten-day mission that took the team to many processing centers in all the districts of the country has provided robust evidences of change in the lives of the women cassava processors and their livelihoods. It has uncovered the under-recognized roles of women in agricultural production that goes beyond rural subsistence and provided tangible and measurable indicators of how the project and its partners have contributed to empowering women as farm owners and managers of processing (units) factories; processors and product developers; marketers of cassava products; and leaders and investors in community development. The mission has made a focused documentation on women's

(without excluding men) participation. Mr Lansana Sesay, Principal Officer, Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), said he had learnt a lot of things from the gender harvest mission, which he had to go back and incorporate into the various innovation platforms we have established. "I know for a fact that people are in need of several technologies which we are yet to train them on."

In summary, the gender outcome harvesting mission is not only about documenting compelling evidences of economic benefits gained by women and how it translates to decision making, it has also documented the complementarities of men and women doing different things but generating income as well as bringing respect to each other. That is what the gender harvest outcome is all about.



Mr. Lasana Sesay, a staff of SLARI interpreting for the team



Mamakor Demby interpreting for the team



Cassava starch on display

Project Coordinator and Supervising Editor - **Dr Chrys Akem**
All stories written by **Adebola Adewole**, SARD-SC project Communication Officer
Production and Printing - IITA Communication Office
Funded by - African Development Bank (AfDB)