

Researchers

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Timeline

2010

Sample Size

8,803 households

Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

Tracking Agricultural Households in Sierra Leone

Abstract

Sierra Leone's government made agriculture its top priority beginning in 2008, but policymakers lacked information about the status of the sector. In August 2009, the Government of Sierra Leone commissioned a large-scale survey to obtain accurate and credible agricultural data that could serve as a baseline for years to come.

Policy Issue

Agriculture is the backbone of Sierra Leone's economy. Agricultural production amounted to about 57 percent of Sierra Leone's GDP in 2011.¹ In 2008, the Government of Sierra Leone made agriculture its top priority. Yet, policymakers lack information about the status of the sector, potentially inhibiting effective policy formulation, planning, implementation and performance evaluation. Therefore, in August 2009, the Government of Sierra Leone requested and supported an independent exercise, the Agricultural Household Tracking Survey (AHTS), to obtain accurate and credible agricultural data that could serve as a baseline for longitudinal analyses of Sierra Leone's progress in agricultural development over the next several years. AHTS was commissioned and overseen by the Office of the President,

and implemented collaboratively by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food Security, IPA/J-PAL.

[This project was not a randomized controlled trial.]

Details of the Intervention

The main goal of the AHTS was to provide accurate and credible information about the agricultural sector in Sierra Leone from the household level. The AHTS was designed to capture decision-making by farmers, data on all aspects of cultivation from planting to harvest, and their access to services, technology, markets and infrastructure.

First, 920 areas were randomly selected out of 9,671 areas used in the 2004 census. Within each area, 10 agricultural households were selected to be interviewed. The total target sample size for the survey was 9,030 agricultural households. Twenty surveyor teams of five people collected data between March and May 2010. Field monitors, district coordinators, and ultimately, the AHTS technical team supervised the data collection.

Results and Policy Lessons

The survey results confirm much existing knowledge about agriculture in Sierra Leone, for example, the national importance attached to rice and cassava, the concentration of cacao and coffee in the East of the country, and the existence of a seasonal hungry season. The results also point to various challenges faced by farming households. If these can be addressed, there is potential for large-scale improvements across the country. The results suggest that policy interventions in the agricultural sector should be intensified and expanded, particularly in the following areas:

- *Technology adoption:* Levels of fertilizer use adoption of improved seed varieties were low, particularly for the main staples, rice and cassava;
- *Access to markets:* Households' access to and interaction with markets remains low. For example, 92 percent of sampled households reported that their main point of sale for threshed rice was at farm gate (64 percent for clean rice). AHTS communities reported an average distance of 6.6 miles to the nearest market and 8.8 miles to the nearest permanent market.
- *Rural infrastructure:* 49 percent of farmers harvesting cereals stored their cereals in a room inhabited by the household; only 13 percent of households used a cement floor for drying. Out of 880 communities surveyed as part the AHTS community module, 25 percent reported a walking distance to the nearest road of more than 30 minutes during the dry season.
- *Financial access:* The majority of farmers with existing loans borrowed on the informal market. Sixty-eight percent of households who did not borrow money said they had nobody to apply to for a loan.

Sources

[1] World Bank. "[Sierra Leone at a Glance.](#)"

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