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The Dynamics Shaping Smallholder Rice Farmers
Household Food Security: A Case study in Mawoma Village,
Northern Region of Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest nations in the world and while many rural poor rely on agriculture for food and livelihoods, many of them are food insecure. Despite efforts by government and other agencies to mitigate food insecurity, it remains a challenge in some regions in the country. A comprehensive food security assessment survey conducted in 2015 reported that the Northern region was one of the most food insecure areas in Sierra Leone. The drivers of food insecurity in Africa, and in Sierra Leone specifically, have been identified and described by other scholars. However, very few explored household and cultural drivers of food insecurity as well as the drivers of food insecurity in the northern part of Sierra Leone. This thesis uses a single case study in the northern part of Sierra Leone to identify and describe household and cultural drivers of food insecurity. It involved unstructured interviews with both key informants and smallholder rice farmer household participants.

This study identifies and describes holistically, the inter-linked nature of intra-household factors, extended family, cultural practices/norms and the broader drivers that shape both household food security as well as household member food security in the case village of Mawoma. The study revealed the prevalence of food insecurity in the study area is impacted by the natural environment, community characteristics and household behaviours/preferences. Food security in this community is influenced by two sets of factors. Firstly, factors that are beyond household control and that neither community characteristics nor the individual households have the ability to mitigate them because they are poor. These factors include climate change, land availability, labour constraints, market constraints, input challenges, pests, limited financial resources and soil infertility. These factors affect land size, soil fertility and productivity and limit the total farm output which jeopardises food stability and security as many households food stock only last a few months of the year. Secondly, household behaviour and preferences significantly impact food accessibility and food utilisation and contribute to food insecurity. Household level factors such as socio-cultural involvement, patterns of food allocation, acceptance of extended family pressure and spending choices by the household head, are associated with household attitudes, perceptions and socio-cultural norms. Household level related factors have been identified by this study as key factors responsible for household food insecurity for smallholder rice farmers.

Key words: Sierra Leone, Northern region, Household food security/insecurity, preferences, socio-cultural norms, Smallholder farmers, household dynamics, external drivers.

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List of Abbreviations

FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOSL	Government of Sierra Leone
Ha	Hectare
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HH	Household
KI	Key Informant
MAFFS	Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
UN	United Nations
UNICEFF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Funds
US\$	United States Dollars