

FOSTERING SMALLHOLDER AGRICULTURE IN SIERRA LEONE

PROACT 2015

ORGANIZATION PROFILE

COOPI (Cooperazione Internazionale) (International Cooperation) is an Italian non-profit organization operating in humanitarian emergency contexts and long-term development. COOPI is currently operating in 28 countries around the world. COOPI began working in Sierra Leone in 1971. After the civil war, it carried out projects of psychosocial assistance and reintegration for children subjected to armed groups, women victims of violence and mutilated soldiers. During the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic that caused thousands of deaths and brought the country's economy to its knees, COOPI supported children orphaned by the epidemic. After that, COOPI focused its intervention on the relationship between the recognition of women's rights and development, with particular importance given to the access to land, food security and nutrition. Specifically COOPI launched two socio-economic development projects, both supported by the European Commission aiming at improving living conditions of people in rural areas. While the first aims to strengthen the cultivation of cashew as cash crops and therefore to improve income generation for stallholders' farmers, the second aims to promote production of renewable energy to provide clean electricity in schools, hospitals and agricultural processing centers.



AGRICULTURE IN SIERRA LEONE

According to International Monetary Fund, Sierra Leone is one of the least economically developed countries with a GDP per capita, ranking 184 out of 237 countries¹. Agriculture is one of the most important sectors of the economy, with 58.9% of the labor force working in subsistence agriculture (ILO, 2018²), contributing to about 50% of the national GDP³. According to the FAO and WFP 2015 in "Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis" (CFSVA), 41.2% of the population in Sierra Leone suffer from significant food consumption gaps, and 8,6% of the population report extreme loss of livelihood assets that lead to food consumption gaps. Furthermore, in its 2018 report "Sierra Leone Food Security Monitoring System", on average, 18% of households in Sierra Leone suffer from poor food consumption, and as result of increasing prices of protein rich food such as fish and meat. A reduction in the intake of protein significantly affected the health and nutrition of the population of Sierra Leone.



Sierra Leone's main staple crops are rice and cassava. Groundnuts, sweet potato and maize also have an important role in the people's diet as well as in the farming systems. Livestock production is largely represented by small ruminants as integrated crop-livestock or practiced under pastoralist systems. The latter also includes cattle and it is mainly practiced in the Northern Provinces, where savannah is the predominant agro-climatic zone.

1 IMF: World Economic Outlook Database, Apr. 2019

2 International Labor Organization - Employment by sector - ILO modelled estimates, Nov. 2018

3 Statistics Division Sierra Leone, 2017

THE CASHEW NUT

While the South East districts of Sierra Leone are traditionally engaged into cocoa and coffee production for export, the Northern Province used to rely on mere subsistence farming as the main livelihood activity for rural households. After the war, the **European Union** identified cashew as a potential emerging cash crop suitable for the Northern Province environmental conditions, which could significantly impact Sierra Leone's rural economy. Therefore, under the operational framework of the European Development Fund (EDF) 10, since 2012 the European Union funded the four years intervention Agriculture for Development project (A4D) and commissioned COOPI to implement the field operation to support the development of the cashew sector in the districts of Kambia, Port-Loko and Bombali. Since then cashew has gained interest in among Sierra Leonean farmers driven by remarkable world prices, and attractive developing trends particularly in the Western Africa region.

VALUE CHAIN APPROACH

The enhancement of sustainable production systems is crucial for supporting the revitalization of community-based agriculture. Hence, COOPI adopts a 'value chain approach' supporting, along with the productive activities, the storage, processing and marketing phases of the produce – as all of them add value to the product. Moreover the support provided to the local production system as a whole include the formal, informal, institutional and private actors that are part of it.

It is noteworthy that the development of supply chains, beyond increasing the value of products and thus the income of the producers, leads to the diversification of activities carried out by the members of a community. Therefore, this offers the possibility to actively involve groups otherwise marginalized in the production process. With regard to this, significance lies in the case of women for whom the access to and control over production dynamics offers the opportunity to increase their purchasing power and promotes their social inclusion as well as their empowerment.

Under the mandate of the A4D, COOPI promoted cashew cultivation in Bombali, Port-Loko and Kambia, encouraging organizational development and mobilization of farmer based organizations.



COOPERATING IS IN OUR SPIRIT

As continuation of the A4D project, COOPI entered into a consortium with the German Non-profit organization Welthungerhilfe and the French InterAide for the implementation of the European Union funded Project *ProAct 2015*. While COOPI maintained its cashew operation in the Northern Province, Welthungerhilfe, (WHH) is working to enhance cocoa and coffee value chains in the eastern districts of Kenema, Kailahun and Kono, whilst Inter Aide is active in the Bombali district by supporting vegetable production and water and sanitation activities.

ProAct saw the 2012 grassroots A4D project trees begin to grow and produce. The first important harvest took place in 2017, which led to the very first official export of raw cashew nuts from Sierra Leone.

COOPI's intervention under ProAct is based on the following objectives:

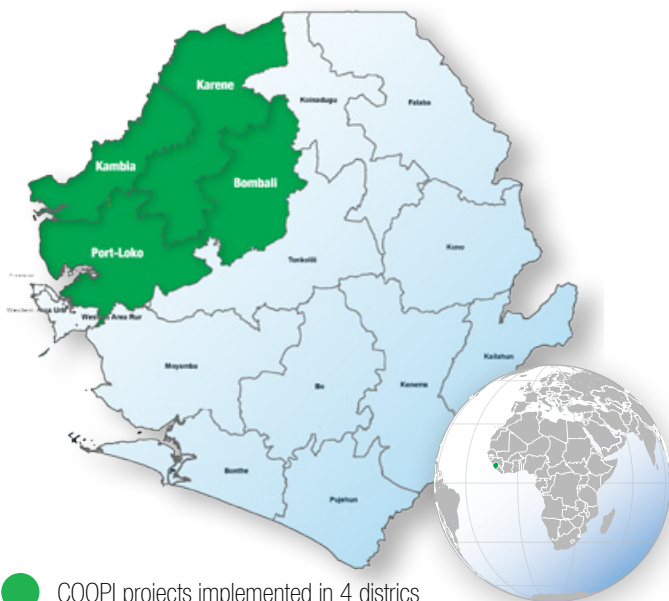
- Output 1:** focusing on boost cashew nut sector through promotion of sustainable agroforestry systems;
- Output 2:** boosting nutrition and promoting food production diversification through expansion of agroforestry practices, vegetable production, intercropping and beekeeping;
- Output 3:** mobilizing farmers to promote collective action to strengthen local processing and marketing of cashew kernels and hive products.



DEVELOPMENT OF CASHEW VALUE CHAIN IN SIERRA LEONE

COOPI is mainly focusing on the development of the cashew value chain through the improvement of the phases of production, processing and commercialization of the cashew nuts. Target beneficiaries of the intervention are 3,000 smallholder farmers in the district of Kambia, Bombali, Port-Loko and the recently established Karene. The intervention aims to introduce technical innovations to enhance cashew plantation productivity through better management of the cashew trees. Special focus is given on the quality of the planting material to the strengthening of smallholders' knowledge base and practical solutions such as pruning, water and soil management, and pest control.

The program also intends to favor an integrated approach, taking into account the sustainability and resilience of the farming system, including intercropping and agro-forestry practices, gender and income distribution within the household. By-products from the cashew based agro-forestry plantations can contribute in almost equal shares to income and family consumption and are therefore highly valued by women smallholders. Cashew cultivation into an agro-forestry system is also expected to increase smallholder farmers' resilience to climate change, natural disasters and other shocks.



COOPI projects implemented in 4 districts



BEEES FOR TREES

Cashew (*Anacardium occidentale L.*) is part of the *Anacardiaceae* family and it is a tree with two different kind of flowers: one male and one hermaphrodite. Self-pollination and cross-pollination therefore play an important role in the formation of the cashew seed. While wind plays little role, pollination largely depends on insects. Specifically, the honeybee (*A. mellifera*) proves to be one of the most efficient pollinators of cashew flowers. Therefore ProAct project is incorporating beehives into cashew plantation with the aim to improve cashew productivity through enhancing pollination while promoting alternative income generation activities for smallholder farmers.

In light of boosting an integrated cashew and honey sector in Sierra Leone, COOPI, in collaboration with the respective regional offices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), conduct training of trainers addressed to selected MAF extension officers and cashew farmers to enhance farmer's knowledge and practical skills on beekeeping management and honey harvesting. COOPI also supports the enhancing of technical skills of local craftsmen such as carpenters, blacksmiths and tailors for the local production of beekeeping equipment comprised wooden boxes (top-bar hives), hive tool, smoker, pair gloves and bee suit.



SATIATING THE NEED FOR BALANCED AND EQUAL NUTRITION

Extensive research has shown severe levels of undernutrition in the main cash crop producing areas mainly in Africa and Asia. Therefore, in order to promote a socio-economically sustainable cashew sector, COOPI is promoting the integration of a holistic approach on nutrition sensitive agriculture, gender roles, income generation and natural resources management called Linking Agriculture, Natural Resources Management, and Nutrition (LANN). LANN methodology was developed by Welthungerhilfe aiming "to link nutrition sensitive dimensions to sustainably improve household food and nutrition security among vulnerable households". LANN is a low-cost and participatory community-based approach focused on "the understanding and use of locally available resources, which increases sustainability and enables the replication from non-beneficiaries", whose areas of intervention are nutrition education, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, natural resources management, water, hygiene and sanitation, and income generation and markets.

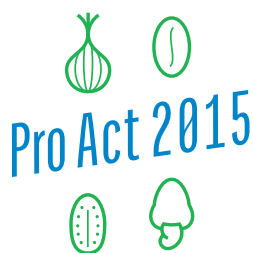
Under the LANN component, COOPI disseminates among farmers' beneficiaries, high nutritive food crops to grow in proximity of cashew orchards to enhance the nutritional status of rural households. Thus far, thanks to the collaborative efforts of Helen Keller International and the Sierra Leone Agriculture Research Institute (SLARI), COOPI has distributed one thousand two hundred bundles (each bundles 2.5 Kg) of vitamin A rich Orange Flesh Sweet Potato veins to farmer's beneficiaries.



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