



Researching livelihoods and services affected by conflict

Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

Sierra Leone Research Programme

Anna Kari/Save the Children

About us

SLRC is a six year global research programme exploring livelihoods, basic services and social protection in conflict situations. Funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Irish Aid and EC, SLRC was established in 2011 with the aim of strengthening the evidence base and informing policy and practice around livelihoods and services in conflict.

SLRC is undertaking research in eight focus countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Uganda. The Sierra Leone research programme – funded by Irish Aid – is being led by the Overseas Development Institute in partnership with Focus 1000, based in Freetown, and with technical support from Valid International.

What is the focus of SLRC's Sierra Leone research programme?

The SLRC Sierra Leone country research programme, which is being implemented over a two year period from April 2013 to April 2015, focuses on (state) capacity to address the country's high malnutrition rates. Guided by an overarching research question – 'How can development partners support improved strategies to prevent malnutrition in Sierra Leone?' – the programme is comprised of three connected phases of research activity, each of which focuses on a specific research question.

- 1 Are development partner approaches to capacity development appropriate to the challenges the nutrition sector in Sierra Leone is facing? Is the model of capacity development being used fit for purpose?**

The focus here will be on support to

strengthen the government's capacity (particularly within the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS), but also within the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA)) to deliver nutrition services throughout the country at the national, district and community level. We will broadly examine the nature of capacity building support from key implementing organisations at the MoHS, District Health Management Team (DHMT) and Peripheral Health Unit (PHU) levels.

Answering this first research question will require a mapping exercise of who is doing what to try and address Sierra Leone's high malnutrition rates, with a particular emphasis on initiatives to develop state capacity to tackle the problem. We will seek to understand how key development actors are engaging with different levels and sectors of government in order to work out where resources and efforts are being concentrated. We will pay particular attention to sketching out what – if any – theory of change approaches are guiding the activities of development partners, with a view to clarifying what the current model(s) of capacity development actually look like. One of the aims of the research will then be to assess how appropriate the models are to the challenges facing the Sierra Leonean government in its efforts to combat malnutrition; to work out whether the model is 'fit for purpose'.

In terms of examining how capacity building support plays out at the local level, political economy analysis methods will be used to examine how development partner programmes are refracted through local power and interest structures and with what result. This will involve analysing the power structures and institutions/norms that influence how programming happens at a local level, as well as the resource and capacity constraints that exist. For this

local-level research, we will be focusing our activities in Kambia – a remote, previously conflict-affected district in the north of the country.

2 What are the blockages to preventing malnutrition at the district and community levels?

The second question aims to understand why, despite several innovative programming approaches, high rates of malnutrition persist in Sierra Leone. Power analysis will be critical in understanding the local power relations that influence feeding practices. Initiatives such as the Farmer Field Schools and Mother Support Groups will be examined to understand how they work on the ground and what the blockages to improved uptake of such services might be. Research here will examine barriers to behaviour change in relation to feeding practices and a healthy diet, as well as community perceptions of government and aid-funded nutrition services and initiatives. In order to generate a deeper understanding, as opposed to a broad overview, we will maintain a geographical focus on Kambia.

A multi-methods approach will be used to answer this research question. Initially, our research partners Valid International and Focus 1000 will undertake a semi-quantitative evaluation of access and coverage (SQUEAC) survey to determine key factors explaining the persistence of malnutrition and why available services might not be utilised. Following on from the survey work, and building on its findings, fieldwork using political economy analysis methods will be undertaken in Kambia, to deepen understanding of the factors that are both (re)producing the conditions for malnutrition as well as limiting uptake of nutrition services. We will look at the broad political and institutional context (both

formal and informal) that the problem of malnutrition sits within, before examining the interests and incentives of the various actors involved to understand why actors behave the way they do. In analysing the interaction between these two elements, the potential opportunities for change will be pinpointed.

3 How can broader stakeholders, beyond the immediate nutrition sector, be engaged to develop a more comprehensive approach to preventing malnutrition?

The initial scoping trip revealed challenges in ensuring that nutrition was seen as more than simply a health issue and subsequently a responsibility of just the MoHS. Efforts are underway, through REACH and now the SUN Secretariat, to broaden government and development partner support for prevention of malnutrition strategies, with plans to better include, on the government side, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and, on the donor side, agencies such as the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Despite these efforts, however, it is not clear that coordinated action will follow, or that strong political coalitions formed around combatting nutrition will form and endure.

This research question will examine how these other stakeholders can be brought on board to tackle malnutrition in a joined-up manner that recognizes the important linkages between education, agriculture, food security and nutrition and diet. It has been left deliberately open at this stage due to the multi-year nature of the programme and our subsequent hesitancy to commit to a specific issue or topic this far in advance. For example, it might be that the way in which the links between farmers and markets are organised represents a particular area of

concern requiring more joined-up policy attention. Leaving the third research question loosely defined at this stage will allow us to explore specific issues such as this later on, thereby helping us ensure that the research programme is responsive to the country's key malnutrition priorities.

What will be done with the research?

Our research will generate practical, evidence-based findings. In addition to communicating policy recommendations to stakeholders working on the politics of malnutrition at a cross-country level, we also hope to influence the policy, programming and coordination activities of the following agencies and practitioners at the country level:

- The Government of Sierra Leone through its relevant ministries
- UN agencies working on nutrition
- Bilateral donors with an interest in nutrition:
- International NGOs
- National NGOs

To maximise the impact of our work, researchers from ODI and Focus 1000 will be working closely together, identifying windows of opportunity to feed into relevant policy processes at multiple levels.

Information on the research partners

The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is Britain's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues, and SLRC's lead partner.

FOCUS 1000 is a non-profit, national development agency in Sierra Leone that is committed to making the best investment in the most crucial time in a child's life: the first 1000 days – the number of days from conception and pregnancy until the child reaches age two. FOCUS 1000 works with the Government, UN Agencies, and other local and international organizations to promote simple, cost-effective and high impact interventions that can help build a solid foundation for children to survive, thrive and develop to become productive citizens.

Valid International is a humanitarian organisation specialising in the research and implementation of evidence-based techniques to improve the quality, impact and accountability of humanitarian assistance.



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