Assessing Poverty and Hunger as Indicators for Development through the MDGs in Nongoma Chiefdom Eastern Sierra Leone

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Abstract
MDGs are the most broadly supported, comprehensive and specific development goals the world has ever agreed upon. These eight time-bound goals provide concrete, numerical benchmarks for tackling extreme poverty in its many dimensions. They include goals and targets on income poverty, hunger, maternal and child mortality, disease, inadequate shelter, gender inequality, environmental degradation and the Global Partnership for Development. Adopted by world leaders in the year 2000 and set to be achieved by 2015, the MDGs are both global and local, tailored by each country to suit specific development needs.

Sierra Leone is characterized by its exposure to a series of vulnerabilities and constraints such as (a) limited human, institutional and productive capacity; (b) acute vulnerability to external economic shocks, conflicts and communicable diseases; (c) limited access to education, health and other social services and to natural resources; (d) poor infrastructure; and (e) lack of access to information and communication technologies. In addition, declining financial resources, domestic and external, a heavy and unsustainable debt burden, falling or volatile commodity prices, complex trade barriers, lack of economic and export diversification and market access for key product which the country benefit from, as well as supply-side constraints, have greatly affected the growth and development prospects of Sierra Leone.

From the poverty and hunger perspective, this study seeks to look at the impact of the MDG One (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015) in Sierra Leone. With increased support and awareness, people are expected to influence the process of MDGs by advocating and championing their own developmental cause. The process of alleviating the peoples’ suffering from poverty and hunger will consequently influences the process of achieving the MDGs and can only be made possible by having effective food security, employment and agricultural policies in place. These strategies will in turn assist the country to meet the 2015 deadline set by the UN for all countries to achieve MDGs.

Introduction
Following the beginning of the new millennium, the world has witnessed two very important events, whose impacts are far reaching and profound and have in many ways shaped the argument on global issues. One of these was the 9/11 incident that ushered in a new era of terrorism. The second event was the creation of a set of ambitious Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the United Nations (2000). The agenda has both short and long term ramifications for the global community in the 21st Century. The clarion call now is for everybody to put his/her hands on the deck to work towards Eradicating Extreme Poverty and Hunger, which is the Millennium Development Goal One (MDG1), with clear targets: halving by 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than one dollar a day; halving by 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger. In the words of Kofi Annan, the immediate past Secretary General of the United Nations, —Hunger is one of the worse violations
Sierra Leone like the rest of the world has less than a year remaining to reach the 2015 deadline that the UN set for each country to attain the MDGs. The question that can be posed is whether Sierra Leone is on track to meeting this deadline? What challenges and successes has the country encountered in that vein?

Further, the mid-point between the adoption of the Goals and the target date of 2015 has elapsed. Important progress has been made and there are many notable successes that offer encouragement. However, despite significant achievements towards some targets, much more needs to be done. Numerous goals and targets are likely to be missed without additional, strengthened or corrective actions that are urgently needed. At the current rate of progress, the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day is unlikely to be reduced by half in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2015; a quarter of all children in developing countries are still undernourished, and 100 countries will fail to achieve gender parity in both primary and secondary school enrolment. Achieving the MDGs is now all the more challenging because the development environment is more threatened now than it has been at any time in the recent past. A global economic slowdown, a food security crisis of uncertain magnitude and duration, the development impact of climate change, all directly affect efforts to reduce poverty and to attain the MDGs more broadly. For many developing countries, there is a risk that important advances made can quickly unravel. Therefore, it is of great importance to undertake this research on the examination of the Millennium Development Goals, drawing special reference to Poverty and Hunger in Sierra Leone.

Therefore, this study critically assesses poverty and hunger as development indicators through the Millennium Development Goals in Sierra Leone, with special reference and attention to the Nongowa Chiefdom in Kenema District. In this vain, it is important to assess government and other development partners’ commitments in eradicating poverty and hunger by the year 2015 in Sierra Leone, as promised by world leaders at the 2000 UN Millennium Summit. In particular, the objective of this study scans through identifying the major commitment of government in alleviating poverty and hunger; exploring the methods of implementing the MDG 1 agenda by government; evaluate the achievements or successes in reducing poverty and hunger; and identify problems or challenges in minimizing poverty and hunger in Sierra Leone.

Theoretically, two theories namely agenda setting and knowledge gap have been used to guide this study. Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basis assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting. These assumptions are as follows:

- The press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it;
- Media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues.

According to Untwente (2009), the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.

This theory is appropriate in the sense that if communications are in place, the media can be a powerful to put MDGs on the priority list of topics that people discuss. As people discuss, they bring out existing problems, suggest possible solutions on how best MDGs can be achieved in Sierra Leone even as the 2015 deadline set by the UN draws by.

The knowledge gap theory, according to Weng (2000), asserts that the increase of information in society is not evenly acquired by every member of society: people with higher socioeconomic status tend to have better ability to acquire information. The knowledge gap can result in an increased gap between people of lower and higher socioeconomic status. The attempt to improve people’s life with

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1 www.fao.org/worldfoodsummit/top/detai
information via the mass media might not always work the way this is planned. Mass media might have the effect of increasing the difference gap between members of social classes. This theory can thus be used to help the study make recommendations to MDG campaigners to establish communication systems that reach out to the people of low socio economic status. This is because people at the grassroots are normally left behind on current issues due to issues such as illiteracy, lack of access to T.V.s and radios among other things. Largely, the nature of the mass media itself is that it is geared toward persons of higher socioeconomic status. People at the grassroots can help make contributions to the attainment of MDGs in Sierra Leone.

**Study Methodology**

The primary study design involves analysis of quantitative and qualitative geographic data from Nongowa Chiefdom the administrative and commercial headquarters of the Eastern Province through the use of case study and questionnaire design to show the relationships between poverty, hunger and development.

This research uses the case study and questionnaire survey design. Under the case study, the study used in-depth interviews with key respondents to get detailed information on randomly selected areas in Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District. It was designed to specifically collect data on the prevalence of poverty and hunger in the study area. To obtain the sample, data were collected from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and The Wealth Hunger Hilfe, an international NGO operating in the country. The data comprised all the names of villages/towns in the Nongowa Chiefdom. The lists were cross-checked to ensure accuracy. The research techniques used were semi-structured interview, questionnaires, personal observation and documentary research (published and unpublished data). The data was analysed through the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software and Microsoft Excel Worksheet using simple percentages, statistics such as measures of central tendency, standard deviation, correlation and regression analysis.

The study population comprised people within the study area at the time of the study. The primary sampling unit was people living in Kenema City. A total of 120 people participated in this study through focus group discussions, interviews and self-administered questionnaires. Twenty four questionnaires were administered to respondents in the five selected communities in Nongowa Chiefdom; Tissoh, Kambuwabu, Hangha, Combema and Nyandeyama. Of the 120, 50 were male, while 70 were female.

Data for this study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. For the primary data collection tool, a structured questionnaire was developed to obtain data on the rate of poverty and hunger in the Nongowa Chiefdom, Kenema District. In line with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper I and II (PRSP I & II), members of staff of the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security in Kenema were interviewed to obtain information on the implemented policies. The questionnaire therefore encompassed all the necessary questions in the four objectives.

Secondary data collection tools were obtained from several documentation centres in Kenema. Libraries used were the Eastern Polytechnic Library, Njala University Library in Bo, Eastern Regional Library in Kenema, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Office, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Office, Statistics Sierra Leone Office in Kenema, Wealth Hunger Hilfe Office in Bo and the Internet. Books, journals, periodicals and project reports were also consulted.

**Analysis Results and Findings**

More than half of the respondents fell within the age bracket of 18-25 years (46%). This could be a reflection of the level of activeness of the youth in the study area, and also confirms the fact that the Sierra Leonean population is a youthful one. Those within 26 and 35 years constitute 29% of respondents and 17% of them were within the age bracket of 36-45 years. Out of the total number of 120 respondents, 74 were female representing 63.1% of the sampled respondents with the remaining 46 members, being male, representing 36.9%.
Respondents’ knowledge about the MDGs

With just less than a year to go in meeting the UN set deadline for achieving MDGs, the study noted that only 48% of the survey respondents indicated knowing about the MDGs. This was sadly noted and worrying especially that 14 years have gone by since the MDGs was outlined by the UN. Targets were set and the deadline to meet these targets by 2015. On the other hand, 52% of the respondents indicated that they have heard little or nothing about the MDGs. The only MDGs that people can easily mention is MDG number 6 which relates to combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases and MDG number 1 which relates to the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger. The implication of people not knowing much about MDGs is that they will not effectively influence the process of achieving the MDGs i.e., they will not place any demands on government to achieve the MDGs. High corruption levels and poor government performance in Sierra Leone to a large extent thrives on people’s lack of knowledge or ignorance on certain key developmental areas.

Figure 6: Bar Graph of respondents’ knowledge about the MDGs

![Bar Graph](source: Field Study (2014))

From the 120 survey respondents, the findings in the graph revealed that only 48% of respondents indicated that they know all the eight MDGs fully well. On the other hand, 52% of respondents indicated that they did not know anything about the MDGs.

Media variables that are the main sources of MDGs for majority of the respondents

The survey findings reviewed that Radio was cited by 58% of respondents as being a main source of information for them on MDGs. This is as a result of the proliferation of radio stations all over the country. Community meeting was also another source of information for 33% of the survey respondents in that some development experts held consultations with communities on development agenda. Third in line was Newspapers with 09% respondents citing it as another source of information on MDGs. However, none of the respondents cited neither the internet nor television programmes as their main source of soliciting information on the MDGs. This is because Sierra Leone is technologically paralysed especially in the area of ICT.

Is Poverty and hunger prevalent in your community?

From the survey findings, 90 people (75%) from the five communities in Nongowa Chiefdom stated that poverty and hunger is prevalent in their communities as a result of lack of food, employment and even the financial strength to support their homes and families. The remaining 25% of the respondents revealed that poverty is not much prevalent in their homes. This is due to the fact that majority of the respondents in this category are part of the employment population.

Government of Sierra Leone Commitment to eradicate poverty and hunger

Out of the 120 responses, 68 of the respondents (57%) in the study area revealed that the Government of Sierra Leone is striving hard to reduce poverty and hunger in their communities. This was better explained through implementation of certain policies in food security, employment and microfinance schemes, small holder commercialized farming, e.t.c. On the other hand, 43% (52 respondents) stated that government is less committed to poverty and hunger eradication as a result of poor implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the PRSP programmes. Furthermore, the outbreak of the
Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) has also contributed to the problems of implementing poverty reduction programmes.

![Image](image-url)

**Source: Field Study (2014)**

**The Rate of poverty and hunger in the Nongowa Chiefdom**

In ascertaining answers from respondents on the rate of poverty and hunger in the Nongowa Chiefdom, 80% of them stated that the rate of poverty and hunger is extremely high in their communities. It was revealed that malnutrition, food insecurity, unemployment and lack of the will on the part of the government to provide the facilities in that regard is part of the reasons for the high rate of poverty in Sierra Leone. However, 20% of the respondents revealed that poverty and hunger was moderate in their communities as a result of their employment and financial prowess. None of the respondents stated that poverty and hunger was low in their respective communities.

**Are you aware of the any poverty and hunger implementation programme in your community/town?**

In soliciting answers from respondents on this question, 60% of them revealed that they are not aware of any poverty and hunger implementation programme in their communities. It was further revealed that there had been no poverty alleviation programme implemented in their communities since the end of the RUF Rebel War in 2002. However, 40% did say that they have heard about poverty alleviation programme from development donors, though it was not well implemented and they were not directly involved in the implementation programme. This category of respondents are those with some level of education and do participate in community development programmes. The table below presents the quantitative data from respondents’ answers to this question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency (f)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Satisfaction level of respondents with regards the implementation of poverty alleviation project**

From the responses received, 85% of the respondents revealed that they were not satisfied with the way poverty and hunger alleviation projects were handled and implemented in their communities. It was revealed that poor implementation, monitoring and evaluation were done in almost all the projects implemented. This was as a result of lack of consultation on the part of the implementing partners. In the same vein, 15% of them stated that they were satisfied with the implementation of most of the projects in their communities.
The high incidence of poverty in Kailahun District could in part be explained by the civil war and its impact on cocoa and coffee production as the main income earning activities. Most of the tree crop plantations were abandoned for over ten years as a result of displacement of the population. In peace time, the crops are harvested once a year and the income from the sales is used to acquire other goods and services throughout the year. There is therefore the need to diversify into other economic activities in order to broaden the sources of income. The devastation of the basic economic and social infrastructure was worsened by its remoteness and isolation. In the case of Kenema, the majority of the working population is engaged mainly in artisan mining activities, which is not a reliable source of income. The people of Bombali District rely mostly on subsistence agriculture. There is no other economic activity or source of income and employment. Port Loko and Kenema districts, which accounted for 9.8 and 8.9 of the sample population, recorded the highest contribution to poverty of 11.5 percent and 11.1 percent respectively (Extract from the PRSP Report, 2005).

However, in evaluating the successes so far the country has achieved in alleviating poverty and hunger, series of responses were revealed from respondents based on the set objectives in the questionnaire. Questions like: Is the government on the right track in addressing poverty and hunger in your community? Which of the poverty alleviation programmes government or development partners have succeeded in addressing in your community? What is your contribution as community member in addressing the poverty and hunger scourge? Responses to these questions were discussed and presented using the following analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Sample Share</th>
<th>Food Poor (%)</th>
<th>Total Poor (%)</th>
<th>Gap Index (%)</th>
<th>Severity Index (%)</th>
<th>Contribution to Poverty (%)</th>
<th>Income Gap Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>42.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonthe</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moyamba</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pujehun</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>59.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kailahun</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>46.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenema</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kono</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombali</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>56.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kambia</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koinadugu</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>43.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Loko</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonkolili</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>84.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>402.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Urban</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Rural</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey 2003/2004
Successes in poverty and hunger alleviation programmes

Out of the 120 responses received, 85 (71%) of the respondents revealed that Food Security programme, through the IFAD Funded Project has succeeded in their communities. This was as a result of the establishment of Agricultural Business Centres throughout the Chiefdom and also the provision of subsidies and loan facilities to subsistence farmers, who form the bulk majority of the population, in order to improve their yield. 35 of the respondents (29%) stated Micro Finance Scheme as success in alleviating poverty and hunger. These categories of respondents are small business owners who rely on micro credit to sustain their lives and businesses. None of the respondents mentioned either employment facility or any other poverty reduction programme as successful in their communities.

Community contribution to alleviate poverty and hunger

From responses received, 70 of the respondents stated that they have contributed to the above mentioned poverty reduction programmes in order to alleviate poverty in their communities. These were mostly farmers and petty traders. On the other hand, 50 of them revealed that they have not contributed in any way to the alleviation of poverty and hunger in their communities.

Conclusion

While the scale of the poverty and hunger challenges in Nongowa Chiefdom can seem overwhelming, it is essential that proactive attention continue to be given to improve the quality of life and reducing poverty for Nongowa residents. The scale of poverty and hunger in places like Nongowa, not only demand attention from local and national governments, but increased international support and a sustained commitment by several parties to improve the quality of life for billions of people across the planet (Briceno-Garmendia et al., 2004). Through clear national priorities and local policies, the City of Kenema, the Government of Sierra Leone and international aid organizations have the opportunity to guide the use of their resources towards investment in food security, commercialized farming and job creation that will be able to spur forth increased access for Nongowa residents in particular, and Sierra Leone in general, in order to reduce poverty levels and improved quality of life for generations to come.

Summary of Findings

In view of the above, the following discoveries have been made in the study:

- No community capacity profiling and participatory poverty assessments were done to precede the design and implementation of the projects on poverty and hunger. This omission defies the literature on good and best practices in poverty alleviation worldwide.
- Most of the respondents in the five selected communities did not know about all the eight goals of the MDGs. The only goals some of them know about are Goal Four (Reduce child mortality) and Goal Six (Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases). This is as the result of strong policies and funding provided by the government and development partners for the actualization of these goals.
The five selected communities in Nongowa Chiefdom and the Government of Sierra Leone lacked adequate knowledge of the intricacies of Goal one as development indicator for all other goals and misjudged the ranking of benchmarks in determining the prospects of using this strategy in their communities and the country as a whole.

The implementers of poverty and hunger projects in Nongowa Chiefdom did not effectively deliver quality jobs. This was partly due to poor monitoring and supervision, partly to the manner in which the projects were implemented.

It was also clearly revealed that the target date for the actualization of the MDGs is 2015. It is less than a year from now to reach this date. Therefore, it is very obvious that Sierra Leone will not meet the targets set for the actualization of the MDGs and particularly for Goal one which was the purpose for undertaking this study. This is as a result of the interruption in many development agenda caused by the RUF Rebel War in 1991 and also the sudden outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) in early 2014, that has escalated in to a crisis.

Conclusion
At the time of writing this research paper, it was only a year remaining to the end of the MDGs. Since 2000, we have been witnessing how this global commitment has been playing out in various countries. This study was conducted with the view to critically analyze poverty and hunger as development indicators through the MDGs in Sierra Leone. The main purpose of this study was to see the effectiveness of the government and development partners’ involvement in championing the cause of MDG One in Sierra Leone in order to make people on the grassroots become aware of the existence of MDGs.

In addition, this study was conducted with the view of making recommendations to the government and organisations that are involved in the MDG One campaign on the areas in which they need to improve or accelerate their efforts when implementing the MDGs in any community. Therefore, after looking at the actual undertakings, prospects and challenges, the developments and/or failures in achieving Goal One (eradicating extreme poverty and hunger), we conclude as follows:

- The commitment of the government to formulate policies and strategies and the inculcation of MDGs in the policy documents is the commitment of the government. On the other side the establishment of government institutions to regulate and manage the sector especially in the Nongowa Chiefdom is among the developments of the sector towards eradicating poverty and hunger in the country.
- The Current policy document of the country (PRSP) calls for the assistance of NGOs to help reduce poverty and hunger in the country. Development partners have been working almost in all regions in the country promoting their own intervention areas. One can understand that their roles are so significant in the promotion of their areas of intervention, technical and financial supports, developing and distributing of relief aids, awareness creation and advocacy services. But only some known NGOs are working on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger in Sierra Leone.
- It was observed that there is no specific regulation to implement programmes on eradicating poverty and hunger in the study area. Even if such draft regulation is prepared by the MAF&S and advocated by NGOs and submitted to Parliament, it is not yet approved.
- It was found that the poverty and hunger rate in the study settings in Nongowa Chiefdom was drastically on the increase, thereby reducing efforts to achieve the MDG1. Broadening social inequalities suggests accelerating decline in the achievement of this goal. Even in the poorest areas, if people of low socio-economic position can benefit from poverty and hunger alleviation programmes, then achieving MDG1 is possible. Furthermore, efforts to reduce poverty and hunger rates are crucial. A major investment in the provision of food and employment facility is required to insure an equitable approach to good living condition so that peoples’ lives might be saved. The solution exists, if there is a will to put it into place.
A set of interventions were also identified associated with the transition from poor to non-poor. Although some of them were unequally distributed, it indicates that poor rural populations are motivated to participate in different community actions designed to strengthen social cohesion and combat the poverty. We found that access to nutritive food is a persistent challenge, particularly in remote rural areas. In certain areas where poverty was concentrated, participation in interventions designed to help overcome impoverishment was low.

Finally, this thesis reveals the necessity of monitoring aspects of human development in the context of poverty and hunger as social stratifications. Further, this work provides the government of Sierra Leone, NGOs and stakeholders working on MDG in similar contexts with transferable and eminent lessons on which interventions have a great impact and how they are being scaled-up. There are undeniable limitations and challenges to be considered when analyzing data, or introducing interventions strategies. Data is an investment for the present and the future. It is still hoped that the good will of a nation makes 2015 not only the end of MDG, but the beginning of a new plan- A plan where equity and sustainability become bases to reach the next generation of goals.

References