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# Sierra Leone Country Strategy 2011-2013

An Independent Programme Evaluation

## Evaluation Report

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and Audit Unit, for Irish Aid

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**Joseph Barnes and Susanne Turrall.**

# Acronyms

<b>ABC</b>	Agricultural Business Centre	<b>MAFFS</b>	Ministry of Agriculture , Forestry and Food Security
<b>ACC</b>	Anti-Corruption Commission	<b>MAPS</b>	Irish Aid Multi-Annual Programme Scheme
<b>AJP</b>	Access to Justice Project	<b>MDA</b>	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
<b>CFSVA</b>	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis	<b>MEST</b>	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation	<b>MHS</b>	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
<b>CSP</b>	Country Strategy Programme	<b>MICS</b>	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development (UK)	<b>NARP</b>	National Agricultural Response Programme
<b>DACO</b>	Development Assistance Co-ordination Office (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development)	<b>NCE</b>	No Cost Extension
<b>E&amp;R</b>	Emergency and Recovery Unit	<b>NEC</b>	National Electoral Commission
<b>EITI</b>	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative	<b>NGO</b>	Non- Governmental Organisation
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agricultural Organisation	<b>OECD-DAC</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development/Development Assistance Committee
<b>FBO</b>	Farmer Based Organisation	<b>PPE</b>	Policy, Planning and Effectiveness Department
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion	<b>P4P</b>	Purchase for Progress
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation	<b>REACH</b>	Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger
<b>FHI</b>	Free Healthcare Initiative	<b>SGBV</b>	Sexual Gender Based Violence
<b>FSU</b>	Family Support Unit	<b>SLDHS</b>	Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey
<b>GBV</b>	Gender Based Violence	<b>SMC</b>	School Management Committee
<b>GoSL</b>	Government of Sierra Leone	<b>SUN</b>	Scaling Up Nutrition Initiative
<b>GIZ</b>	German Society for International Cooperation, Ltd	<b>SWAp</b>	Sector Wide Approach
<b>HRC</b>	Human Rights Commission	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>HRCSL</b>	Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone	<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technology	<b>UNIPSIL</b>	Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone
<b>IFPRI</b>	International Food Policy Research Institute	<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development programme
<b>IMATT</b>	International Military Training and Advisory Team Sierra Leone	<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>IRC</b>	International Rescue Committee	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>ISAT</b>	International Security Advisory Team Sierra Leone	<b>WJP</b>	World Justice Project
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology		
<b>IYCF</b>	Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices		

# Executive Summary

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide Irish Aid management with an **independent, evidence based assessment of the performance** of the Irish Aid programme in Sierra Leone for 2011-2013. The evaluation applied OECD (2012) guidance for evaluating programmes in fragile contexts<sup>1</sup>. The evaluation design was based on two main objectives: providing accountability for results and documenting learning.

The Country Strategy 2011-2013 was a €16.4 million programme<sup>2</sup> based on three objectives aimed at bringing about changes in niches where Irish Aid has strong comparative advantages. Originally designed to run for two years with a budget of €11 million, strategy was later extended by an extra year.

**Goal: To reduce hunger and strengthen accountability mechanisms in Sierra Leone**

***Outcome 1: Poor people (particularly women and children under five) benefit from improved local nutrition and agricultural services.***

- Objective 1: To strengthen government and community based delivery systems in nutrition
- Objective 2: To improve food security for poor people and particularly women through improving national and local government systems in agriculture and strengthening food based safety nets

***Outcome 2: Citizens and democratic institutions progressively hold those in authority to account***

- Objective 3: To enhance good governance through strengthening democratic mechanisms, improving domestic accountability mechanisms and promoting gender equality

Activities included €8.2 million in support to acute and chronic malnutrition in partnerships with UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), Action Contre la Faim, Helen Keller and Welt Hunger Hilfe. This involved Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM), Therapeutic Feeding, and Supplementary Feeding. Food Security interventions received €3.8 million, including a WFP school feeding programme, FAO Agricultural Business Centres, and a new project to develop a national early warning system on food and nutrition security. A further €4.4 million was provided to the Election Basket Fund for voter registration; International Rescue Committee (IRC) support to survivors of sexual and gender based violence (Rainbo Centres); the Anti-Corruption Commission; and a UNDP Access to Justice project that includes support to the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. More recently, Save the Children was also funded €0.5 million to support adolescent sexual and reproductive health services.

## Context

The Country Strategy was designed with a heavy focus on three main policies: the 2006 White Paper on Ireland's Development Assistance; the OECD-DAC principles for engagement in fragile states; and the Sierra Leone poverty reduction strategy (*Agenda for Change*). During the course of the Country

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2012), *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility*. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series. OECD Publishing.

<sup>2</sup> Including disbursements made in 2010 for programming in 2011. Actual expenditure for years 2011-2013 was €14.2 million.

Strategy, Sierra Leone marked a decade since the cessation of hostilities. This has given both national stakeholders and development partners a greater sense of confidence about the country's future.

Those classified as living in poverty has decreased from 66.4 to 52.9 percent between 2003 and 2011 (World Bank, 2013). Agriculture remains the main livelihood for 52.4 percent of households (World Bank, 2013). The mining sector contributes about 30% of the country's GDP, however, its fiscal contribution is low. Net ODA accounts for 30% of real GDP (UNDP, 2010). The under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) is 185 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality ratio (adjusted) is 890 per 100,000 live births (UNICEF, 2010, 2011).

According to the 2012 World Bank *Country Policy and Institutional Assessment* (CIPA), Sierra Leone rates higher or equal to the continental average on all dimensions. Sierra Leone rated significantly higher than the scores for countries classified as Fragile States in terms of economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public sector management and institutions. By the end of 2012, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had removed Sierra Leone from its list of 'fragile and conflict-affected' countries. The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) is due to close its mission in 2014. The Peacebuilding Commission, stated that the 2012 elections showed the country had crossed 'a threshold'.

Despite this, many of the previous drivers of conflict still exist. A recent paper by the Institute of Development Studies (Allouche, 2013) argues that Sierra Leone remains – and is increasingly – fragile due to the re-emergence of the traditional elite groups; marginalisation of young people and women; structural youth unemployment of 60 percent; and a winner-takes-all style of politics. Nevertheless, Sierra Leone has demonstrated a number of positive capacities, including ethnic and religious tolerance: statistical analysis has found there is no difference, in development and conflict terms, between parts of the country that experienced more or less civil war violence, and areas with more or less religious diversity. This is an impressive social base on which to build.

## Evaluation Design

The evaluation applied a utilisation-focused approach; it used survey and participatory tools to collect primary data and contribution analysis to develop findings. In addition to an extensive desk review, visits were undertaken to Freetown and Kono District in Sierra Leone. The sampling of stakeholders was designed to provide 'typical' examples of project issues rather than to be statistically representative: with an overall aim to provide the most useful and relevant insights possible for the primary intended users (Irish Aid) within the resources and time available.

The main limitations of the design relate to absence of statistical data, constraints on the extent to which contextual detail could be explored for all issues, and reliance on results data from Irish Aid's M&E systems. The evaluation mitigated these through: triangulating multiple sources to understand contribution, being transparent about assumptions, and using field visits and focus groups to understand qualitative changes.

## Findings

In terms of the overall strategy, the evaluation found that the choices made by Irish Aid have been relevant, justifiable, and consistent with a long-term process of refining the organisation's areas of comparative advantage. However, by executing the strategy primarily through a project modality the evaluation questions the extent to which the dominant drivers of conflict (including political

clientelism; a “winner takes all” social contract; social emphasis on kinship; endemic corruption; underemployment; and arbitrary justice) have been successfully reflected within the portfolio

Nevertheless, in the context of Sierra Leone, Irish Aid’s culture, approach, and systems are well suited to addressing long-term complex issues (such as nutrition and food security, and gender). In comparison to most other donors, for example, Ireland has a coherent relationship between its foreign and development policies, is not politically limited to only issues that provide short term-quantitative results, and can draw on its own modern history of state-building.

The Country Strategy helped to avoid nutrition and gender becoming ‘*aid orphans*’ – meeting both a fragile states principle and Ireland’s global policy priorities. In doing so, however, Ireland chose not to ‘*stay the course*’ (another fragile states principle) in two sectors – health and youth – where it previously had significant engagement. In the view of the evaluation, the most important consideration is that a decision was indeed made: avoiding spreading limited human and financial resources too thinly to have any meaningful effect. This discipline has contributed to Irish Aid achieving many of its planned outputs for the Country Strategy.

Cases are available that show Irish Aid is helping to make very real contributions to the human rights, nutrition and livelihoods of marginalised women, men and children in Sierra Leone. Eight of the 30 programme targets in the revised Programme Results Framework were achieved or exceeded, including:

1. 29 percentage point increase (to 59%) in the number of villages with at least one active trained volunteer on Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) in areas targeted by UNICEF with Irish Aid support;
2. 304 chiefdoms now have at least one out-patient therapeutic programme (OTP) site ;
3. 62% of women with children 0-24 months report at least 2 contacts with a Mother Support Group in areas targeted by UNICEF with Irish Aid support;
4. 14 percentage point increase (to 36%) in children with routine under-five Vitamin A supplementation and de-worming in areas targeted by UNICEF with Irish Aid support;
5. Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) secretariat established;
6. 87.3% of 2.7 million registered voters took part in elections that EU, African regional and CSO observers reported as fair and free;
7. Systems and processes of the Anti Corruption Commission appraised; and
8. Facilities for emergency obstetrics services in Kenema increased from 1 to 6.

A further eleven programme targets were partially met, with most either on track for completion by 2014 or against indicators for which no clear targets were set. These achievements include: expansion of the Saturday Sexual and Gender Based Violence court system to Kenema; 22 Agricultural Business Centres constructed and equipped in Bo and Bonthe districts; and 17 percentage point increase in Public Health Units providing treatment for severe acute malnutrition.

Of considerable concern to the evaluation, however, is that no data was available within Irish Aid or partner systems in relation to eleven performance indicators, including all outcome-related data (for example, changes in the extent to which nutrition services are accessed; increases in food production; or on the resolution of Sexual and Gender Based Violence cases). This is a problem in terms of managing for development results. The programme also relies on national statistics to determine the achievement of outcomes: but this data has not been reliably collected since the Country Strategy began.

Part of the challenge of Managing for Development Results (MfDR) has been the need for the Mission to build its own project management cycle over the period of the Country Strategy: putting in place standard procedures for assessing and monitoring projects. The absence of standardised systems in Irish Aid has increased the transaction costs and time to develop and implement these core business

functions. Despite some progress in project cycle management, every project has received at least one – and up to 5 – No Cost Extensions (NCEs) throughout the Country Strategy. When considered in isolation, each of these NCEs was justifiable and pragmatic. In sum, however, enhancing MfDR and developing more realistic future proposals need to be given priority in the next Country Strategy.

Some major achievements not sufficiently captured by the current MfDR systems include: i) scaling up and introducing value-addition to agricultural business centres linked to providing meals for 250,000 school children; ii) putting nutrition on the national agenda and forging working links between the ministries for agriculture and health; iii) mobilising over one hundred local groups led by women to push nutrition and justice out into communities; iv) mainstreaming gender in the PRSP; v) establishing islands-of-excellence in care and justice for survivors of SGBV; vi) supporting international recognition of the Human Rights Commission; and vii) delivering risk-based systems assessments of corruption.

Two major events during the implementation of the Strategy – the Mid Term Review and a nutrition technical visit – enabled step-changes in the programme by combining opportunities for team reflection with advice from sector specialists and management within Irish Aid. Following the visits, it was found that new avenues were explored with greater conviction and focus – such as in regard to supporting the next phase of contracting for acute malnutrition. It is the view of the evaluation that, whilst the technical visits and inputs during the design of the Country Strategy were substantial, the Sierra Leone context would have benefitted from more country visits by HQ or commissioned technical experts during programme implementation. Consequentially, the future Country Strategy will require resourcing for more HQ technical visits, technical strengthening of the country team, or access to outsourced technical assistance.

Other implications of Irish Aid’s management arrangements include: i) the institutional appetite for risk that is available to the programme can (and does) shift over the period of the Country Strategy as the domestic context in Ireland evolves; and ii) the project-by-project approach to approval leads to a focus on managing output-level risks at the expense of achieving programme-level outcomes and goals. Where problems have arisen, Irish Aid has been good at dealing with them, but it has been relatively weak in foreseeing and forestalling implementation issues. This is due, in part, to a lack of detailed assessment of how resources flow through a project and where the major vulnerabilities are.

The Country Strategy’s funding has been substantially (75 percent) directed through the United Nations agencies. Support through the UN agencies was both practical (in terms of human resources) and coherent with the 2006 White Paper commitment. Significantly, however, there has been a recent shift in funding away from the UN agencies and towards International NGOs (INGO). Ireland does not provide direct budget support, and only €200,000 was transferred directly to Government systems (although €400,000 was planned).

Irish Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Sierra Leone outside of the Country Strategy (mostly through Civil Society Section support to NGOs) is estimated to have been worth up to €12.4 million over the course of the programme. Despite this, the links between activities funded by the Country Strategy and other sources of Irish money are few, ad hoc, and not prioritised. Whilst this has not been critical to achieving Country Strategy results, there is a strategic gap in the potential to maximise the value-for-money of the total Irish ODA to Sierra Leone.

Partnering with proven organisations has worked well – so far – in terms of minimising programme performance risk whilst avoiding the workload of managing open requests for proposals. It has, however, led towards using more specialist INGOs (and away from UN agencies or government programming) and thus led to the Country Strategy being a ‘collection of projects’ rather than a strategically cohesive programme. It is the view of the evaluation, therefore, that shifting to more and smaller INGO projects – however relevant each is in its own right – runs counter to the strategic ambition of achieving cohesive programming in the sectors in which Irish Aid works.

Part of the challenge of achieving cohesive programming is the absence of clear sector-level theories of change – the logic for how change is to be created under each outcome area – within the Country Strategy document. Under each Country Strategy objective, projects were found to have been selected primarily according to the opportunities that were available at the time and that Ireland could afford to support.

When operational flexibility is manifested in terms of commissioning short projects and continuously changing Implementing Partners, there is a risk of becoming continuously disappointed with partners and never fully resolving implementation risks. Despite the strategic commitment to the Fragile States principles, these practical implications have not been fully factored into the overall Irish Aid calculation when planning programme modalities due to a focus on fiduciary risk. Thus, the primary question for Irish Aid moving forwards is not whether the Country Strategy is aligned with Fragile States Principles, but whether the choice of modalities and other operational constraints are consistent with realising the strategy.

## Conclusions

### **1. Sierra Leone represents an improving but uncertain context for strategic programming**

Irish Aid is strategically well placed – through its guiding framework of human rights and collaborative culture – to deal with the continued uncertainty of stability in Sierra Leone, and is well placed to take on long-term difficult issues (such as gender) that require patience, partnership with government, and working through a community of supporters. Operationally, however, Irish Aid’s level of staffing and systems make it much more vulnerable to short-term shocks (staff leaving, project failure) than is ideal.

### **2. The Country Strategy encompassed a comprehensive reflection of policy priorities, but lacked the cohesion to achieve more than the sum of its parts**

Although the Country Strategy was aligned to Ireland’s policy commitments in-the-round, specific areas of programming (e.g. nutrition) did not have clear theories of change, and thus did not fully maximise conceptual links across the programme. Consequently, the Country Strategy can report a ‘set’ of results, rather than adding up to something more. The same observation can be made to links between the Country Strategy and other Irish Aid funding (civil society). Taken in total, this means Ireland is getting, at the very best, €30 million of results from spending €30 million, and not more.

### **3. The underlying logic of the programme has shifted progressively away from central institution-building towards addressing injustice through local service delivery**

As a result of a steady shift towards funding decentralized and INGO-led projects, Ireland has good relationships but low levels of real leverage with the political elite in Sierra Leone. In many ways, this suits the mediating role and the use of soft power that Ireland appears to be most comfortable with. However, protecting or extending gains made through Irish support to justice issues will increasingly rely on the political leverage of other donors and the UN agencies. This may, in reality, be of little real consequence, except that Irish Aid is now considering issues that are highly sensitive – land rights, female genital mutilation, anti-corruption – and thus it may wish to consider options for maintaining independent political leverage with political elites that have a stake in the development of centralized institutions, particularly through funding and international cooperation.

### **4. A combination of intense local-level interventions and national institution building appears to offer the highest chance for creating sustainable achievements**

Whilst the Country Strategy has delivered the greatest achievements in cases such as Rainbo which provides services to survivors of SGBV, there is continued relevance for centralised institution building from the perspective of overall programme effectiveness. Based on experience, it would seem wise to avoid attempts to deliver large-coverage programmes, and focus instead on leveraging the combination of policy and institution building, with funding support to relevant pilot or experimental work in issues where Ireland has a comparative advantage. Such an approach goes back to the vision of the Country Strategy of creating impact in niche areas, with the implication that Irish Aid divests itself further from working in issues where it cannot bring its comparative advantage to bear.

#### **5. Measured by its potential impact, Ireland is not a small donor in Sierra Leone**

Being a ‘small donor’, and the implications this has for making strategic choices, is a strongly held identity for Irish Aid. However, Ireland is, to all intents and purposes, a big presence in Sierra Leone. This lies at the root of different views on how ambitious the next Country Strategy should be. Ireland’s classification of Sierra Leone as a Key Partner Country and its disproportionate voice in nutrition, gender, and human rights has also led to a high expectation among Government, development partners, and the Mission itself. If this expectation is not met, then Ireland may lose the attention of Government and opportunities to influence that it currently enjoys. This being the case, scaling up the capacity of the Mission in Freetown would be a strong endorsement of the One World One Future commitment to work in areas of fragility in order to have the greatest impact.

#### **6. By beginning to place a greater emphasis on decentralised state-building the programme may be trading influence for relevance**

The Mission holds good relationships at the political centre in Sierra Leone; however, the real leverage it enjoys is likely to reduce as Irish Aid directs its resources to decentralized structures. This is the price associated with working more with NGOs and more with district-level service delivery. The potential upside, especially according to the recent Institute of Development Studies analysis, is that work at the periphery is more likely to mitigate the dynamics of conflict that are showing signs of re-emerging. However, despite the relevance that working at the district level has, it is unlikely that Ireland’s contribution will be sufficient to fully mitigate the underlying dynamics of conflict relating to injustice. Thus, it would seem judicious to ensure that maintaining influence at the centre remains part of the strategic mix (see also Conclusion 3).

#### **7. Ireland has carved out niches in nutrition and gender in which it is well positioned to create transformational changes – assuming that the riskiness and long-term commitments needed in these areas can be borne**

The most promising organising pillars for a future Country Strategy are nutrition and gender. Both of these are likely to require long-term (20 years+) engagement to be truly transformative due to their multigenerational and cross-cutting nature. This is well suited to Ireland’s past experience and approach in other countries, providing that the same level of patience and vision can be maintained under pressures to ‘demonstrate results’. Whilst the choice to focus purely on gender and nutrition would substantively reduce the spread of strategic risk across the programme, in Sierra Leone both areas are unlikely to progress without Ireland’s continued support.

#### **8. Ireland’s partnership approach, flexibility and whole-of-government approach is a large comparative advantage in adapting and succeeding in a complex space, if the human resources are available to make it work**

The evaluation proposes that the limited level of human resources available to support the Country Strategy is reflected in the mixed level of attention placed on different parts of the programme portfolio, with staff time naturally directed to where there is greatest traction or the most pressing problems. This has missed some opportunities, especially with regard to food security. The greatest



increase in impact, therefore, is less likely to come from increases in the aid allocation to Sierra Leone, and more likely to come from continuing to expand the Mission's HR capacity.

**9. Modality and partner choices have been aware of risks, but decision-making has mostly been influenced by the practical considerations of human resources and support systems available in Irish Aid.**

A broader view of risk than is currently taken would suggest that the Country Strategy is better served by setting out medium-term objectives for the types of modalities and partnerships Irish Aid would like to work through, and then to proactively start nurturing such opportunities through long-term commitments and capacity development. It is recognized that long-term partnerships in Sierra Leone will be subject to many challenges; but the alternative is to continue funding a series of projects that simply end when each partnership stops. The evaluation considers that the policy commitment to *staying the course* demands that a more strategic view is taken, and that Irish Aid's experience elsewhere is that long-term partnerships are an important element of this.

**10. The real extent of the risks associated with working through specific partners was under-appreciated until recently, but this lesson is being learnt**

Lessons from the programme include the need for Irish Aid to clearly understand in detail the way that resources move through the programmes it is funding. In particular where NGOs or Government institutions are 'sub-contracted' to implement and monitor parts of a project, implementing partners should be expected to be able to provide a comprehensive risk map, mitigation strategy, and risk-based monitoring plan. The current capacity of certain UN agencies in Sierra Leone to deliver this has proven to be questionable, and highlights the need to have stronger assurances (in terms of detailed plans) than relying on international, or even local, reputation. Sierra Leone's new project cycle management systems and Organisational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) are necessary and timely developments. Continuing to strengthen risk-assessment and mitigation need to remain a priority for the Mission.

**11. The programme has been unable to find a practical-yet-meaningful way of managing for results in a context of limited data and complex dynamics**

Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is a weakness in Irish Aid's current capacity in Sierra Leone, reducing opportunities for learning and limiting accountability to the delivery of activities (rather than changes in people's lives). National data systems are likely to remain inconsistent for the foreseeable future. Irish Aid thus needs to find a way of obtaining reliable data that does not rely on national systems, but does not undermine their development either. The most promising immediate option is to work with implementing partners to include agreed-upon national outcome indicators in their own project monitoring and evaluation systems – and to ensure that this aspect of the work is properly funded.

**12. Since Irish Aid initiated its presence in 2005, its achievements in Sierra Leone have been built on the back of a small group of highly committed, resourceful, and overstretched staff: this is becoming an unsustainable, risky and inefficient model for creating long term impact**

The Country Strategy has fully consolidated the gains that were established by the work that preceded it. It remains, however, a programme that has mainly progressed because of the quality, commitment and resourcefulness of the individuals involved. The allocation of human resources must weigh up the duty of care owed to staff, the multi-dimensional risks associated with understaffing in a fragile context, and the opportunity (as recognised in One World One Future) for Ireland to make real impact. Against this backdrop, addressing human resources needs are a priority for Irish Aid moving forwards.

## Recommendations

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### *Recommendations for Irish Aid HQ*

**Priority 1: In the transition of Sierra Leone and Liberia to Key Partner Country status, ensure that future programme management systems maintain the strategic flexibility needed to be effective given the context of fragility**

The resolution of management arrangements and Embassy status for Sierra Leone – both announced subsequent to the research stage of this evaluation – are timely and relevant outcomes. In transitioning to a longer programme cycle it is critical to maintain a degree of the flexibility that Sierra Leone has previously had to respond to opportunities and political uncertainty. In particular, arrangements should be found to make available a reserved flexible portion of funds and technical assistance throughout the Country Strategy period (as per Priority 2).

**Priority 2: Continue to find every opportunity possible – including innovative new ways – to support the Mission in Sierra Leone with high-level technical assistance to ensure coherence within and across Ireland’s strategic investments**

Three main actions are recommended to enhance the strategic coherence of the next Country Strategy, each of which requires commitment from senior levels of management: i) provide training and assistance in the use of theories of change; ii) appoint and budget for external technical advisors to the programme; iii) review institutional barriers to building meaningful synergies across Irish funds disbursed through the Country Strategy Programme and from Civil Society Section.

**Priority 3: Undertake a comprehensive review of the human resources needs for the Sierra Leone and Liberia programmes in light of the One World One Future commitment to situations of fragility, including identification of HR-related issues of specific relevance to working in fragile contexts**

Sierra Leone is a good example of Ireland’s policy commitment to maximising impact through working in situations of fragility. The experience of the Country Strategy clearly demonstrates that the human resource implications of working effectively in these contexts requires a different human resources assessment compared to working in low-income countries. This is manifested in terms of the risk to the organisation of low State capacity, restricted choices of partners and modalities, and overloaded staff (both in-country and HQ).

Currently, there is no mechanism for establishing what the ‘right’ level of human resources is across the full portfolio of Irish Aid interventions in Sierra Leone. It is recommended, therefore, that a comprehensive organisation review be established to assess the staffing implications of the policy commitment to fragility, and to provide clear guidance on future HR levels.

### *Recommendations for Irish Aid Sierra Leone*

**Priority 1: Focus the next Country Strategy on two issues (and the supporting institutional systems) that Ireland wants to help develop over the next 20 years**

It is recommended that the next Country Strategy focuses on two ‘pillars’ – institutional systems that Ireland is willing to commit to develop over the long-haul. The obvious choices for this are gender and nutrition. Food security and governance should be maintained as areas of investment, albeit more

clearly situated under the logic of overall gender and nutrition goals (On page 55 ten nutrition and gender related areas of focus for the next Country Strategy are proposed).

**Priority 2: Invest time to fully analyse the data systems and management-for-results needs of the future Country Strategy as a matter of high priority**

Bearing in mind the need to adapt management-for-development-results (MfDR) to each country context, the evaluation recommends that comprehensive training and assistance on MfDR be provided to the Mission *before* the development of the next Country Strategy. This should explore options to link future objectives and outcomes to the national PRSP framework and the national Mutual Accountability Framework.

Beyond MfDR within the Irish Aid programme, there is also significant scope to include developing national capacity in data management as a specific area of investment within the design of the Country Strategy, especially where it relates to generating and using evidence on gender and nutrition.

**Priority 3: Focus on identifying and developing long-term partnerships, and the opening up of new modality options**

The evaluation recommends a strategy for creating ‘the partners Ireland wants to work with’ in Sierra Leone. This could include: a scoping of potential partners based on long-term trends and not just short-term performance; agreeing a clear division of labour in each sector, with Irish commitment to providing follow-on funding for partners who meet their obligations and invest in their capacity to do so; and establishing an agreed process for constructively working through problems. Partners have not always recognized that they have a problem: linking an explicit commitment to long-term funding to their acknowledging and addressing issues could provide a helpful incentive. Similarly, Ireland needs to demonstrate leadership in order to open up new modality options. This would help stem the shift towards project funding as being the only option that Ireland is willing to use.



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# 1.0 Evaluation Background

The purpose of this evaluation is to provide Irish Aid management with an **independent, evidence based assessment of the performance** of the Irish Aid programme in Sierra Leone for 2011-2013. It applied OECD DAC standards for evaluation of official development assistance (ODA), including specific OECD (2012) guidance for evaluating programmes in fragile contexts<sup>1</sup>.

The utilisation-focused evaluation approach aimed to assess contribution by applying **fair, reasonable, and credible judgement**, based on two main objectives that are derived from the purpose: i) Provide accountability to the Governments and peoples of Ireland and Sierra Leone for results from the funds expended during the period; and ii) have a strong orientation towards lesson learning and particularly learning for post conflict and Fragile State contexts.

The primary intended users for this evaluation are: i) Irish Aid Senior Management Group, Emergency and Recovery Section, Key Partner Countries Section, Irish Aid Sierra Leone; ii) other sections in Irish Aid and DFAT more broadly; and iii) Government and partners in Sierra Leone.

The evaluation primarily focused on generating new data and undertaking comprehensive analysis of:

1. Processes, relationships, funding levels and decisions;
2. Applicability and implications of fragile states principles;
3. Irish Aid capacities and their implications; and the achievements of - and relationships with - Ireland's partners in Sierra Leone.

## 1.1 Evaluation Framework

The evaluation explored five key issues: 1) What was the context? 2) Was Irish Aid aware of it and understand it? 3) Did Irish Aid act appropriately in response? 4) What were the results of this action? and 5) What lessons can be drawn from this?

Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected and processed using an Evaluation Framework based on four broad categories (Strategy, Achievements, Process, Management) and best practice OECD-DAC criteria (Effectiveness, Efficiency, Relevance, Sustainability, Impact). These were *'unpacked'* in consultation with the Evaluation and Audit Unit into **twelve detailed questions**, priority sub-questions, sources, and analyses for the evaluation process. These are presented in full in Annex 3.

**Relevance:** The extent to which the objectives of the Programme are consistent with the evolving needs and priorities of the beneficiaries, partners, and stakeholders.

**Effectiveness:** The extent to which the Programme's objectives were achieved, or are expected / likely to be achieved.

**Efficiency:** How economically resources / inputs (funds, expertise, time, etc.) were converted to results.

**Sustainability:** The likelihood of a continuation of benefits from the intervention after it is completed or the probability of continued long-term benefits.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2012), *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility*. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series. OECD Publishing.



**Impact:** Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by the Programme, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.

## 1.2 Stakeholders

In cooperation with Irish Aid, 31 stakeholder groups were identified and included in the evaluation research, including: 20 types of End-User Groups (a sample was taken of different types of group, such as Public Health Units, Police Family Support Units, Agricultural Business Centres, Schools, Mother’s Groups, etc); 17 CSOs including local sub-implementing partners, Irish NGOs, and civil society representatives; 11 district-level departments or officials (a sample visit was made to Kono District); 10 national Ministries, Departments or Agencies (in Freetown); 7 CSP implementing partners; 11 strategic partners (development partners, UNIPSIL, etc); 17 Irish Aid staff members (in Freetown and HQ). A full Stakeholder Map is presented in Annex 1, linked to the Evaluation Framework.

## 1.3 Evaluation Design and Limitations

The evaluation applied a utilisation-focused approach; it used survey and participatory tools to collect primary data and contribution analysis to develop findings. In addition to an extensive desk review, visits were undertaken to Freetown and Kono District in Sierra Leone. The sampling of stakeholders was designed to provide ‘typical’ examples of project issues rather than to be statistically representative: with an overall aim to provide the most useful and relevant insights possible for the primary intended users (Irish Aid) within the resources and time available.

The evaluation recorded, processed, and analysed data through hand written notes, quantitative analysis in Excel, timelines, affinity mapping (clustering associated points around evaluation framework), and political economy (desk based) analysis.

The main limitations of this approach are the lack of a statistically valid analysis of attribution (what percent of any changes observed can be reliably attributed to Irish Aid interventions). Lack of baseline data for the programme and resource constraints meant that the evaluation also had to rely on quantitative results data from Irish Aid’s M&E system. Where this data was missing or of uncertain quality, the evaluation relied on alternative (qualitative) methods for assessing results.

### Data included in the evaluation

1. 65 Semi Structured Interviews (some combined – e.g. meeting all Irish NGOs together): 25 User Group or district-level representatives; 6 CSOs, 8 MDAs, 8 CSP partners, 5 strategic partners, 13 Irish Aid staff and consultants;
2. 9/15 Perception Surveys (using email/Word based data collection): 6 Irish NGOs, 3 CSP partners;
3. Focus Group Discussions during 15 Direct Observations (field visits); and
4. 200+ sources of Secondary Data Analyses: Irish Aid documents, published research.

### Applying (elements of) contribution analysis

The evaluation reconstructed the underlying theories of change in the Country Strategy, and compared these to the programme logic, the evidence of results, and an examination of other influencing factors. This aimed to i) clarify which, if any, elements of the theory of change were supported and/or verified by available data, and ii) reduce uncertainty about the contribution the programme has made to observed results.

These limitations were primarily mitigated through field visits and focus groups to understand qualitative changes, combined with triangulating multiple sources to understand Irish Aid’s likely contribution.

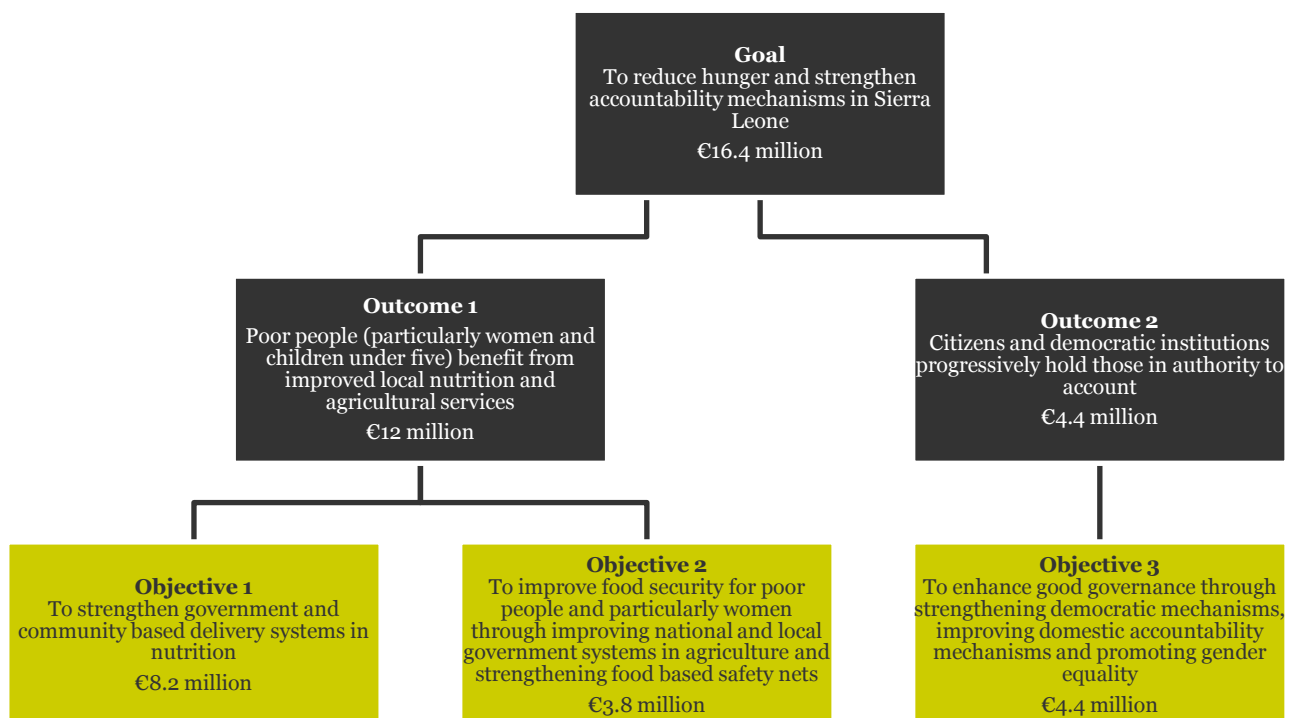
Ideally, an evaluation of this design will assess as much contextual detail as possible, in order to help explore other explanations for any changes that are observed. The evaluation was particularly cognisant of: i) coordination with Irish Aid money through MAPS / Civil Society; ii) the implications of Irish Aid's work in Liberia; iii) Irish Aid global policies and procedures, including One World One Future and the Fragile States principles; and iv) performance assessment of CSP Partners and Sub-partners, cost-effectiveness of projects, and risk quantification of partners and modalities.

A quality assurance process was put in place for the evaluation process, ethics (including voluntary informed consent), data management and gender mainstreaming (see Annex 2). A briefing was provided at the conclusion of the field visit. Where assumptions remain, these are presented as transparently as possible.

## 2.0 The Irish Aid Country Strategy 2011-2013

The Country Strategy 2011-2013 was a €16.4 million programme<sup>2</sup> based on three objectives aimed at transformational changes in niches where Irish Aid has strong comparative advantages. Originally designed to run for two years with a budget of €11 million, it was later extended by an extra year.

**Figure 2.1: Programme Logic and Expenditure**



Seven main strategies were proposed by the programme to implement this vision: i) leverage Ireland's 'honest broker' role; ii) focus on a few strategic funding gaps in key areas; iii) whole-of-Mission approach; iv) a blend of modalities; v) flexible implementation; vi) predictable funding; and vii) enhanced systems for accountability and learning.

In the absence of a published theory of change for the Country Strategy, the evaluation drew on ten generic theories of change used by peace-building programmes<sup>3</sup>, and considered whether they have featured in Irish Aid's thinking. It was found that the Country Strategy primarily intended to address the drivers of conflict through **addressing the underlying issues of injustice**, with a secondary role for establishing stable social institutions and changing the political calculus of key leaders and groups (see Table 2.1).

<sup>2</sup> Including disbursements made in 2010 for programming in 2011. Actual expenditure for years 2011-2013 was €14.2 million.

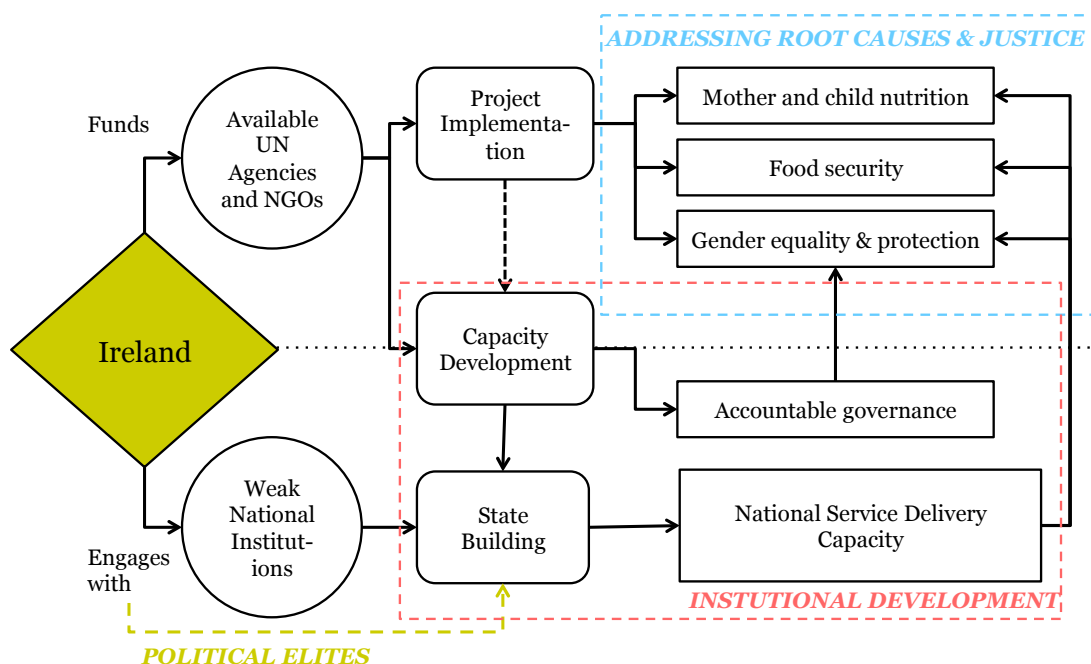
<sup>3</sup> Church, C. and Rogers, M., 2006. *Designing for Results: Integrating Monitoring and Evaluation In Conflict Transformation Programs*. Chapter 2. Search for Common Ground. These are: 1) The Individual Change Theory; 2) The Healthy Relationships and Connections Theory; 3) The Withdrawal of the Resources for War Theory; 4) The Reduction of Violence Theory; 5) The Root Causes/Justice Theory; 6) The Institutional Development Theory; 7) The Political Elites Theory; 8) The Grassroots Mobilization Theory; 9) The Economics Theory; and 10) The Public Attitudes Theory. Download full publication at: <http://bit.ly/QusnWK>

**Table 2.1: Presence of peace-building theories of change in the Country Strategy**

Generic Theories of Change	Presence in the Country Strategy
<p><b>THE ROOT CAUSES/JUSTICE THEORY</b></p> <p>We can achieve peace by addressing the underlying issues of injustice, oppression/ exploitation, threats to identity and security, and people’s sense of injury/victimization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ National Nutrition Programme; 6 Month Contact Point Programme; School Feeding; Supplementary Feeding.</li> <li>☐ Agricultural Business Centres</li> <li>☐ IRC Funding; UNDP Justice Programme</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY:</b></p> <p>Peace is secured by establishing stable/reliable social institutions that guarantee democracy, equity, justice, and fair allocation of resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Anti Corruption Commission</li> <li>☐ Election Basket Fund</li> <li>☐ UNDP Justice Programme</li> <li>☐ Human Rights Commission</li> <li>☐ Gender Policy</li> <li>☐ Scaling Up Nutrition</li> </ul>
<p><b>THE POLITICAL ELITES THEORY:</b></p> <p>Peace comes when it is in the interest of political (and other) leaders to take the necessary steps. Peace-building efforts must change the political calculus of key leaders and groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>☐ Election Basket Fund</li> </ul>

By combining the programme logic (Figure 2.1), the seven implementation strategies, and the theories of change analysis (Table 2.1), the evaluation reconstructed an overall Theory of Change for the Country Strategy (see Figure 2.2). This provides the basis for an assessment of how valid the assumptions that were made in the country strategy have been, and the lessons that this gives for future programmes.

**Figure 2.2: Reconstructed Theory of Change for the Programme**



## 3.0 The Context of Sierra Leone

The conflict in Sierra Leone ended in 2002. During the course of the Country Strategy, Sierra Leone marked a decade since the cessation of hostilities. The first ten years after conflict is a period shown to have around 50 per cent greater risk that a country will relapse into conflict<sup>4</sup>. This has given both domestic and international actors a greater sense of confidence about the country's future.

Sierra Leone's economy is growing but it is not keeping up with sub-Saharan Africa overall; and as a result official development assistance (ODA) makes up a third of the national income<sup>5</sup>. Nationally, poverty decreased by more than 10 percent between 2003 and 2011. Nevertheless, more than half the 5,978,727 population – 52.9 percent – is still classified as living in poverty (World Bank, 2013).

Whilst the rate of urbanisation (3 percent per year) is lower than in other Irish Aid partner countries in Africa, Sierra Leone is starting with a significantly higher urban population (39 percent). With the exception of Zambia, the next highest is Mozambique at 31 percent, which has the same rate of growth as Sierra Leone. Urbanisation is an important factor because economic inequality is increasing in urban areas outside of Freetown<sup>6</sup>, and the poverty headcount increased by 52 percent in the city of Freetown between 2003 and 2011 (UNICEF, 2011; CIA, 2013)

Despite this, agriculture remains the main livelihood for 52.4 percent of households<sup>7</sup> in Sierra Leone (78.3 percent in rural areas). Whilst the mining sector contributes about 30 percent of the country's GDP, its fiscal contribution is actually very limited (around US \$1 per capita compared to US \$6.80 in Tanzania and US \$2.30 in Mozambique – EITI). Lack of transparency about this money has also resulted in Sierra Leone's suspension from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

The education system collapsed during the civil war and is still struggling to recover. More than half of adults (56 percent of over 15s) have never attended formal school<sup>8</sup>. The result is a total adult literacy rate of only 42 percent (UNICEF, 2011). The main focus of development aid has been on primary schooling. Gender parity has been achieved for these younger children, but girls' enrolment rates still fall sharply as they enter childbearing years. Although the overall numbers are up, a marked decline<sup>9</sup> (-31 percent) since the war in new enrolments of six year olds (the entry age for primary school) highlights that major problems in the education system remain (World Bank 2013).

The government introduced the Free Health Care Initiative in April 2010, targeting pregnant women, new mothers, and children under five. More children are now born in hospitals and maternity centres, however, 57 percent of children living in households in the lowest quintile are still born at home (compared to 38 percent of children in the highest quintile) (World Bank 2013). The under-5 mortality rate (U5MR) is 185 per 1,000 live births and the maternal mortality ratio (adjusted) is 890 per 100,000 live births. These are double the rates of Mozambique – the next lowest performer among Ireland's partner countries in Africa – and nearly triple the rates of Ethiopia (UNICEF, 2010, 2011)<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Collier, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Despite recent growth, overall GDP per capita levels lag behind the sub-Saharan African average. In the period 2003-2011, the GDP per capita for Sierra Leone increased 78 percent to \$374 USD; the sub-Saharan average increased 132 percent, to \$1,445 USD (World Bank 2013). Net ODA accounts for 30% of real GDP in Sierra Leone, (UNDP, 2010), with education receiving 6 percent and health 16 percent (OECD, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Overall, national inequality levels (the Gini Coefficient) decreased: from 0.39 in 2003 to 0.32 in 2011.

<sup>7</sup> More male-headed households (55.5 percent) than female-headed households (44.1 percent) list agriculture as their main occupation (World Bank 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Household Survey data from 2011

<sup>9</sup> From 62 percent in 2003 to 43 percent in 2011

<sup>10</sup> Mozambique: U5MR 103, MMR 490; Ethiopia: U5MR 77, MMR 350.

The rate of moderate and severe stunting is 44 percent, use of improved drinking water sources 55 percent, and improved sanitation facilities 13 percent. Current estimates of adult HIV prevalence are low, at 1.6 percent. It is estimated that 88 percent of the adult female population have undergone genital mutilation or cutting (UNICEF, 2011).

Sierra Leone is a country in which the social economic conditions for the majority of the population are improving; but they are doing so from an incredibly low base. Many of the structural challenges of uneven and combined development have yet to manifest themselves because the needs have been so great and so common. However, the signs of unequal development are becoming more apparent in data about growing urban poverty, rural marginalisation, and national socio-economic performance that is falling behind the rest of Africa. This will increasingly strengthen the case for targeted and conflict-sensitive development assistance.

### 3.1 International and National Policy Changes

The Country Strategy was designed with a heavy focus on three main policies: the 2006 White Paper on Ireland's Development Assistance; the OECD-DAC principles for engagement in fragile states; and Sierra Leone's national development strategy (Agenda for Change).

A major concern of the **2006 White Paper** was the global food crisis, and the connected issues of hunger, nutrition, and climate change. The **Sierra Leone PRSP, Agenda for Change 2008-2012**, had three main objectives: i) Energy – to drive pro-poor growth; ii) Transport –to facilitate development, investment and economic activity; and iii) Sustainable human development – through provision of health and education.

The internationally agreed **Fragile States Principles** are the main guiding reference within the country strategy 2011-2013 design: i) Take context as the starting point; ii) Ensure all activities do no harm, iii) Focus on state building as the central objective; iv) Prioritise prevention; v) Recognise the links between political, security and development objectives; vi) Promote non discrimination as a basis for inclusive and stable societies; vii) Align with local priorities in different ways and in different contexts; viii) Agree on practical co-ordination mechanisms between international actors; ix) Act fast... but stay engaged long enough to give success a chance; x) Avoid pockets of exclusion (“aid orphans”).

Since the design of the CSP 2011-2013, other policy frameworks have emerged that are central to Irish Aid's future work in areas of fragility. Principally, these include: Ireland's International Development Policy (One World, One Future), The New Deal for Fragile States, and the Sierra Leone PRSP 3 (Agenda for Prosperity).

**One World, One Future** has three goals: i. Reduced hunger, stronger resilience; ii. Sustainable development, inclusive economic growth, and iii. Better governance, human rights and accountability. And, it has six priority areas for action: i) Global hunger; ii) Fragile states, iii) Climate change and development, iv) Trade and economic growth, v) Essential services, and vi) Human rights and accountability.

The international **New Deal** highlights five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs): PSG 1: Legitimate Politics; PSG 2: Security; PSG 3: Justice; PSG 4: Economic Foundations; and PSG 5: Revenue and Services. The PSGs are supported with the TRUST principles that outline the behavior expected from donors: Transparencyl; Risk sharing; Use and strengthen country systems; Strengthen capacity; Timely and predictable aid.

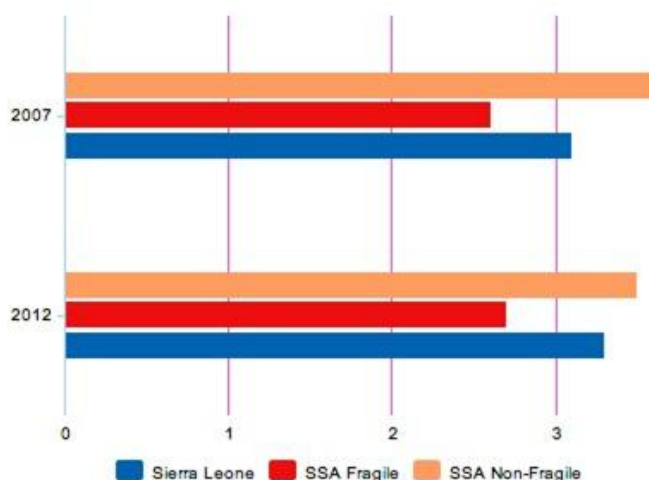
Sierra Leone's new **Agenda for Prosperity** is based upon delivering advances along eight pillars: Pillar 1 – Diversified Economic Growth; Pillar 2 – Managing Natural Resources; Pillar 3 – Accelerating Human Development; Pillar 4 – International Competitiveness; Pillar 5 – Labour and

Employment; Pillar 6 – Social Protection; Pillar 7 – Governance and Public Sector Reform, and Pillar 8 – Gender and Women’s Empowerment.

### 3.2 From Fragility to Resilience

In recent years, many institutions –including the country team in Freetown – have viewed Sierra Leone as having ‘*graduated*’ beyond a post-conflict fragile state. There is some data to back up this view (see Figure 3.1). According to the 2012 World Bank Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA)<sup>11</sup>, Sierra Leone rates higher or equal to the continental average on all dimensions (economic management, structural policies, policies for social inclusion and equity, and public sector management and institutions). Improvements were recorded 2007-2012 in all dimensions except ‘economic management’, which declined. Sierra Leone rated significantly higher than the overall scores for countries classified as Fragile States in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Figure 3.1: Comparison of overall CPIA scores for fragile and non-fragile states in SSA**



By the end of 2012, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had removed Sierra Leone from its list of ‘fragile and conflict-affected’ countries: graduating the country to low-income status. According to Allouche (2013), this reflected the “*more stable political environment, as evidenced by largely fair and violence-free elections in November 2012*”. The United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL) is due to close its mission in 2014. The Peacebuilding Commission, stated that the 2012 elections showed the country had crossed ‘a threshold’.

Despite this apparent progress, many of the previous drivers of conflict still exist. The Security Sector Reform Report (Office for National Security, 2012) identified six threats to stability in Sierra Leone:

A **participatory fragility assessment** was piloted in Sierra Leone as part of the New Deal (GoSL, 2012). This identified the drivers of conflict as:

1. positive institutional reforms, but capacity restraints and delays;
2. regulations, policies and procedures are in place but are often not enforced;
3. civil service under rewarded; regional variation and resentment;
4. importance of customary or informal systems;
5. short term focus of projects;
6. political competition, with limited opportunities for participation of majority;
7. impunity of elite and sense of injustice;
8. extreme inequalities between the elite and the majority;
9. unemployment and low standards of living led to a population with nothing left to lose;
10. low levels of education;
11. poor access or equality in basic service provision limits public stake in peace and security.

<sup>11</sup> The CPIA consists of 16 criteria grouped in four equally weighted clusters: Economic Management, Structural Policies, Policies for Social Inclusion and Equity, and Public Sector Management and Institutions. For each of the 16 criteria, countries are rated on a scale of 1 (low) to 6 (high). The scores depend on the level of performance in a given year assessed against the criteria, rather than on changes in performance compared to the previous year. The ratings depend on actual policies and performance, rather than on promises or intentions. The ratings reflect a variety of indicators, observations, and judgments originated in the World Bank or elsewhere. For details see: [www.worldbank.org/africa/CPIA](http://www.worldbank.org/africa/CPIA)

i) very weak capacity of the security sector institutions compared to their required capabilities; ii) uncontrollable immigration of people from West Africa drawn to the relatively investor-friendly atmosphere and growth in agriculture and mining; iii) environmental degradation and pollution as people source energy and income, often from unregulated and uncontrolled mining; iv) involvement of the Sierra Leone Armed forces in the African Union Peacekeeping force in Somalia puts the country at risk of retribution from Al Shebaab; v) organised criminal activities including money laundering, human trafficking, and illegal printing of currency notes; and vi) weak national disaster management and coordination mechanisms, inaccessibility, and poor communication networks.

A recent paper by the Institute of Development Studies (Allouche, 2013) argues that Sierra Leone remains – and is increasingly – fragile due to re-emergence of the same drivers of conflict as before. He finds that:

1. Donor focus on the institutions of governance, including re-establishing the chieftaincy system, has allowed the same patriarchal elite to maintain power – marginalising young people and women;
2. Structural youth unemployment stands at about 60 percent and one of the grievances considered a major driver in the conflict; and
3. Sierra Leone’s winner-takes-all style of politics has largely been mediated by the international community, making the decreased international political attention associated with UNIPSIL’s departure a significant factor of vulnerability.

Nevertheless, Sierra Leone has demonstrated a number of positive capacities that are not considered by most conflict analyses. Glennerster, Miguel and Rothenberg (2009) from MIT and U.C. Berkeley studied the impact of ethnic, religious, and class divisions on local collective action and public goods in Sierra Leone. Despite being among the world’s most ethnically diverse countries, and having the legacy of conflict, their analysis found that conflict in Sierra Leone is not statistically linked with different levels of religious diversity, historical slavery, or civil war violence (as might be expected based on theory). The authors explained this extraordinary finding in terms of both shared history and language, and the coercive traditional hierarchy of chiefdoms.

**Overall, it is the view of this evaluation that whilst the trends in national development are currently positive – and need to be recognised as so – these are built on weak foundations.** This creates a complex, unusual, and emergent context for programme design in Sierra Leone. Simply classifying Sierra Leone as a *‘fragile state’* does an injustice to the progress that has been made, and risks being blind to opportunities or capacities to consolidate this transition. At the same time, programmes still need to address the root causes of conflict – youth unemployment, political marginalisation, barriers to justice – and be alert to the continuing fragility of the current social contract.



## 4.0 Strategic Choices: did Irish Aid recognise and understand the context?

**The evaluation finds that the decisions made in the design and continuous adaptation of the Country Strategy were strongly aligned with Irish Aid policy, Fragile States principles and contextual awareness. However, the implementation of this design – in terms of choices of modalities and partners – has been more informed by organisational and operational constraints than by strategic relevance. Overcoming these constraints requires Ireland to be proactive in developing new strategic options for modalities and partners, developing a more rounded responsiveness to strategic risks, and improving coherence between Country Strategy and Civil Society Section funding to Sierra Leone.**

### 4.1 Major Strategic Choices

A September 2009 internal evaluation of Irish Aid’s Interim Strategy for Sierra Leone 2006-2008 recommended to “*focus efforts on the three sectors of Health, Food Security and Peace building*”. Subsequent consultations led to this being refocused primarily in nutrition, food security and governance (and the links between them)<sup>12</sup>. As a result, Irish support was phased out of projects that worked on: youth, private sector, media, Special Court for Sierra Leone, Search for Common Ground and health. An internal Mid-Term Review undertaken by Irish Aid in 2012 found this strategy to be relevant in the changing context.

Programme documents and interviews with Irish Aid stakeholders from the time suggest that these decisions were based on i) areas of strategic relevance within Ireland’s existing experience, ii) policy priorities under the White Paper 2006 – and thus likely technical support from HQ, iii) the funding commitments and interests of other donors, and iv) the performance and reputation (at the time) of potential partners working in each area.

Socio-economic data on Sierra Leone illustrates that every sector is an area of high priority: with the implication that any decision to focus the programme would have cut interventions that were still relevant. The opportunity costs for Irish Aid of the decision to focus on nutrition, food security and governance were disengagement from: i) a major national policy priority (the Free Healthcare Initiative, which has multi-donor support<sup>13</sup>), and ii) major drivers of conflict including youth disenfranchisement, structural unemployment (estimated at 60%) and education.

Some people within Irish Aid question whether this was the best strategic decision. Most importantly, in the view of this evaluation, a necessary and timely decision was made. This avoided spreading limited human and financial resources too thinly to have any meaningful effect<sup>14</sup>. The Country Strategy certainly helped to avoid nutrition and gender becoming ‘*aid orphans*’ – meeting both a fragile states principle, and Ireland’s global policy priorities. In doing so, however, Ireland chose not to ‘*stay the course*’ (another fragile states principle) in two sectors – health and youth – where it previously had significant engagement.

<sup>12</sup> The justification for each of these focus areas is explored under “5.0 Programme Results”.

<sup>13</sup> It should be noted that the Free Healthcare Initiative was not included in Agenda for Change, the PRSP at the time of the Country Strategy design.

<sup>14</sup> See also the later discussion on programme management and processes

Although the design of the programme attempted to mitigate the downsides of this decision, this has been met with mixed success. For instance, the programme’s nutrition work still provides support to some of the same target group as the Free Healthcare Initiative, and health sector strengthening has continued successfully without Ireland’s participation<sup>15</sup>. It has also brought nutrition to the attention of health and agriculture policy makers, and is now part of the global Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative (see later discussion on achievements). By comparison, the youth sector is an underfunded area, and none of the Country Strategy projects are able to report a specific impact on youth employment, participation or education (the major drivers of past conflict)<sup>16</sup>.

The OECD-DAC principles for working in Fragile States<sup>17</sup> emphasise both contextual awareness and practical approaches to relevant and effective action. Secondary data analysis and interviews found that both the Country Strategy document and Irish Aid staff are sensitive to the principle drivers of conflict that have recently been identified under the New Deal for Fragile States process. Notably, however, the programme document focused primarily on negative drivers (and did not describe positive capacities for peace as is considered good practice). Nevertheless, the actual practice of project commissioning and policy engagement has reflected an understanding of positive capacities for peace (such as ethnic and religious tolerance, and willingness to put aside past acts of violence).

In terms of practical action, multiple stakeholders noted that **Irish Aid’s culture, approach, and systems are well suited to addressing long-term complex issues (such as nutrition and food security, and gender) in the context of Sierra Leone**. In comparison to most other donors, for example, Ireland has a coherent relationship between its foreign and development policies, is not politically limited to only issues that provide short term-quantitative results, and can draw on its own modern history of state-building (especially in terms of the length of time it takes to build effective institutions).

The evaluation considered each of the OECD Fragile States Principles in turn, drawing on both document analysis and interviews to establish a view on the alignment of the Country Strategy with these ideals. As a means of illustrating the relative strengths and weaknesses of the programme, a five-star rating system was used to synthesise the findings: with 5 representing full alignment and 0 representing no alignment. These ratings (see Table 4.1) are merely an illustrative device.

#### Lesson

Irish Aid’s internal culture, programming approach and relationships with national institutions are well suited to addressing long-term issues such as human rights and gender in fragility.

Ireland is trusted by government and maintains open access to decision makers by refraining from expressing strong normative opinions, providing constructive (rather than critical) inputs to policy, measuring success qualitatively (rather than in short-term numbers), and maintaining foreign and development policies that are consistent with one another.

<sup>15</sup> The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has created a single project unit to oversee all health programmes, and is regarded as being the sector closest to establishing a full Sector Wide Approach (SWAp).

<sup>16</sup> Although it should be noted that young mothers are targeted by multiple components in the Country Strategy

<sup>17</sup> The Fragile States Principles are intended to help international actors foster constructive engagement between national and international stakeholders in countries with problems of weak governance and conflict, and during episodes of temporary fragility in the stronger performing countries. They are designed to support existing dialogue and coordination processes, not to generate new ones. In particular, they aim to complement the partnership commitments set out in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

**Table 4.1: Consistency with the Fragile States Principles**

Principle	Evaluation rating	Evidence
Context as the Starting Point	★★★★•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The CSP included a conflict analysis that has been largely verified by a subsequent Country Fragility Assessment under the New Deal;</li> <li>The Conflict analysis did not include positive drivers for peace and/or development;</li> <li>The Mission has good strategic and local awareness through its relationships, but human resource constraints leave it <i>firefighting</i> issues that could have been mitigated;</li> <li>A flexible approach allowed the Country Team to respond rapidly to a changing context;</li> <li>A trend in No Cost Extensions suggests that the capacity context is continuously overestimated.</li> </ul>
Do No Harm	★★★★••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project-by-project based programming has not been conducive to mainstreaming conflict issues across the programme, although individual projects are sensitive;</li> <li>Risk assessments have been introduced to the project cycle management system, but are still over-reliant on partners' narrative reports or Irish Aid monitoring;</li> <li>The Mission has acted fast and with considerable engagement to resolve corruption issues where they have emerged – but this has not always been the case among its partners.</li> </ul>
Focus on Statebuilding	★★★★••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The concept of state building has shifted from the centre to the districts over the course of the CSP, this is reflected in a shift of funding from the UN to INGOs;</li> <li>Whilst this fits Ireland's comparative advantages, the small number of donors in Sierra Leone mean that it is still expected to play a strong role at the centre;</li> <li>UN funding modalities tend to complement – but are weak at strengthening – national systems, and the project-by-project commissioning of support based on available funding opportunities mitigates against state-building focus;</li> <li>In some cases – particularly school feeding – the Mission has pushed Partners to develop extensive monitoring systems outside of Government to address its operational concerns;</li> <li>Policy work has strengthened the presence of gender and nutrition on the national agenda.</li> </ul>
Staying the course	★★★★••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within the sectors and partnerships of this CSP, Irish Aid has mostly remained actively engaged – particularly in relation to nutrition and gender;</li> <li>Ireland forewent the opportunity to stay engaged in the health and youth sectors as the price of focusing;</li> <li>The Mission appears to be disengaging from its Food Security projects due primarily to discontent with partners.</li> </ul>
Non-discrimination	★★••••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data on who is being reached and who excluded (and how often) is not collected;</li> <li>Current needs are so widespread that this is yet to register as a major concern, but more research on barriers to access in</li> </ul>

		projects is required.
Prevention	★★★★•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ireland’s philosophical approach is focused on addressing conflict through enhancing justice, this (along with the building of institutions to enable the delivery of equitable services) is in line with most analyses of the causes of conflict in Sierra Leone;</li> <li>• Within the programme, women’s groups are emerging as having strong potential for creating wider change.</li> </ul>
Links between security, political and development	★★★★•	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Field visits by the Mission, combined diplomatic and development arms, and lack of commercial interests are advantageous for whole-of-Government working in Sierra Leone;</li> <li>• Ireland relies on other countries to take the burden of security work;</li> <li>• Tensions around land rights, FGM/C and other justice issues have yet to be tested without the presence of international security forces.</li> </ul>
Practical coordination	★★★★••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ireland engages where it can with the human resources it has;</li> <li>• Policy and programme coordination is largely pragmatic and informal;</li> <li>• Development of a Mutual Accountability Framework being led by DFID is an opportunity for Ireland to formalise participation at the policy level;</li> <li>• Medium term funding commitments would enhance opportunities for coordination, the new 5 year national Agenda for Prosperity is a timely moment to introduce this;</li> <li>• Data is a massive challenge in Sierra Leone, and Ireland has not invested in this area until a 2013 project was agreed with FAO to support food and nutrition security early warning;</li> </ul>
Avoiding exclusion	★★★★••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nutrition and gender are both underfunded areas in which Ireland has exercised leadership and prevented aid-orphans;</li> <li>• Country Team field visits regularly question the reach of projects;</li> <li>• Rainbo Centres and Saturday Courts are addressing an issue that is invisible to the main economic development policies;</li> <li>• Education – especially secondary and tertiary – is a major gap in funding to Sierra Leone, and Youth issues remain a major under-addressed concern in relation to conflict;</li> <li>• Within its financial and human resource envelope, Irish Aid has found niches in which an impact can be made.</li> </ul>
Local priorities	★★★★••	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ireland is perceived as collaborative – aligning to national goals, but constructively challenging the processes and approaches within these;</li> <li>• Ireland did participate in the multi donor trust fund for elections, but has chosen not to participate in moves towards budget support, sector-wide funding in health, or other efforts to enable nationally-led modalities.</li> </ul>

Overall, it was found that the Country Strategy was well aligned with the Fragile States Principles (see Table 4.1). The evaluation did detect a propensity towards the broad ‘strategic’ principles such as responding to context, avoiding exclusion, and statebuilding (which are perhaps more readily

addressed by a small team). The areas that were comparatively weaker were largely a consequence of blanket targeting of beneficiaries by projects, or the decision to withdraw from health and youth sectors (as discussed above). These issues are both discussed in more detail in the section of the report on achievements (in relation to blanket targeting) and management (in relation to the decision to focus on fewer sectors).

As noted above, the experience of Irish Aid in Sierra Leone has revealed some of the inherent tensions between the Fragile States Principles when resources are finite: such as choosing to *avoid exclusion* of nutrition issues, but at the expense of *staying the course* in youth. In terms of its overall strategy, the evaluation found that the choices made by Irish Aid have – despite these tensions – been relevant, justifiable, and consistent with a longer-term process of refining the organisation’s areas of comparative advantage. By executing this strategy primarily through a project modality, however, the evaluation questions the extent to which the dominant drivers of conflict (including political clientelism; a “winner takes all” social contract; social emphasis on kinship; endemic corruption; underemployment; and arbitrary justice) have been successfully taken account of within the portfolio.

**At the root of this challenge is the absence of clear sector-level theories of change – the logic for how change is to be created under each outcome area – within the Country Strategy document.** Under each Country Strategy objective, projects were found to have been selected primarily according to which opportunities were available at the time and that Ireland could afford to support in terms of the Mission’s human resources capacity (rather than what was needed to address the programme’s theory of change for that sector).

**Lesson**

Country Strategies need to have detailed theories of change for each outcome and objective in order that all the individual projects, partners and modality choices add-up to a coherent strategic ‘big picture’.

These conditions initially led to a reliance on large UN projects that have been subject to their own implementation difficulties (see next section). However, shifting to more and smaller projects (primarily with INGOs) has resulted in a portfolio of projects that rely for their effectiveness partly on institutions (particularly the criminal justice system) that Irish Aid’s own analysis has identified as sources of fragility (see next section). **Thus, the primary question for Irish Aid moving forwards is not whether the Country Strategy is aligned with Fragile States Principles, but whether the choice of modalities and other operational constraints are consistent with realising this strategy.**

## 4.2 Selection of Modalities and Partners

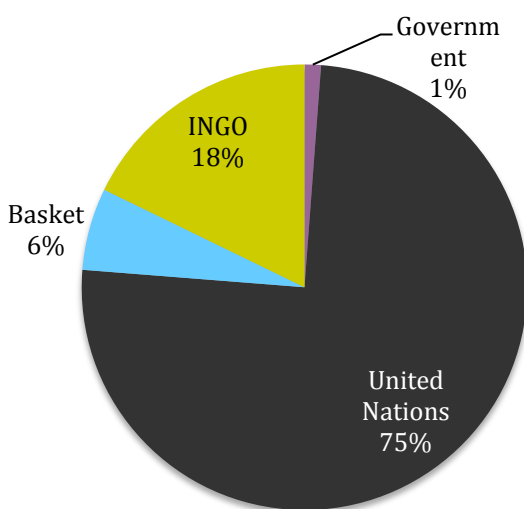
The intention of the Country Strategy has been to use a mix of modalities – as appropriate – and transition towards more direct support to Government. The reality of implementation has been 75 percent of funding directed through the United Nations agencies (see Figure 4.1). Support through the United Nations was both practical (in terms of human resources) and coherent with the 2006 White Paper commitment. Significantly, however, there has been a recent shift in funding away from the UN and towards INGOs (see Figure 4.2). Ireland does not provide direct budget support, and only €200,000 was transferred directly to Government (although €400,000 was planned).

**Table 4.2: Country Strategy Partners and Areas of Focus**

Modality	Partner	Focus
United Nations (Programme)	UNICEF	Nutrition
	UNDP	Governance (access to justice)
	FAO	Food security

	WFP	Nutrition and food security
Basket	UNDP	Governance (elections)
Project	International Rescue Council	Governance (gender based violence)
	Welt Hunger Hilfe	Nutrition and food security
	Save the Children	Nutrition and health
	Helen Keller	Nutrition
	Action Contre la Faim	Nutrition
Government	Anti-Corruption Commission	Governance (anti-corruption)

**Figure 4.1: Country Strategy spend according to modality**



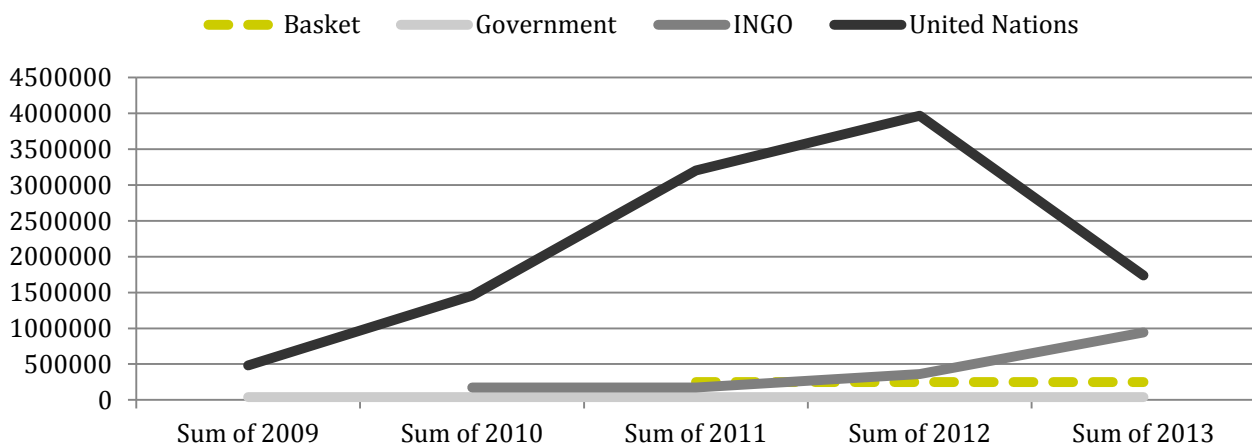
Despite the enthusiasm for budget support within Government ministries, absorption capacity and accounting remain major sources of risk. Information provided by donors who do provide budget support suggests that, at present, no more than 10 percent of their portfolios are allocated to budget support, with even this amount is split into conditional tranches. Applying the same proportions to Ireland’s budget would imply a ceiling of €550,000 in direct budget support per year.

**Based on this, it is the view of the evaluation that budget support is unlikely to offer value (above that available through alternative modalities) in relation to the domestic political risk (in Ireland) and level of management oversight it necessitates. The amount is considered too small to meet any**

**significant gap in the national budget, and is thus unlikely to bolster Ireland’s voice with either Government or other donors.**

With no sector-wide approaches (SWAp) in Sierra Leone, the Mission continues to face limited choice in terms of sector support. Project and programme (UN) funding remains the predominant modality in the Country Strategy largely for practical reasons. The flexibility of project funding has enabled new partners to be brought on board as opportunities or problems have emerged. However, it also fragments the programme and reduces the strategic linkages between activities.

**Figure 4.2: Average annual spend according to modality\***



\*assumes that projects are funded equally across all years

Whilst acknowledging that parts of the programme *have* achieved important links – notably around food security (agricultural business centres, P4P and school feeding), gender (Rainbo and access to justice), and nutrition (UNICEF, Helen Keller International, and supplementary feeding) – each of these is subject to the performance of individual projects and the informal commitment of implementing partners to working together. An example of where these ‘*clusters of projects*’ have fallen short of what might be expected from a full sectoral programme is the production of rice by Agricultural Business Centres. This has responded to the project-needs of school feeding (which buys through Purchase for Progress) rather than the overall sector priority of promoting more nutritious alternatives.

**It is the view of the evaluation, therefore, that shifting to more and smaller INGO projects – however relevant each is in its own right – runs counter to the strategic ambition of achieving cohesive programming in the sectors in which Irish Aid works.**

Out of the four main sectors in which the current *de facto* programme operates (food security, nutrition, governance and gender), evaluation interviewees suggest that gender and nutrition both show the greatest promise for the development of sector-wide funding mechanisms. Although both issues are cross-cutting in nature, they both benefit from having defined groups of advocates (convened by the Scaling Up Nutrition – SUN – movement and the Gender Pillar of the Agenda for Prosperity) who appear willing to develop joint mechanisms as a means of strengthening their influence.

#### 4.2.1 Exploring alternative modalities

Helping to create new sector-wide programmes or approaches in nutrition or gender would enable the Country Strategy to diversify the modalities it uses, and – in the view of the evaluation – should be considered a priority. Whilst there is interest within Irish Aid to explore such modalities (especially given positive experiences with the health sector fund in Liberia), there is little evidence that the Country Strategy is actively seeking to open these up. Regardless of whether this is due to human resource constraints (discussed under the section on management) or the design of the country strategy, the implication of this is that Irish Aid will continue to be a *prisoner to circumstance* in relation to modalities.

Indeed, even without the availability of joint-funding mechanisms, alternative modalities to project funding – such as providing technical assistance to Government or supporting exchange visits – may have added value to the intended ‘mix’ in the Country Strategy. Alternatively, Irish NGOs are interested in developing coalitions to implement programmes – and are the most obvious grouping that could to develop a like-minded grouping to implement larger sector programmes as a complement to the UN<sup>18</sup> – but funding rules (the Country Strategy cannot fund Irish NGOs directly) mean that this option has not been explored (this is a separate issue from collaboration more generally, which is discussed under section 4.4).

Based on its recent success in policy engagement (see discussion on policy, below), **Irish Aid has been considerably more successful at putting issues on the agenda (particularly gender and nutrition) than it has at extending the range of modalities available to implement these ambitions.** But, Ireland has an important role to play in doing this. For the four large donors (European Union, World Bank, DFID, African Development Bank), the possibility of

#### Lesson

Success at the policy-level in the areas of gender and nutrition needs to be matched with Irish leadership to help bring about the modalities required to implement those policies.

<sup>18</sup> Similar to USAID’s approach

using direct budget support reduces their immediate need for sector-support options. Of the ‘second tier’ donors (in terms of ODA spend – USAID, Germany, Japan, Ireland), the evaluation considers that it is Ireland that has the biggest policy and capacity interests in making available alternatives to project funding<sup>19</sup>. **Irish leadership, therefore, is likely to be catalytic to the creation of sector wide approaches and new basket funds.**

Whilst the Irish Aid programme has, in essence, remained confined to project funding, the Mission has moved a considerable distance in putting in place more systematic approaches to assessing partners and projects<sup>20</sup>. The need for more systematic programme management was identified in Irish Aid’s 2009 internal evaluation of the Interim Strategy, but was only made possible in the ‘space’ created once there was: i) an enlarged team, ii) in a new office, iii) focused on programme implementation. The Country Team was also able to build on wider Irish Aid investments in Results Based Management and project appraisal mechanisms.

The main changes that these systems have brought are the depth and breadth of pre-contracting assessment. The initial identification of potential partners has remained the same – primarily based on organisations that are already working on issues of interest to Ireland (such as Helen Keller’s existing work on nutrition), and that have a track record and positive reputation among other donors. Country visits by HQ technical experts have made significant contributions to clarifying issues and providing surety in the selection of partners. The recruitment of experienced national advisors has also added significant technical and local knowledge to the review process.

**Partnering with organisations that had a track record was intended to minimise programme performance risk whilst avoiding the workload of open requests for proposals. A key lesson has been that even large multilateral organisations may not be able to maintain an assured level of quality in the context of Sierra Leone. This experience has led towards using more specialist INGOs (and away from UN or government programming), and thus exacerbated the Country Strategy as a ‘collection of projects’ rather than a strategically cohesive programme.**

#### 4.3 Alignment of the Programme with Irish Aid Policy

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*“We will help build government systems. We will build capacity to plan, deliver, manage and monitor services. We will support efforts to combat corruption and help make governments more responsive to the needs of their citizens. Working with civil society, we will help citizens articulate those needs.” – White Paper on Irish Aid 2006*

The overall design of the Country Strategy demonstrates strong alignment with many of the key principles and decisions in the 2006 White Paper (including working with United Nations agencies). In particular, the *partnership* approach to working with Government was reflected in all interviews with ministries. *Transparency* and *effectiveness* have been weaker in the design due to limitations around performance data (discussed later under Programme Management). The commitment to Human Rights is strongly reflected in the project choices and the strong focus on SGBV is also in line with specific commitments under both the 2006 White Paper and *One World One Future*.

Some aspects of Ireland’s development policy commitments are not reflected in Sierra Leone, as is to be expected due to the need for prioritising interventions. For example, whilst disabilities are a major issue in Sierra Leone (WHO estimate there are at least 450,000 people who are differently abled), this

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<sup>19</sup> USAID has traditionally used NGO alliances to deliver programme support, interviews with GiZ revealed that Germany’s risk tolerance is lower than that of Ireland’s Country Strategy

<sup>20</sup> It is noted that these systems had to be developed locally, only drawing to some extent on information shared by other partner countries and without having standardized protocols as guidance.



issue is not explicitly included in the programme portfolio. Similarly, the programme work on food security has not addressed issues of climate change or environmental conservation (which are not on the political agenda in Sierra Leone)<sup>21</sup>.

Some of the outcomes of Country Strategy implementation experience do position the Sierra Leone programme to take account of the goals and priorities under *One World One Future*. In particular, **Irish Aid is now well positioned in Sierra Leone to deliver Ireland’s commitment to championing nutrition through the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) movement (OWOF, p14); and to maximising impact by working in contexts of fragility (OWOF, p3).**

The Mission has executed a dual strategy in pursuing these policy commitments: both funding projects and engaging in national policy dialogue. Irish Aid’s work in policy engagement is more fully explored in a separate *Learning Brief* that accompanies this evaluation and under the discussion on achievements (see Section 5.0). Overall, the evaluation considers that the Mission’s policy work is both relevant to the OECD-DAC Fragile States principle of state-building as a central objective, and the New Deal for Fragile States ‘FOCUS’ principle to “*support political dialogue and leadership... for credible and inclusive processes.*” This is discussed further under Chapter 5.

#### 4.3.1 Working in Contexts of Fragility

In terms of policy engagement, the consistency of Ireland’s foreign policy and development goals, and the combined diplomatic and development roles of the Mission, has been advantageous to effective strategic engagement in a fragile context. The Sierra Leone 2012 election process – including Ireland’s work with the Election Commission, the Human Rights Commission, and party leaderships – is illustrative of this (see Section 5.0). In terms of funding, however, Irish Aid’s approach has been less ‘geared’ to strategically managing the risks associated with fragility.

Whilst *One World One Future* acknowledges the inherency of risks in fragile contexts, the domestic appetite for fiduciary risk in Ireland is has reduced. This is in contrast to the reality of Sierra Leone, which ranks 119/177 in the Corruption Perceptions Index 2013. Whilst Irish Aid’s policy engagement work does reflect a strategic understanding of this risk environment – and the use of risk registers and discussion of risk in programme documents does reflect the importance placed on risk – the evaluation found that the current assessment of programmatic risk is incomplete. For example, the risk associated with *not* intervening is not being systematically assessed, and neither are the vulnerabilities associated with overextending staff.

The Country Strategy approach has been to mitigate and control programmatic risk (both fiduciary and in terms of results) by diversifying the project portfolio (to avoid having ‘all the eggs in one basket’), one-year funding windows (to allow the Mission flexibility where projects are not working or where the situation changes), and extensive field monitoring by Irish Aid staff members. However, due diligence with regard to partners has been confined to relying on past experience, discussions with other donors, and reassurances placed in proposals.

**Where problems have arisen, Irish Aid has been good at dealing with them; but it has been relatively weak in foreseeing and**

#### Lesson

Assessments of fiduciary risk have to go beyond the immediate implementing partner, and analyse the pathways that resources move through a project all the way to the intended beneficiary. Identify the vulnerable points in these pathways means that Irish Aid can support appropriate capacity development of partners before difficulties arise. This process needs to be on going, because history in Sierra Leone has shown that the capacity and performance of partners has varied greatly with changes in their staff members.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/research/climate/projects/undp-cp/UNDP\\_reports/Sierra\\_Leone/Sierra\\_Leone.lowres.report.pdf](http://www.geog.ox.ac.uk/research/climate/projects/undp-cp/UNDP_reports/Sierra_Leone/Sierra_Leone.lowres.report.pdf)

**forestalling implementation issues. This is due, in part, to a lack of detailed analysis and understanding of how resources will flow through a project and where the major vulnerabilities are.**

*“We will focus within our programme on countries experiencing greater fragility ... while such work presents more risks, the risk of inaction is greater.” One World One Future*

*One World One Future* justifies taking risks based on them outweighing the alternative ‘risk of doing nothing’. The Country Strategy has not, however, articulated the case for (and risk of) inaction as a means for calibrating what level of programme risk is tolerable. This is considered to be especially relevant given that the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative, Human Rights Commission and gender project are all substantially reliant on Irish Aid. It is also the case that it is insufficient to focus primarily on reducing fiduciary risk when the justification

for taking risk in the first place is to create impact: delivery of the Sierra Leone programme may, in-the-round, actually be most vulnerable to staff burnout, accidents, or continuous changing of the Liberia programme officer.

**From a strategic perspective, the evaluation thus considers that the choice to engage with and attempt to mitigate the risks associated with working in Sierra Leone is fully in line with Ireland’s current policy commitments.**

In executing these commitments, however, particular strategic risks are being given greater visibility than others – particularly fiduciary risk. Rebalancing the assessment of risk to include, for example, issues of staff stress and the consequences of Ireland not being present in a sector is necessary in order to fully meet the stated intent of *One World One Future*. This is discussed under Chapter 6.

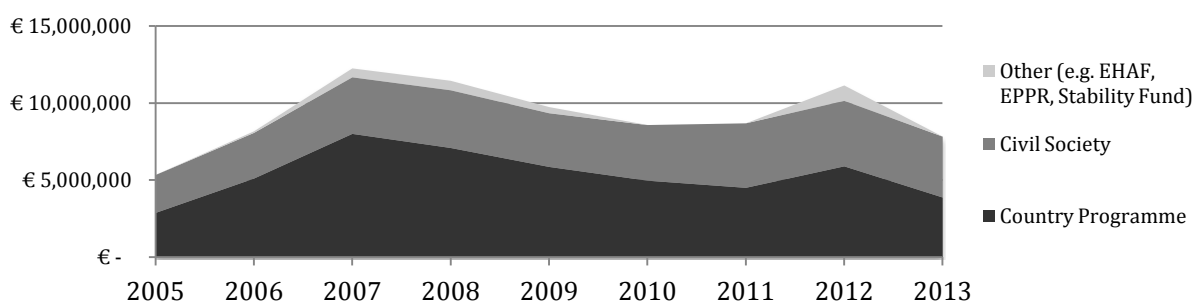
**Lesson**

The risk in Sierra Leone of Irish Aid not acting, in terms of Ireland’s commitment to human rights and gender equality, is very great indeed. Whilst *One World One Future* recognises the importance of this risk in choosing to work in fragile contexts, it is not being explicitly assessed, captured or included in the rationale for decision making. Without this understanding, it is very easy for the strategic consideration of risk to lose sight of why Ireland is partnering with Sierra Leone, become preoccupied with only reducing fiduciary risks, and to miss other factors such as staff burnout.

#### 4.4 Coherence with Other Sources of Irish Development Assistance

Irish Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Sierra Leone outside of the Country Strategy (mostly through Civil Society Section support to NGOs) is estimated to have been worth up to €12.4 million over the course of the programme. Figure 4.3 illustrates the significance of this amount on total Irish funding to Sierra Leone. Despite this, no significant reference is made in the Country Strategy or in the Mid Term Review to aligning with the work undertaken using this money. Programmatically, the links between activities funded by the Country Strategy and other sources of Irish money are few, ad hoc, and not prioritised.

**Figure 4.3: Aggregate Irish funding to Sierra Leone, 2005-2013**



In Sierra Leone, communication between the Mission and Irish NGOs appears to be appropriate to the level of ambition that Irish Aid currently has for these relationships. This avoids unnecessary ‘meetings for the sake of meetings’. The perspective of both the Mission and Irish NGOs appears to be that the current funding arrangements mean that there is little incentive for either party to proactively develop more sophisticated programmatic linkages. This dissipates the full potential of Irish ODA to leverage impacts as a ‘bloc’, and is leading to missed opportunities.

If greater coherence and joint programming were to be demanded of both ‘streams’ of Irish Aid money being channelled to Sierra Leone – as is reported by HQ stakeholders to have been the case in other Key Partner Countries – then the current pragmatic, informal, and ‘resource-light’ collaboration arrangements will need to be revised.

For example, Irish NGOs have technical, research, and field level capacity that could add benefit to the comparative advantage and technical knowledge of the Mission and Irish Aid HQ. The Mission is well placed to assist with institution building and linking to national priorities, which complements INGO technical design capacity and service delivery. Furthermore, Irish NGOs are developing regional programming, which could help inform and complement nuanced synergies between the Sierra Leone and Liberia Country Strategies.

**Whilst the evaluation does not consider these collaborative possibilities for the Country Strategy and Irish NGOs as critical to achieving Country Strategy results – and acknowledges the coordination that is happening – it does consider that there is a strategic gap in maximising the value-for-money of the total Irish ODA to Sierra Leone.**

## 5.0 Programme Results: what did the Country Strategy achieve?

**The evaluation finds that the Country Strategy delivered an impressive set of outputs – both expected and unexpected. The combination of financial grants, field visits and policy advocacy have delivered significant percentage point increases in the delivery of acute malnutrition services, access to justice and care for survivors of gender based violence, and participation in food security interventions. Along with support to human rights and anti-corruption, these achievements are clearly aligned with the situation analysis in the Country Strategy. However, systemic weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation mean that it is not possible to state how many Sierra Leoneans have been supported by Irish Aid, or what the impacts have been on their lives.**

### 5.1 Introduction

Some major achievements of the programme have been: i) scaling up and introducing value-addition to agricultural business centres linked to providing meals for 250,000 school children; iii) putting nutrition on the national agenda and forging working links between the ministries for agriculture and health; iii) mobilising over one hundred local groups led by women to push nutrition and justice out into communities; iv) mainstreaming gender in the PRSP; v) establishing islands-of-excellence in care and justice for survivors of SGBV; vi) supporting international recognition of the Human Rights Commission; and vii) delivering risk-based systems assessments of corruption.

Programme achievements were assessed by the evaluation through the analysis of secondary data and project reports. Interviews with relevant stakeholders, observations, and focus group discussions with project users were undertaken to triangulate findings. The original results framework for the Country Strategy was revised to be more measurable following the recommendations of the mid-term review. Whilst this revised framework does not capture all of the programme activities (discussion of additional achievements is presented under sections 5.1-5.3), Irish Aid’s data reveals that eight programme indicator targets were achieved or exceeded.

A further eleven programme targets were partially met, with most either on track for completion by 2014 or against indicators for which no clear targets were set.

A major shortcoming faced by the evaluation, is the fact that no data was available within Irish Aid or partner systems in relation to eleven performance indicators, including all outcome-related data (e.g. changes in the extent to which nutrition services are accessed, food production has increased, or on the resolution of Sexual and Gender Based Violence cases).

Furthermore, The revised CSP monitoring and evaluation matrix does not include indicators at goal and outcome levels. Thus, the evaluation analysis focuses on the indicators at the objectives

#### **Main limitations in the available data**

1. There is a lack of national statistic sets since the Country Strategy began in 2011.
2. Projects are at different stages of completion. Various projects are delayed and have been granted no-cost extensions. Some of the projects are at too early a stage to report results;
3. Project data is variable in quality and most report on outputs rather than outcomes; and
4. Much of the output data focuses on service delivery rather than uptake, use or effectiveness.

level, with a discussion in broad terms of the possible contribution towards wider goals.

Analysis of the results framework data reveals that the majority of tracked activities took place in pursuit of ‘addressing the underlying issues of injustice’ (primarily in terms of service delivery improvements) – see Table 5.1, below. Within this ‘theory of change’, the most reliable data was provided for the work in nutrition, with most targets (where data was available) either achieved or on track. Data was more variable for food security and governance interventions, but both areas recorded proxy indicators of achievements. By contrast, far fewer activities were tracked under the work on ‘establishing reliable institutions’ and ‘changing the political calculus of leaders’. However, data under these activities was more readily available and reflected more consistent levels of achievement. The work on school feeding and policy influence was not tracked in the CSP results framework, and this is discussed under sections 5.3 and 5.4.

**Table 5.1: The main achievements of the Country Strategy (based on revised CSP indicators) according to the Theories of Change.**

Country Strategy Activities	Achievements by Country Strategy Indicators	Status
Addressing the underlying issues of injustice		
National Nutrition Programme; 6 Month Contact Point Programme; School Feeding; Supplementary Feeding.	29 percentage point increase (to 59%) in number of villages with at least one active trained volunteer on Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM);	Exceeded
	304 chiefdoms now have at least one out-patient therapeutic programme (OTP) site	Exceeded
	62% of women with children 0-24 months report at least 2 contacts with a Mother Support Group	Exceeded
	14 percentage point increase (to 36%) in children with routine under-five Vitamin A supplementation and de-worming	Exceeded
	17 percentage point increase in Public Health Units providing treatment for severe acute malnutrition	On Track
	19 districts have at least one Stabilisation Centre, with 6 districts having two or more	On Track
	80 health staff trained on Infant and Young Child Feeding counselling	Too early to assess
	Caregivers aware of the 6 months contact point for child health services	Too early to assess
	Percentage increase in number of child referrals to Stabilisation Centres (SC), Outpatient Therapeutic Programmes (OTP), Supplementary Feeding	No data
	Proportion of mothers who exclusively breastfeed their babies for six months by 2013	No data
	Proportion of infants receiving appropriate complementary foods from 6 months to 24 months	No data
Agricultural Business Centres	30% of Farmer Based Organisation members are female-headed households	No target set
	22 Agricultural Business Centres constructed and equipped in Bo and Bonthe districts	No target set
	National Food and Nutrition Policy implementation plan finalised but not yet launched	Partly achieved
	91% of farmers stated that their household food security had improved thanks to their participation	Proxy data only

	67% of the farmers interviewed confirm they receive additional income from the ABC	Proxy data only
	90% farmers said that their crop production was intensified as a consequence of being part of the FBO. 75% confirmed that they have diversified their production.	Proxy data only
	Agriculture sector growth	No data
Rainbo Centres; UNDP Justice Programme	Facilities for emergency obstetrics services in Kenema increased from 1 to 6	Achieved
	Expansion of the Saturday Sexual and Gender Based Violence court system to Kenema District	Part achieved
	Police Family Support Unit, local courts, the judiciary and paralegals and health personnel provide survivor (SGBV) friendly services according to IRC evaluation reports	Awaiting verification
	Average time to process cases for survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence	Too early to assess
	SGBV cases resolved by mobile courts	No data
	Women and girls' access to justice	No data
<b>Establishing reliable social institutions</b>		
Anti Corruption Commission; Election Basket Fund; UNDP Justice Programme; Human Rights Commission; Gender Policy	Systems and processes of the Anti Corruption Commission appraised	Achieved
	The Human Rights Commission in Sierra Leone has delivered two State of Human Rights reports (2011 and 2012), conducted two public enquiries in 2011 and 2012, and held two public hearings on these enquiries.	Part achieved
	Significant progress on the implementation of recommendations for the Human Rights Commission made in an Irish HRC capacity assessment report.	Part achieved
	Anti Corruption Commission reviews of systems and processes in the Health, Education, Lands and Agriculture sectors	Part achieved
Scaling Up Nutrition	Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) secretariat established	Achieved
<b>Changing the political calculus of key leaders and groups</b>		
Election Basket Fund	87.3% of 2.7 million registered voters took part in elections that EU, African regional and CSO observers reported as fair and free	Achieved

## 5.2 Achievements in Nutrition (Objective 1).

The selection of Objective 1 as a priority issue for the Country Strategy balanced an analysis of national needs with Irish Aid's financial and human resource constraints. The Mission justified the selection for five main reasons: i/ national nutritional survey showed that 10% of children were wasted and 36% were stunted (SLDHS, 2008); ii/ the Government of Sierra Leone had recently launched its first National Food and Nutrition Policy; iii/ there was a significant gap in funding – the only other donor being USAID; iv/ the Hunger Task Force report to Ireland in 2008 highlighted targeting the prevention of maternal and infant undernutrition as one of three critical priority areas; v/ human resources levels in the Mission were seen as better suited to working in a niche area.

The initial selection of modalities was driven by a commitment to state-building with a pragmatic acknowledgement of current capacity constraints within the health system. The GoSL launched a Free Health Care Policy (FHI) in 2010, which provided a basic package of essential health services. However, the implementation capacity of the Ministry of Health was considered to be weak. Support

to UN agencies was considered as appropriate because of their role in implementing FHI on behalf of government (see Table 5.2a).

**Table 5.2a: Country Strategy Disbursements under Nutrition Objective**

Organisation/Agency	Purpose	Paid €
Action Contre La Faim	Nutrition Programme	647,393
Helen Keller International	Integrating a Six-Month Contact Point for Essential Nutrition Actions into Routine Child Health Services in Sierra Leone	483,385
UNICEF	Accelerated Reduction of Child and Maternal Under-nutrition	3,955,116
UNICEF	Reducing Child and Maternal Under-Nutrition in selected districts in Sierra Leone	1,000,000
Welthungerhilfe	Linking Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Nutrition	468,500
WFP	Support to WFP’s activities to support supplementary nutrition elements of Component Five of the Government of Sierra Leone’s Smallholder Commercialization Programme	2,000,000

Most of the work with INGOs is too recent to assess reliably in terms of performance. The majority of results data comes from UNICEF, and reveals that most of the planned activities have either exceeded their targets or are on track for doing so (see Table 5.1). **The main gap, in terms of data, relates to changes in the number of people accessing services, and their knowledge and behaviours. This is a significant concern in terms of managing for development results.**

Whilst activities have largely been delivered, changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviours is less certain. For example, according to UNICEF 10% of women acknowledge that traditional beliefs around breast feeding are inaccurate. This is well below the 50% target. There is also no mechanism for tracking the longitudinal outcomes of the projects – i.e. whether therapeutic and supplementary feeding are proving to be relevant to the long-term health outcomes of mothers and children.

Most of the results have generally taken longer than anticipated (performance data in Table 5.1 reflects achievements after multiple no cost extensions), something that might be expected given the operating environment and the nature of what the interventions were seeking to achieve. However, the programme strategy of using UN implementing partners in order to address capacity constraints and risks in the government systems proved to be based on flawed assumptions. Both UNICEF and WFP projects activities relied on national systems in order to deliver services. Weaknesses in supply chain control and record keeping required significant adaptations to project management systems during implementation, and resulted in significant delays to project plans. The process of addressing these issues revealed that the tolerance of fiduciary risk in the UN and Irish Aid differed at the outset, with Irish Aid more sensitive to fiduciary issues.

The recent trend in providing support through INGOs is partly a response to these specific difficulties experienced during implementation via UN agencies. It is the view of the evaluation that this increase in the number of partners brings with it implications for increased administration, monitoring, and relationship building. To avoid the risks of using national systems altogether is also to depart from the Fragile States and Paris Declaration principles. A relevant long-term response is to develop constructive capacity assessments of UN projects, and to enhance the quality of joint monitoring within these.

For instance, the programme has not tracked data on the use of the facilities that have been provided: the only indicator used within the results framework (which relates to the increase in number of referrals) has not been reported, and is unlikely to be measurable because UNICEF and WFP are not collecting data about referrals across these services. The programme also relies on national statistics to determine the achievement of outcomes: but this data has not been collected since the Country Strategy began. Data from before the Country Strategy suggests that, going into the current programme there were high-but-steadily-reducing levels of both acute and chronic malnutrition (see Table 5.2b) – although different surveys provide contradicting assessments, and are not directly comparable because of the different methods used.

Similarly, there is no national data available regarding infant or maternal mortality since the Country Strategy began<sup>22</sup>. The project data that has been collected is aggregated, and does not differentiate between urban and rural areas. This is important, as the national data that is available suggests that acute malnutrition is three-times more prevalent in Freetown than some rural areas, whereas chronic malnutrition is particularly high in rural areas.

**Table 5.2b: Levels and trends in malnutrition**

Malnutrition	Last available national data on levels	Last available national data on trends	Next planned data
Acute	6.9% (2010, SMART nutrition survey)	Reduced from 7.6% (2008, Demographic and Health Survey)	Multi Indicator Cluster survey: 2014; SMART nutrition survey (UNICEF): 2014
Chronic (stunting)	34.1% (2010, SMART nutrition survey)	Reduced from 43% (2008, Demographic and Health Survey)	Multi Indicator Cluster survey: 2014; SMART nutrition survey (UNICEF): 2014

It is the view of the evaluation that, whilst national data systems and surveys – including the Demographic and Health Survey, the Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, and UNICEF Multi-Indicator Cluster or SMART surveys – may offer the best available quality data, they have been (predictably) too irregular for the purposes of measuring Irish Aid’s outcomes. The implication of relying on only these sources without providing funding or support to ensure sufficient regularity is to have denied Irish Aid of any meaningful possibility of measuring its impact on nutrition. As a result, the most that can be said with certainty is the achievement of preconditions for impact – such as expanding the number of feeding centres or securing a dedicated budget line for nutrition in the national accounts.

Whilst there are no indicators as regards the quality of the services to address acute malnutrition, partner reports and monitoring visits reveal a number of barriers to achieving results: long and frequent gaps in supply of Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF), many staff needing training or refresher training, high turnover of staff and heavy reliance on volunteers, over reliance on District Nutritionists, and physical access being a problem in rural areas given the poor quality of the roads (particularly in rainy season).

<sup>22</sup> The most recent data shows positive trends, with infant mortality having reduced from 158 to 89, and under five mortality from 267 to 140 per 1000 births. Maternal mortality data showed very high levels at 875 per 100,000 live births (DHS, 2008).



Data regarding the contribution of Ireland to the reduction of chronic malnutrition is mixed. Exclusive breastfeeding is comparatively low – the only indicator currently available shows a low level in positive attitudes towards breastfeeding (10%). However, the percentage of women who have contact with mother support groups is above target at 62%. This is an indication of the reach of the mother support groups. The mother support groups observed during the evaluation revealed a vibrant network for information sharing and support around improved feeding practices for children.

New projects with Helen Keller and ACF are designed to meet some of the needs that have emerged in the nutrition portfolio, and build upon successful pilots. Furthermore, Irish Aid has helped to put nutrition firmly on the national agenda with its support to the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative (housed in the Vice President’s Office) and promotion of nutrition within the Ministry of Agriculture: *“when you think of nutrition, you think of Irish Aid”* (donor interviewee). Ireland was the co-convenor of the Nutrition Working Group – a role highly valued and appreciated by other stakeholders. In 2013, they accepted the role of Donor Convenor for the SUN movement. This effort is reflected in the political attention being given to the forthcoming national Food and Nutrition Security Strategy, and the integration of nutrition within national food security indicators – developed in collaboration with international partners such as the Renewed Efforts Against Child Hunger (REACH) initiative. Building on these achievements, recent work on food and nutrition early warning has been funded with FAO.

Overall, the programme has delivered well in terms of achieving programmed activities, especially given the context. However, a structural lack of data means that there is little evidence available to answer critical questions such as: i) the effectiveness of nutrition infrastructure in increasing the number of people accessing services and reducing malnutrition; ii) the relevance of supplementary feeding as a means to reduce moderate acute malnutrition when global data questions its efficacy<sup>23</sup> (Corbett, 2013); iii) and the wider impacts of Mother Support Groups as agents of community healthcare. Given the substantial policy and financial inputs of Irish Aid, addressing these data gaps is a priority concern.

### 5.3 Achievements in Food Security (Objective 2)

The decision to work on general food security within the Country Strategy was relevant given that, at the time, 1 in 3 households consumed a diet that is inadequate for healthy living (SLDHS, 2008). Hunger is a key priority for Irish Aid globally. Unlike nutrition, there were (and are), however, other large donors in Sierra Leone (particularly EU, DFID) who are already directing significant support to the food security sector – particularly the Smallholder Commercialization Programme. Ireland prioritised working with the Government on the flagship agricultural programme, the Smallholders Commercialization Programme (launched in 2010).

**Table 5.3: Country Strategy Disbursements under Food Security Objective**

Organisation/Agency	Purpose	Paid €
UNFAO	Support to UNFAO’s National Agricultural Response Plan	458,737
UN FAO	National Early Warning System on Food and Nutrition Security in Sierra Leone	652,841
Welthungerhilfe	Linking Agriculture, Natural Resource Management and Nutrition	468,500
WFP	Support to WFP’s activities to support the school-feeding	1,500,000

<sup>23</sup> Global research currently suggests that prevention – education, behaviour change and improved feeding and care practices – is a more effective and sustainable approach.

Whilst it is acknowledged that Irish Aid was aiming to work within the programme priorities identified by the Government, the evaluation expresses some concern that these activities were not linked to Objective 1 (nutrition) as was envisioned in the Country Strategy. For example, providing school feeding in primary schools is known to be too late to have an impact on stunting. Furthermore, the inclusion of school feeding in the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme was intended to provide a safety net, whereas project implementation was found by the evaluation to be almost entirely geared to improving education access (MDG2)<sup>24</sup>. As a result, although the School Feeding project has provided daily meals to a large cohort of 250,000 primary school children, there is no evidence available regarding the impact of this activity on food security or nutrition indicators (see Table 5.1). The question of whether Irish Aid made the right choice in supporting School Feeding is not a simple one, however, and is discussed further below.

In general, data for food security indicators has not been collected, indicators are not specific (they do not have numbers, percentages or definitions attached to them), and there are neither baseline nor targets set in the results framework. The main sources of information for the programme have been a perception-survey of 244 Agricultural Business Centre users conducted by FAO and the activity numbers (numbers of students, tonnage of food) for school feeding. These are not sufficient to assess the effectiveness of the projects, and indicate a capacity gap in both partners and Irish Aid (see discussion below on Managing for Results).

Whilst the Mission is aware of these issues, and has attempted to engage partners to improve reporting, some final project reports have still not been accepted by Irish Aid because of: i) lack of data in the report around the procurement processes; ii) changing data provided on project indicators without explanation; and iii) inconsistent reasons given for not meeting targets.

### 5.3.1 School Feeding

The WFP School Feeding project reports that 58.7% of children in target areas received food; and 55.6% of girls received take-home rations. There is no data available relating to how the project contributed to food security or to education outcomes. As a result, evidence is not available to support or refute observational concerns (by both the Mission and the Evaluation Team) around the impact of feeding on attendance, diversion of children from non-school feeding to school feeding schools, or children being denied food at home in the evening because they have eaten lunch at school.

Whilst qualitative research highlighted a great deal of enthusiasm for school feeding among schools, communities and education sector staff, it is the view of the evaluation that – based on delays in distribution, uncertainty over multiple headcounts, and weak monitoring data – school feeding has not, until recently, been implemented with sufficient reliability to act as an effective safety net.

One head teacher noted that he had observed a “*difference in the children... they seem more lively, pay more attention to the teacher and do better... you know when a child has not had breakfast, they sweat and start falling asleep, and you have to send them home although you know they will not come back*”.

This leads the evaluation to find that the current School Feeding programme does not fit well within either the nutrition or food security objective of the Country Strategy. The strategy of supporting School Feeding was, however, not necessarily a poor one. Had WFP and FAO managed to better combine their interventions, then Home Grown School Feeding could have helped drive local production of nutrition crops. School feeding can also support gender equality and be used as a platform for wider development objectives. It would appear, however, that over the course of the Country Strategy the context has moved past any of these objectives being real and immediate possibilities.

<sup>24</sup> Based on evaluation interviews with multiple stakeholders directly involved in the school feeding activity.

During project implementation, Irish Aid collaborated with DFID to push for improvements in the monitoring systems used by WFP. Field visit reports suggest that there have been some improvements, including: training on Standard Operating Procedures; enhanced food tracking; and daily class registers. A visit to two schools during the evaluation showed cases of these systems being used. Whilst this represents an immediate improvement in project accountability, it raises concerns that Implementing Partners are expected to duplicate systems that should be core functions of government (e.g. taking class registers).

### 5.3.2 Agricultural Business Centres

Through its project with FAO, Irish Aid supported the National Agricultural Response Programme (NARP), a response to food price increases. Key outputs across the component included: 70 Farmer Field Schools established, with 2,100 farmers having received training on improved agronomic practices; 63 Farmer-Based Organisations established, with a total membership of 4,725 people; members received training on skills such as business plan development, record keeping and financial management, leadership, and decision making; 22 Agri-Business Centres were established; 4 rice milling and marketing associations have been created and are operating commercially.

There is little data available to establish the scale of the increase in productivity of ABC members. According to an FAO perception survey, 89% of ABC members report enhanced food security as a result of the project, against a target of 50%; only 30% of ABC members report increased marketing activity, against a target of 50%. At the macro-economic level, the objectives of NARP have been met: crop production had increased by 25.8% by 2010 and the quantity of crops sold on the market had increased by 15% – although it is difficult to quantify the contribution of this project to such national-level results.

Women make up 30% of ABC members, against a target of 40%; Youth make up 25% of ABC members and 30% of FBO members, against (very low) targets of 20% and 10% respectively. It would be valuable to gain a disaggregated understanding of *who* is accessing and benefitting from the ABCs beyond this, particularly in relation to poverty levels (i.e. is it the better off farmers? Are the very poor able to afford the membership?).

The extent to which the ABCs are on the road to be self-sustaining also remains an open question. An impact assessment is being carried out which may help to answer these questions. A visit to one ABC during the evaluation found that in cases where production is not purchased there is no strategy for creating other options.

The evaluation considers that it unlikely that that programme contributed meaningfully to Country Strategy nutrition objectives through either the Agriculture Business Centres or the school feeding project. Noticeably, links between these projects and the nutrition education by Mother Support Groups were also not pursued, despite all being implemented by UN agencies. However, a new project with FAO to develop a National Early Warning System on Food and Nutrition Security has begun to help integrate nutrition more comprehensively into the Food Security system.

Overall, the evaluation found that vital links between food security and nutrition (both under Outcome 1 of the Country Strategy) have only come about relatively recently. It is thus essential that Ireland continues to emphasise nutrition issues with FAO and other stakeholders to ensure that momentum continues in this area.

## 5.4 Achievements in Good Governance and Gender Equality (Objective 3)

Sierra Leone has a mixed record in terms of assessments of Good Governance. The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2012-13 places Sierra Leone relatively highly: 2<sup>nd</sup> amongst low-income countries and 5<sup>th</sup> in Africa as regards to checks on government power. The legislature and judiciary are considered relatively independent, and the civil society and press are mostly free from

government interference. However, there is also widespread corruption, ineffective regulatory enforcement, lack of official information, and serious weaknesses in the criminal justice system (World Bank Institute’s Country Data Report, 2009)

Including a Country Strategy objective focused on governance is viewed by the evaluation to be highly appropriate given this context, especially considering Irish Aid’s (and the Government of Sierra Leone’s) recognition of the role of poor governance as a driver of conflict. Funding in this area was through a mixture of an Election Basket Fund, UNDP and – to a lesser extent – NGOs and direct support to the Anti Corruption Commission. The Basket Fund was viewed as a positive step in the harmonisation of donor funds, whilst the Mission saw funding through UNDP and NGOs as a way to diversify risk.

**Table 5.4: Country Strategy Disbursements under Governance Objective**

Organisation/Agency	Purpose	Paid €
Caritas Makeni	Post-Rehabilitation of former child combatants	50,000
IRC	Mek Wi Tok Bot GBV- Let’s Talk GBV	699,873
IRC	Gender-based violence programme: “Gender-based violence in Sierra Leone: Improving survivors’ access to quality health services”	649,241
St. Joseph’s School for the Deaf	Construction of a Junior Secondary School extension (three classrooms).	5,000
Save the Children	Adolescent Sexual Reproductive Health programme “Fambul Welbodi Programme”	454,554
UNDP	Support to the Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone (2011–2014)	1,000,000
UNDP	Improving the Rule of Law and Access to Justice in Sierra Leone	1,400,000

### 5.4.1 Governance and Human Rights

An evaluation of the electoral process is due soon. Irish funds were earmarked specifically for the purchase of voter registration equipment. Biometric Voter Registration (BVR) data capturing was considered a success overall, with a provisional figure of 2,701,299 eligible voters registered (see Table 5.4). Qualitative analysis revealed that the Mission’s integrated diplomatic and aid roles were a big advantage for the work in the electoral cycle: multiple sources stated that Ireland had a disproportionately high level of positive leverage ‘behind the scenes’. In particular, this benefited from Ireland’s willingness to listen to Government concerns, constructive contributions to dialogue, provision of funds, lack of commercial interests, positive reputation at the international level (e.g. as a member country of the EU or UN entities), recent first hand field experience of staff, and ‘open door’ policy of the senior team.

So far, the Mission has not systematically captured the full ‘effort’ or tracked the contribution made to policy dialogue. Suggestions for doing so are made in the accompanying Learning Brief on policy influencing.

It is possible to state that with Irish Aid support, the

#### Lesson

Participating in the Election Basket fund provided Ireland with ‘a seat at the table’, an opportunity which it was able to maximise because of the integrated diplomatic and development roles played by the Mission.

Similarly, support to gender in the process to develop the next national development plan (Agenda for Prosperity) was successful because it combined political advocacy, coordination and tangible technical support.

Human Rights Commission for Sierra Leone (HRCSL) has made progress in terms of strategic planning, human rights education, human resource management, information technology, regional services, and complaints handling. A link was established to the Irish Human Rights Commission, who produced a capacity assessment for Sierra Leone.

Despite delays in implementing all the recommendations of this report, the HRCSL has gained ‘A’ status and consequently has been made a member of the Human Rights Council. It has also successfully reported to Treaty bodies, both African and Global, and through their relationship with the Irish HRC the HRCSL has developed a national monitoring tool.

Whilst overall awareness of Human Rights appears to be increasing (the HRCSL District office in Kenema for the Eastern Region has seen steadily increasing numbers of complaints on human rights violations and abuses), the Commission has managed half the target level of public enquiries and reporting with the constrained level of capacity available to it. It has also been highly dependent on logistics support from the UN mission.

The evaluation found that Ireland is valued by HRCSL as a “*consistent friend*” on human rights: demonstrating the flexibility required to work in Sierra Leone and being “*the only people you can go to and ask – what do you think?*” Whilst the HRCSL has not achieved around half of its objectives, the two issues that *have* been addressed – demobilisation of soldiers and conflict between host communities and mining companies – are both important drivers of conflict; and there has been no other institution positioned to ‘bridge’ the political divide in the same way HRCSL has (i.e. getting reparations for demobilised soldiers in a politically acceptable way).

Irish Aid funding to the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has contributed to Systems Reviews (*University of Sierra Leone and Ministry of Marine Resources*); Monitoring and Compliance (*Local Government & Councils*) and Free Health Care Monitoring; and the implementation of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (*Establishment of Integrity Management Committees*). There is no data available on the implementation of the recommendations from these reviews, although one ACC report stated that School Management Committees (SMC) were formed as an outcome of the Systems Review on School Subsidies.

Support to the project experienced serious challenges of “unspent funds”, with five requests for no-cost extensions being granted. The evaluation found that larger funding amounts from other sources had been prioritised by the ACC, with the implication that Ireland needs to avoid situations in which it is perceived as a ‘junior’ partner, especially where there are capacity constraints<sup>25</sup>.

#### 5.4.2 Access to Justice and Gender Based Violence

The relatively recent UNDP Access to Justice Programme is supporting organisations working on gender and land rights. In the first year of implementation it has updated the Standard Operating Procedures for dealing with Sexual Offences for the Sierra Leone Police, as well as the Case Management Guidelines for SGBV Cases for the Family Support Unit (FSU). Other outputs include expansion of SGBV Saturday Courts to cover a total of two districts at both Magistrate and High Court levels; with more than 900 Case Monitoring Reports received from UNDP’s CSO partners.

Whilst no outcome data is yet available, positive attitudes and behaviours among traditional leaders and women’s groups was observed during the evaluation visits. Women are traditionally seen as property, and widows are forced to marry into deceased husband’s family to maintain property. Now, some women met by the evaluation have been taught about the three Gender Acts, and their rights. As

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<sup>25</sup> Whilst it was a ‘minor donor’ to the Election Basket fund, the political role of the Mission meant that Irish Aid was considered a major stakeholder by other agencies

a result, women are beginning to open accounts in their own names; and it was noted that “*ownership of land opens up the opportunities for loans*”.

It is the view of the evaluation – based on field visits – that the Access to Justice Programme is already demonstrating potential to deliver near-term changes in Women’s lives. However, the sustainability of the SGBV Saturday Courts, access to land, and empowerment of individual women within their marriages are all difficult to achieve. The evaluation does not foresee sustainability of changes to women’s lives unless the project explicitly addresses the institutions – the formal court systems, chieftaincies, land law, and secret societies – that have historically maintained systems of marginalisation. So far, the programme is not addressing these.

With Irish Aid funding the International Rescue Committee (IRC) supported three Rainbo Centres and Kailahun government hospital, providing services to 3,490 survivors of sexual and gender based violence during the Country Strategy. IRC has supported the development of Women Action groups (WAGs) in 14 communities and provided them with training in basic counselling, case management and referral skills, and connected with other relevant service providers. 30 WAG members were also trained as peer counsellors in their communities, to help respond to SGBV survivors. Girls’ clubs were established and supported in 18 Junior Secondary Schools.

The project is also working to support primary health units to provide support to survivors. Training on clinical care for sexual assault survivors (CCSAS) was provided for 70 health workers based at Public Health Units (PHUs) in the Eastern Region. 10 PHUs in each of 3 districts were involved. National Referral Protocols (NRPs) for SGBV services and the National Action Plan on SGBV were completed and launched in October 2012 with IRC support and facilitation.

Increased sensitisation is increasing case numbers, but major challenges remain in realising justice for survivors of SGBV. For example, in Kono District, only 4 SGBV cases had been prosecuted in 2013, and ‘many’ were pending. One Police Station in the District reported 140 cases SGBV cases in 2013, with 59 charged, 4 convictions, and 40 people (potentially innocent) still on remand.

**The evaluation found Rainbo to be playing a pivotal role – a source of confidential support and also a link to other support services as needed.** There is a high level of awareness of their presence at all levels, and extremely high regard for their care, links to other service providers and values. An exit strategy – so that the Rainbo Centres are nationally owned and managed – is under way. The original intention was that they would be located under MoHS, but MoHS capacity was found to be limited. Instead a national NGO is being developed with interim support provided by IRC<sup>26</sup>. Care needs to be taken that the Rainbo Centres continue to do what they are strong at, and that the quality of care is not lost in any way.

The evaluation acknowledges that the Country team are aware of the risks created by the transition in terms of the quality of care provided at Rainbo, but believes that it is worth reemphasising that maintaining this flagship level of quality has implications beyond service delivery – especially in terms of the credibility that it provides IRC and Irish Aid in the wider dialogue on SGBV.

At the policy level, Irish Aid was the co-sponsor, with the African Development Bank, of technical efforts to mainstream gender issues within the national development plan, *Agenda for Prosperity*. This was achieved with significant success, resulting in both the mainstreaming of gender across the Agenda for Prosperity and a specific ‘gender pillar’ within the plan. One donor partner reflected the view of many other stakeholders in suggesting that, “*Irish Aid have created a role for themselves in*

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<sup>26</sup> The Rainbo Initiative Board of Directions is established with office and organisational structure. The intention is for IRC to fund the project for an interim two years and to support them to find financing.

*gender which is very welcome – GBV and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) are key areas of progress. They have a good platform for further leverage”.*

The impacts that this work was found to have had are numerous – ranging from policy and legislative changes to attitudes and behaviours of Government economists:

1. *Policy content.* A Sexual Offences Act in 2012 included: raising the minimum sentence from two to five years; makes provisions for various types of sexual assault and is inclusive of sexual assault within marriage and in the case of children; and supersedes customary (non formal) law;
2. *Procedural Change.* Standard Operating Procedures for dealing with Sexual Offences for the Sierra Leone Police, as well as Case Management Guidelines for Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Cases for the Police Family Support Units (FSU);
3. *Attitudinal Change.* The issue is now on the political agenda;
4. *Discursive Commitments.* International targets and protocol were drawn upon within policy discussions;
5. *Behavioural Change* Women’s Action Groups and the Rainbo Centres have increased awareness and knowledge of rights at community level.

It is the view of this evaluation, therefore, that the policy work on gender has made a substantive contribution to increasing the likelihood that gender is integrated in national programmes, budgets and data over the five years of the Agenda for Prosperity, and this is a major achievement. Much of the gender work so far, however, has been instrumental rather than transformative: it has sought to deliver improved conditions for women (through service delivery or policy) rather than addressed gender roles within society, culture, politics and economics. Many of the questions regarding sustainability of project achievements are rooted in this approach.

## 5.5 Contribution of programme achievements to outcomes

### 5.5.1 Expected outcomes

The target population of Outcome 1 of the Country Strategy is stated as: *‘Poor people (particularly women and children under five)’*. ‘Poor people’ are, however, not defined. In a context such as rural Sierra Leone, with such high poverty levels, it may make little practical difference to disaggregate levels of poverty. Theoretically, however, ‘poverty’ would need to be defined within a logframe in order to know whether the outcome is being met for the target population.

Whilst it can broadly be said from qualitative assessment that there are aspects of (but not all of) the projects that have contributed to benefitting ‘poor people’, **the absence of valid and reliable quantitative data within the programme means that it is not possible to attempt to state how many Sierra Leoneans have been supported by Irish Aid, or to give a credible assessment of the impacts of Irish Aid’s support on the lives of people.**

The Country Strategy sought to deliver two main outcomes:

1. Poor people (particularly women and children under five) benefit from improved local nutrition and agricultural services; and
2. Citizens and Democratic Institutions Progressively Hold Those in Authority to Account.

By choosing to direct most funding through project support, the programme has ensured that nearly all activities and outputs described in this section are in some degree attributable to Irish money. The positive view held by government and most Implementing Partners of Irish Aid as a donor also supports the conclusion that the Country Strategy has made contributions to both project results (through the financial grant, field visits, consultation, and technical assistance) and policy advances (especially in nutrition and gender). Whilst acknowledging the roles of USAID in nutrition and

African Development Bank in gender mainstreaming, all the stakeholders consulted by this evaluation support the finding that Ireland has made a critical contribution in these areas. Similarly, Ireland played an important supporting role in the election process.

Performance across the project portfolio varied across Objectives:

- Objective 1 (nutrition) had a clear logic as to the extent to which the activities would contribute to the outcome. Implementation has largely been successful in achieving what it intended to do, particularly in strengthening community-based delivery systems (more Mother's groups, service delivery points, trained community-level staff). Projects have, however, taken longer than originally expected, and there have been management problems that caused delays;
- Objective 2 (food security) comprised activities that did not follow such a clear logic, and were not necessarily complementary to the overall outcome. The agricultural business centres are perceived by farmers to have delivered benefits in terms of food security and increased incomes. The implementation and reporting of food-based safety nets has been inadequate for this purpose;
- Objective 3 (governance) had a sound logic as to the extent to which the activities would contribute to an ambitious outcome. Implementation has largely been successful in achieving what it intended to do, particularly in promoting gender equality, but rely on national institutions with current weaknesses that may make advances difficult to maintain. Projects have taken longer than originally expected.

This evaluation is limited in drawing findings about the achievements of outcomes by the very same data constraints that are facing Irish Aid managers in Sierra Leone: reliance on national surveys that are irregular and inconsistent, and weak and unreliable project monitoring systems. Cases are available (such as the survivors of SGBV met by the evaluation) that show Irish Aid is helping to make real contributions to the human rights, nutrition and livelihoods of some highly marginalised women, men and children. It is the view of this evaluation that, unless Irish Aid is content to consider such achievements in terms that are more than just the delivery of planned activities and the perceptions of a few stakeholders, then the quantitative data deficit must be considered to be a high priority challenge that needs to be addressed.

### *5.5.2 Unexpected outcomes*

The evaluation found that the programme has delivered several significant achievements that were outside of the planned results framework and thus not fully captured in the discussion above.

Within the food security component, the districts in the FAO-implemented NARP programme that were funded by Irish Aid pioneered the shift towards a greater focus on value-addition by including the provision of milling equipment. Whilst there is no clear outcome data available for the effects of this part of the project, it has been influential in the design of the next phase of FAO's work in support of the Smallholder Commercialisation Programme.

The partnership with WFP's Purchase for Progress initiative seems to have been the main source of demand for the outputs from Agricultural Business Centres, and has simultaneously helped supply school meals to 250,000 primary school children, reducing the reliance on imported food. Although the data available from this programme is limited, studies from other countries have found that school feeding can have considerable impacts on school participation and there is some evidence of



significant impacts on cognitive development and children's ability to manipulate concepts (particularly for malnourished children)<sup>27</sup>.

At the national policy level, the evaluation found that Irish Aid has played a major role, in partnership with USAID and REACH, in putting nutrition on the national agenda and forging working links between the ministries for agriculture and health. Similarly, Irish Aid, in partnership with the African Development Bank, is credited by both Government and development partners with successfully mainstreaming gender into the next national development policy, Agenda for Prosperity. The evaluation considers these to be major policy achievements that are likely to contribute to significant positive outcomes *'down the road'*.

Internationally, the experience in Sierra Leone has been used to influence Irish Aid's international policy engagement on fragile states. This has included the Peace Building Fund and Commission in New York, the procurement rules around WFP's Purchase for Progress (P4P) initiative, and OECD-DAC and INCAF regarding the New Deal for Fragile States.

A number of individual project outputs also exceeded the expected results. For example, over 100 women-led local groups have been mobilised to push nutrition and justice out into communities. The evaluation found, through the field visit and interviews, that these groups have transformed perceptions of women's leadership – amongst both themselves and the communities in which they live. The groups have also recognised the links between their work in promoting nutrition and eliminating violence against women, and there is some evidence from the evaluation field visit that they have started to demand stronger working relationships between different service providers (such as health centres, Police Family Support Units, and Rainbo).

The evaluation considers that, in some important aspects, the Country Strategy has gone beyond the ambition of the original programme, and seized opportunities to deliver additional outputs. Whilst these were not included in the original results framework, they remain consistent with the overall design and the intention of the Country Strategy. The evaluation found no clear evidence of unexpected negative effects (although, as discussed in 5.3 and 5.4, there is potential for these to emerge later). Unfortunately for Irish Aid, the current approach to monitoring results in Sierra Leone means that these achievements are unlikely to be fully captured, recognised or learnt from by those sitting outside of the immediate programme team.

The evaluation considers that the Country Strategy would do better to consistently track a small set of outcome-level indicators longitudinally across the entire portfolio (including baselines for every project) and to document strategic changes, rather than continue collecting large amounts of narrative and activity level data against a results framework that does not reflect the underlying theories of change used by the Country Strategy. Complementary monitoring tools, such as Outcome Mapping, would also be well suited to recording the combination of policy, programme and project work undertaken by the country team.

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<sup>27</sup> See IFPRI presentation: <http://www.ifpri.org/sites/default/files/DGilliganppt.pdf>

## 6.0 Programme Management and Processes

This section of the report includes discussions on both management and processes (which are separate categories in the evaluation framework) in order to provide a more coherent view of the highly interrelated issues (and evidence) involved.

**The evaluation finds that the operational flexibility available to the Country Strategy has enabled the pursuit of opportunities to deliver on Irish Aid global priorities (particularly in relation to reducing hunger and promoting gender equality). However, the ‘projectised’ approach and lack of standardised management systems has had high associated costs. These have included building up project management cycle to cope with the frequent change in partners, a responsive (rather than predictive) approach to managing risks, and weaknesses in the systematic capture and use of data for evidence-based decision-making. The current project-based approach to funding, risk management, and MfDR mean that the inevitable change in the people making up the country team is likely to have a disproportionate negative impact on programme continuity.**

### 6.1 Irish Aid Capabilities

Logistics and everyday living are enormous challenges in Sierra Leone. An office move that overlapped with the Country Strategy meant that there were a total of 16 months with no server or paper filing system. However, once completed, the new office and progressive development of the local team members has freed up a considerable amount of programme staff time from fixing generators, phone connections and water problems. Nevertheless, the viability of the Mission in Freetown still relies on staff working consistently over and above their contracted hours. Not only does this place the organisation at risk from staff burn-out in Freetown, but it also resulted in staff members from Emergency and Recovery Unit working beyond their available capacity to provide the requisite HQ attention.

Within the Mission, team dynamics were found to be outstanding and a credit to the reputation of Ireland. The accessibility and approachability of the team is a key feature of current projects and policy engagement. Ireland’s donor partners identify the combination of width of vision and depth of engagement by Mission staff as hallmarks of success in the Country Strategy. Ireland has developed a reputation among its partners for being “*good at relationships, not bombastic or arrogant: not trying to be the normative agency.*” If the team expands, as it needs to, the challenge will be to maintain this critical faculty of *soft power*.

#### Lesson

The competencies and conduct of Irish Aid’s people are one of its main comparative advantages. However, the complexity and difficulty of operating in fragile contexts places additional stress on staff members that makes the Country Strategy vulnerable to staff burn out and interruptions to business continuity. This needs to be recognised in terms of human resource allocations.

This suggests that important competencies for staff members relate to *attitude and mindset*. Programmes do not need to be technically sophisticated in a country like Sierra Leone to create impact, but the country is politically complex and emergent. In the view of the evaluation, success has so far rested on having Mission staff with the ability to be: i) resilient, ii) politically astute, iii) humble but firm, iv) courageous but diplomatic, and v) builders and maintainers of relationships.

The pool of Irish Aid management staff willing and able to work in Sierra Leone is small, making it hard to find replacement staff with the required competencies quickly. Whilst the two-fold increase in the size of the team in Sierra Leone over the course of the Country Strategy (with the addition of two

local Programme Staff) has reduced Ireland’s vulnerability to losing local knowledge, political capital and relationships, a larger team would reduce this risk even further.

Sierra Leone has a private sector *Local Content Policy* that is seen by the Mission as providing Irish Aid with additional political capital if a balance between local and international staff members is achieved. This is an enormous challenge in Sierra Leone, where many of the educated class emigrated and the education system was eviscerated as a result of conflict<sup>28</sup>. The pool of technically strong local experts (seen by some in HQ as being a hallmark of Irish Aid capability in other key partner countries) is thus also smaller than might be expected in less fragile contexts.

It is the view of the evaluation that, if working in situations of fragility is a priority, further expanding the capacity of the local team and the relevant HQ support units is required to effectively address the practical challenges, organisational risks and programmatic complexities of the context.

Since this evaluation was commissioned, Sierra Leone has been upgraded to a full Embassy and responsibility for the programme has shifted to Key Partner Countries section. Both the Government and partners have seen the announcement of Sierra Leone as a Key Partner Country (KPC) as a powerful statement. This upgrade is appropriate and timely. However, deciding and communicating what this will involve in terms of capacity is important to the credibility of Irish Aid. In addition, it would further benefit all stakeholders to have clear and agreed upon stages for the remainder of the transition, including: i) upstaffing to a staff-budget ratio in line with other Key Partner Countries<sup>29</sup>, and ii) instigating the full CSP design process.

## 6.2 Management for Development Results

### 6.2.1 Applying MfDR Principles

By the Mission’s own account, the Country Strategy did not apply a *full* Management for Development Results (MfDR) approach (particularly in relation to “*results-based statistics, performance monitoring systems and evaluation protocols*”)<sup>30</sup>. A results framework was developed for the Country Strategy, and was subsequently revised following the Mid Term Review to make it more measurable (whilst maintaining the intent of the original). Whilst they were developed consultatively, and were owned by the implementing teams (of the time), both frameworks have a number of weaknesses that have limited their usefulness:

1. Indicators are primarily at the activities level, focusing on outputs. There are no Goal or Outcome level indicators to track overall progress of the Strategy according to a theory of change;
2. Some indicators rely on quantitative data that does not exist – or is unreliably collected – in Sierra Leone;
3. Other indicators are broad, with undefined measures or methods of measuring;
4. The Country Strategy frameworks are not linked to national frameworks (although some national data sources are identified);
5. The revision of the results framework focused on measurability, and therefore did not capture the refocusing of the Strategy (e.g. towards Gender); and
6. Ireland is not engaged sufficiently with the development of a national Mutual Accountability Framework to ensure that transactions costs of MfDR are minimised.

<sup>28</sup> Partners report the same challenge of recruiting qualified and experienced candidates – especially women – at all levels.

<sup>29</sup> Considering the demands of – and commitment to – working in situations of fragility, the staff-budget ratio in more stable countries would best be viewed as an absolute minimum.

<sup>30</sup> Taken from OECD DAC Managing for Development Results Draft Policy Brief – <http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/41178251.pdf>

Managing for Development Results, as it is defined in the Paris Declaration, is a long-term vision in the context of Sierra Leone: in terms of culture and the practical ability to collect and use reliable data. National data systems are extremely weak or non-existent. The evaluation’s assessment of Country Strategy partner reports reveals that their results data – and monitoring systems – are generally also weak.

The main quality assurance of results data from partners is undertaken by the Mission, and it was noted that the role of ‘results champion’ – to act as a critical friend – does not clearly fit in the reporting chain for quarterly reports from Sierra Leone. For example, the Agricultural Business Centres project did not – and was unable to – collect any of the food security outcome indicators that were included in the logframe, but this does not appear to have been challenged. Neither does there appear to be a demand for reporting ‘headline’ numbers of people reached (which is a basic input to evidence-based decision-making on cost-benefits).

*“MfDR centres on gearing all human, financial, technological and natural resources – domestic and external – to achieve desired development results. It shifts the focus from inputs (“how much money will I get, how much money can I spend?”) to measurable results (“what can I achieve with the money?”) at all phases of the development process. At the same time, MfDR focuses on providing sound information to improve decision-making. This entails tracking progress and managing business based on solid evidence and in a way that will maximise the achievement of results.”*

OECD-DAC Information Sheet on MfDR

Whilst the evaluation did find an appreciation of and supportive culture for MfDR within the organisation, the practice of decision-making has been based on partners’ delivery of agreed outputs rather than progress towards defined outcomes (which should ideally correspond to the theories of change for each CSP objective). The evaluation found that many Irish Aid stakeholders at all levels understand this aspect of MfDR to be a weakness in the programme, but that without stronger political demand from Headquarters for evidence of *outcomes* (rather than just outputs) the capacity to deliver an appropriate system will not be prioritised.

A core capacity required for enhancing MfDR in Sierra Leone is thus the capability to collect, store, process and access data. Doing this efficiently is reliant on appropriate ICT systems. The evaluation found that the current combination of corporate IT security and poor bandwidth across the country (both fixed line and mobile) means that Ireland is behind other donors in terms of the usability and added value of ICT for delivering the Country Strategy. This is undermining the effective use of the management information that is available – especially when operating outside of Freetown. It is the view of the evaluation that these conditions – likely to be found in future contexts of fragility – cannot be fully appreciated without experiencing working in Sierra Leone, and that adapting corporate IT solutions to this context will benefit from country visits by the ICT provisioning team.

### 6.2.2 Project Management

A challenge for MfDR has been the need for the Mission to build its own project management cycle over the period of the Country Strategy: putting in place standard procedures for assessing and monitoring projects. The absence of standardised systems in Irish Aid has increased the transaction cost and time to develop and implement these core business functions.

Despite some progress in project cycle management, every project has received at least one – and up to 5 – No Cost Extensions (NCEs) throughout the Country Strategy. When considered in isolation, each of these NCEs was justifiable and pragmatic. In sum, however, there is a risk that the prevalent use of NCEs creates a perverse incentive for partners to over-promise and under-deliver. To not grant NCEs would result in the money no longer being available to support activities in Sierra Leone. However, the management burden of continuing to administer delayed projects is substantial and should also be accounted for. Either way, developing more realistic future proposals is a priority (especially if long term partnerships are to be built).

The evaluation finds that the Mission has made progress in terms of developing and deploying appropriate project management systems over the course of the Country Strategy. The transaction costs of doing this have been unnecessarily high in terms of researching and building up systems from scratch rather than being able to draw on a set of common systems, model protocols, and standard tools. This process has, however, demonstrated the commitment of the Sierra Leone programme to improving project management and accountability – and the transition to Key Partner Countries (including a full CSP process) may resolve some of these factors.

The next Country Strategy needs to continue the progress made by developing a full set of *shared* results with government and other partners, establishing the data infrastructure to track and respond to evidence of results, and agreeing a roadmap towards full integration with national systems (particularly the Mutual Accountability Framework).

## 6.3 Programme Implementation

### 6.3.1 Human Resources

Tracing the historical establishment of an Irish Aid Office in Sierra Leone, starting in 2005, reveals a continuous process of testing which areas are ‘right’ for the organisation to add value in. Each stage of this exploration has been a negotiation between two concerns: i) that Irish Aid should maximise opportunities to create impact in this particular context; and ii) the workload should be geared to available human resources (both in Freetown and HQ).

Whilst the ambition of the Mission in Freetown has maximised the growth in the programme team, no additional human resources (in terms of time) have been available in HQ to managed the subsequent increase in the level of requests for input. This has resulted in different expectations of what type and level of programme activity and achievement is manageable as an institution (rather than as a Country Team). Resolving these, through a clearly agreed set of expectations, will be a priority as Sierra Leone transitions to Key Partner Country status in Irish Aid.

Despite these challenges, Ireland is recognised by all parties in Sierra Leone for maintaining strong relationships, being very understanding in work with partners, and having a team that is well grounded in appreciating the context. Enabled by the addition of national staff in 2013, Ireland is seen as more than just a donor, with Government and partners valuing the open door for strategic and technical reflection. As a result of these achievements, Ireland is widely recognised as having a presence that goes far beyond the money that has been invested, especially in relation to gender, nutrition and elections.

The effective contributions resulting from Irish Aid’s way of working carries with it a two-fold challenge: i) the success can create a temptation to overstretch the capacity of the programme in the future; and ii) being ‘seen’ as too involved in too many areas in comparison to its aid budget risks undermining Ireland’s credibility. The risk of overstretch is made more intense due to the fact that weak data systems and a reliance on the capacity and dynamism of individuals occupying leadership positions in partner organisations, including state level, makes “monitoring” to be the main mechanism for the early detection and mitigation of problems.

### 6.3.2 Flexibility

Field visits, issues identified within partner reports, and the maintenance of informal relationships have been the main sources for adaptation of the Country Strategy<sup>31</sup>. This has required i) staff

<sup>31</sup> The 2012 Mid Term Review led to a change in the results framework to reflect the reality of the programme, rather than being a major point of inflection.

members who possess resilience and interpersonal skills, ii) communications technology, and iii) continuous working at all levels (local, national, international). The tangible results of having this in place include taking advantage of the opportunity to deeply integrate gender in the Agenda for Prosperity, achieving crucial changes in WFP’s global procurement guidelines (to enable local purchase), and having the space to stay engaged with highly sensitive issues such as FGM/C.

This way of working has delivered other benefits. When combined with Ireland’s partnership approach, continuous engagement has resulted in government agencies feeling that *“Irish Aid always supports government without taking the front seats, but they are always there.”*

Beyond the human resources implications of maintaining this capability there is, however, a further need to mitigate some of the strategic costs associated with being flexible. **When flexibility is manifested in terms of commissioning short projects and continuously changing Implementing Partners, there is a risk of becoming continuously disappointed with partners and never fully resolving implementation risks.**

Working through projects that keep changing, also means that it is harder for Government to include Irish money as predictable funding in medium term budget mechanisms, undermining state building. It is the view of the evaluation that despite the strategic commitment to the Fragile States principles, these practical implications have not been fully factored into the overall Irish Aid considerations when planning programme modalities due to a focus on fiduciary risk.

### Lesson

The ‘vertical integration’ that Irish Aid practices – in terms of having team members who constantly move between field, policy, political and international levels – is a great organisational strength. Not only does it ground Ireland’s policy work in a current and realistic appraisal of reality, but it also adds significant credibility to the policy inputs that Irish Aid makes.

Maintaining this practice and linking it to formal learning systems is important, especially as the office grows in size and there is a temptation to ‘compartmentalise’ roles.

## 6.4 Implementation of Irish Aid Priorities

Irish Aid’s commitment to working in complex and uncertain environments is a strong indication that it is willing to work with risks, where the benefits and impacts can be significant. It also recognises that it is where Ireland can have most impact; and that the risk of not acting outweighs being involved. The evaluation found that Ireland appears to have a strong comparative advantage in working with some areas of risk (such as long term thinking, working in partnership with government, and engaging at multiple levels).

The Country Strategy is highly aligned – overall – with many of Irish Aid’s global priorities, most especially hunger, nutrition, gender and human rights. The principle exception to this is HIV/AIDS (which is due to low prevalence rates). An assessment of the projects within the Country Strategy reveals, however, that coverage of policy issues tends to be based on specific activities, with a lesser degree of mainstreaming or strategic integration.

Gender is the most strongly embedded policy commitment, featuring as an intended outcome in nearly all projects. Indeed, many of the programme activities specifically target women. By comparison, there is only marginal evidence of direct behavioural-change work with men and boys outside of selected school clubs, which, in combination with withdrawal from the youth sector, implies that gender within the overall programme design is primarily concerned with women’s empowerment. There are notable contact-points between Rainbo centres, Mother’s/Women’s Groups,

and Police Family Support Units – all supported by Irish Aid. Nevertheless, practical links<sup>32</sup> on gender between different parts of the programme are less obvious than under nutrition.

By comparison, the commitment to nutrition had, until recently<sup>33</sup>, been confined to activities under Objective 1 of the programme, including strong integration between Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN), UNICEF, WFP, Helen Keller and ACF. Outside of Objective 1, school feeding was not designed to be a nutrition intervention, and agricultural business centres and Purchase for Progress (P4P) largely produced and purchased rice (considered to be of low nutritional value). Nevertheless, Irish Aid support did enable the first pilots of agro-chain value addition – including local fortification – under FAO’s project, and the recently commissioned food security work with Welt Hunger Hilfe and FAO includes nutrition mainstreaming.

Within the food security programming, there was conceptual integrity to the strategic vision of linking smallholder production to school feeding through structured demand (P4P). This is very much in line with Irish Aid’s global partnership with WFP. However, despite having an ambitious vision for developing Home Grown School Feeding (in which a national school feeding programme is used to create demand for production from local farmers), the key stakeholders in government and the UN appear to have been unable to develop the institutional arrangements required to deliver such a programme.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the range of global Irish Aid priorities – and the temptation to ‘address everything’ – has generally been managed well in the Country Strategy in terms of staying focused on issues that are relevant to the context. There is a risk that the commitment to Food Security (in terms of the Agricultural Business Centres, the Purchase for Progress and the school feeding programme) is being steadily relinquished more because of the experience with those projects than the higher strategic value of Scaling Up Nutrition or Gender Equality. This needs to be carefully examined in the design of the next programme. There is also room to explicitly consider the global commitments to HIV/AIDS, disabilities and climate change as potential mainstreaming issues within the future Country Strategy where they are relevant (not that they become the objective of the Country Strategy, but, rather, to ensure that future project designs are sensitive to these issues).

## 6.5 Managing Operational Risk

The Department categories risks under the following headings:

- (i) **Strategic:** those risks that could result in a failure to achieve the High Level Goals as set out in Ireland’s Statement of Strategy.
- (ii) **Operational:** those risks that could lead to losses resulting from inadequate or failed internal/operational processes and systems.
- (iii) **Financial:** those risks that could result in a failure to maintain effective financial management and accountability arrangements in all the Department’s activities, and expose the Department to avoidable financial risks, including risks to assets.
- (iv) **Reputational:** those risks that could impact negatively upon the external view/reputation of the Department.

*An assessment of the level of risk is based on a combination of the likelihood (“the chance of something happening”) and the impacts (“the outcome of an event affecting objectives”) of a risk occurring.*

<sup>32</sup> Field interviews and focus group discussions suggest that Mother’s Groups could be a potential ‘flash point’ for practical links between the nutrition, governance, and gender work at district level – and that the chieftaincies and judiciary should be important stakeholders in future engagements.

<sup>33</sup> In terms of the 2013 project with Welt Hunger Hilfe

Irish Aid is currently strengthening its approach to risk management, and a Chief Risk Officer was appointed in 2012 to roll out risk management at an operational level. A Risk Policy is being developed in order to increase awareness of risks and so that this is integrated to work practices in a coordinated way. The Risk policy highlights the importance of risk management as a broader set of management processes. However, a lack of a standardised system for programme cycle management outside of the Key Partner Countries CSP process means - in terms of risk management – that there is a likelihood of divergent approaches, interpretations and degrees of tolerance of risk. Systemic processes do not exist to support staff to think through and assess risk management issues holistically and consistently.

The management arrangements for Sierra Leone and Liberia suggest that the roles for deciding on risk have been divided as follows (noting that this is likely to change with the transition to Key Partner Countries Unit):

1. The Mission primarily determines how the level of risk is assessed and what it is as part of their recommendation to Emergency and Recovery Unit;
2. The Emergency and Recovery Unit primarily determine how risk is communicated as part of their submission to the Minister;
3. The Minister primarily endorses the appetite for risk based on approval (or not) of each submission by Emergency and Recovery.

The implications of this arrangement have been two-fold: i) the level of risk available to the programme can (and does) shift over the period of the Country Strategy as the domestic context in Ireland evolves; and ii) the project-by-project approach to approval leads to a focus on managing output-level risks at the expense of achieving programme-level outcomes and goals. Evaluation sources note that the appetite for risk in Irish Aid fluctuates fairly frequently, and that there is currently a relatively low tolerance for risk and innovation. However, the current organisational appetite for risk appears to be primarily concerned with financial and operational risk, with Ireland still seeming to be more willing to work on entrenched issues and experiment with policy and programme linkages than some other donors (and thus accepting strategic and reputational risk).

The main tools currently used by Irish Aid to manage operational risks across its partnerships are:

1. Assessment of partners' reputation, systems, leadership quality, and track record through the Mission's network, professional engagement, and co-development of project proposals;
2. Expert technical feedback on proposals from HQ is highly valued;
3. Contracting specialists, including due diligence, in HQ;
4. Project risk registers – some of which are more basic (focusing on financial and logistics risks), others of which are more sophisticated (such as UNDP Access to Justice that includes strategic risk around political will);
5. Multi-layer monitoring and reporting, including implementing partners, Mission staff members, and (sometimes) government.

Analysis of the risk types identified within OECD-DAC guidance<sup>34</sup> on operating in Fragile States (see Table 6.1) reveals a tendency for risk assessments and risk registers to focus on fiduciary and legitimisation risks. Issues of market distortion, distribution and targeting are not currently considered on a systematic basis, and this is a gap.

The evaluation finds, overall, that the current management of risk is thus distorted towards fiduciary and programmatic risk (i.e. risk of not delivering agreed outputs). Some strategic and contextual

<sup>34</sup> OECD (2012). Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series. p37.



risks, such as legitimising partners or distribution bias, are still managed informally through the knowledge of the Mission members – but lack of formalisation (in terms of documented analysis) means that this knowledge could easily be lost by personnel changes in the country team. Other programmatic risks – including market distortion and targeting – will progressively require greater focus and the development of specific management strategies in the future.

**Table 6.1: Risk Analysis Undertaken of Partners and Projects by Irish Aid**

Risk Dimension <sup>35</sup>	Current Approach of Irish Aid Sierra Leone
Theft/diversion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Application format now requires information on financial management and audit, as well as the use of partners. Risk registers tend to focus on fiduciary risk.</li> <li>□ However, system diagnostics and tracing of financial pathways has not been undertaken – whilst this would be very useful, it will also place strain on the Mission’s current human resources capacity.</li> </ul>
Market distortion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ No assessment of market impacts (positive or negative) was included in the food security projects undertaken by WFP and FAO<sup>36</sup>. There is no obvious market to be distorted for the services delivered by other projects.</li> </ul>
Bias in distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ The first analysis of this risk is in technical appraisals of project proposals, which have become more systematic. This is complemented with field visits, including spot checks during implementation.</li> <li>□ Where the Mission has identified concerns, they have pushed for the development of Standard Operating Procedures and strengthening monitoring systems.</li> </ul>
Substitution of capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ The main risk in regard to capacity appears not to be substituting national capacity (because this is extremely weak), but substituting the opportunity to strengthen national capacity. All proposals and assessments have included capacity development activities, and project risk registers include reference to national capacity.</li> <li>□ The current direction of the programme strategy tends to lean towards creating additional capacity that can – at some point in the future – transfer to national ownership (either by the state or other local institutions).</li> <li>□ Future projects may benefit from explicitly considering the opportunity cost of each project not being implemented by national agencies<sup>37</sup>.</li> </ul>
Legitimisation of who you work with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ This risk is considered informally and is well informed by the Mission’s dual role, strong networks, and on going field monitoring.</li> <li>□ The main concern expressed by ministries was that NGO’s use a lot of branding at the point of delivery, which reduces the felt presence of government at community level, even if they are working in partnership. This risk does not appear to have been assessed.</li> </ul>
Targeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ School feeding provided blanket coverage in highly food insecure areas (based on CFSVA 2010). Other service delivery programmes provide self-selected targeting based on eligibility criteria, awareness raising, and priority areas (e.g. UNICEF targets areas using SAM rates, but users have to self-present at the clinic where they are assessed for the programme according to eligibility criteria).</li> <li>□ The Anti-Corruption Commission states that it uses risk-based targeting. The Human Rights Commission responds to complaints. All projects are potentially subject to politicisation, but the evaluation encountered no claims of this – suggesting that the political engagement of the Mission is providing a sufficient safeguard.</li> </ul>

It is the view of the evaluation that a number of other tools identified during the course of the evaluation – including some of which are already being used by projects or implementing partners – would be relevant to the context (given sufficient human resources):

<sup>35</sup> From OECD-DAC, Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility

<sup>36</sup> A market assessment was included as part of the P4P project, funded by HQ. This found WFP demand for pigeon peas created a spike in the market price of 33%, and led to WFP withdrawing from the direct purchase of pigeon peas.

<sup>37</sup> We are not arguing that they should be implemented by national agencies, given the risk associated with capacity gaps, only that there is also a risk linked with building the capacity of civil society instead of government.

1. **Systems diagnostics:** tracking financial/logistics flows and controls, identifying points of vulnerability all the way to the point of delivery (and potentially, to the household) – this could also help to identify delays in government recruitment and payments (or excessive volunteerism) that incentivise corruption-for-survival;
2. **Piloting projects:** Helen Keller International uses this method and notes that it provided much more information to supplement initial risk frameworks;
3. **Multi-tranche grants:** greater use of staggered payments based on delivery of agreed outputs or approved realignment of projects based on emerging information;
4. **Standard Operating Procedures:** ensuring they are developed and well-publicised for each project activity;
5. **Including cross-cutting criteria in assessment:** applying a specific governance, poverty, gender, fragility, and nutrition lens to the analysis of every project proposal;
6. **Enhanced outcomes reporting:** tracking changes in behaviours, institutions, or people’s realisation of human rights (i.e. beginning to answer the ‘so what’ question);
7. **Theory of change modelling:** clear identification and tracking of changes in the national or local capacities that are required to bring about change in a particular policy area (and whether they are being developed as needed);
8. **Support to national monitoring systems and analysis:** including market assessments and social intelligence reporting<sup>38</sup>;
9. **Enhancing transparency of information and documentation capacity:** developing the legal framework, systems, and culture of documenting institutional data and making it publicly available (e.g. the Anti-Corruption Commission is starting to make all judgements pertaining to corruption available in a book, there is no such public record for other cases);
10. **Appointing technical partners:** cultivating long term relationships with organisations – this could be UNDP, an institution, or consultancy – specifically to provide additional technical expertise to the programme;
11. **Addressing the mobility of project and government staff:** transport and access is a critical bottleneck in project delivery and monitoring;
12. **Ensure consequences for corruption:** addressing gaps in the criminal justice system that are preventing culpable persons from being successfully prosecuted for misappropriation;
13. **Local byelaws and enforcement:** mobilising communities to safeguard projects from corruption and poor quality;
14. **Stress tests, simulation games and scenario planning:** using simulated events and exercises to test the responsiveness of partner and Irish Aid systems, identify and address gaps, and develop awareness of risks and responses.

## 6.6 Programme Learning

Overall, learning efforts have been geared to the immediate needs of the programme, using a pragmatic and informal approach (such as correspondence with other Irish Aid Heads of Development or convening meetings of partners at the Mission). Partners in Sierra Leone describe this as time efficient and useful (although, as previously noted, having long-term relationships with implementing partners would enhance programme learning).

Beyond a gender-focused paper produced by the Mission, explicit attempts to formally capture the learning around integrating new capacities into national systems have not been attempted. An ad hoc presentation was made during a visit to HQ, and this was well received. There is also particular

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<sup>38</sup> Social Intelligence Reporting is a method developed primarily by UNICEF. Rather than relying on periodic ‘big bang’ surveys, SIR works with district-level development officers to regularly visit and follow-up with service delivery points (schools, health centres, water points). The nature of these visits are based on general enquiry and support rather than ‘audit’ or ‘monitoring’ specific projects. In addition to establishing trust with the community, district officers attempt to immediately resolve problems at the community level, or to elevate more difficult challenges as rapidly as possible. The data collected during these visits can be collated into a valuable ‘real-time’ database to complement more statistical research surveys.

interest expressed for learning in regard to Rainbo SGBV centres because they deal with the delivery of highly sensitive services that are not traditionally seen as ‘core’ healthcare provision. However, there is not a clear organisation-wide learning strategy or guidance for the Country Team to feed into.

The current Country Team identified two main learning events – the Mid Term Review and a nutrition technical visit – as enabling them to make step-changes in the programme. These combined opportunities for team reflection with advice from technical and managerial authorities within Irish Aid. Following the visits, it was found that new avenues were explored with greater conviction and focus – such as in regard to supporting the next phase of contracting implementation partners for the acute malnutrition component.

It is the view of the evaluation that, whilst the technical visits and inputs during the design of the Country Strategy were substantial (as compared to other key partner countries), the changing context in Sierra Leone benefits greatly from on-going country visits by HQ and commissioned technical experts during programme implementation. Although these visits do not always explicitly contain a learning component, they do result in exchange of information and ideas. Consequentially, there would be significant benefit from resourcing HQ units to provide more regular country-visits in support of fragile contexts.

At the political level, Ireland is viewed as a *confidante* for human rights and governance organisations – helping to protect them from political subversion. This role opens up opportunities for the Mission to integrate wider – and sometimes sensitive – learning into the programme. It also provides an opportunity to generate and share learning within Irish Aid regarding the sensitivities of operating successfully in contexts of fragility.

Organisationally, learning has been shared mainly through the technical reviews of proposals undertaken by HQ (although this was not their core purpose, which was accountability). It would appear in some cases that distance and real-life time pressures have led to misaligned expectations about the purpose and utilisation of these reviews. In addition, the project-by-project commissioning of feedback fragments technical inputs and loses the value that could be gained from technical inputs into strategy.

Learning between Sierra Leone and other Key Partner Countries appears to be through ad hoc meetings, informal discussions, and bilateral emails. The most commonly cited mode of learning with Irish Aid appears to be face-to-face discussions and presentations, limiting opportunities for learning to occasional visits to Ireland for meetings. The shared team means that a great deal of informal learning *has* taken place between the Liberia and Sierra Leone country strategies, including having examples of institutional development (such as the health sector basket fund) working in other low capacity contexts.

As has been noted elsewhere, the ‘vertically-integrated’ operational model of Irish Aid – with staff working from the ground all the way up to national and international policy forums (e.g. through visits to Malawi, Ethiopia and New York) – provides many opportunities for learning and sharing lessons. The main challenge, as the evaluation sees it, is that these are largely informal and, therefore, hard to ingrain within the formal institutional memory. This reduces the access to lessons from both the Sierra Leone and other contexts for incoming staff and programme partners. It is the view of the evaluation, therefore, that a structured organisational approach to learning and development would provide good value for money if it was sensitive to the context of: i) a preference for face-to-face learning, ii) the small number of key partner countries in Africa, and iii) the difficulty of deploying technology solutions effectively in Sierra Leone.

## 7.0 Conclusions

The evaluation team has developed the following independent conclusions based on the data, analysis and evidence marshalled through the evaluation process. Conclusions were considered for each of the evaluation criteria combinations (e.g. management/effectiveness) associated with the evaluation questions. The validity of conclusions has been tested and subsequently strengthened through responding to four rounds of comments from the evaluation management group, evaluation reference group and wider stakeholders.

### 1. Sierra Leone represents an improving but uncertain context for strategic programming

There is substantive quantitative, observational and circumstantial evidence to suggest that Sierra Leone is making progress “*along the right path*” to stability and development. The New Deal Fragility Assessment (2012) rated Sierra Leone as ‘half-way’ to resilience. The World Bank CPIA and Poverty Profile of Sierra Leone suggest that country’s institutions and policies are stronger than might be expected in a Fragile State, and that overall inequality is decreasing (although general perceptions dispute this). The 2012 elections are viewed as a hallmark of transition, culminating in the withdrawal of UNIPSIL, drawdown of IMATT, and changed classifications by international institutions (notably the IMF).

Nevertheless, detailed conflict analysis points to little change in the underlying drivers of conflict, and even a re-emergence of elite capture, patriarchal hierarchy, and youth marginalisation. National institutions are strongest in the centre and weakest at the decentralised level. Neither the institutions, nor the international response has yet been tested in the absence of peacekeeping forces by large external shocks, natural hazards, or full-scale mineral extraction (and the social contract around this). All of these are likely to feature in the period of the next Country Strategy.

The context, therefore, creates a high level of strategic uncertainty even as it ‘looks’ as though stability is consolidating. Syrett and Devine (2012) of The Economist research unit have identified six capabilities for managing uncertainty that have been found to be effective in other turbulent contexts (see Table 7.1). Assessing Irish Aid using this framework suggests that it is strategically well placed – through its guiding framework of human rights and collaborative culture – to deal with uncertainty. In other words, Ireland is well placed to take on long-term difficult issues (such as gender) that require patience, partnership with government, and working through a community of supporters. Operationally, however, Irish Aid’s level of staffing and systems make it much more vulnerable to short-term shocks (staff leaving and project failure among others).

**Table 7.1: Six capabilities for strategic readiness in uncertainty**

Capability	Description (Syrett and Devine, 2012)	Current Irish Aid Position
<b>Strategic anticipation</b>	The capability to determine and the ability to implement a strategy that is highly responsive to an unpredictable and potentially volatile environment	<b>Medium:</b> The Country Strategy was cognisant of risks, but faced challenges with responding effectively to implementation challenges because of missing theories of change.
<b>Navigational leadership</b>	The capability to instil a collective sense of where the organisation is and the confidence and optimism to move forward into an uncertain future	<b>Medium/Strong:</b> The universal commitment to Human Rights in Ireland’s approach to Sierra Leone creates a strong navigational framework. Additional technical

		support would enable the Mission to move forwards more confidently within this.
<b>Agility</b>	The capability to move rapidly and flexibly in order to shape or adapt to the threats and opportunities arising from uncertainty	<b>Medium:</b> Programmatically the Country Strategy has been very (almost too) agile, and the systems are in place to change within the Country. Administratively, delegation of accounting authority will enhance this.
<b>Resilience</b>	The capability to absorb and positively build on adversity, shocks and setbacks	<b>Weak:</b> Individual team members (both in-country and in HQ) have proven themselves to be very resilient. But, low levels of staffing, high workloads, and difficult conditions make the programme vulnerable to shocks.
<b>Open collaboration</b>	The capability to dissolve boundaries, forge links and reach outside through partnerships and the sharing of ideas and information to gain a broader perspective and maximise innovation	<b>Strong:</b> Ireland’s partnership approach and culture of relationship building is a key comparative advantage that has come out strongly throughout the evaluation.
<b>Predictive learning</b>	The capability to sense, probe and analyse previously hidden patterns and trends in order to anticipate sudden or disruptive change	<b>Medium:</b> Ireland has shown a strong capacity for informal analysis and learning, but is vulnerable to groupthink without a more structured approach.

## 2. The Country Strategy encompassed a comprehensive reflection of policy priorities, but lacked the cohesion to achieve more than the sum of its parts

The design of the Country Strategy demonstrated a clear awareness and acknowledgement of Ireland’s global policy commitments. All aspects of the Country Strategy have been found to be in line with the overall policy intentions of the White Paper 2006, One World One Future, or the New Deal for Fragile States.

In particular, the policy commitments to hunger, nutrition, gender equality, human rights, and fragile states principles were integrated into the overall programme logic. However, they have tended to feature as specific activities, rather than as mainstreamed policy ‘lenses’. For example, the food security projects have only touched on issues of nutrition and gender, does not include a human rights analysis, and do not consider aspects of governance (although FAO’s work on right to food has represented a more recent improvement).

Furthermore, although the policy commitments were considered in-the-round, specific areas of programming (e.g. nutrition) did not have clear theories of change, and thus did not fully maximise conceptual links across the programme. Consequently, the Country Strategy can report a ‘set’ of results, rather than adding up to something more. Projects have been targeted at issues, rather than poverty profiles<sup>41</sup>. This broad targeting is pragmatic in terms of the expected results and the level of funding provided, but there needs to be greater analysis of who is not accessing services and why.

The same observation can be made to links between the Country Strategy and other Irish Aid funding (civil society funding). Whilst there are many areas for potential collaboration, or even a ‘grand alliance’ of Irish NGOs as an implementation option, the reality has been limited to informal and ad hoc coordination. Taken in total, this means Ireland is getting, at the very best, €30 million of results from spending €30 million, and not more.

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted that poverty profiling of most of Sierra Leone has not had the same relevance as in other countries due to the very low levels of development across the country.

In the meantime, both the Mission and the Irish NGOs are, respectively, facing technical and political challenges that call for greater integration. The number of policy references in the Country Strategy demonstrates the temptation to do ‘as much as possible’ in a context where there are so many priority needs. With the current level of human resources, the Country Strategy would better focus on fewer rather than more international policy commitments. Better collaboration with the Irish NGOs could change this consideration. However, there is currently no clear driver or vision for greater collaboration between different sources of Irish funding.

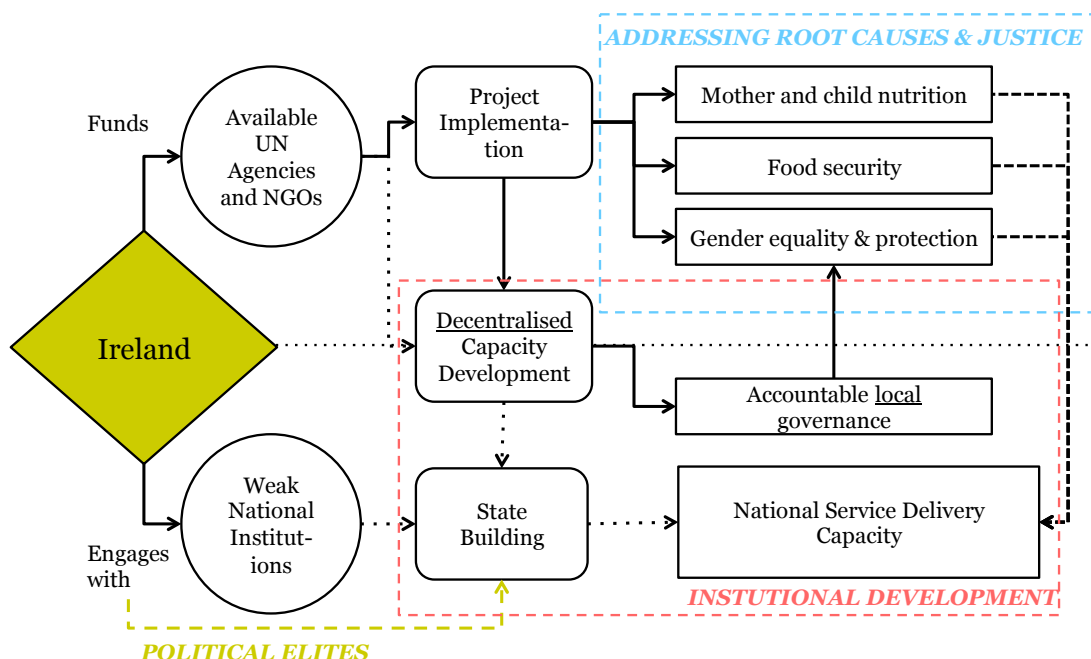
### 3. The underlying logic of the programme has shifted progressively away from central institution-building towards addressing injustice through local service delivery

The evaluation noted that the Country Strategy implicitly used three approaches for bringing about change in a fragile context: i) addressing the underlying issues of injustice, oppression/exploitation, threats to identity and security, and people’s sense of injury/victimization; ii) establishing stable/reliable social institutions that guarantee democracy, equity, justice, and fair allocation of resources; and iii) changing the political calculus of key leaders and groups to take the necessary steps.

Of these implicit underlying theories of change, there has been a shift over the course of the Programme to a focus on addressing the root causes of injustice, with less focus on institution building (see Figure 7.1). Most project activities and policy engagement is now geared towards mitigating structural issues of injustice and marginalization. Institution building has been retargeted to support this cause, and – as a result – Ireland has disengaged from developing the ‘core capacity’ of the major institutions in Sierra Leone: the Economic, Agriculture, Health and Education Ministries; parliamentary and judicial systems; the chieftaincy and local council systems.

As a consequence, Ireland is *still* supporting institutional development, in line with Fragile States principles. However, rather than strengthening national service-delivery capacity as a primary ‘means’ of creating change (as envisaged by the Country Strategy), institutional development has been relegated to a future side-effect from (the intention of) integrating the capacities of implementing partners into decentralized/national systems.

**Figure 7.1: Shifts in the Country Strategy use of theories of change over time**



Beyond the example of elections, the focus on local level service delivery means that Ireland has good relationships but lower levels of real leverage with political elites in Sierra Leone than if it was funding the centralized institutions in which they have the greatest stake. In many ways, this fits with the mediating role and the use of soft power that Ireland appears to be most comfortable with: influencing individuals within the political elites whilst avoiding tensions related to fiduciary or programmatic risk management.

However, in the future it is likely that Ireland will have a weaker voice through its relationship with UNDP/ISAT than it previously had through its relationship with UNIPSIL/IMATT. As a result, protecting or extending gains made in justice issues will increasingly rely on Ireland fostering good working relationships with other donors – particularly DFID and the EU – and the UN agencies.

Having a weakened voice may, in reality, be of little real consequence, except that Irish Aid is now considering issues that are highly sensitive – land rights, female genital mutilation/cutting, anti-corruption – and thus it may wish to consider options for maintaining independent leverage with political elites that have an interest in the development of particular national institutions.

#### **4. A combination of intense local-level interventions and national institution building appears to offer the highest chance for creating sustainable achievements**

Irish Aid has developed a level of ‘vertical integration’ (working all the way from the grassroots to international forums) that is admired by other donors, that is highly effective, and that is a strong contributing element to its relationship-building. The ‘horizontal integration’ across programme, policy and diplomatic roles also means that implementation experience can be leveraged into political engagement. This arrangement is, however, resource intensive in terms of staff time, and thus has to be carefully prioritised in terms of what issues are pursued.

From the (limited) results data that is available, the strongest results have been in areas where the programme has managed to combine both a focused project intervention with either institution building or policy engagement (particularly in sexual and gender based violence, and infant and young child feeding). So far, large scale or broad projects (school feeding, agricultural business centres, supplementary feeding, anti-corruption, human rights) have not worked as well for Ireland.

This is not to conclude that broad programmes should be excluded, only that the Country Strategy has delivered the greatest achievements in cases such as Rainbo (noting that the scaling up of both IRC and Helen Keller’s work is yet to be tested, and will be challenging). It does, however, highlight the continued relevance of institution building from the perspective of overall programme effectiveness.

This being the case, it would seem wise to avoid attempts to deliver large-coverage programmes, and focus instead on leveraging the combination of policy and institution building with funding support to relevant pilot or experimental work in areas of greatest interest to Ireland. Such an approach goes back to the vision of the Country Strategy of creating transformational impact in niche areas, with the implication that Irish Aid divests itself further from working in areas – such as food production and general good governance – where it cannot bring its advantage to bear.

#### **5. Measured by its potential impact, Ireland is not a small donor in Sierra Leone**

At every level of consultation within Irish Aid, it is clear that being a ‘small donor’, and the implications this has for making strategic choices, is a strongly held identity. The international community share this view. However, the people and Government of Sierra Leone do not. As they see it, Ireland is a big presence in Sierra Leone. The expectation that this carries with it, and the potential to leverage impact, is repeatedly communicated to the Mission in Freetown by being given a seat at the table, having whole thematic areas basically reliant on Irish funds or attention (nutrition, human rights, gender), and by being given an important behind-the-scenes role as a mediator.

This pressure of expectation on Irish Aid in Sierra Leone lies at the root of views on how ambitious the programme should be, and what level of organisational resourcing is required. Taken from the perspective of a small donor, some of the aspiration in the Country Strategy needs to be reduced to fit with (overstretched) capacity. Taken from the perspective of a donor in a position to make a big difference, the capacity needs to be increased to deliver on the promise of the Country Strategy.

Wherever the balance is struck, Ireland's classification of Sierra Leone as a Key Partner Country and its disproportionate voice in nutrition, gender, and human rights has led to a high expectation among Government, development partners, and the Mission. If this expectation is not met, then Ireland may lose the attention of government and the opportunities to influence that it currently enjoys. This being the case, scaling up the capacity of the Mission in Freetown would be a strong endorsement of the One World One Future commitment to work in fragility in order to have the greatest impact.

## **6. By beginning to place a greater emphasis on decentralised state-building the programme may be trading influence for relevance**

As noted above, the trend in the programme has been towards shifting institution building activities to a more decentralised level, or restricting them to niche departments. This has happened against a backdrop of two factors (see Section 3.0): i) support for decentralization is the main strategy by which the international community aimed to overcome the past drivers of conflict; and ii) political will and elite capture of capacity and resources at the centre does not help decentralization, and leads to the re-emergence of old centralized power structures.

Thus, despite its good interpersonal relationships at the centre – among both ministries and other power brokers – the real leverage of Ireland is likely to reduce as resources (or the chance of accessing resources) are seen to be directed to decentralized structures (see also Conclusion 4). This is the price associated with working more with NGOs and more with district-level service delivery. The potential upside, especially according to the recent IDS analysis (2013) is that work at the periphery is most likely to mitigate the dynamics of conflict that are showing signs of re-emerging.

Balancing this issue of central versus local support will be a central challenge for the next Country Strategy. Either way, it is important to ensure that all work is designed to support state capacity, at the relevant levels, so as to maintain the emphasis on state-building and move towards an eventual exit strategy (such as is happening with Rainbo). Despite the relevance that working at the district level has, Ireland's contribution will not be sufficient to fully mitigate the underlying dynamics of conflict relating to injustice. Thus, it would seem judicious to ensure that maintaining influence at the centre remains part of the strategic mix (see also Conclusion 3).

## **7. Ireland has carved out niches in nutrition and gender in which it is well positioned to create transformational changes – assuming that the riskiness and long-term commitments needed in these areas can be borne**

An original principle in the Country Strategy was to position Ireland in niches where it could use its comparative advantage to deliver transformational changes. Analysis of achievements suggests that this have been most clearly attained under Objective 1 (nutrition). Under Objective 3 (governance), significant potential has emerged for Ireland to deliver on this ambition in relation to gender, rather than overall 'governance'. Least value has come from the strategy of niche positioning in regards to Objective 2 (food security) where it is unclear both what has been achieved and how Irish Aid was uniquely positioned to deliver these gains (although food security also remains a relevant aspect of both nutrition and gender objectives).

The implication of this conclusion is that the most promising organising pillars for a future Country Strategy are nutrition and gender. Both of these are likely to require long-term (20 years+) engagement to be truly transformative due to their multigenerational and cross-cutting nature. This would be in keeping with Ireland's approach in other countries. The evaluation, therefore, considers



that maintaining a 'long-term' vision is an important consideration in the development of future Irish Aid management systems (particularly results-measurement) in order to avoid the trap of only programming short-term interventions that can be more easily measured (see conclusion 11, below).

In considering a tighter focus on gender and nutrition, some weight needs to be given to the fact that both of these issues are particularly susceptible to deteriorate rapidly in conflict conditions. History suggests that if conflict returns, the result will be high levels of both gender-based violence and malnutrition, partly because they cannot be easily managed through emergency interventions. Thus, the choice to focus purely on gender and nutrition would heighten the strategic risk in the programme, with the possibility of years of work being rapidly undermined by conflict (by comparison, food security levels can be more easily maintained through blanket food distributions). Without Ireland's interventions, however, such regressions may happen even in peacetime, suggesting that there is substantial risk associated with choosing *not* to act firmly on gender and nutrition.

### **8. Ireland's partnership approach, flexibility and whole-of-government approach is a large comparative advantage for adapting and succeeding in a complex space if the requisite human resources are available to make it work**

A repeated finding in this evaluation is that Irish Aid's culture, way-of-working, and outlook is well suited to delivering on the fragile states principles. The social complexity, uncertainty, and sensitivity of the context make the development of multi-faceted partnerships with government, programming flexibility, and grassroots-to-policy working a strong comparative advantage. However, the nature of each of these competencies is that they require continuous work, reflection and development in order to maintain them.

The level of staffing in relation to the Sierra Leone programme – including all HQ staff with a responsibility for the programme – is currently less than one person per €1 million per year. Based on the average value and length of a project in the Country Strategy, this equates to each member of the programme team (including HQ staff members) managing 3 projects each – plus all the normal business of running a Mission, administration, relationship development, etc. This workload leaves very little scope for maximizing the organisation's comparative advantage in a context of fragility.

The heavy pressures on management are reflected in the mixed level of attention placed on different parts of the programme portfolio, with staff time naturally directed to where there is greatest traction or the most pressing problems. If, for example, the same level of engagement had been placed on developing the potential for Home Grown School Feeding (see Section 6.3) as on gender, the outcome may have been an integrated UN food security programme. Increasing impact, therefore, is less likely to come from increases in the aid allocation to Sierra Leone, and more likely to come from continuing to expand the programme's HR capacity.

### **9. Modality and partner choices have been aware of risks, but decision making has mostly been influenced by the practical considerations of human resources and support systems available in Irish Aid.**

The strategic approach for both the selection of modalities and the choice of partners has been 'the least risky option considering the capacity of the Mission in Sierra Leone'. The implementation of this strategy has changed as new experiences have emerged during implementation – specifically in terms of UN capabilities – and as the number of staff members in the Mission has increased. Until recently, risk had been primarily determined in terms of likelihood of 'getting the job done', although this was sensitive to building capacity as well as delivering services (more as a means of fulfilling fragile states principles than to mitigate risk).

New project management systems promise to change the calculation of risk in terms of capacity analysis of partners and mapping fiduciary controls. This is an important step. Nevertheless, the choice of modalities and partners remain confined to which possibilities are available considering the

limited number of staff members (both in Sierra Leone and HQ). Ireland has used a basket fund, where it was available, and has worked with partners ranging from state institutions (ACC) to the UN and INGOs. However, the current Human Resources level does not give Ireland the space to open up new funding modalities (such as pushing for new basket funds) or to nurture stronger Partners through long term capacity-developing commitments. Indeed, where the Mission has invested time in strengthening a partner out of necessity – such as with WFP – there has been a tendency to move away from established partnerships to alternative partnerships that are considered less risky.

By implication, without a shift in the availability of human resources, Ireland will remain confined to whichever choices of modalities and partners are most available and least risky at any period in time. Considering fluctuations in the capacities of development organizations in Sierra Leone, this substantially reduces the opportunity for developing a long-term strategic position. A broader view of risk would suggest that the Country Strategy would be better served by setting out medium-term objectives for the types of modalities and partnerships Irish Aid would like to work through, and then to proactively start building such opportunities through long-term commitments and capacity development.

It is recognized that long-term partnerships in Sierra Leone will be subject to the challenges associated with occasional changes in leadership; but the alternative to maintaining long-term partnerships is to continue funding a series of projects that simply end (or are severely disrupted) when each contract stops. The evaluation considers that the policy commitment to *staying the course* demands that a more strategic view is taken. Irish Aid’s experience in the occupied Palestinian territories has demonstrated the value to programming of having long-term, effective and relevant partners. If Irish Aid in Sierra Leone wants to benefit from having access to similar partners, proactive steps will need to be taken to identify and build-up such organizations rather than continuing to choose from whatever is available at any given time.

### **10. The real extent of risks with working through particular partners were under-appreciated until recently, but this lesson is being learnt**

Within the Country Strategy, risk – particularly conflict, capacity, and fiduciary risk – was broadly assessed as part of the overall analysis of the context. This analysis described the institutional and political context and contained a conflict analysis, which clearly sets out: drivers of conflict; category, likelihood and impacts of conflict; the risk ‘owner’; and Ireland’s mitigation strategy. Risks that were identified are largely external to the programme (although the Mid-Term Review also identified internal risks). The analysis did not, however, apply a comprehensive risk analysis framework – systematic analysis of different types of risk derived from a recognised model (such as presented in Table 6.1 of this report). Doing so would have helped to identify some of the more nuanced risks present in the current portfolio of projects (such as the risk of self-selection in projects excluding marginalized groups from accessing services).

Lessons from the programme, particularly the UNICEF project, include the need for Irish Aid to clearly understand in detail the way that resources move through the programmes it is funding. In particular where NGOs or government institutions are ‘sub-contracted’ to implement and monitor parts of a project, implementing partners should be expected to be able to provide a comprehensive risk map, mitigation strategy, and risk-based monitoring plan. The current UN capacity to deliver this in Sierra Leone has had difficulties and highlights the need to have stronger assurances (in terms of detailed plans) that are more than a reliance on international – or even local – reputation.

Sierra Leone’s new project cycle management systems now require information about contextual risks, financial management and audit, and funding and accountability agreements with their partners. Organisational Capacity Assessments (OCAs) are also now being carried out. This is closely monitored, and partners are asked to provide updates to risk analysis and mitigation strategies: reflecting a move from light-touch to a more rigorous approach. It is the view of the evaluation that these are necessary and timely developments. Within the context of Sierra Leone, proactive mapping

and monitoring of risks will remain an important tool for the foreseeable future. This has resource, time, and planning implications. However, it also means that Irish Aid will be better positioned to choose – and develop the capacity of – long-term partnerships as discussed under Conclusion 9. Continuing to strengthen risk-assessment and mitigation thus needs to remain a priority for the Mission.

**11. The programme has been unable to find a practical-yet-meaningful way of managing for results in a context of limited data and complex dynamics**

The Mission – and the Country Strategy development process – lacked the skills and experience to make Management for Development Results (MfDR) work in the context of Sierra Leone (with limited and poor quality data) and the context of Ireland’s interest in complex, long-term issues such as gender. The conundrum is that all the internal stakeholders value the idea of MfDR, but have been unable to bring the resources to bear on delivering a solution. This is partly due to capacity shortcomings that can be addressed through training or technical assistance. However, it is also due to the challenges with developing an approach to measuring outcomes that ‘fits’ with the rest of Ireland’s way of working (see Table 7.2).

**Table 7.2: Principle challenges facing the development of appropriate MfDR in Irish Aid Sierra Leone**

Type	Challenges
Known ‘knowns’	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Many of the issues that Irish Aid is addressing are not suited to short-term quantitative measures of progress;</li> <li>□ Partners in Sierra Leone are not familiar with providing outcome data and national systems are weak;</li> <li>□ Work in relation to policy has not yet been captured in the results framework;</li> <li>□ Irish Aid has constrained human resources and ICT capacity in-country and at HQ;</li> </ul>
Known unknowns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Whether the National Framework for the Agenda for Prosperity will be completed and whether it will work (i.e. data being collected regularly);</li> <li>□ Whether the Mutual Accountability Framework will prove itself to be of benefit;</li> <li>□ Which future partners – and their capabilities – Irish Aid will work with;</li> <li>□ What the political and public demand for results data will be;</li> </ul>
Unknown unknowns	The development of MfDR in Sierra Leone needs to be able to work within the same principles of flexibility as practiced in other aspects of the Country Strategy implementation.

Measurement of results is a significant gap in Irish Aid’s current capacity in Sierra Leone, thereby reducing opportunities for learning and limiting accountability to the delivery of activities (rather than changes in people’s lives). National data systems are likely to remain weak and unreliable for the foreseeable future, despite investments by other donors. Irish Aid thus needs to find a way of obtaining reliable data that does not rely only on national systems, but does not undermine their

development either. It is the view of the evaluation that Ireland also needs to avoid falling into the MfDR ‘trap’ of short-term programming according to what can be easily measured.

The most promising immediate option is to work with implementing partners to include agreed-upon national outcome indicators for food security, nutrition, gender and governance in their own project monitoring and evaluation systems – and to ensure that this aspect of the work is properly funded. So, for example, a future food security project would include a clear mechanism for tracking *household food consumption scores* (for which WFP has globally developed a simple tool in its FFA programme Guidance Manual) because this is consistent with the national Food Security and Nutrition framework. The outcome data used by Irish Aid would thus align with the intentions of national systems, keeping open the possibility of transitioning to the use of these systems if that became a future option. There is also a strong case for aligning with the main outcome measures used by Irish NGOs in order to get a clearer picture of the sum total of Irish investments.

**12. Since Irish Aid initiated its presence in 2005, its achievements in Sierra Leone have been built on the back of a small group of highly committed, resourceful, and overstretched staff: this is becoming an unsustainable, risky and inefficient model for creating long term impact**

In the view of the evaluation – based both on achievements and on the perception of external stakeholders – the Country Strategy has fully consolidated the gains that were made by the strong work that preceded it. It remains, however, a programme that has mainly progressed because of the quality, commitment and resourcefulness of the individuals involved (at both country and HQ level).

Whilst it is essential that Ireland should continue to find, develop and deploy high calibre programme staff to fragile states contexts, future strategies cannot assume the same intensity, calibre and style of team. Mindful of the duty of care owed to staff (in terms of avoiding burnout), the human resources considerations must weigh up the multi-dimensional risks associated with understaffing in a fragile context, and the opportunity (as recognised in One World One Future) for Ireland to make real impact. Against this backdrop, ensuring adequate and appropriate human resources capacity needs to be in the first order of priority for Irish Aid moving forwards.

## 8.0 Recommendations

The evaluation team has developed the following recommendations based on the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. In order to ensure a prioritised and logical set of actionable proposals, three of the four relevant evaluation framework criteria (strategy, processes, and management) have been used to guide the formulation of these recommendations.

### 8.1 Recommendations for Irish Aid HQ

**Priority 1: In the transition of Sierra Leone and Liberia to Key Partner Country Section, ensure that future programme management systems maintain the strategic flexibility needed to be effective given the context of fragility**

The new management arrangements and Embassy status Ireland’s mission in Sierra Leone – both announced subsequent to the research stage of this evaluation – are timely and relevant. It is the view of the evaluation that the mission has a level of capacity to be able to benefit from the opportunities that these decisions make available, most especially in terms of a 5-year funding commitment for the next Country Strategy (which should be linked to the national planning cycle and the UN planning cycle).

In transitioning to a longer programme cycle, however, it is critical to maintain a degree of the flexibility that Sierra Leone has previously had in order to respond to opportunities and political uncertainty. In particular, arrangements should be found to make available a reserved flexible portion of funds that are linked to the strategy and available to support emerging research needs or initiating opportunistic experimental work.

**Priority 2: Continue to find every opportunity possible – including innovative ways – to support the Mission in Sierra Leone with high-level technical assistance to ensure coherence within and across Ireland’s strategic investments**

The technical capacity of the Mission has been enhanced significantly by the addition of national programme advisors. Nevertheless, access to technical support – particularly from country visits – has previously enabled a step change in the integrity, cohesion, and confidence of programming. Three main actions are recommended to enhance the strategic coherence of the next Country Strategy, each of which requires commitment from senior levels of management:

- a) As part of the next strategy development, provide training and assistance in the use of theories of change to ensure that there is a clear logic for how Ireland intends to bring about change within sectors (e.g. nutrition) – as a part of wider capacity development in MfDR;
- b) In time for the next strategy implementation, appoint and budget for external technical advisors to the programme to complement available Irish Aid human resources, these could be a) UNDP, b) a private consultancy, or c) an appropriate civil society organisation. This could be through a long-term service contract, partnership agreement, or ‘draw-down’ framework, with a focus on technical expertise in issues covered by the Country Strategy (particularly poverty analysis, human rights, acute malnutrition, women’s empowerment, ending violence against women, food security, agricultural value-chains, justice and governance reform, and youth mainstreaming); and
- c) Over the course of the next Country Strategy, assess the institutional barriers within Irish Aid to delivering greater coherence between Country Strategy and Civil Society funds, including reviewing current policies whereby Irish NGOs may not be funded through the Country Strategy Programme.

**Priority 3: Undertake a comprehensive review of the human resources needs for the Sierra Leone and Liberia programmes in light of the One World One Future commitment to situations of fragility, including identification of HR-related issues of specific relevance to working in fragile contexts**

Sierra Leone is a good example of Ireland’s policy commitment to maximising impact through working in situations of fragility. The experience of the Country Strategy clearly demonstrates that the human resource implications of working effectively in these contexts requires a different human resources assessment compared to working in low-income countries. This is manifested in terms of the risk to the organisation of low State capacity, restricted choices of partners and modalities, and overloaded staff (both in-country and HQ).

The recent shifts within the Sierra Leone programme – working to integrate intensive policy engagement with targeted service delivery – was made possible by the increase in programme staff in Freetown, and demonstrates that each additional person can create a disproportionate effect on the overall scope of the Strategy. By implication, value-for-money will be maximised – and the level of risk Ireland is exposed to will be minimised – by committing the requisite level of human resources to Sierra Leone (and, by extension, Liberia).

Currently, there is no mechanism for establishing what this ‘right’ level of human resources is across the full portfolio of Irish Aid interventions in Sierra Leone. It is recommended, therefore, that a comprehensive organisation review be established to assess the staffing implications of the policy commitment to fragility, and to provide clear guidance on future HR levels.

## 8.2 Recommendations for Irish Aid Sierra Leone

**Priority 1: Focus the next Country Strategy on the two issues – and the supporting institutional systems – that Ireland wants to help develop over the next 20 years**

The history of Irish Aid work since 2005 has been a process of experimenting to find the areas in which the organisation can make the biggest contribution. The evaluation has identified three major areas of strategic importance that Ireland is currently engaged with: i) scaling-up nutrition, ii) gender under Pillar 8 of the PRSP; and iii) home-grown school feeding (including P4P and ABCs). All the evidence gathered by the evaluation points towards benefits from further focusing the strategic scope of the next Country Strategy. This will maximise the potential of the Mission to direct limited resources at leveraging policy change and delivering high quality projects.

The current trend is for increasing momentum in nutrition and gender, less so in food security and governance. In addition, there is a comparative advantage in nutrition and gender in terms of their links to other sectors and the expertise available within the Mission. The evaluation has not found, and thus does not recommend, scope for *directly* re-engaging with health and youth as focus sectors.

It is thus recommended that the next Country Strategy focus on two primary ‘pillars’ – institutional systems that Ireland is willing to partner with and help develop over the long-haul. The obvious choices for this are gender and nutrition. However, history shows that momentum in particular sectors can change rapidly, and both sectors are exposed to similar types and levels of risk. It is, therefore, strongly recommended that aspects of food security and governance be maintained as areas of complementary investment, albeit more clearly situated under the logic of overall gender and nutrition goals.

Specific recommendations under the proposed Country Strategy focus on nutrition and gender are:

Programme-wide	Nutrition	Gender
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Developing specific theories of change/logical frameworks for how change happens in each sector, with, as appropriate, clearly articulated links between them;</li> <li>2. Applying a specific nutrition, gender, poverty/vulnerability and governance lens to assessing each proposed project within the programme;</li> <li>3. Revisiting the conflict analysis to consider the extent to which youth, decentralisation, marginalisation entrenched by the chieftancy system, and weaknesses in the judicial system need to be mainstreamed into the programme<sup>42</sup>;</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Focusing on consolidating and ensuring quality in treatment of severe <u>acute</u> malnutrition, with a longer-term view of scaling up further;</li> <li>5. Shifting to prevention of <u>chronic</u> malnutrition (as opposed to treatment);</li> <li>6. Concentrating efforts on the 1000-day window (for the foetus during pregnancy to the age of 2), including working with carers for behavioural change, diverse diets and improved care and hygiene practices;</li> <li>7. Addressing food security primarily where it will enhance the objectives of the programme in relation to nutrition and gender;</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Advocating for greater focus on integrating and having coherence in the policies, structures, systems, and services that target sexual and gender based violence, including prevention, protection, reporting, care, justice, and recovery;</li> <li>9. Linking the Irish Aid supports in governance interventions on anti-corruption and human rights to outcomes for gender equality and nutrition; and</li> <li>10. Exploring the use of Mothers' Support Groups as a community-level nexus to bring together, in a meaningful way, all of Irish Aids' interventions in a particular location.</li> </ol>

**Priority 2: Invest time to fully analyse the data systems and management for results needs of the future Country Strategy as a matter of high priority**

Bearing in mind the need to adapt MfDR to each country context, the evaluation recommends that comprehensive training and assistance on management for development results be provided to the Mission *before* the development of the next Country Strategy. This should explore options to link future objectives and outcomes to the national PRSP framework and the national Mutual Accountability Framework. Future project proposals should include the means to collect outcome level information using standard national indicators wherever possible.

Beyond MfDR within the Irish Aid programme, there is also significant scope to include national data capacity as a specific consideration within the design of the Country Strategy, especially where it relates to generating and using evidence on gender and nutrition. This could include working with partners that can include data capacity development (training, databases and equipment, transport) within their support to national institutions, or making provision for impact evaluations of specific areas (such as the work of the Human Rights Commission). Detailed further research on this possibility is required, including a capacity assessment of the existing data infrastructure, mapping of other development assistance, identifying gaps in the current evidence-base, and ex-ante cost-benefit analysis based on the risk of low data capacity to the rest of the programme.

<sup>42</sup> The concept of 'mainstreaming' is not suggesting that the programme includes specific activities to address the issues of youth, etc. Rather, it is proposing that nutrition, gender and food security programmes are designed to be sensitive to the issues identified in the conflict analysis. For example, nutrition training programmes could include specific targets for the percent of trainees who are young women and men; the gender policy support could include dialogue on the entrenched marginalisation of young men and women by the chieftancy system; and the access to justice work could seek out explicit partnerships with the judicial reform programme around magistrates in targeted areas.

### **Priority 3: Focus on identifying and developing long-term partnerships and modality options**

The pattern of projects in Sierra Leone reveals: i) a relatively rapid ‘turnover’ of partners, and ii) an increasing use of smaller projects (and, thus, more partners). This is indicative of a process-of-elimination, as Ireland learns about who is available to work with on different issues. However, it also creates substantial transaction costs, and is subject to continuous variation in the capacity and leadership quality of partners.

The evaluation, therefore, recommends the Mission to develop a strategy for identifying ‘the partners Ireland wants to work with in Sierra Leone. This could include: a scoping of potential partners based on long-term trends and not just short-term performance; agreeing a clear division of labour in each sector, with Irish commitment to providing follow-on funding for partners who meet their obligations and invest in their capacity to do so; and establishing an agreed process for constructively working through problems<sup>43</sup>.

Similarly, Ireland needs to demonstrate leadership in order to open up new modality options (sector-wide approaches, technical assistance, area-based programmes). More specifically, Irish Aid can push for – and commit to – joint programmes, basket funds or NGO coalitions<sup>44</sup> for nutrition and gender. This would help stem the shift towards project funding as being the only option that Ireland is willing to use (based on the current portfolio). It would also enable the next Country Strategy to re-engage with the ambition of directly strengthening national institutional capacity as a complement to addressing decentralised justice (see Conclusion 3).

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<sup>43</sup> A current challenge is that partners do not always recognize that they have a problem: linking an explicit commitment to long-term funding to their acknowledging and addressing issues could provide a helpful incentive.

<sup>44</sup> By NGO coalitions, we are referring to highly integrated sector-programmes jointly implemented by multiple partners, rather than groups of de facto separate projects.



# Annex 1: Stakeholders Consulted

## Irish Aid Stakeholders:

1. Kevin Kelly, Emergency and Recovery, Head of Unit
2. Nuala O'Brien, Mary Ryan, E&R, Sierra Leone programming and Fragile State policy responsibilities.
3. Sinead Walsh, Paula Molloy, Grace Harman, Sibida George, Irish Aid Freetown.
4. Fragile State working group representative, Nuala O'Brien
5. Bronagh Carr, PPE and Fragile States, Research, Learning.
6. Elisa Cavacece, Gender Adviser, PPE.
7. Laura Leonard, E&A, PFM, Financial management and programme risk in SL
8. Grainne O'Neill, former HOD Freetown
9. Anne Marie Callan, former HOD Freetown
10. Karen Miller, former Deputy HOM, Freetown
11. Mags Gaynor, Hunger and Nutrition, Thematic Sectors and Special Programmes (TSSP)
12. William Carlos, E&A, Head of Unit
13. Frank Kirwan, E&A, evaluation manager.

## 30 Implementing Partners, Sierra Leone:

14. ACF
15. Anti-corruption Commission
16. FAO
17. HKI
18. Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone Kenema
19. Human Rights Commission SL
20. IRC
21. Scaling Up Nutrition
22. UNDP
23. UNICEF
24. World Food Programme

## Ministries, Departments and Agencies:

25. Justice Sector Coordination Office
26. MAFFS Nutrition Department
27. Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security

28. Ministry of Education Science and Technology
29. Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
30. Ministry of Health and Sanitation
31. Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
32. National Election Committee

## Development Partners, Sierra Leone

33. Caritas
34. Christian Aid
35. Concern
36. DFID
37. European Union
38. GIZ
39. GOAL
40. UNIPSIL
41. World Bank

## Programme Stakeholders

42. Agriculture Business Centre, Kono
43. COOPI (NGO)
44. District Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security Office, Kono
45. District Education, Science and Technology Office, Kono
46. IBIS (NGO)
47. Journalists, Kono
48. Magistrate, Kono
49. Mother's Clubs, Kono
50. Police Family Support Unit, Kono
51. Public Health Unit staff and users, Kono and Freetown
52. Rainbo Centre staff, Kono and Freetown
53. Saturday Courts, Kono and Freetown
54. School Gender Club, Kono
55. School staff and children
56. Stabilisation Centre staff and users, Kono and Freetown
57. Statistics Sierra Leone
58. Survivors of Gender Based Violence, Kono
59. Women's Action Groups, Kono
60. World Vision

# Annex 2: Quality Assurance Processes

## Process

- Oversight provided by Julian Gayfer (IOD PARC Director) at critical points (Inception, Exit, Recommendations)
- Evaluation managed according to IOD PARC quality assurance processed and ImpactReady quality assurance policy: <http://2013.impactready.org/quality-assurance-policy-evaluations/>
- Continuous dialogue with the Evaluation Manager

## Ethics

- Explicit consent requested from participants (verbal with checkbox prompt for SSI/FGD/observation, written for Perception Survey)
- Protection of identity in line with ethnographic norms
- Avoid prompting recall of traumatic events experienced by participants
- Dignifying representation of participants in line with Dóchas Code of Conduct
- Maintain independence

## Data

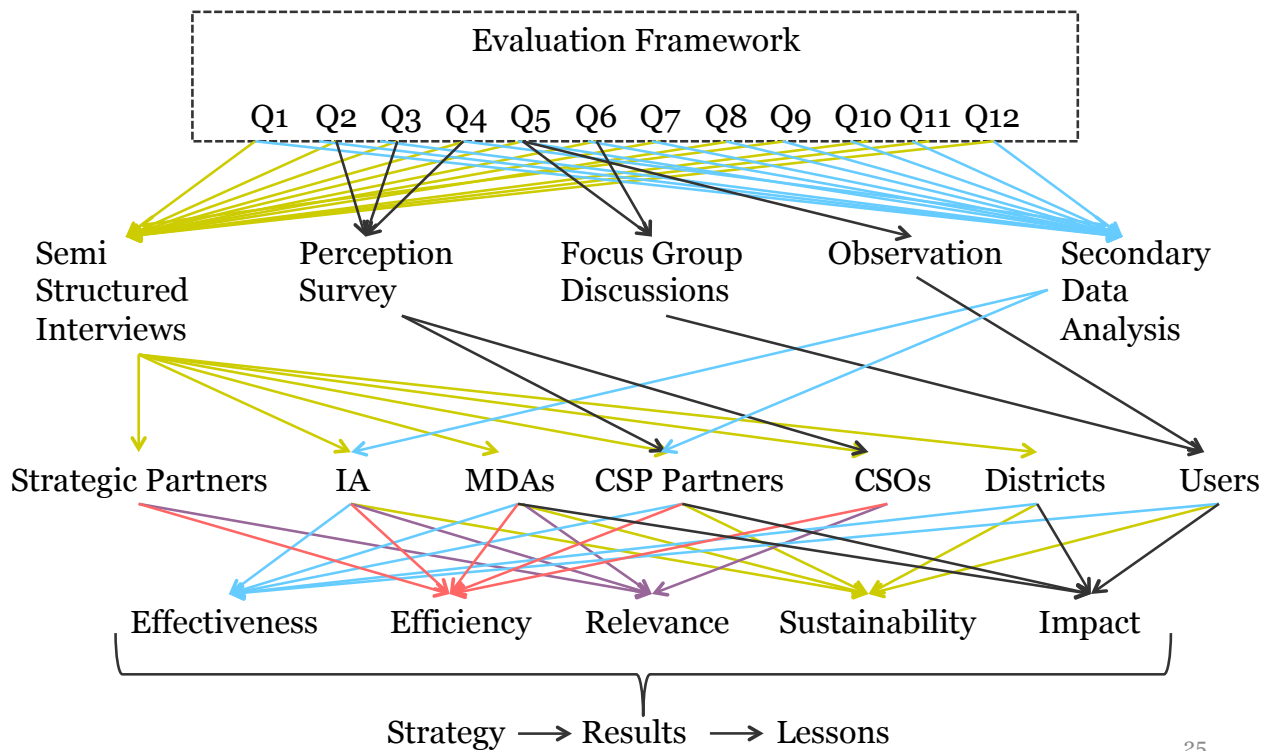
- Hand written notes typed up and stored in password-protected Dropbox account
- All data stored on password-protected computers and backed up by Dropbox
- Participants provided with information about what will happen with their data
- All sensitive data made anonymous before being shared publically

## Gender

- Gender disaggregated analysis (where appropriate)
- Gender-relevant questions in data collection instruments
- Human Rights language in questions and report
- Same-sex interviewers for vulnerable SSI/FGD respondents
- Gender-separated FGD (where appropriate)

# Annex 3: Evaluation Framework

100 **Figure A3.1: Evaluation design and relationship to the evaluation framework**



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**Table A3.1: Relationship between the Evaluation Questions and the Criteria**

Criteria	Strategy	Achievements	Process	Management
<b>Relevance</b>	Question 1, 2, 3, 4	Question 6	Question 8	-
<b>Effectiveness</b>	Question 3, 4	Question 6	Question 7, 8	Question 10, 11, 12
<b>Sustainability</b>	-	Question 5	-	-
<b>Efficiency</b>	-	-	Question 7, 9	Question 11
<b>Impact</b>	-	Question 5	-	-

## Question 1 (Relevance)

**To what extent was the design of and strategic choices made within the programme for Sierra Leone 2011-2013 in line with the Fragile States Principles and based on Irish Aid policies and priorities?**

1. What were the strategic choices made by Irish Aid for the 2011-13 CSP?
  - a. Did the choice to focus on nutrition, food security, gender and governance reflect an awareness of national priorities and the full constellation of resources (both national and other donors)?
  - b. Was the decision to withdraw from Youth, Health and the UN Joint Programme in alignment with national priorities and systems?

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- 120
- c. Were efforts to ensure harmonisation and alignment balanced with the need to deliver results for people?
  - 2. Were the strategic choices and the resulting logical model consistent with the Fragile States Principles?
    - a. Were the principles explicitly applied, and were they applicable?
    - b. Was having the principles useful for decision making, and what did this mean in practice?
  - 3. Were the strategic choices and the resulting logical model consistent with the Irish Aid policies and priorities of the time?
- **Sources:** CSP 2011-13; Relevant IrishAid documentation prior to 2011; Fragile State Principles; Irish Aid principle policy documents of 2011; Key Informant interviews
  - **Stakeholders:** Irish Aid SL, relevant HQ staff of the time; GoSL; Strategic Partners.

### Question 2 (Relevance)

***To what extent were the programme choices based on good contextual, political economy, poverty, equality and vulnerability analyses and built upon lessons learned from earlier implementation?***

- 130
- 4. Are analyses that were carried out regarding the context, political economy, fragility, poverty, equality and vulnerability analyses evident in the programme choices?
    - a. Were programme components that were selected guided by appropriate analysis that were relevant to the context? (doing the right things)
    - b. Were programme components adapted to the context? (doing things right)
  - 5. Were pre-2011 lessons from Sierra Leone and other Key Partner Countries documented and available?
    - c. Are they evident in programme choices?
- **Sources:** CSP 2011-13; Background analyses documents; Lesson learning documents pre 2011; Key Informant interviews; Anonymous perceptions study
  - **Stakeholders:** Irish Aid SL and relevant HQ staff of the time; GoSL; Strategic Partners
- 140

### Question 3 (Relevance and Effectiveness)

***How strategic, relevant and effective were the choices of Modalities including choices of Partners?***

- 150
- 6. What analysis (including risk analysis) was carried out regarding the choice of modalities?
    - a. Why were particular modalities chosen and what were the associated risks?
  - 7. What analysis (including risk analysis) was carried out regarding the choice of partners?
    - b. What was the available choice of partners in SL to Irish Aid in 2011?
    - c. Why were the particular partners chosen and what were the perceived risks?
    - d. Was fiduciary risk understood, including how money moves through the system?
  - 8. What was the domestic risk appetite in 2011, and how has this changed?
    - a. What is acceptable risk at different levels in Irish Aid?
    - b. How was risk communicated (programmatically and politically)?
    - c. What risk management strategies were used?
- **Sources:** CSP 2011-13; Background analysis to support the CSP; Key informant interviews; Anonymous perceptions study

- **Stakeholders:** Previous and current IA staff (HQ and SL); GoSL; CSP Partners; Strategic Partners

#### *Question 4 (Relevance and Effectiveness)*

160 ***How did the programme planning and implementation take account of the other sources of Irish Aid funding in Sierra Leone?***

9. What other funding was there in SL by Irish Aid in 2011-2013?
  - a. Was this included in the decision-making regarding strategic choices and programme planning?
  - b. Are Irish NGOs receiving Civil Society money (approx. €4.2m) reporting a similar experience of implementation as the CSP?
- **Sources:** CSP 2011-13; Background analysis to support the CSP; MAPS evaluation/SL section; Key informant interviews; Anonymous perceptions study.
- **Stakeholders:** Previous and current IA staff (HQ and SL); GoSL; CSOs.

#### *Question 5 (Sustainability and Impact)*

170 ***To what achievements did the programme implementation contribute?***

10. What progress has been made against (2013) indicators towards objectives 1;2;3?
  - a. According to Irish Aid and partner M&E systems
  - b. How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps?
11. What progress has been made towards Outcome 1 and 2?
  - a. Collated analysis of findings from the above
  - b. Were there any unexpected positive or negative changes as a result of the CSP?
12. What can we say about the contribution IA made to these objectives and outcomes?
  - a. Are there alternative explanations for achievements and can these be discounted?

- 180
- **Sources:** Country Strategy 2013 results framework; Key informant interviews; Collation of data for each indicator (from reports and secondary data); Interviews to triangulate findings; Focus groups of those affected by the projects using rapid appraisal techniques; Partner reports; Other relevant secondary data; Key informant interviews.

- **Stakeholders:** IA HQ and SL; CSP partner organisations; GoSL; District authorities; CSOs; User Groups

#### *Question 6 (Relevance and Effectiveness)*

***In what way were the intended results and programme achievements in line with a focus on state building as a central objective of a Fragile States Principles approach?***

- 190
13. To what extent did the programme's planned and actual outcomes support state building?
    - a. In terms of the GoSL's legitimacy and accountability?
    - b. In terms of GoSL fulfilling a core function in service delivery and in terms of enhancing institutional capacity? e.g. mobilising revenue and establishing an enabling environment for service delivery?

- **Sources:** DAC Principles; 2011 and 2013 results framework; Analysis from Q5; Key Informant Interviews ; Focus Groups with Users

- **Stakeholders:** District Authorities; Ministries; User groups; CSOs; CSP Partners.

### Question 7 (Effectiveness and Efficiency)

***In line with a Fragile States Principles approach how appropriately and effectively did the Programme change and/or adapt to contextual changes that occurred in the period of implementation?***

- 200
14. Was the programme responsive to contextual changes and if so, were programme changes appropriate and effective?
    - a. What broad contextual changes occurred in 2011-2013?
    - b. Was the level of ambition and focus appropriate and helpful?
    - c. Were Voice + Money effectively combined to enable responsiveness?
    - d. As a smaller donor, did Irish Aid leverage its flexibility to meet gaps?
- **Sources:** CSP 2011, Results framework 2013; Any documentation of contextual changes (incl. MTR); Key informant interviews
  - **Stakeholders:** IA HQ and SL - past and present; CSP partner organisations; GoSL relevant Ministries; Strategic Partners

### 210 Question 8 (Relevance and Effectiveness)

***How well were the policy priority areas and mainstreaming issues of Irish Aid and particularly Hunger and Nutrition and Gender equality and Gender Based Violence (GBV) integrated and aligned across the programme?***

15. Have policy priorities been integrated within the programme?
    - a. In terms of practical needs?
    - b. In terms of strategic needs?
    - c. Are partners aware of Ireland's policy priorities?
- **Sources:** CSP 2011, Results framework 2013; Relevant policy documents; Key informant interviews
- 220
- **Stakeholders:** HQ and SL – past and present; CSP partner organisations; GoSL relevant Ministries; Strategic partners

### Question 9 (Efficiency)

***Did the Partner choices take account of the financial and supply chain management risks?***

16. What risk analysis was carried out regarding financial and supply chain of different partners?
    - a. Theft/diversion (also fuels conflict)
    - b. Market distortion
    - c. Bias in distribution
    - d. Substitution of capacity
    - e. Legitimisation of who you work with
    - f. Targeting
  17. What criteria were used for decision-making and who made these decisions?
    - a. Where is the level of risk tolerance decided, and what implications does this have?
  18. What strategies are available for effectively managing partner risks?
    - a. What are the implications of more rigorous assessments?
    - b. What are some of the trade offs between risk, innovation and social returns in contexts of fragility?
- 230

- **Sources:** Management documents; Key informant interviews
- **Stakeholders:** IA (SL and HQ) staff in post at the time and now; CSP Partner organisations

240 *Question 10 (Effectiveness)*

***How effectively did Irish Aid’s programme management systems in Sierra Leone work?***

19. What were the roles of IA HQ and SL teams?
  - a. How was the programme affected by having management based in Ireland?
  - b. Key Partner Country that still sits with Emergency and Recovery – implications for learning across KPC?
  - c. Was there an appropriate skills mix to maximise effective management?
20. Is it realistic to pair SL and Liberia?
  - a. What implications does Liberia have for SL?

- 250
- **Sources:** Key informant interviews; Irish Aid documentation regarding management systems;
  - **Stakeholders:** IA staff (HQ and SL) past and present; CSP partner organisations

*Question 11 (Effectiveness and Efficiency)*

***How effectively did the programme management systems generate and utilise lessons learnt?***

21. What systems were there for learning lessons across the programme?
  - a. How effective are these?
  - b. Were – and if so how - were lessons learnt incorporated in the programme (management/ systems/ implementation) in an ongoing way?
  - c. What lessons have been learnt from Rainbow in terms of how do you set up a transition for sensitive service delivery?
  - d. What lessons have been generated about the implications and strategies for managing in a country that is moving between, emergency, recovery and key partner country states?

- 260
- **Sources:** Key informant interviews; Lesson learning documents/ records of events and initiatives
  - **Stakeholders:** IA staff (HQ and SL) past and present; CSP partner organisations

*Question 12 (Effectiveness)*

***Has the use of Management for Development Results Approach been a useful management tool?***

- 270
22. To what extent has Management for Development Results been used and useful?
    - a. Is MfDR in Sierra Leone practical and does it make sense in terms of the return on investment?
    - b. Were any lessons incorporated in the revised version of the results framework that came out of the MTR?
    - c. Were options to integrate with national systems available, realistic and useful?
  23. Did the results framework follow a sound logic, based upon reasonable assumptions?

a. What are the theories of change for both the 2011 logframe and revised 2013 logframe and what causal links do these identify?

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- **Sources:** MTR and any reflective documentation from the programme; Key informant interviews; Analysis of how the results framework has been used (Q5)
- **Stakeholders:** IA staff (HQ and SL) past and present; CSP partner organisations



## Annex 4: Main Data Collection Tools

Partners	
3.2.2 3.2.3	<p><b>1. Can you describe the process by which you began working with Irish Aid on this project/programme?</b></p> <p>What was the available choice of partners in SL to Irish Aid in 2011? Why were the particular partners chosen and what were the perceived risks?</p>
3.2.4 3.3.4	<p><b>2. In your dealings with Irish Aid, how have they approached the issue of avoiding corruption involving project resources?</b></p> <p>Was fiduciary risk understood, including how money moves through the system? What risk management strategies were used?</p>
4.1.2	<p><b>3. What are some of the main challenges you face in implementing projects in Sierra Leone, and what seems to work best in managing these?</b></p> <p>Are Irish NGOs receiving Civil Society money (approx. €4.2m) reporting a similar experience of implementation as the CSP?</p>
5.1.3 5.2.3 5.2.6 5.3.2 5.3.7	<p><b>4. What are the main achievements of the project/programme, and do you feel they fit into the wider Irish CSP?</b></p> <p>How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps?</p>
6.1.2	<p><b>5. To what extent do you feel that this project/programme has created a lasting legacy in terms of Sierra Leone's capacity to deliver core services for its people?</b></p> <p>In terms of GoSL fulfilling a core function in service delivery and in terms of enhancing institutional capacity? e.g. mobilising revenue and establishing an enabling environment for service delivery?</p>
7.1.2	<p><b>6. What do you think are the main contextual changes of the past three years that have affected this project/programme? – are there lessons from the project/programme for other programmes in countries moving from recovery to development?</b></p> <p>What broad contextual changes occurred in 2011-2013?</p>
7.1.3 7.1.5	<p><b>7. Was Irish Aid helpful in driving the project/programme to be successful, and in what way?</b></p> <p>Was the level of ambition and focus appropriate and helpful? Were Voice + Money effectively combined to enable responsiveness?</p>
8.1.3	<p><b>8. What do you feel Ireland's main priorities are in terms of issues they want to work on as a donor in Sierra Leone?</b></p> <p>Are partners aware of Ireland's policy priorities?</p>
9.1.2 9.2.3	<p><b>9. When designing and implementing the project/programme, how did you attempt to identify and address different types of risk? – for example with your local partners.</b></p> <p>Theft/diversion (also fuels conflict); Market distortion; Bias in distribution; Substitution of capacity; Legitimisation of who you work with; Targeting Where is the level of risk tolerance decided, and what implications does this have?</p>
9.3.3 9.3.4	<p><b>10. How do you manage the trade offs between minimising risks and ensuring results in the context of Sierra Leone?</b></p> <p>What are the implications of more rigorous assessments? What are some of the trade offs between risk, innovation and social returns in contexts of</p>

	fragility?
10.1.2 10.1.4	<b>11. What is your experience of Irish Aid’s people and systems in managing this project/programme effectively?</b> How was the programme affected by having management based in Ireland? Was there an appropriate skills mix to maximise effective management?
11.1.2 11.1.3	<b>12. To what extent have you seen evidence of Irish Aid encouraging learning within and beyond this project/programme?</b> How effective are these? Were – and if so how - were lessons learnt incorporated in the programme (management/ systems/ implementation) in an ongoing way?
11.1.4	<b>13. What are the main lessons you have learned in terms of transitioning services to government ownership in Sierra Leone?</b> What lessons have been learnt from Rainbow in terms of how do you set up a transition for sensitive service delivery?
12.1.2 12.1.3 12.1.4	<b>14. What has been your experience of trying to implemented results based management in Sierra Leone?</b> Is MfDR in Sierra Leone practical and does it make sense in terms of the return on investment? Were any lessons incorporated in the revised version of the results framework that came out of the MTR? Were options to integrate with national systems available, realistic and useful?

MDAs	
1.1.1 1.1.2 2.1.2 2.1.3	<b>1. In 2011, Ireland made a strategic choice to focus on specific areas where it felt a difference could be made: nutrition, food security, governance, and gender. From your perspective, and in retrospect, do you think this decision makes sense – and what have the implications been?</b> Did the choice to focus on nutrition, food security, gender and governance reflect an awareness of national SL priorities and the full constellation of resources (both national and other donors)? Was the decision to withdraw from Youth, Health and other areas in alignment with national priorities and systems? Were programme components that were selected guided by appropriate analysis that were relevant to the context? (doing the right things) Were programme components adapted to the context? (doing things right)
5.1.4 5.2.4 5.2.6 5.3.7 6.1.3	<b>2. What do you feel that the main achievements of Irish Aid-supported programmes have been in the past three years, especially in terms of results for people on the ground and national capacity?</b> How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps? In terms of GoSL fulfilling a core function in service delivery and in terms of enhancing institutional capacity? e.g. mobilising revenue and establishing an enabling environment for service delivery?
5.5.2 7.1.3	<b>3. What do you feel the main events or changes have been in Sierra Leone over the past three years that may explain some of the achievements or setbacks faced by Irish Aid’s programmes?</b> Are there alternative explanations for achievements and can these be discounted? What broad contextual changes occurred in 2011-2013?

7.1.2 7.1.4	<b>4. Do you feel that Ireland has demonstrated the discipline and presence needed to be effective as a donor in the context of Sierra Leone?</b>
	Was the level of ambition and focus appropriate and helpful? Were Voice + Money effectively combined to enable responsiveness?
8.1.4 10.1.5	<b>5. What areas do you feel are policy priorities and key competencies for Ireland?</b>
	Are partners aware of Ireland's policy priorities? Was there an appropriate skills mix to maximise effective management?
9.1.3 9.2.4	<b>6. At home, Irish Aid is under significant pressure to be accountable for the funds it distributes. What do you feel Ireland's approach to risk is, and what implications has this had in the programme?</b>
	Theft/diversion (also fuels conflict); Market distortion; Bias in distribution; Substitution of capacity; Legitimisation of who you work with; Targeting Where is the level of risk tolerance decided, and what implications does this have?
9.3.4 9.3.5	<b>7. What level of risk-taking is required by an agency to be truly effective in Sierra Leone, and what are the most promising strategies for managing this?</b>
	What are the implications of more rigorous assessments? What are some of the trade offs between risk, innovation and social returns in contexts of fragility?

Donors	
5.1.7 5.2.5 5.3.6 5.5.1	<b>1. From your perspective, what do you feel Ireland's most significant contributions have been in the past 3 years – and what events or other factors might explain some of the achievements or setbacks faced by donors more generally?</b>
	How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps? Are there alternative explanations for achievements and can these be discounted?
7.1.6	<b>2. As a smaller donor, do you feel Ireland was able to leverage its flexibility to meet gaps?</b>
	As a smaller donor, did Irish Aid leverage its flexibility to meet gaps?
8.1.5	<b>3. What areas do you feel have been policy priorities for Ireland, and how appropriate were they to the context of SL? – are they still appropriate?</b>
	Are partners aware of Ireland's policy priorities?
9.2.1 9.3.1 9.3.2	<b>4. In your experience, what approach to programmatic and fiduciary risk do you think is needed to be effective as a donor working in Sierra Leone?</b>
	Where is the level of risk tolerance decided, and what implications does this have? What are the implications of more rigorous assessments? What are some of the trade offs between risk, innovation and social returns in contexts of fragility?
10.1.6 10.2.2	<b>5. Working in contexts of fragility places unique demands on in-country staff. What level of human resources and skills are needed to work here effectively – and does Ireland have it?</b>
	Was there an appropriate skills mix to maximise effective management? What implications does Liberia have for SL?
12.1.5	<b>6. Is Managing for Development Results a feasible, useful and realistic prospect – especially in terms of integrating with national systems – in the context of Sierra Leone?</b>
	Were options to integrate with national systems available, realistic and useful?

District Level	
5.1.5 5.1.6 5.2.3 5.3.3 5.3.4 5.3.5	<b>1. What are the main achievements of the project/programme, and do you feel they have contributed to building the strength of Sierra Leone in the long run?</b>
6.1.4 6.1.5 6.1.6 6.1.7	How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps? In terms of GoSL fulfilling a core function in service delivery and in terms of enhancing institutional capacity? e.g. mobilising revenue and establishing an enabling environment for service delivery?
7.1.4 7.1.5	<b>2. Does this project/programme address issues that nobody else is supporting, or does it overlap with other organisations' work?</b>
	As a smaller donor, did Irish Aid leverage its flexibility to meet gaps?
8.1.5	<b>3. What do you feel are the priority issues for this project/programme – what are the things that (the partner) or Irish Aid staff really put a lot of focus on?</b>
	Are partners aware of Ireland's policy priorities?

CSOs	
4.1.2	Are Irish NGOs receiving Civil Society money (approx. €4.2m) reporting a similar experience of implementation as the CSP?
9.3.2	What are some of the trade offs between risk, innovation and social returns in contexts of fragility?
10.1.3	Was there an appropriate skills mix to maximise effective management?
12.1.1	Is MfDR in Sierra Leone practical and does it make sense in terms of the return on investment?

Observations	
5.1.2 5.1.3 5.1.4 5.1.5 5.1.6 5.1.7 5.1.8 5.1.9 5.1.10 5.1.11 5.1.12 5.1.13	<b>1. What do you think the main achievements and set backs of the programme have been?</b>
5.2.2 5.2.4 5.2.3 5.3.2	How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps? <b>2. Is the programme making any contribution to the long-term ability of the government to deliver more effectively?</b>

5.3.3	<p>In terms of GoSL fulfilling a core function in service delivery and in terms of enhancing institutional capacity? e.g. mobilising revenue and establishing an enabling environment for service delivery?</p> <p>What lessons have been learnt from Rainbow in terms of how do you set up a transition for sensitive service delivery?</p> <p><b>3. Has this programme helped to address needs that were previously unmet?</b></p>
5.3.4	
5.3.6	
5.3.7	
5.3.8	
5.3.9	
6.1.1	
6.1.2	
6.1.4	
6.1.5	
6.1.6	As a smaller donor, did Irish Aid leverage its flexibility to meet gaps?
7.1.4	
7.1.6	
7.1.7	
7.1.8	
7.1.9	
11.1.3	

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Journalists	
5.3.5	<p><b>1. Are aid programmes (particularly in nutrition, food security and gender) achieving everything they say or think they are?</b></p> <p>How robust is this data and what are the implications of any gaps?</p>
6.1.3	<p><b>2. Have you seen evidence of the state institutions being strengthened – particularly in light of the 2012 election and the work against corruption?</b></p> <p>In terms of GoSL fulfilling a core function in service delivery and in terms of enhancing institutional capacity? e.g. mobilising revenue and establishing an enabling environment for service delivery?</p>
7.1.5	<p><b>3. What are the critical issues facing people that you see really being forgotten by government and aid organisations?</b></p> <p>As a smaller donor, did Irish Aid leverage its flexibility to meet gaps?</p>

# Annex 5: Organisation of the Evaluation

## Calendar of evaluation activities

31 October	Inception report draft submitted
7 November	Inception report finalised
9-22 November	Field visit SL
25 November	Short exit presentation shared
3 December (New)	Validation and learning workshop (Dublin?)
9 December	Draft report submitted. Draft policy brief submitted
11 December	Draft Learning briefs submitted
17 December	Final deliverables submitted
18 December	Agreement on expectations for communication activities in Jan 2014

## Country Visit Schedule

### FREETOWN

Saturday 9th	Arrival	
Sunday 10th	Informal Briefing at Hotel <b>TBC (evaluators to call Sinead if required)</b>	
Monday 11 <sup>th</sup>	<p>8:20 hotel pick up</p> <p>8:30am: Briefing at Mission with all staff-<b>confirmed</b></p> <p><b>Freetime</b></p> <p>12:00: Ministry of Education, Science &amp; Technology -confirmed</p> <p>13:15 Lunch at Crown Bakery</p> <p>14:30: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, Development Assistance Cooperation Office – <b>Deputy Confirmed</b></p> <p>15:45 Anti Corruption Commission - <b>Confirmed</b></p>	
Tuesday 12 <sup>th</sup>	<p>9:00 UNICEF – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>10:15 Helen Keller International – <b>Confirmed</b></p>	<p>10:00 Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs - <b>TBC</b></p> <p>11:45 World Food Programme - <b>Confirmed</b></p>

	11:45 ACF - <b>Confirmed</b>	
Wednesday 13 <sup>th</sup>	<p>09:45 Stabilisation Centre &amp; meet with mothers of discharged children – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>11:00 Freetown Rainbo Centre (same hospital compound) - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>Helen Keller/UNICEF/ACF supported clinic in Freetown - <b>TBC</b></p>	<p>9:00 FAO - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>10:30: UNDP - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>12:00 UNIPSIL – <b>TBC</b></p> <p>14:00 Ministry of Justice - <b>TBC</b></p>
Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup>	<p>9:00 DFID – <b>TBC</b></p> <p>10: 15 International Rescue Committee - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>11:30 GIZ - <b>Confirmed</b></p>	<p>9:00 EU – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>10:30 MAFFS – <b>SCP Confirmed</b></p> <p>12:00 SUN Coordination Committee – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>14:00 World Bank – <b>Confirmed</b></p>
Friday 15 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 FGD HQ INGO Partners @ IA Office: GOAL, World Vision, Concern, Plan, Christian Aid, Trocaire, Sightsavers – <b>Sightsavers, Christian Aid &amp; GOAL Confirmed. Trocaire Cannot. Rest TBC</b>	
Saturday 16 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 Visit to GBV Saturday court – <b>Provisionally scheduled</b>	

## KONO

Monday 18 <sup>th</sup>	<p><b>Site visits -Koidu</b></p> <p>08:30 Rainbo Centre in the District Hospital – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>09:30 District Nutritionist @ District Hospital - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>10:00 Meeting with District Medical Officer @ District Hospital - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>10:30 Stabilisation Centre @ District Hospital – (accompanied by district nutritionist if desired). <b>No confirmation necessary, just drop in.</b></p> <p>[Optional: Paediatric Ward can be passed by briefly as funded by pre-strategy Irish Aid funding through Joint Programme. Similarly Sightsavers clinic in Kono district hospital was funded by IA]</p>	<p><b>Site visit -Koidu</b></p> <p>09:00 Family Support Unit of Sierra Leone Police - TBC</p> <p>10:15 Kono District Council - TBC</p> <p>11:30 District Unit of Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children Affairs - TBC</p> <p>Lunch: Journalists - TBC</p> <p>14:30-16:00 Justice System users for land rights and GBV (group of 5 CBOs receiving UNDP support). We will ask these CSOs to arrange for some justice system users - <b>Confirmed</b></p>
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	<p>14:00 NEC District Offices – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>15:15 District Justice Officials - TBC</p>	
Tuesday 19 <sup>th</sup>	<p><b>Site visit: Lea (2 hours from Koidu)</b></p> <p><b>ALL MEETINGS TO BE RECONFIRMED</b></p> <p>10:00(leave at 07:45) School feeding (we will ask for school management committee members to be present) – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>11:00 PHU to talk to staff re nutrition programme (clients may be around although not specific day for feeding) – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>12:00 Mother support group for nutrition – <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>13:30 ABC (Fiama—road back to Kangama, we will request some farmers to be present) – <b>Confirmed</b></p>	<p><b>Site Visits—Koidu and Miama</b></p> <p>09:00 District Education Officer &amp; MEST Officer –<b>Confirmed DEO TBC</b></p> <p>10:15 District Agricultural Officer - <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>11:30 COOPI re land rights (introduction) - TBC</p> <p>12:15 Meet with women’s group – (COOPI land rights programme) - TBC</p> <p>14:00 Miama (45 minutes from Koidu--where COOPI land rights beneficiaries live) - TBC</p>
Wednesday 20 <sup>th</sup>	<p><b>Site visit: Kangama, to finish in Kenema</b></p> <p>(this is 1 hr 45 away from Kono but on the way to Kenema/Freetown)</p> <p>09:30 Clinic re nutrition &amp; GBV &amp; Mother Support Group (Supplementary Feeding Day so mothers will be around—clinic also received support for GBV response) <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>11:00-13:00 IRC Women’s Action Group &amp; School Club <b>TBC</b></p> <p>13:00: WFP school feeding <b>Confirmed</b></p> <p>18:00 Evening meeting with HRC Kenema <b>Confirmed</b></p>	

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**FREETOWN**

Thursday 21 <sup>st</sup>	<p><b>Travel to Freetown</b></p> <p>14:30 Human Rights Commission – <b>TBC NOT AVAILABLE WEEK OF 11TH</b></p> <p>16:00 Ministry of Health &amp; Sanitation - Food &amp; Nutrition Directorate – Confirmed</p> <p>16:45 Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry &amp; Food Security - Nutrition Focal Person -TBC</p>
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# Annex 6: Terms of Reference

Evaluation of the Irish Aid Programme in Sierra Leone 2011-2013.

## 1. Introduction:

310 Sierra Leone gained independence from the UK in 1961 and over the years has faced major developmental challenges. With a land mass the size of Ireland and a population of 5.5 million, Sierra Leone is abundant in natural resources, including diamonds, gold, titanium ore and aluminium ore. There is also abundant rainfall and good agricultural potential.

Sierra Leone was ruled by a single party government from 1968 to 1992 and had a civil war from 1991-2002 that saw an estimated 50,000 killed and displaced up to 2 million. Though having transitioned to democracy in 1996, the one party period along with the civil war, in effect means that Sierra Leone has had a long period where development progress has been hindered. Agriculture and infrastructure development has been seriously affected. Capacity across all levels of government is a challenge. Sierra is ranked by the 2013 UNDP Human Development Report HDI Index at 177 out of 186 countries.

320 Sierra Leone has a heavy dependency on external aid. Currently the four biggest donors in Sierra Leone are the UK, the World Bank, the European Union and the African Development Bank, with significant resources channelled through the UN system and through International NGOs.

In 2005 Irish Aid opened an office in Freetown. In 2009 the Freetown office gained diplomatic status and a Chargé d’Affaires was appointed. The Freetown mission manages the Irish Aid programmes in both Sierra Leone and Liberia with backstopping support provided from the Emergency and Recovery Section of Irish Aid at HQ. The programme funding comes from the budget managed by Emergency and Recovery Section.

330 The recently launched One World One Future, Ireland’s Policy for International Development seeks to ensure that Irish efforts remain focussed on those countries where the needs are greatest. It therefore signals an intention to increase the focus on situations of fragility, making this one of six priority areas for action for the aid programme. The new policy announced that Sierra Leone is now one of Irish Aid’s nine Key Partner Countries. The policy also commits to continue Irish support for programmes in Liberia and deepen engagement there, while over time, to examine how best to increase engagement in other countries experiencing instability and fragility.

In addition to the Irish Aid programme, Ireland’s links with Sierra Leone includes the work of missionaries, development workers, volunteers and a modest level of Irish business sector engagement. Each year there is significant financial support to Irish and International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) from Irish Aid HQ - Concern, Trocaire, Goal and Christian Aid are among these -that is in addition to the support through the Freetown Irish Aid programme.

340 The details of the current Irish Aid programme for Sierra Leone are in the document Development Cooperation Strategy for Sierra Leone 2011-2012. (See Annex I attached). Following a mid-term review in March 2012, the programme implementation period was extended to include 2013. The programme focuses on addressing the issues of nutrition and food security along with strengthening accountability and the promotion of gender equality. The goal of the programme is to reduce hunger and strengthen accountability mechanisms in Sierra Leone.

## 2 Purpose of the evaluation:

350 The purpose of the evaluation is to provide Irish Aid management with an independent, evidence based assessment of the performance of the Irish Aid programme in Sierra Leone for 2011-2013. The evaluation will help inform future decisions with regard to Irish Aid support to Sierra Leone and inform the wider policy and programming considerations for Irish Aid in post conflict and fragile state contexts. The evaluation will also provide accountability to the Governments and peoples of Ireland and Sierra Leone for the funds expended during the period. Overall, the evaluation process will have a strong orientation towards lesson learning.

### 3. Scope of the Evaluation

#### Evaluation Principles, Criteria and Quality Standards

The evaluation will be guided by the OECD-DAC Principles for International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations. This evaluation will be also guided by the OECD-DAC evaluation principles and quality standards and will use the evaluation criteria of Relevance, Efficiency, Effectiveness, Sustainability and Impact (where evidence of such impact is available).

360 The period to be examined will be the three years of the current Irish Aid Strategy for Sierra Leone, 2011 to 2013. The exercise will take account of the Irish Aid programming in the preceding years and how this earlier programming influenced the current Strategy.

The evaluation questions will be grouped in four broad categories:

1. Programme Strategy
2. Programme Achievements
3. Programme Processes
4. Programme Management.

#### Programme Strategy:

370 This category examines the strategic analysis used to develop the Strategy for Sierra Leone. It asks as to whether the programme was clear on the partnership strategies to be used and how partner choices were made. It asks as to how the Strategy took account of Irish Aid policies and obligations as a Donor.

Applicable DAC Criteria: Relevance and Effectiveness.

#### Programme Achievements:

This category examines what were the intended and actual achievements of the programme. In particular to examine the Irish Aid approach to Management for Development Results.

Applicable DAC criteria: Effectiveness, Sustainability and Impact

#### Programme Processes:

This category examines the effectiveness and efficiencies of the modalities used and the partners used. It looks at how decisions were made on any changes to the Strategy during implementation. It examines how the Partner choices took account of the financial and supply chain management risks.

380 Applicable DAC Criteria: Effectiveness, Efficiency, and Sustainability

#### Programme Management:

This category looks at the effectiveness of the Irish Aid Sierra Leone programme implementation management systems. It examines how Irish Aid performed bilaterally, and with other donors, in coordinating efforts towards alignment with government strategies.

Applicable DAC criteria: Relevance, Effectiveness and Efficiency

#### Evaluation Questions (see full framework in Annexes 2 & 4)

The overarching evaluation question is:

To what extent did the Irish Aid programme for the period 2011-2013 contribute to the reduction of hunger and strengthen accountability in Sierra Leone?

### 390 **4. Methodology**

To ensure the credibility of the ‘Strategy-Results-Learning’ focus of this evaluation, it will be important that sufficient evidence and rigour of analysis is presented and especially concerning causal claims. The contractor will be expected to propose and adopt an underpinning approach which can be reasonably applied within the resources available and which will provide this credibility to process and end products.

It is envisaged that the evaluation will consist of three broad Phases;

#### Phase I Inception

The first phase will consist of:

- An Inception meeting with Evaluation & Audit unit
- 400  Desktop review of documentation
- Since the evaluation is to have a strong orientation towards learning it is intended to produce two Learning Briefs on themes/subjects to be identified during the inception phase.
- Interviews with key informants from Irish Aid and other stakeholders. (Telephone and VC can be used as appropriate)
- Refinement of the methodology and detailed planning for the field mission
- Prepare an Inception Report detailing the output and the analysis/reflections from the above activities and which will include an identification of the key issues to be examined and a refinement of the core evaluation questions

#### PhaseII FieldMission

410 The second phase will consist of:

- Further review of documentation
- A field visit to Sierra Leone.

It is envisaged that the field visit will be scheduled to have 12 days in country. The visit will validate, or otherwise, the evidence arising from the documentation review and inception work. It is intended that a de-briefing prior to departure from Sierra Leone will be held with key stakeholders outlining key/emergent findings.

### Phase III Reporting

420 The final phase will consist of a debrief from the field visit at Irish Aid HQ, any follow up work with Irish Aid staff, production of the two Learning Briefs, writing of the draft and final reports, writing of a Policy Brief summary version of the final evaluation report (4 pages) and which is suitable for publication on the DFAT website and a HQ final presentation and debrief of the evaluation report.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The approach to data collection and analysis will primarily consist of a review of secondary data sources verified by qualitative evidence gathered through fieldwork. The field visit to Sierra Leone is to include at least one visit to a programme implementation location outside of Freetown. It will be important also for the evaluation to optimise links with other processes, reviews or evaluations that are available.

## 5. Outputs

The expected outputs of the assignment are as follows:

430 1. At the end of Phase I, an Inception Report (approximately 10-12 pages) will be submitted that sets out inception activities and analyses, refines the methodology and in particular how the exercise will capture programme achievement and approach the Learning Briefs. This report will propose any further refinement of the evaluation scope and evaluation questions, summarises key issues to be addressed during the second phase of the evaluation, and presents a work plan for the remainder of the assignment.

440 2. A final report (of approximately 25-30 pages, excluding appendices) that will include findings, analyses, key lessons and recommendations for Irish Aid in Sierra Leone, the Emergency and Recovery Unit as well as Irish Aid in general. The primary audience for this report is Irish Aid senior management, the Sierra Leone mission staff, Emergency and Recovery Unit of Irish Aid, Irish Aid Civil Society Partners, the Government of Sierra Leone and Sections and technical staff in Irish Aid Headquarters.

3. Two Evaluation Learning Briefs on specific themes (to be specified).

4. A Policy Brief summary version of the final evaluation report (4 pages) and which is suitable

for publication on the DFAT website. More than an executive summary, this Policy Brief should capture concisely, clearly and in so far as possible in non technical language, the main findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned of the main report in a manner that preserves the evidential integrity of the evaluation.

450 Reports should demonstrate familiarity with the revised OECD-DAC Evaluation Quality Standards and be written to a high standard, ready for publication. The contractor should provide its own internal quality assurance for all products before they are forwarded to DFAT.

A maximum of 66 consultancy days will be available for this assignment.