

Green Scenery

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The Country's Natural Resources Are Nature's Gift To Us What We Make Of Them Are Our Gift To Posterity

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Freetown, 04/06/2020

Press Release

“A dramatic rise in food insecurity will follow the COVID-19 Crisis in Sierra Leone”

It has become clear, that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a devastating effect on global food supply chain and agricultural food production, possibly leading many Sierra Leonean households into an acute food, nutrition and livelihood crisis. Green Scenery urges the government and its partners to take all measures possible to mitigate the impact of the disease as well as the preventive measures on food insecurity.

The purchasing power of populations around the world is reducing due to loss of jobs/livelihoods as a result of global recession caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The restrictions on work, movement and slowdown in essential goods transportation is impacting on food productivity and value chain maintenance, hence leading to spikes in global food prices.

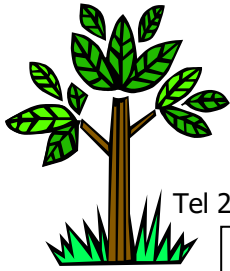
Sierra Leone, a net food importing country will be gravely affected by the Covid-19 impact on global food productivity and must consider to step up efforts to increase national food production. If it fails to do so, the country will face the harsh reality of spending huge foreign exchange on food importation.

As the Pandemic rages, daily wage earners in urban settings are at risk of losing their income as a result of social distancing measure required to limit the spread of the virus, while rural residents are already affected by inter-district movement restriction, limiting access to large weekly markets by residents of other districts, and hence affecting buying and selling rates. Furthermore, the provision of quality seeds or cultivars to farmers is limited during the ongoing planting season, putting them at risk to miss out on the crucial timing.

Even though the Covid-19 Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP) is scheduled to provide assistance for local food production to the tune of some Le 140 billion, we continue to be worried that the need to attend to the direct impact of the pandemic and prioritize health-related expenditures, will overshadow necessities in the agricultural sector and especially in regard to small holder farmers.

We note with keen interest that in his address to Parliament, his excellency President Bio acknowledged the need to boost small scale agricultural production in which 60 to 70% of the population are employed for their livelihoods. We wish to bring to his attention that in the QAERP, the least money was allocated to assist local farmers and a funding gap of 79.3 billion Leones especially affecting provision of farming inputs remains. We urge the government to prioritise the funding of farming inputs in the short term as these are crucial with the progress of the farming season.

“If Sierra Leone is to learn from the 2014 Ebola crisis, then government must put emphases on home grown food as a basis to cushion food insecurity,” Executive Director, Joseph Rahall cautions. Green Scenery wishes to recall that during the Ebola Crisis, the FAO recorded a decline in food production in



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Sierra Leone by 8 percent for Cassava and Rice in the years 2013 to 2014¹ and an estimated 280,000 individuals became food-insecure due to the Ebola Outbreak. With regards to the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Food Programme has classified Sierra Leone as a country at risk of experiencing an acute food crisis, with 1.3 million acutely food insecure individuals in 2020².

We therefore call on the government and its partners to pay special attention to the state of food and nutrition security in the country during and following the COVID-19 Epidemic and to consider the following:

- Increase the funds allocated to incentivize smallholder food production and distribute agricultural inputs to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on supply chains
- Set up a monitoring system to identify the localities most at risk of and most impacted by the Epidemic on their food security and livelihoods, access to market and supply chains
- Set up trade corridors to ensure the provision of farming materials such as seeds and fertilizer to local markets and communities in need
- Allow farmers to work throughout possible future lockdowns in order to ensure a successful planting season
- Improve storage methods for key food staple of small holder farmers in order to prevent post-harvest losses

END

For further information contact Green Scenery on +23276601979

¹ FAO/WFP crop and food security assessment – sierra Leone. 17th December 2014

² WFP - Economic and food security implications of the COVID-19 outbreak. 14th April 2020