

In Sierra Leone, Ginger Trade

by Trade Forum team

Sierra Leone's export development authorities are working to revitalize the ginger industry, a route out of poverty after years of war. This story is based on an interview with Abu Bakkar Kebbay, from the export development agency of the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

The civil war between 1990 and 2001 created at least 1 million refugees and largely destroyed our services. The United Nations declared us safe in 2002 but some people still don't know that the war has ended and business people remember the atrocities they saw," says Abu Bakkar Kebbay. "As a result, few people come to Sierra Leone to do business. We are still suffering from this image of a country at war."

To help reintegrate returning refugees and internally displaced farmers, the new Government sought to revitalize sectors in which Sierra Leone had been successful before the war. Spices are one such sector, as they provide many opportunities to create jobs for large numbers of people, thus helping to reduce poverty.

Spices also have high export potential. When the Government of Sierra Leone looked to stimulate the economy, it focused on encouraging new business ventures and export opportunities with high growth potential. Within this context, it identified the development of the spice sector in general, and ginger production and exports in particular, as a priority of its economic development strategy to create jobs and generate income for displaced farmers.

Jobs and income

Selling superior-quality ginger to European markets is one such export opportunity. Its appeal is that it can bring revenues to the poorest groups and provide jobs, particularly for women.

The Government had attempted to revive ginger exports a few years earlier, but abandoned the project because of the war. A once-flourishing export business, Sierra Leone's ginger trade had dried up due to competition from Asian countries, which grew a variety of ginger more prized in the West.

In 2002, as part of an assistance package from China, the Sierra Leone Export Development and Investment Corporation (SLEDIC) obtained 53 tonnes of Chinese seed ginger. SLEDIC distributed it to chiefdoms in the ginger-producing areas of Moyambo and Kambia, with training and field demonstrations. But bad agricultural practices and inexperience with the improved variety meant that the harvest was relatively poor.

In October 2003 the Ministry of Trade approached ITC to help develop ginger exports. ITC developed a programme to provide work and income for more than 9,000 subsistence farmers, especially women, who account for over 60% of Sierra Leone's agricultural labour.

e Helps Recovery

An international expert made a preliminary assessment of the supply and demand conditions. He proposed exporting processed ginger to Europe in the second year of production, with better methods and technology. Peeling, drying and processing ginger increases its value by about 90% and provides work for more women on the farms.

Unexpected demand, mobile phones and bikes

ITC held a technical workshop on post-harvest treatment of ginger, and provided advice on demand, trends and market promotion.

It arranged for two Sierra Leonean officials (an agricultural extension coordinator and an export development specialist) to visit India, the largest producer and exporter of high-quality ginger.

In Sierra Leone, people use local ginger in beverages rather than to spice food. With its strong aroma and flavour, it is valued for its reputed benefits in reducing blood pressure. The Sierra Leonean officials found export possibilities for their local variety of ginger — cultivated in more than five times the present acreage of the improved variety — in the Indian essential oils market.

The \$100,000 project included providing motorbikes, bicycles and mobile phones to agronomists and extension workers. The phones and bikes made data collection, dissemination and project monitoring and evaluation, much easier and timely, particularly in the rainy season.

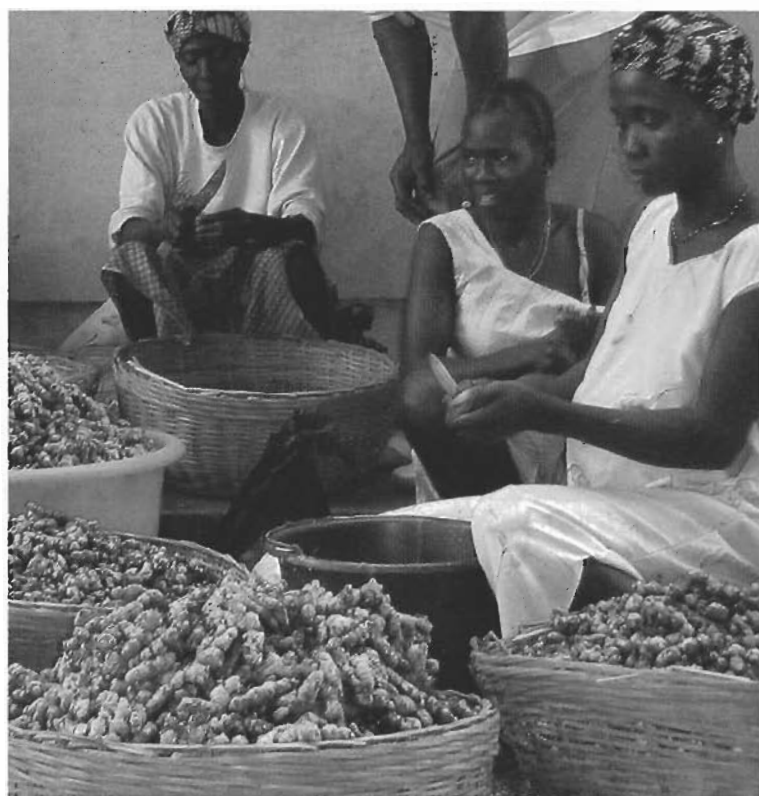
With training and information workshops in the ginger-growing areas, farmers were achieving yields up fourfold by the end of the third year, meaning they could repay their initial seed allocation to their chiefdoms.

First ginger exports in 22 years

After three years of cultivation, Sierra Leone was able to prepare four trial exports in 2006: two tonnes of the Chinese variety and two of the local variety — the first ginger exports since 1984. Buyers included importers in a total of 11 countries, including Germany, India, the Netherlands, Nigeria, South Africa and the United Kingdom. In 2007 it plans to export 80 tonnes of dried ginger, which requires the processing of 320 tonnes of fresh ginger.

Tests indicate that the ginger is of good quality, free of aflatoxins, and meets the European Spice Association standards. ITC financed this quality assurance test, which will help obtain higher revenues for exporters.

So far, the project has created 150 new jobs for processors and 30 new jobs for foremen, loaders, transporters and others. It has also generated income for the Government through port charges.



Women sort and prepare ginger for export.

Currently, ginger cultivation is limited by the availability of seeds. The export development agency therefore plans to secure at least 50 tonnes of seeds by the middle of 2007 to further scale up the project.

Learning exchanges

The training ITC offers in the ginger project takes place in the context of technical cooperation among developing countries whereby linkages are created between farmers/experts in India, Kenya, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

The cooperation between Kenya and Sierra Leone, for example, has the potential to increase intra-African trade. ▀

For more information, contact Ramin Granfar, ITC Trade Promotion Officer, at granfar@intracen.org

This article draws on reports by ITC consultants C.K. George and Roger Clarke.

Interview by Prema de Sousa and Peter Hulm.