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In partnership with the  
Government of Sierra Leone

IN BRIEF

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## STATE OF FOOD SECURITY IN SIERRA LEONE 2020

# Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis

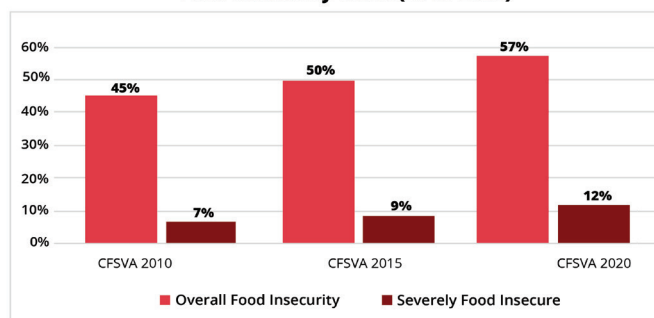
Food insecurity and vulnerability to shocks have worsened significantly over the past ten years for most Sierra Leoneans, reaching a staggering 57 percent of the population. The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout has further exacerbated living conditions and access to basic amenities in 2020. The latest Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis in Sierra Leone gives an overview and a trend analysis of the food and nutrition security situation today compared with previous analyses of 2010 and 2015.

### What is the state of food insecurity in Sierra Leone?

- Today over 4.7 million people are food insecure of which 963,217 are severely food insecure and 3,790,029 are moderately food insecure. More than half a million people have been added to the count of food insecure people over the last five years.
- Not only are more people food insecure but also the severity of food insecurity is deepening. The number of people facing severe hunger tripled between 2010 and 2020.

- Over 3.3 million people are food insecure in rural areas compared to 1.4 million people in urban areas.
- Severe acute malnutrition (measured by mid upper arm circumference) increased from 0.6 percent in 2017 to 3.7 percent in 2020 and is strongly correlated to high mortality risk. Global acute malnutrition rate of 6.7 percent is also higher compared to the 2.6 percent rate in 2017.
- Food insecurity and malnutrition in Sierra Leone are mainly caused by limited access to nutritionally diverse foods: 85 percent of children between ages 24–59 months do not consume a diet that meets minimum dietary diversity. Rice prices have doubled and cassava prices have quadrupled since 2015.

Food insecurity trend (2010–2020)



## Where do most food insecure people live in Sierra Leone?

With such a high national prevalence, food insecurity is spread across Sierra Leone. However, more food insecure people live in rural communities. The districts with the highest number of food insecure people are in Kenema (527,571), Kailahun (411,693), Bo (397,850), Pujehun (392,245) and Tonkolili (389,040). The districts with significantly less food insecure populations are Western Area Slum (54,735), Koinadugu (123,640), Western Area Rural (139,279) and Western Area Urban (210,336).

Households with a poor food consumption score have a slightly higher prevalence of malnourished children, specifically severely malnourished children. The situation is serious in Moyamba district where 10 percent of children under the age of five years are malnourished. Falaba (8.8 percent) and Port Loko (7.7 percent) districts also have high levels of acute malnutrition.

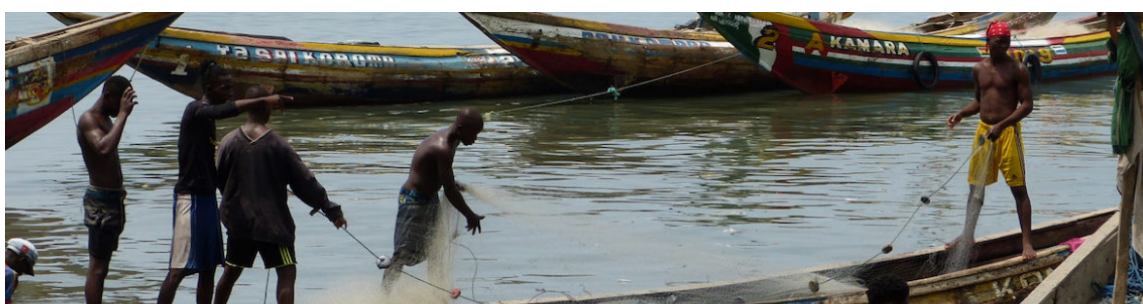
## Why are people food insecure in Sierra Leone?

While COVID-19 has had a serious impact on livelihoods and food security, it can only be partly attributed to the deterioration of food security over the past decade. Outdated agricultural methods, insufficient and expensive agricultural inputs contribute to low yields, whilst unacceptably high harvest and post-harvest losses, uneconomical access to markets and high food prices all contribute to food insecurity in Sierra Leone. Unaffordability of healthy foods also leads to malnutrition, forcing households to adopt unsustainable and negative coping strategies.

Labour intensive food production is a main livelihood for most rural households (77 percent). Almost all farmers (97.5 percent) use hand tools to cultivate the land, making agriculture a labour-intensive, uneconomical and subsistent livelihood activity. Only 7 percent of farmers applied chemical fertilisers, which is inadequate given the poor soil fertility. Improved seeds are only used by 17 percent of farmers (compared to 10 percent in 2015) and thus, the majority are unable to achieve a better crop yield. Farmers rely on environmentally degrading slash and burn land preparation methods and adoption of modern farming machinery is exceptionally slow: usage of 4-wheel tractors only increased from 0.2 percent in 2015 to 0.3 percent in 2020 and hand tractors were used by only 1.2 percent of farmers.

In urban localities, the most common source of income is petty trading and this group was hardest hit when the lockdown was imposed: 97 percent of traders reported being affected by the restrictions.

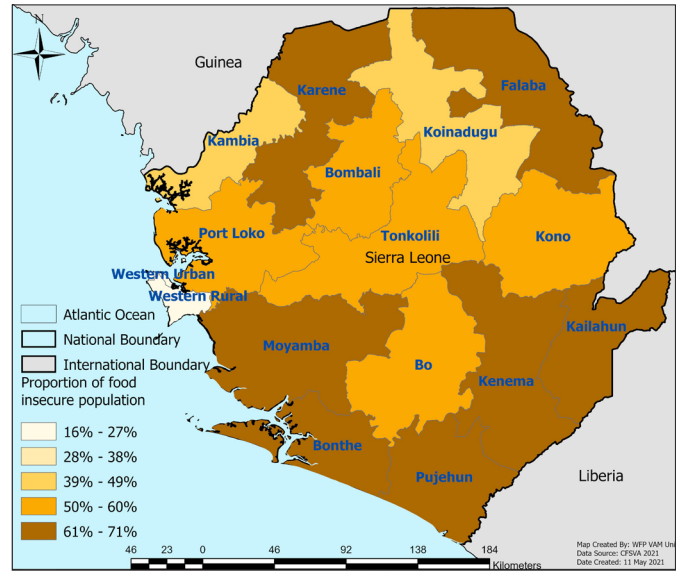
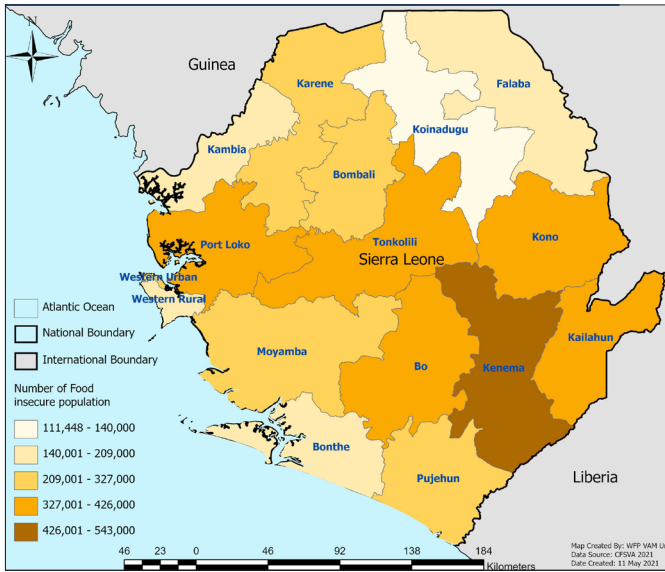
Most Sierra Leoneans depend on the market for food and spend, on average, 63 percent of total expenditures on food. The majority are thus vulnerable to price increases as their income margins are small. Rice is the main staple, with the average price increasing by 38 percent compared to 2019, and more than doubled (135 percent) compared to 2015 prices. Cassava, a close substitute to rice, was also affected by a 36 percent price increase since 2019, and quadrupled in price (437 percent) compared to 2015. When staple prices increase, the most common coping strategy is to reduce consumption of other food groups, particularly those rich in protein and vegetables.



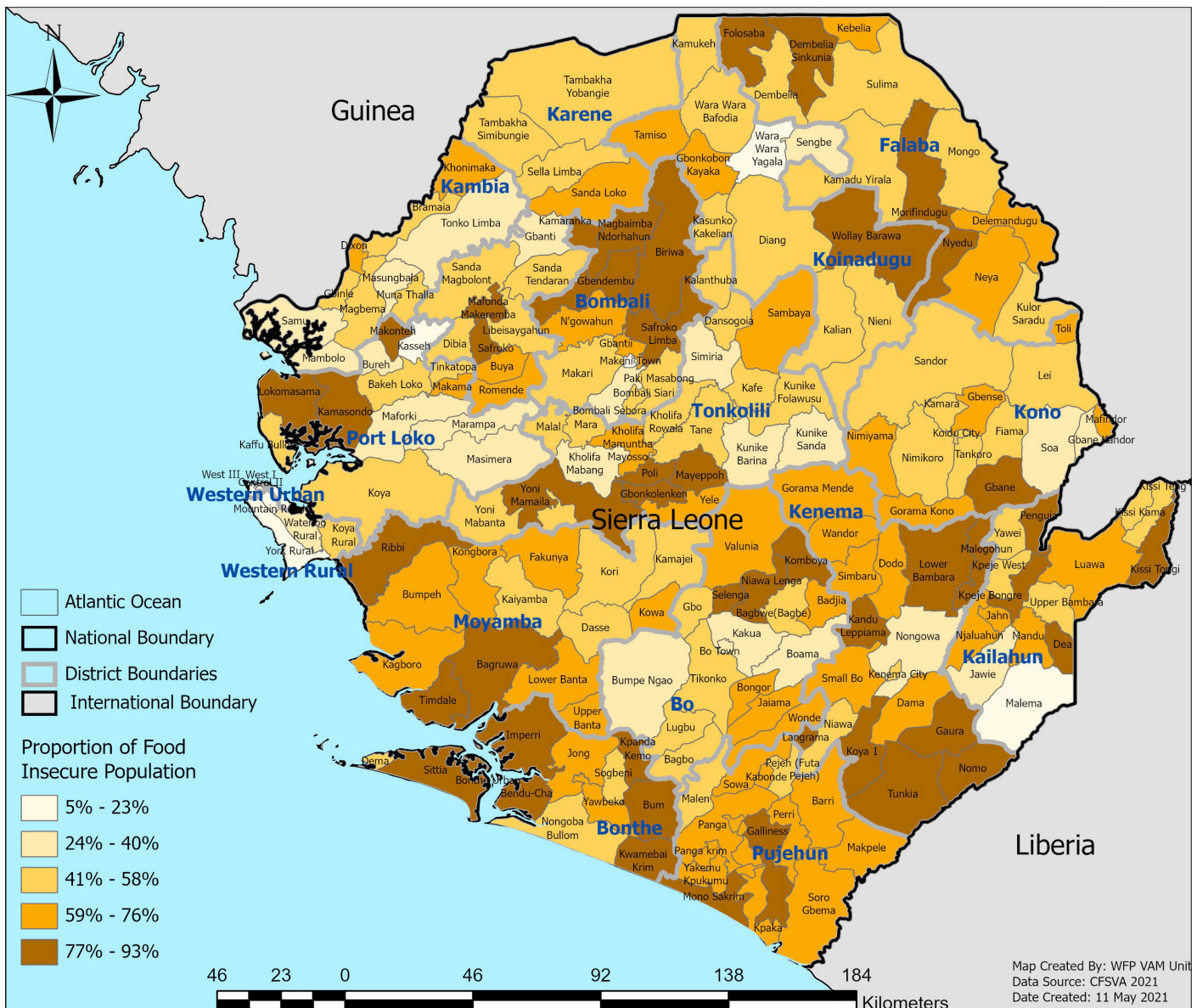


Number of food insecure populations by district, CFSVA 2020

Proportion of food insecure population by district, CFSVA 2020



Proportion of food insecure population by chiefdom, CFSVA 2020



## Who are the most food insecure people in Sierra Leone?

The highest percentage of food insecure people in Sierra Leone are those involved in agriculture based livelihoods, such as production and sale of food and cash crops, fishing and unskilled wage labour (agriculture) with over 60 percent being food insecure. These livelihood activities are mainly performed by households in rural areas.

Close to one in four fishing families are severely food insecure, followed by households relying on fruits and vegetable sales. The latter is a livelihood primarily done by women. Households engaged in salaried work and trading are least food insecure at 43 percent and are mainly found in urban areas.

Factors that heavily influence food and nutrition security are income, education, nutritional quality of foods consumed and hygiene. The higher the education level of the head of households, the better their food security status. For example, a household headed by a person without formal education is more food insecure than one whose head has vocational training (61 percent compared to 46 percent). Women in Sierra Leone have less education than men and often drop out before completing primary school.

The prevalence of severely food insecure households is however only slightly higher at 13 percent among female headed households compared with 11 percent among male headed households.

## What can be done to improve the food security situation?

- **Train farmers** in improved agricultural practices.
- **Provide farmers with much needed improved seeds and fertilisers** to increase their production and make agriculture economically viable as a livelihood for youths.
- **Improve food access** by strengthening markets and road networks.
- **Improve accessibility and affordability** of diverse and nutritious foods.
- **Provide affordable solar energy** that supports modernization.
- **Continue to promote** community health and hygiene.
- **Provide cold chain facilities** to reduce post-harvest losses of vegetables and fish, and to increase the income potentials of these livelihoods.
- **Expand school feeding** to the most vulnerable and deprived communities.
- **Invest in literacy training** of adult women.
- **Establish vocational institutions** for youth and offer affordable loans.

**If you would like more information, please contact our office:**

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