

## **SIERRA LEONE - The Food Security Project:**

Bonthe, in south eastern Sierra Leone, is one of the poorest regions in the country. The Food Security Project, ran by Christian Aid partner the Methodist Church of Sierra Leone (MCSL), reached over 130,000 people, increasing agricultural production across the entire district and lifting some of the most vulnerable families out of poverty.

Our partner empowered communities to support themselves for the long term. By setting up local farming groups, MCSL ensured that farmers could receive training in the best techniques, new seeds and tools, essential to improve the amount of crops they could grow.

Thanks to the generosity of UK churches, 126 groups were formed, helping farmers cultivate staple crops like cassava and rice, far exceeding the target of 80. So many more families were reached than initially predicted. 14 beekeeping groups were also formed, ensuring that communities had diverse sources of income. But the project focussed on the long-term benefits at all times. MCSL invested in business centres to help farmers process their crops for sale and, by improving roads, made sure that they can transport their goods to market easily. This infrastructure will continue to help farmers support themselves for years to come.



Beekeeping groups have enabled communities to produce honey, securing incomes for the long term. Credit: Christian Aid

MCSL organised 10 fishing groups over the course of the project, training them in the best ways to process fish and to market their goods. With the gift of 10 improved fish smoking ovens, production has become more efficient. What's more, because the groups were trained in sustainable fishing methods, the project has ensured that their businesses can continue for years to come.

Our partner also set up Savings and Loans Schemes among all the farming and fishing groups in Bonthe. By granting loans to group members at minimum interest rates, MCSL is making sure that they can flourish in the long term. Many of the fishing groups, for example, took out loans to buy additional fishing nets, meaning that they can fish throughout the year by varying the size of net they use, depending on the movement of fish in each season.



Trained in sustainable ways to fish, fishing groups in Bonthe are flourishing. Credit: Christian Aid

Women in particular are benefitting from small loans, giving many the opportunity to start small businesses for the first time. This new-found economic independence promises a brighter future for everyone in these communities.

Similar to the Water and Sanitation Project in Pujehun, MCSL organised Village Development Committees (VDCs) across Bonthe, local groups which decide on the development needs in the community and lobby the government for funding to address them. In the Sargor community, for example, the VDC successfully lobbied the local councillor for money to build a road linking the village to the nearest town. This change will allow so many farmers to sell their crops at bigger markets, allowing them to support their households over the years to come.

What's more, VDCs will ensure that the successes of the project will last. Monthly meetings have continued beyond the close of the project, and committees are continuing to identify the needs of their communities and to lobby local government. Thanks to the project, these poor communities have been organised and empowered, ready to protect their interests. Our partner remains ambitious, and won new funding from the Isle of Man International Development Committee to scale up the fishing project, which is continuing until 2016.

The long lasting change brought about by the support of UK churches is clear: before the work began, families ate on average 1 meal per day. Now, this has increased to 3, indicating a dramatic improvement in the quality of life for so many people. This is a testament to the hope that this project has delivered.