

Context

Sierra Leone's Food & Consumer Goods Processing Market

Sierra Leone imports the vast majority of the processed food and consumer goods consumed in country. According to the World Bank, imports of consumable food were valued at USD 135.6m in 2015. As Sierra Leone's 7.2m population continue to grow in size and income, demands for these goods will too.

Failing to meet this demand with locally-processed foods is an important, missed opportunity for Sierra Leone. Many raw materials – sesame, sorghum, rice, pigeon peas, palm oil, to name a few – are all produced and traded by farmers in Sierra Leone. More than 50% of GDP and two-thirds of the country's labour force is concentrated within the agricultural sector. In other words, increasing the range and volume of products processed locally increases the demand for locally-sourced materials – creating new economic opportunities and growing income for farmers, most of whom earn less than USD 1.25 per day.

To date, the food and consumer goods processing and trade market has been inhibited by:

Poor production and business management practices.

- Few production facilities utilise proper health and hygiene practices that would be required to ensure food and consumer goods are safe for consumption as well as capable of export. Poor practices limit consumer confidence. Unfortunately, guidance and standards are also opaque, poorly understood, and maligned to the context.
- Processors own facility set-up often limits production efficiency and safety.
- Business and financial management practices are poor, inhibiting growth potential and best use of limited resources.

Poor understanding and alignment to market.

- Consumer-facing products, like those concentrated in the processed and consumer goods industry, are often poorly aligned to local consumer preferences and demand. Improved packaging, stronger brands, product lines, and marketing and distribution all miss the mark.
- Underpinning poor product-market fit and customer orientation is a general and widespread reputational gap: consumers in Sierra Leone do not believe that products produced in Sierra Leone are of good quality when compared to imported options.

Poor quantity, quality and consistency of raw material inputs

- Raw materials sourcing and supply chain management challenges (quality, quantity, consistency, reliability, price, formality) all inhibit the quality of the output and underpin reputational issues. Collaborating with farmers to improve production and to better align with processor needs would help to smooth this.