



Snapshot: Freetown Farmers Market

Introduction

Sierra Leone Opportunities for Business Action (SOBA) launched the Freetown Farmers Market in partnership with Nianda, a hybrid seed supplier, in early 2017. The Market aimed to improve communication between end consumers and farmers as well as food and consumer goods processors, helping to strengthen customer orientation – with the ultimate goal to drive sales and grow local markets.

Background

In Sierra Leone, there is a clear disconnect between vegetable producers, traders, buyers, and consumers. Farmers are discouraged by the inconsistency of demand and lack of access to markets for their produce. As a result, they're dissuaded from investing in vegetable farming, believing there to be little market for their produce. Paradoxically, there is a significant shortage of fresh produce in Freetown. The produce that is available is expensive and with erratic supply. Caterers, hotels, and restaurants find it difficult and expensive to source fresh fruits and vegetables. Over time, these larger customers have become cautious and somewhat sceptical regarding the quality and reliability of vegetable goods from local sources. To mitigate for risk, these buyers prefer expensive, imported, frozen alternatives. This is an important and missed opportunity for Sierra Leone's farmers.

Farmers Market Tactic

SOBA launched the Freetown Farmers Market, among other initiatives, with the purpose of improving communication and alignment within the vegetable value chain.

Freetown Farmers Market was launched in partnership with Nianda, the only hybrid vegetable seed supplier in Sierra Leone. The Market transpired monthly, on the third Thursday of each month. Freetown-based consumers, including larger institutional buyers, were actively targeted for attendance. Farmers were given guidance and question prompts aimed at soliciting feedback from customers regarding the diversity, quality, attractiveness, and volume of their vegetable supply.

Since launch, six total farmers markets have transpired. On average, between 100-200 people have attended each market. Across the first four, 17.5 farmers attended on average. Farmers typically represented larger farmer groups or associations. Additionally, 11 processed foods/goods businesses also attended on average. There was a steady increase in the number of processed goods firms in attendance across the four Markets.

The Market generated an exciting and previously inaccessible opportunity for processed foods and cosmetics companies. Typically, these companies are run by individuals with capacity to take advantage of the opportunity to engage with consumers directly. These companies proved adept at soliciting feedback and keen to adapt their offerings. As a result, they sold a significant volume of goods at the Farmers Market. Moreover, more and more joined the market monthly.

Farmer Profiles

What was the experience like for farmers? Meet participating farmers and hear from them:

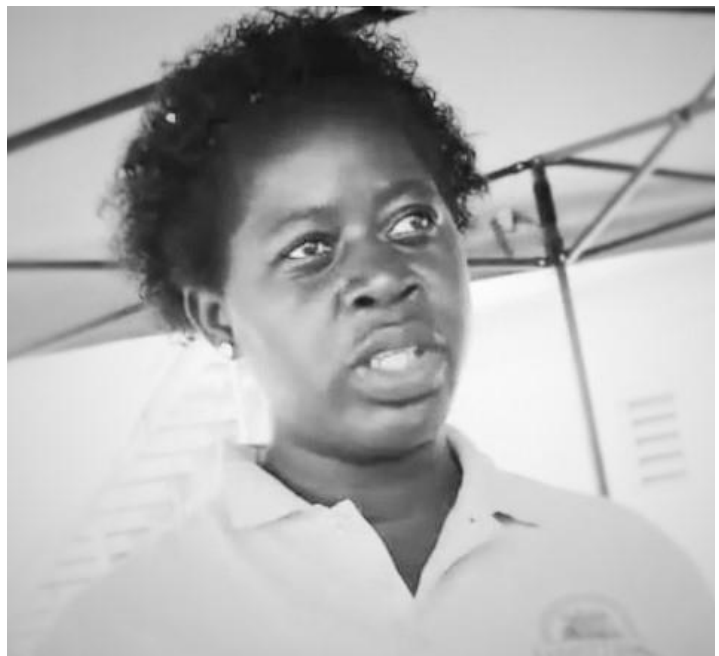
Marie Bangura

Farmer Group: Gloucester Leicester Organization for Rural Youth

Location: Gloucester

Produce: Lettuce, Parsley, runner beans, tomatoes, spring onions, chilli pepper, cabbage

“I am very happy with the support and opportunity that the Farmers Market has given me to showcase my vegetables. This is a very good initiative and I’m glad that I have a platform where I can show people how fresh our local vegetables are. I would encourage my fellow farmers out there to come on board so that our own people will get to see how fresh our locally grown vegetables are.”



Mabinty Kamara

Farmer Group: Evergreen, Chairwoman

Location: Regent

Produce: Cabbage, mint, avocado, lettuce, tomato

“The farmers market has taught us that you need to address the need of your customer, and see what they need. We have had to change the size of our vegetable bundles and the way we sell them after talking to customers here.”



Al Haji Amadu

Farmer Group: Tomba Farmer Group

Location: Tombo

Produce: Mango, limes, mangos, avocado, yam, plums

“I now know that it is helpful to ask customers what produce I bring to the next market. Last time I learned that people wanted plums and no one else was selling them and now I always bring them to the market.”

Hana Kamara

Farmer Group: Glory Farmers Group

Location: Gloucester

Produce: Pineapple, mint, cassava, avocado

“The farmers market has connected me to customers that will call me when they want produce and I will deliver it to their house. I appreciate the extra business!”



Fatmata Kamara

Company: Leecon Poultry

Produce: Fresh local eggs

“The eggs we produce for ourselves are so much better than the imported eggs mainly because it takes 6 months to 1 year they are imported. By that time, their shelf lives would be diminished significantly. This is why I am very thankful to the organisers of the Farmers Market because they have given me a chance to showcase these fresh local eggs and I hope we continue to get support from our local markets in order to grow.”



Reflections

Following several months of implementation, the Market offered an opportunity to reflect on purpose and performance:

- Larger institutional buyers, including major hotels, restaurants and catering companies, came out in full force for the first market. All expressed interest in the concept. However, these buyers require greater frequency and consistency. While the market generated leads, farmers weren't equipped to follow-up on these. Vegetable brokers are a valuable, missing intermediary.
- Farmers require direction and training to best engage customers. Question prompts did not prove sufficient. Additional guidance and training was required for farmers to maximize Market potential.
- Farmers did respond to consumers. From one market to the next, the produce – especially variety – reflected sales from the previous market. At times this frustrated consumers: farmers had to trade to acquire produce of interest as they hadn't yet planted it. However, in time, this also resulted in greater variety of produce that was also grown by farmers directly and previously unavailable to consumers. Some examples include red and yellow peppers, butternut squash, French beans, grapefruit – as examples. These types of produce also fetched higher prices.
- The Market itself garnered a lot of interest and support. At programme closure, both the US Embassy and Family Kingdom offered to host the market going forward without charge. Moreover, the food and consumer goods processors had derived so much value from the engagement that they had launched an informal association. Though costs were driven to a minimum (with near zero running costs for the Market management at the August Market), continuation remains tenuous. The Market itself requires significant management and organization that may not drive enough return for Nianda to take ahead.

Interested in learning more? See [Freetown Farmers Market](#) or www.sobasf.org

The Freetown Farmers Market was launched by Sierra Leone Opportunities for Business Action (SOBA) in 2017. SOBA is a private sector development programme that uses a market systems approach to facilitate pro-poor economic growth in Sierra Leone. The programme collaborates with private sector businesses in three primary areas: (1) agriculture, (2) renewable energy, (3) professional services and entrepreneurship markets, to trial and to scale innovative and inclusive business practices that reduce poverty and improve economic opportunities for poor women and men. SOBA is funded by UK Aid and implemented by Adam Smith International.