



REBUILDING BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT IN POST-CONFLICT SIERRA LEONE

How the World Bank Group's program
Removing Administrative Barriers to Investment
helped build a regulatory framework for easier business and investment in a post-conflict environment

Investment Climate Advisory Services | World Bank Group



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About the Investment Climate Advisory Services of the World Bank Group

The Investment Climate Advisory Services (IC) of the World Bank Group helps governments implement reforms to improve their business environment, and encourage and retain investment, thus fostering competitive markets, growth and job creation. Funding is provided by the World Bank Group (IFC, MIGA, and the World Bank) and over 15 donor partners working through the FIAS platform and the Conflict Affected States in Africa (CASA) initiative.

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Washington DC 20433

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Preface

Today, the last UN peacekeeping contingent left Freetown. Nine years after the end of hostilities, Sierra Leone is finally considered at peace again. And indeed, the streets of the capital are vibrant. Hope is visible in the faces of young and old alike.

There is no reason for Sierra Leone to be poor. It is rich in minerals, including gold, diamonds, and iron ore. It is a magnificent country with vast uncultivated lands, beautiful beaches and a rare fauna.

While signs of war have mostly faded, it is not hard to imagine how much further along the country could be. We believe that vibrant, dynamic development with opportunities created through private initiative will provide an excellent weapon against future conflicts. When new businesses are created, when people have jobs, and when families can pay for their children’s food and education there is less incentive to pursue conflict.

Our staff now has been in Sierra Leone for seven years. Our investment climate program in the country was one of our first in a conflict affected country. We have learned much: that we must be on the ground to provide the best support; that a committed government is essential to the success of our programs; and that we are stronger when we work alongside our development partners. These lessons learned in Sierra Leone are also proving invaluable to us in South Sudan, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo and other conflict affected countries where we work.

To better serve our clients, we have put together here the story of our engagement in Sierra Leone: what worked, what was difficult, what was successful, and what remains to be done. This is a candid review of our experience that we hope will inspire and provide the foundation for applying lessons so that we can do more.

Thierry Tanoh
IFC Vice-President
Latin America and the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe
February 18, 2011



Executive Summary

Sierra Leone’s devastating 11-year civil war destroyed much of its infrastructure, and left its economy in tatters. In 2004, two years after the end of the war, Sierra Leone asked the Investment Climate Advisory Services of the World Bank Group to help create a better business and investment climate that would lay a foundation for the country’s future economic growth.

Answering the call, the World Bank Group’s Investment Climate (IC) Advisory Services partnered with the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID) to design a program to help Sierra Leone improve its business climate, encourage job creation, and spur investment.

The result of this partnership was the Removing Administrative Barriers to Investment (RABI) Program, which ran from 2004 to 2010. RABI pioneered a collaborative approach by working closely with the government, local institutions and the private sector to implement a comprehensive, integrated agenda that focused on reforms in the following four areas:

- Reducing barriers to businesses operating in the formal sector by simplifying new business registration.
- Streamlining tax administration, reforming tax policy, and supporting the National Revenue Authority to simplify taxes.
- Creating a platform for effective and constructive dialogue between the government and the private sector in focal areas such as financial sector reform, access to land, and overall improvements in the investment climate, and supporting reform in those areas.
- Building and developing an effective investment and trade facilitation structure and promoting Sierra Leone as a vibrant and desirable location for business, especially in the tourism and agribusiness sectors.

Sierra Leone’s government and IC Advisory Services agreed that tackling barriers in these areas would encourage future reforms. The RABI Program was innovative and responsive, conducting rapid diagnostics, proposing integrated solutions, and moving quickly into implementation with support staff on the ground. The program was also one of the first of its kind to operate in a conflict-affected country, which demand specialized and targeted support solutions.

Despite a change of administration in Sierra Leone’s Government mid-way through the program, RABI actively engaged with the public and private sectors to make tangible progress that had broad impact and showed measurable results, earning the country’s confidence.

Saving Businesses Time and Money in Registering a New Business

Before RABI launched in 2004, business registration in Sierra Leone took eight steps, 26 days and cost more than 1,500 percent of income per capita. The most recent survey of Doing Business (2011) says it takes six steps, 12 days and costs 110.7 percent of income per capita making it the 61st easiest place in the world to open a business – above Spain, South Africa and the Bahamas.

Thanks to these reforms, the total number of businesses registered more than doubled over a five-year span, from 369 in 2004 to 861 in 2009.

RABI’s support went beyond technical advice to help with practical aspects of creating a streamlined registry. The Business Registration Center at the Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General (OARG) in Freetown was refurbished and now houses representatives from the National Revenue Authority (NRA) and the Freetown City Council in a one-stop shop where businesses can complete each step of the process. Work has begun on establishing centers in provincial hubs and on computerizing the list of company names.



Streamlining Tax Administration, Reforming Tax Policy, and Supporting the National Revenue Authority in Order to Simplify Taxes

Prior to the RABI Program, Sierra Leone had one of the lowest tax collection rates in the world – only 10 percent of GDP in 2008, well below the African average of 22 percent. The RABI team, in collaboration with the IMF and stand-alone DFID-funded efforts, worked with the NRA to restore the social contract between taxpayers and

the government. The immediate impact of these efforts was a 40 percent increase in the number of taxpayers – from 4,650 in 2008 to 6,593 in the first quarter of 2010.

The RABI Program is on track to exceed its target of helping the government collect over 12 percent of GDP as tax revenue. In 2009, following RABI’s interventions, the NRA collected 11.7 percent, and in 2010 tax revenues are projected to reach 12.3 percent of GDP.

RABI helped the government increase its tax revenues in part by supporting a taxpayer awareness campaign.

A survey conducted by the NRA found that more than 70 percent of taxpayers in Sierra Leone could not read or write English, clarifying the need for local-language messaging throughout the country to help ensure that people understood their obligations as taxpayers.

Using everything from text messages to radio jingles, from DJs in nightclubs to religious leaders, from city billboards to town criers, the RABI Program has spread the word about the benefits of paying taxes.

In addition to the public awareness campaign, RABI provided support to the NRA on streamlining tax laws and responded to their needs for the necessary forms which were revised to take into consideration the changes in the law.

Creating a Platform for Public–Private Dialogue on Business-oriented Issues

From its creation in 2007 as an IFC-operated and funded entity, the Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF) promoted private sector interests on issues such as tax modernization, financial sector reform, land rights, and other legal reforms, and lobbied for business-oriented policy changes. In 2009, the RABI Program helped the SLBF develop strong governance and financial management processes and procedures, and become an independent entity, operated by a board with representatives from the formal and informal sectors, and run by a professional manager.

World Bank President Robert Zoellick met with members of Sierra Leone’s private sector in early 2010 to discuss their challenges. He spoke with foreign investors, directors of mobile telephone companies and banks, and two important women business leaders.

The SLBF’s advocacy efforts resulted in the enactment of six laws and amendments that drastically reduce red tape and save businesses time and money.

Promoting Sierra Leone as a Destination for Tourism and Agribusiness Investment

RABI provided technical assistance to the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA), which was created by the SLIEPA Act in 2007.

The organization has achieved numerous milestones:

- To capitalize on a RABI study indicating specific agribusiness subsectors for investment opportunities, SLIEPA packaged these opportunities and disseminated them to potential investors, including via overseas missions led by Sierra Leone’s President Ernest Bai Koroma to Brazil, Nigeria, India, China, Kuwait.
- SLIEPA organized the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum in London in November 2009. The very successful, high-profile event, attended by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, investor George Soros, and Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, attracted over 600 registrants and showcased Sierra Leone as a peaceful, stable democracy that is open for business with a government committed to reform.
- Active investment leads have grown from four in the first year of operation to more than 100 as of June 2010. In the month following the Trade and Investment Forum, SLIEPA received a 71 percent increase in overall investor enquiries. Interest in investment in agriculture and mining increasing by 55 percent and 81 percent respectively.
- A media outreach campaign yielded more than 160 news articles between October 2009 and February 2010 in a range of international media, including BBC World Business Report, BBC World Service, The Economist, New York Times, The Times of London, CNN, Reuters, among others.

DFID says SLIEPA is seen as a model by international advisors for effective investment promotion. After just two years, the agency enjoys international credibility as a professional organization that can facilitate investment and trade effectively.

The RABI team also helped increase investor interest in Sierra Leone’s tourism industry. The initial aim was to develop a strategy to restore the tourism sector to levels of success enjoyed in the 1980s when more than 100,000 visitors came annually, drawn to the country by its pristine beaches, mountainous jungles, and captivating culture and history. The team achieved the following:

- Reached out to other donors to look at ways in which RABI could contribute to the long-term tourism development of Sierra Leone.
- Worked with the National Tourism Board to draft an action plan for tourism development, which attracted a US\$1.5 million grant for implementation.
- Helped develop an action plan to make operational the Sierra Leone Environmental Protection Agency and discussed conservation issues related to long-term tourism development with the European Union and the World Bank.

Getting Results

Overall results have been significant. Despite Sierra Leone’s serious capacity and resource constraints, the team supported and advised on investment climate improvements that helped

the country climb 20 places between 2005 and 2011 on the World Bank’s *Doing Business* report, which lists economies around the world on the ease of doing business based on a number of business procedures.

When the *Doing Business* report came out in 2008, Sierra Leone’s government asked the IC Advisory Services team to help it improve its indicators. With support from RABI, the country passed several laws, streamlined agencies and worked with the private sector to make permanent improvements to its business environment. Government-led committees were created to determine how best to improve the indicators, focusing on key areas for reform – business start-up, registering a property, access to finance and paying taxes.

In 2009, Sierra Leone was ranked the quickest and easiest place to start a business in West Africa and was considered one of the top five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for investor protection – a remarkable turnaround only seven years after a civil war that had all but destroyed the economy. Sierra Leone’s climb in the *Doing Business* rankings is thanks to the government’s strong backing for reform and to the support of the RABI Program, and a number of other donor partners.

Learning from the Program with the Pioneering Approach

The RABI Program and its pioneering approach have produced lessons that will inform the development of other post-conflict countries in Africa and other emerging markets.

Writing the Next Chapter of Reform

The current phase of the RABI Program is winding down and IFC is scoping for the next phase which will focus on sector specific interventions including infrastructure and agriculture. In addition, other donors have developed programs to support further improvements in the country’s investment climate. The European Union (EU) has pledged its support for investment and export promotion; the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), under its Enhanced Integrated Framework, will support eco-tourism development; and the World Bank is financing the development of a credit bureau.

Sierra Leone will continue to rely on domestic and international partners to help it achieve economic growth, but future reform will ultimately be the responsibility of the country’s government. As Sierra Leone’s President, Ernest Bai Koroma, said in London in 2009:

“These reforms are helping to build investor confidence, but they are just the beginning, not the end, of our efforts – a down-payment if you will, on the pro-business, pro-reform agenda we are committed to pursuing in the years to come.”

00. THE ONSET OF THE WORLD BANK GROUP’S INVESTMENT CLIMATE IN SIERRA LEONE

Sierra Leone has no business being poor. Rich in gold, diamonds, iron and other minerals, sitting on huge tracts of verdant land, and home to rare animal species and beautiful beaches, the country is blessed with resources, but has yet to realize its immense potential.

Following decades of misrule in Sierra Leone, a devastating 1991-2002 civil war killed and displaced hundreds of thousands and destroyed the country’s economy. In its aftermath, more than 70 percent of Sierra Leone’s almost six million people lived on less than \$1.25 per day, and two-thirds of the country’s young people were unemployed or underemployed. The infant mortality rate has hovered at the third-highest in the world, after Afghanistan and Angola.¹ Sierra Leone’s few post-war investors have battled red tape, risk and underdeveloped resources.

Despite suffering through years of turmoil, the people of Sierra Leone have never abandoned their pursuit of a better future. Walk down Freetown’s Garrison Street or Free Street today, and economic activity is everywhere: traders pile shoes on car hoods, hang jeans from walls, and carry an array of goods stacked high on their heads.

“This business you see today I started with six Leones and 20 cents” (about twenty US cents) says Sulaiman Kamara, who now runs his own wholesale business, importing everything from artificial flowers to costume jewelry from Dubai and Hong Kong.

“I came into business because of the war: when you’re unemployed, you have to find work.”



¹ Data from the World Development Indicators, 2009.



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Sierra Leone's Improving Stability

Since 2008, Sierra Leone has climbed faster than any other country on the Mo Ibrahim Index, which measures standards of good governance in Africa. According to a recent study by the World Bank, standards of governance, political stability and the ability of citizens to hold government to account has risen faster in Sierra Leone than almost anywhere else in the world.

The Gallup Coexist Index examined 27 multi-faith countries in 2009 and found Sierra Leone to be the most integrated, with two thirds of the population classified as such. This is almost 20 percent higher than any other country in the sample three times higher than India, the United Kingdom or France and more than double that of the United States and Canada.

The IC Advisory Services, through IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, began work in Sierra Leone in 2003. It built a partnership with the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), and from 2004 to 2010, the partners implemented the \$7.76 million Reforming Administrative Barriers to Investment (RABI) program to help Sierra Leone's public and private sectors improve and modernize the country's business environment, focusing on supporting changes that will help businesses grow.

"We started the project because we all recognize that the private sector is the leader of growth," says David Carew, Sierra Leone's former Minister of Trade and Industry.

From 2004 to 2010, the program supported changes to regulations addressing business start-up, tax and customs reform, tourism investment generation and development, investment and export promotion, and public-private dialogue facilitation. Its activities included:

- Reducing barriers to new business registration and streamlining the administration of taxes, specifically
 - to help draft and implement new legislation to reduce the time and cost of business registration and make the registration process more accessible and
 - to help change necessary policy and administrative aspects of paying taxes in order to reduce the burden on small businesses;
- Creating a platform for effective and constructive dialogue between the government and the private sector in focal areas such as financial sector reform, access to land and overall improvements in the investment climate, and supporting reform in those areas; and
- Building and developing an effective investment and trade facilitation structure and promoting Sierra Leone as a vibrant and desirable location for business, especially in the tourism and agribusiness sectors.

RABI tackled formidable challenges, knowing they could be overcome. It also worked in two fundamentally different ways from most previous projects: it was more streamlined

"When you say implementation, and you talk about so many different but related areas for reform, you need a person on the ground. This person can coordinate and help ensure that the reforms are integrated and being carried out in conjunction with the day-to-day work of the government," says Maiko Miyake-Digbeu, the IC Advisory Services' Regional Program Manager, West and Central Africa.

and delivered results fast by putting people on the ground to ensure action and sustainability.

RABI was innovative, responsive, and departed from traditional private sector development and trade reform projects by

focusing on many areas. RABI's pioneering approach involved a comprehensive, integrated reform program that worked closely with the government and local institutions. RABI went from diagnostics to solution design to implementation with staff on the ground supporting the operation. Engaging with both the

public and private sectors helped RABI build confidence in the country and move quickly and efficiently to respond to the government’s needs, despite a change of administration, from the SLPP (Sierra Leone People’s Party) to the APC (All People’s Party), mid-way through the program.

“It was a post-conflict country, and people were still worried about infrastructure, water, and food – people weren’t talking about softer infrastructure to catalyze growth,” says Miyake-Digbeu. “RABI was unique in putting in such support so soon after coming out of a conflict period.”

RABI focused on quick-wins before moving on to tackle more complex and political problems.

“Starting with the business registry creates an appetite in the country with the government for reform,” says Mary Agboli, IFC Resident Representative for Sierra Leone, of efforts to introduce a one-stop shop to register businesses within three days. “Once issues with registering a business have been addressed, we can address the bigger things.”

Throughout RABI’s lifespan, IC Advisory Services consulted experts from across the World Bank Group, and worked closely with Sierra Leone’s government. Central to RABI’s strategy to support the country’s private sector was helping strengthen two business-focused institutions: the Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF) and the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA). Both organizations are today independent institutions with sound governance and financial management systems in place, and advocate for change to help companies in Sierra Leone more easily do business.

Sierra Leone has enjoyed the fastest improvement in political stability in the world in recent years, and has made major improvements to its investment, trade, and business start-up policies. The World Bank Group’s Doing Business Report lists economies around the world on the ease of doing business based on a number of business procedures and is a good way to gauge a country’s comparative performance in establishing a business-friendly regulatory environment. Since 2006, thanks in part to the efforts of SLBF, SLIEPA, and the RABI Program, Sierra Leone has risen 20 places in the annual Doing Business survey – to 148 of 183 economies evaluated on objective measures of business regulations and their enforcement.

Sierra Leone’s Doing Business Rankings

Year	Ranking
2005	163
2006	168
2007	168
2008	160
2009	156
2010	148
2011	143

Source: Doing Business, 2011
World Bank Group

When the *Doing Business* report came out in 2008, Sierra Leone’s government asked the IC Advisory Services team to help it improve its indicators. IFC’s Doing Business Reform Unit visited Freetown immediately after the request and presented its recommendations. The government also created an inter-ministerial “Doing Business Reform Committee” and SLBF helped develop a list of administrative reforms to improve the country’s position on the rankings, as well as some of the legislative reforms needed to ensure more fundamental changes in the investment climate. With support from RABI, which included the appointment of a Doing Business consultant in Freetown to provide input into the government’s initiative, the country passed several laws, streamlined agencies and worked with the private sector to make permanent improvements to the country’s business environment. Two government-led committees were created to determine how best to boost the indicators, focusing on key areas for reform – business start-up, registering a property, access to finance and paying taxes. The committees were chaired by the Minister of Trade and Industry and included representatives from government agencies and a local lawyer. The resulting four pieces of legislation enacted by Sierra Leone have significantly improved the country’s rankings:

1. The Companies Act brought Sierra Leone in line with international standards
2. The Bankruptcy Act made it easier to close a business
3. The Payment Systems Act ensured payments can be made electronically and in line with monetary policy in the Economic Community of West African States region
4. The Goods and Services Act introduced a streamlined tax that encompasses seven pre-existing and overlapping taxes

Red tape has also been cut by improving the speed and cost of registering a business; speeding up the time taken to file tax



returns; and by new High Court rules that stipulate parties should exchange documents ahead of hearings. The minimum capital requirement for commercial banks has been increased to \$5 million. While this has forced one player, Procredit, out of the market, it has strengthened the standing of other commercial banks, helping them secure private sector funds.

“Under RABI we have seen great progress in the ease of doing business in this country,” says former Minister of Trade and Industry David Carew.

“The business environment in Sierra Leone has completely changed in the last few years,” says Eva Roberts, a Diaspora Sierra Leonean who returned home in 2007. “I hadn’t been home since 1990, but my husband and I felt it was safe to come now,” says Roberts. “The biggest shift I noticed was one in attitudes – nobody wants to let the country go back to the way it was before, and the younger generation coming back is really cause for celebration. They haven’t lived through the difficulties in the past, so their minds are open.”

Roberts has invested in a tourism project, has been growing cassava and raising tilapia in fishponds, and is considering cultivating moringa, a nutrient-rich plant with numerous applications. With her plan to produce and process the plant,



Above: Eva Roberts



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she won Business Bomba, a 2009 nationwide competition to find the country's best budding entrepreneurs. The competition was funded by DFID, the George Soros Development Foundation, and the Government of Sierra Leone.

"The night I won, everyone was throwing their business cards at me," she says, adding that access to capital is one of the hardest obstacles to doing business in Sierra Leone. "I went on to have meetings with five banks, and in the next 18 months I'm thinking of producing herbal teas from the dried moringa leaves."

"The RABI Program got things going," says Agboli. "Through our work with our international and local partners, we have achieved a number of results in a key areas, such as business start up, tax and customs reform, tourism and other investment and export promotion, public-private dialogue, and in the general business enabling environment – all in a very difficult environment. This shows the government's strong appetite for reform, and also help lays the groundwork for future reforms."

Future reforms will ultimately depend on Sierra Leone's commitment to continue to push through private sector reforms, something the President has already said is clear.

01. SAVING BUSINESSES TIME AND MONEY IN REGISTERING A NEW BUSINESS

Registering a business in Sierra Leone has historically involved a tangle of red tape, bribes and lengthy delays. Today, however, lower fees and quicker processing times are encouraging the country's numerous informal traders to officially register their businesses. In 2008, Sierra Leone was the most expensive place to open a business in the world. A year later, following RABI interventions and the establishment of the one-stop shop, it was the easiest in West Africa, involving the lowest number of steps.

Sierra Leone's only international accountancy firm, KPMG, once charged companies wanting to establish in the country \$5,000 to oversee the complicated process. Today, KPMG has abandoned this service because the process is so much simpler and less expensive. Following intensive lobbying (led by the Sierra Leone Business Forum, an independent public-private dialogue organization established with RABI's support) for new rules concerning business registration, entrepreneurs can now register their business at a single location in three days for the equivalent of US \$50 – and without paying a lawyer.

Before RABI started in 2004, business registration took eight steps, 26 days and cost 1,540 percent of income per capita. The most recent survey of Doing Business (2011) says it takes six steps, 12 days and costs about 110.7 percent of income per capita, making it 61st easiest place in the world to open a business, – easier than in Spain, South Africa, or the Bahamas.

"Before it was just a gamble – previously the process was fragmented, a company needed to be registered by a solicitor, pay advance tax, and it would take a long time," says Joseph Fofanah, deputy registrar general at the Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General's



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Above: Marie Bob-Kandeh

Joining the Formal Economy

Marie Bob-Kandeh, the managing director of Rehoboth Services, Secretary General of the Market Women's Association and representative of the informal sector on the board of the Sierra Leone Business Forum, started out as a street hawker. For years she sold sugar, tomatoes and onions from a basket balanced high on her head as she negotiated Freetown traffic. Later, in 1993, building on her hard-won knack for business, she ran a vegetable market stall in Garrison Street, in the heart of downtown Freetown. A long-term champion of the informal market, she has finally registered her first ever formal business at the new one-stop shop, naming it Rehoboth, a Biblical word that for her represents freedom.

"I started out hawking on my head. I had to leave very early in the morning, and then I would work all day," she says. "It was difficult for businesspeople to develop companies in this country. Laws prevented investment, even if you worked hard. Even our own local people were distrusting each other because of bureaucracy. Then after the 2007 Business Act so many things were amended, like the rule abolishing the payment of advance tax."

"Some, like me, have registered since the Act. My business is my own, that's why I called it Rehoboth, a Biblical word: it's my business so it's my freedom. Now that I have registered Rehoboth, I have the opportunity to apply for contracts. I couldn't do that before."

"In the past it was difficult to register your business, and people are still thinking it will be the same. We need to tell our people about the advantages."

(OARG) One-Stop Shop. "Now anybody can just come, it takes one, two days – at most three."

The one-stop shop is simplifying federal procedures and making it easier for businesses to join the formal economy. Businessmen and women no longer have to visit several different government agencies and line up in various offices. Establishing the one-stop shop was part of an effort guided by the RABI Program to formalize large parts of Sierra Leone's economy and to encourage foreign investors to set up in the country.

Much of Sierra Leone's economy was informal in 2004, according to a study commissioned by IFC at the time. Estimates of the proportion of unregistered business varied between 40 and 80 percent. Sierra Leone's informal economy was estimated at about 45 percent of GDP, according to the Doing Business 2005. In the same year, the Sierra Leonean Census of Business Establishments estimated that two-thirds of the country's businesses were not registered with any government agency.

Generally, informality constrains growth, costing developing countries dearly. Beyond the obvious lost tax revenue, informal businesses are less productive and smaller than formal ones. One McKinsey Global Institute study² showed that informal companies are on average three times less productive than formal ones. Informal companies also struggle to access capital, and their employees do not benefit from social protection or training.

Yet, as of 2005, most firms in Sierra Leone, in all stages of the investment cycle (start-up, locating and operating), found it simpler and more cost effective to remain informal than to comply with cumbersome licensing, tax and other official requirements to start and operate a business.³

To help streamline Sierra Leone's business registration process, the RABI Program identified barriers and proposed strategies to eliminate or reduce them. An IFC survey of sources of informal economic activity throughout Sierra Leone identified cost as the main barrier to business formalization. The survey, published in April 2006, found that of 659 informal businesses

² Farrell, Diana. 2004. "The Hidden Dangers of the Informal Economy." McKinsey Quarterly, no. 3.

³ FIAS, 2005. Administrative Barriers Study, International Finance Corporation.

At a Glance

The General Law (Business Start-Up Amendment) Act 2007 and the Registration of Business Act 2007 put into law five specific RABI program recommendations:

- Cancellation of foreign exchange requirements when registering a business
- Elimination of the obligatory involvement of a lawyer (solicitor) in the business registration process to prepare a memorandum and articles of association
- Elimination of the annual renewal of the business registration license
- Elimination of the advance tax payment for newly registered businesses
- Combination of the work and residence permits into a single permit and extension of the validity of this permit beyond one year



© Government of Sierra Leone / Aubrey Wade

surveyed, 87.6 percent cited the high cost and burden of licenses as the reason for their informality, alongside lack of information (79.2 percent) and the tax burden and administration (73.6 percent). Entrepreneurs stayed informal because the total costs of entry, operation, and exit associated with joining the formal sector were prohibitive.

Among the 1,199 responses by formal and partially informal firms, 56 percent of businesses said formal businesses were in a better situation, and 45.1 percent said they had operated in the informal segment before they became formal. Although informality offers some benefits to businesses (no taxes, social contributions, regulatory fees or compliance costs), its downside is great. Some of the negative impacts to businesses of staying informal are: having to keep operations small enough to avoid being noticed by the government or paying bribes to go "undetected"; limited access to finance; no possibility of bidding on government contracts; reduced productivity.

For most survey respondents, the most important reason for wanting to formalize their business was a desire to expand. However, more than a third (35.8 percent) of the informal market said they "knew nothing" about the steps needed to formalize their business. Another 27.2 percent had tried previously to become formal, but said they could not find all the necessary information or the steps were too expensive or too complicated. More than half (56.2 percent) said they would consider becoming formal if more information were available.

An even greater number (87.9 percent) said that lower taxes would encourage them to go formal.

The RABI Program created a two-month advertising campaign (launched in May 2009) to inform the public about the business registration process. Radio jingles in Krio and English heavily promoted business registration via the country's most widespread form of media. Journalists were invited to tour the OARG's renovated building to help spread the word.

Billboards still stand at key gathering points throughout Freetown, trumpeting the new, cheap, easy registration process. "Business registration now made easier, faster and cheaper," reads the campaign's simple and effective slogan.

RABI supported the following additional changes to the business registration process:

- Drafting, review and enactment of an amendment to the General Law–Business Start-up and the Registration of Business law
- Elimination of requirements for businesses to obtain exchange control permission from the Central Bank
- Mandatory involvement of solicitors in the preparation of company documents
- Requirements for a newly registered company to make an advance tax payment
- Annual renewal of business licenses
- Creation of templates and standardization of forms for reporting to OARG

Improving the business registration process has produced a number of notable results, including higher revenue collection; an increase in the number of registrations; and easier foreign business registration. The time required to register a new business fell from seven to about two days, and the costs dropped from US\$1500 to US\$79.

“Revenue collection jumped considerably,” says the OARG’s deputy Fofanah, citing data from the National Revenue Authority (NRA), which show that more than 1 billion Leones (\$250,000) were collected in 2009, up from 600 million Leones (\$150,000) in 2007.

“We’re starting to see the impact because now I can say there has been a considerable rise in the number of applications,” says Fofanah. “Because of the reduction in the cost of doing business, most of these guys in the informal sector are now coming and registering their businesses.”

Marie Bob Kandeh, Secretary General, Sierra Leone Market Women’s Association, agrees: “The business climate has improved—I now understand the business registration process and can afford it, too. As a result, I have formally registered my business.”

The number of businesses registered has more than doubled in five years, from 369 in 2004 to 861 in 2009.

Trends in New Business Registrations

Year	Number of new businesses registered
2001	190
2002	218
2003	316
2004	369
2005	415
2006	553
2007	629
2008	843
2009	861
2010*	345

Source: Office of the Administrator and Registrar General
*Ytd: year to date as of June 2010

RABI’s support went beyond technical advice to help with practical aspects of creating a streamlined registry. The Business Registration Center at the OARG in Freetown was refurbished and now houses representatives from the NRA and the Freetown City Council in a one-stop shop where businesses can complete each step of the process. Efforts are underway to computerize all the information, including company names, to make searches faster and more reliable. Computerization will also make it easier to retrieve data from the completed forms. So far, more than 4,000 records (complete through 2005) have been computerized. Another planned improvement is extending one-stop service to locations throughout the country. Currently, businesses from across Sierra Leone must come to the capital to register. Under a scheme funded by the Investment Climate Facility for Africa, Fofanah says four centers – in Bo, Makeni, Kenema and Port Loko – will open up before the end of 2011.



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02. STREAMLINING TAX ADMINISTRATION, REFORMING TAX POLICY, AND SUPPORTING THE NATIONAL REVENUE AUTHORITY IN ORDER TO SIMPLIFY TAXES

Tax collection

Before the RABI Program's intervention, Sierra Leone's tax collection rates were among the lowest in the world – 10 percent of GDP in 2008, well below the African average of 22 percent. This poor performance was caused by a glut of tax laws, a lack of understanding among taxpayers, and a poorly-equipped tax authority.

The RABI Program, by supporting and advising on tax policy and administration reforms, set out to help the government boost tax revenues to 12 percent of GDP by 2013.

“Getting tax revenues up to 12 percent of GDP, while still a relatively small percentage, is a big jump for them,” says Sebastian James, Senior Investment Policy Officer and Taxation Specialist at the World Bank Group's Investment Climate (IC) Advisory Services, who led work on the tax component.

To begin, RABI identified the lack of public awareness and understanding of taxes as major barriers hindering their collection. In response, RABI designed and implemented a taxpayer education program to raise awareness and preparedness to pay. Second, it supported changes to simplify and strengthen tax policy and tax administration to reduce the burden on small businesses, encourage formalization, and, ultimately, widen the tax base. Finally, it helped clarify confusing procedures and rules that hampered business and foreign investment, removing a substantial barrier to investment.

Although the Government of Sierra Leone introduced the Income Tax Act in 2000, even by 2006 few were paying what they owed, and those who did pay often paid too little. An April 2006, a RABI survey found that among formal or partially formal businesses (which declared their earnings), 61 percent declared less than half their revenues to authorities and about 16 percent of businesses reported nothing at all.

The conclusion? Only about 23 percent of businesses were reporting their revenues.

The NRA, established in 2002, had previously informed the public through newspaper ads about the need for those whose profit for the previous year exceeded Le 1,500,000 (US \$375) to pay in the range of 20 to 30 percent tax, depending on their income band. In a country of nearly six million people, where fewer than 20,000 newspapers are printed every day and just over a third of adults are literate, those ads were largely ineffective.

An NRA taxpayers' perception survey found that more than 70 percent of taxpayers could not read or write English. That made clear the need for local-language radio discussion programs throughout the country to help ensure that people understood what was required of them as taxpayers.

“Sierra Leone is very grass roots, so getting information and knowledge of tax out to the people is a challenge that needs a special approach,” said Buffy Bailor, IC Advisory Services consultant.

To help the government more effectively inform the public about taxes and tax policy, the RABI Program developed a variety of methods, including sponsoring awareness campaigns and workshops, and developing street advertising and radio shows. The RABI-developed communications strategy complemented the NRA's wider modernization program, funded separately by UK aid, and helped the NRA set up a special public affairs and taxpayer education unit. This unit increased the spread of information; drummed up support for taxpaying via widespread public communications, including innovative methods such as sending out mobile vans with public address systems onto the streets; helped explain the process through practical workshops; and developed a better website.



Paying Your Taxes means good hospitals

FILE YOUR INCOME TAX RETURN

by March 31st



The RABI Program has spread the word about paying taxes through almost every conceivable medium, from text messages to radio jingles, from DJs in nightclub to religious leaders, town criers and city billboards (some reading “Paying your taxes means good hospitals”), “Di lass day go cam jisnor (the deadline is almost upon us),” Krio actors instructed Sierra Leoneans over the airwaves, their messages written by celebrated national playwright Charlie Haffner, as a RABI radio jingle implored the nation to pay the taxes they owed to support better public services.

Tax workshops held during March 2009 in Freetown and the three regional capitals, Kenema, Bo and Maken, explained to more than 990 people how to fill out income tax forms. The task was especially difficult because many of those who attended the workshops were illiterate and had never completed an income tax return.

The NRA also made income tax returns available at tax offices nationwide and, for the first time, available for download from the NRA website (www.nra.gov.sl), which was being redesigned with the RABI Program’s support. The updated website offers useful features, including a “frequently asked questions” section, downloadable forms, and lists of local NRA office addresses.

Now, March 31 is no longer just another day on Sierra Leone’s calendar. It is a date synonymous with the deadline for tax “self-assessments.” Thanks to efforts of the NRA and the RABI Program, Sierra Leoneans now experience a “tax season” and are held responsible for filing their own income tax returns.

“If there is one thing that I could claim as a major success, it is the strengthening of the social contract between tax administration and taxpayers,” says James. “Tax administration and taxpayers trust each other much more; there are fewer instances of bullying of taxpayers by tax administration.”

Following the campaign, the NRA reported that the number of returns received and income tax revenues collected increased significantly in 2008.

The public awareness campaign also explained that taxpayers who failed to file their income tax returns by the 2009 deadline were subject to a penalty of 10 percent of the tax due plus a Le 50,000 (\$12.50) fine. “Dis de go for all udat wey de refuse for obey di law (this applies to everyone who refuses to obey the law),” went the radio jingle.

After the first campaign, almost half of the 50 largest taxpayers completed their returns after the May 31 cutoff point for late filing. In 2010, the NRA raised the late payment penalty from Le 50,000 to Le 2,000,000 (\$500), and Le 1,000,000 for small businesses.

Tax and Investment

Sierra Leone’s complicated tax system has historically dissuaded investment. The country’s vague tax provisions, multiple tax instruments, arbitrary implementation of tax laws, negotiated exemptions, limited opportunities for redress of grievances, and excessive discretion provided to tax authorities in the laws, have penalized existing investors and deterred new ones.

Parallel with efforts to publicize the need to pay taxes, RABI also supported efforts to simplify the tax system, especially customs and overlapping service taxes. The expectation was that simpler laws would encourage payment, avoid bottlenecks and reduce corruption.

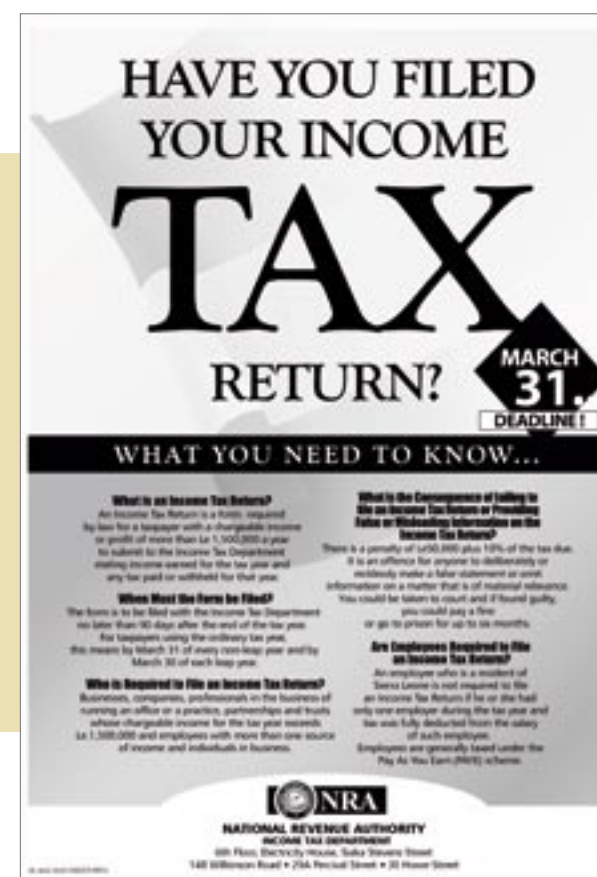


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These efforts included:

- Helping the NRA publish the consolidated Income Tax Act for Sierra Leone in May 2009, which included amendments made since 2000, reduced time spent by lawyers, accountants and judges interpreting the law. This was the first official publication of all tax-related regulations since 2000.
- Working with the NRA to reform the SME Tax Regime, including simplifying the process SMEs use to pay taxes, and supporting the passage of the Finance Act, which reduced the cost of compliance for businesses by reducing or eliminating fees and user charges. Introducing a goods and services tax (GST) that combined seven different taxes (covering hotels, entertainment, import sales and other services taxes) into one.
- Coordinating with government to introduce a computerized software package at the Customs and Excise Department (known as the ASYCUDA++), which streamlines Income Tax Department processes and procedures for new businesses.
- Bringing together a tax working group, which is led by the Sierra Leone Business Forum and includes key stakeholders from the Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Small Businesses, the Ministry of Finance and the National Revenue Authority.

In 2008, at the government’s request, RABI assessed the impact of tax waivers applied to a variety of deals designed to attract investors. The assessment concluded that the



incentives cost an estimated minimum of 20 percent of total tax revenue annually and were being given out in a secret and ad hoc manner, drawing little parliamentary oversight. Another analysis suggested the waivers, which included import duty exemptions, amounted to 30 percent of revenue, or 3.44 percent of GDP.

RABI Program staff discussed these findings with key players in the Finance Ministry, NRA, Office of the President, SLIEPA, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and recommended that Sierra Leone stop exempting businesses on a case-by-case basis and instead draw up universal criteria; require parliamentary approval for any prospective tax waivers; ensure that all companies file tax returns, whether or not they were exempted from payment, and be subject to audit by the NRA.

In December 2009, the Sierra Leonean Cabinet passed a tax incentive policy that reduced discretion and disqualified any tax incentives that were not enacted into law.

Overall, the results of RABI's support for tax reform are impressive. The table below provides a summary view of Sierra Leone's goals and progress to date.

Goal	Baseline	Target*	June 2010
Reduce time to file taxes	399 hours	200 hours	357 hours
Reduce number of tax payments	28 payments	20 payments	21 payments
Savings to businesses as a result of tax reforms	Zero	\$1 million	\$244,000
Increase tax/GDP ratio	10 percent	12 percent	11.7 percent (2009) 12.3 (projected 2010)

Source: IFC
*Target date varies. In most cases, goals are targeted to be achieved within two to three years after RABI Program completion.



03. CREATING A PLATFORM FOR PUBLIC-PRIVATE DIALOGUE ON BUSINESS-ORIENTED ISSUES

Following a request from the Government of Sierra Leone to increase dialogue between the public and private sectors, the Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF), supported by RABI, set out to create a forum where government and business could share concerns and discuss strategies.

“RABI gave us the business forum, which acts for us as a bridge between the private and public sectors,” says Alpha Tanue-Jalloh, President of the Sierra Leone Importers’ Association and an SLBF board member. “We were looking for an advocacy group that would put our position forward and that was lacking. But now, anything we say will reach the government. I can get the government to listen.”

From its creation in 2007 as an IFC-operated and funded entity, the Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF) promoted private sector interests on issues including tax modernization, financial sector reform, land rights, or other legal reforms, and lobbied for important, business-oriented changes. In 2009, the RABI Program helped the organization develop strong governance and financial management processes and procedures, and become an independent entity, operated by a board with representatives of both the formal and informal sectors, and run by a professional manager. The board is comprised of four leading local business membership organizations with the head of the Chambers of Commerce and the Minister of Trade and Industry as co-chairs of the SLBF Board of Directors. IFC continues to support the SLBF through a grant agreement.

“The most important thing has been creating a voice at the table,” says Oluniyi Robbin-Coker, formerly executive director of SLBF from inception to October 2008, and now private sector advisor to the President.

By 2008, the forum already had “an impressive story to tell,” according to a report commissioned by DFID and written by a team of international consultants from consultancy firm Adam Smith International. SLBF’s crowning achievement that year was

a private sector forum – the first of its kind – held with the Office of the President in June 2008, when the SLBF presented the findings of its working groups and its concerns and recommendations to the president, vice president and other ministers and government officials.

Sierra Leone was ranked 169 of 178 countries in the 2008 World Bank Group’s Doing Business report, something that did not sit well with the private sector and President alike. Nearby Ghana was far higher, at 87.

“We should at any given time sit down and talk about the issues, the problems, the difficulties and what both of us are expected to do on both sides,” President Ernest Bai Koroma said at the meeting. “We agree and give ourselves assignments. At the end of the sessions we go back and do our assignments and come back at the next session and report on the progress we have made and ensure that we remain focused.”



The Presidential Private Sector Forum was described at the time as “the most Sierra Leonean dialogue ever undertaken.” President Koroma was committed to ensuring the private sector’s voice would be heard. The meeting produced genuine momentum for reforms.

“We’ve had a lot of seminars, a lot of talking shops and no action,” said President Koroma. “The challenge is for all of us to translate the dialogue, the talking, the presentation of papers... into action.” The President continued to urge the forum to bring problems to the government, saying, “If it requires new laws, we will pass the laws.”

Crucial to the formation and effectiveness of the SLBF was having input from many voices, including the informal sector, whose reach and impact stretched across the country. SLBF’s business umbrella covers many single-interest groups, such as the Fullah Progressive Union, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce and the Indian Merchants Association, as well

as the ministry of lands, ministry of finance and SLIEPA. Demonstrating its commitment to them, SLBF gives its informal sector representatives some key responsibilities. Marie Bob-Kandeh, Secretary General of the Market Women’s Association, represents the informal sector on the SLBF board.

When World Bank President Robert Zoellick held discussions with Sierra Leone’s private sector in 2010, he met foreign investors and the managing directors of mobile telephone companies and banks, and also Victoria Williams, executive secretary of the Sierra Leone Indigenous Business Association, and Marie Bob-Kandeh of the market women’s association.

“I never imagined I would be chairing a meeting with the head of the World Bank,” says Bob-Kandeh of leading the meeting, which raised business needs ranging from high electricity costs to the need for feeder roads to promote agriculture, from lack of capacity to combat illegal fishing to access to long-term finance. “It was an honor and a chance to tell him what we think.”

SLBF’s advocacy efforts paid off in the form of six new laws or amendments that drastically reduce red tape and saved businesses time and money:

- 1. Companies Act
- 2. Payment Systems Act
- 3. General Services Tax
- 4. Bankruptcy Law
- 5. Amendment to the General Law – Business Start-up
- 6. Registration of Businesses Law



04. PROMOTING SIERRA LEONE AS A DESTINATION FOR TOURISM AND AGRIBUSINESS INVESTMENT

Sierra Leone sorely needs investment. During its lengthy civil war, investment in the country collapsed. From 1991–1999, the country received an average of only \$3 million a year in foreign direct investment (FDI) according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), down from an annual average of nearly \$10 million in previous years.

Agriculture

To help Sierra Leone increase its share of foreign investment, the RABI Program supported the government’s efforts to promote the country to the international business community. In May, 2007, the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA) was established. Launching an institution from scratch in a post-conflict environment was challenging. To guarantee the institution’s success, RABI provided a wide range of technical assistance, including: strategy development and sector targeting, incorporating information technology to improve operations, and record keeping of interactions with investors.

RABI helped SLIEPA prepare an investment guide, which describes potential in key agriculture subsectors, including sugar cane, palm oil, livestock, and biofuels. The guide also estimates the country’s potential annual fish catch from its 400km of coastline.

The RABI Program also helped SLIEPA prepare detailed promotional packages for the agribusiness, sugar, and palm oil sectors – three of the country’s most promising investment opportunities.

Research uncovered three potential sites suitable for sugar plantation investment, each worth \$100 – 200 million and with the potential to generate 20,000 jobs. Two sites were identified for palm oil, also worth \$100 – 200 million each and with the potential for 20,000 jobs each. This is a significant economic opportunity for a country desperate to create more private-sector driven jobs, especially in the rural areas.

“A major achievement of SLIEPA via the project was to help the government understand the potential impact of attracting large investments,” says Andrew Thorburn, IC Advisory Services’ Lead Advisor to SLIEPA. “SLIEPA prepared a presentation for ministers and senior officials that talked about the sort of job numbers that could be created by a handful of large investors. Suddenly it wasn’t just a question of improving the business environment to get a better Doing Business ranking, but because there is real potential to transform the economy through very significant job creation. So, you now have a government who understands the potential impact both of business reforms and professional investment promotion activities. It’s not often that this happens.”

A revamped Web site (www.investsierraleone.org) is helping investors understand what is on offer and gives practical advice on



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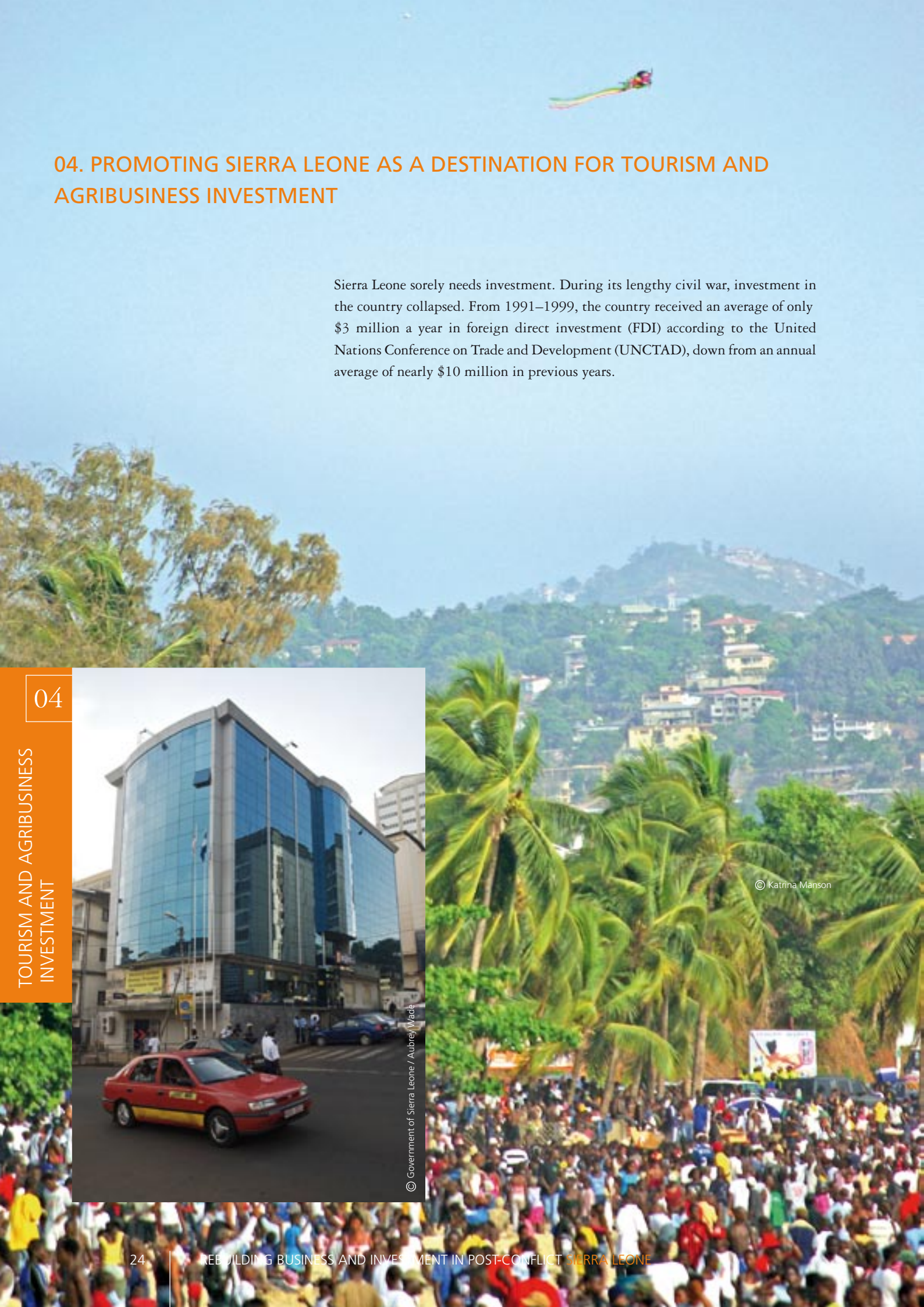
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investment considerations. The website features: a number of studies; downloads describing opportunities in agriculture, oil and gas, energy, fisheries, mining and tourism; facts and figures; and information on incentives and tax systems, land tenure and business registration.

The IC Advisory Services team also supported efforts to improve access to land and clarify regulations surrounding land ownership, a complex issue often fraught with political ramifications. Primary areas of progress have been to encourage better access to information about property rights, and increased transparency in land transfer.

Thanks to support from RABI experts, SLIEPA achieved numerous other milestones:

- SLIEPA communicated opportunities in Sierra Leone's agribusiness sector to potential investors in Brazil, China, India, and Kuwait through missions led by President Ernest Bai Koroma.
- SLIEPA organized the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum in London in November 2009. The very successful, high-profile event, attended by Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, investor George Soros, and Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, attracted over 600 registrants and demonstrated that Sierra Leone is a peaceful, stable democracy that is open for business. The event showcased the government's commitment to reform, and highlighted investment opportunities in the country's strategic target sectors of tourism and agribusiness.
- Active investment leads have grown from four in the first year of operation to more than 100 as of June 2010. In the month following the Trade and Investment Forum, SLIEPA received a 71 percent increase in investor enquiries. Interest in investment in agriculture and mining increased by 55 percent and 81 percent respectively.
- A media outreach campaign yielded over 160 news articles between October 2009 and February 2010 in a range of international media, including BBC World Business Report, BBC World Service, The Economist, New York Times, The Times of London, CNN, Reuters, among others.



Clockwise: Gareth Thomas, Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, HRH Prince of Wales and HE President Koroma

Bottom: President Koroma and Minister Carew

Top: President Koroma and Ministers

DFID says SLIEPA is seen as a model by international advisors for effective investment promotion. After just two years, the agency enjoys international credibility as a professional organization that can facilitate investment and trade effectively.

"When the ministries get leads, now they send them our way because they know we can deal with them best," says Patrick Caulker, chief executive officer of SLIEPA. "Investors interested in Sierra Leone now come through SLIEPA



Representing its Members' Interests

Freetown's downtown hums to the noise of trade. From tin pans to prayer mats, there's a welter of color and wares sold on the streets. So when traders shut their doors as part of a city-wide strike in January 2009, and again a year later, Freetown felt it.

On January 26, 2009, the city was quiet as importers protested against corruption and price hikes at the port. The problem was so severe, it drew the President's attention.

The President gave the Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF) a leading role in resolving the dispute and the problems that caused it. The then acting head of the SLBF chaired one of two subcommittees set up to study the problem, the subcommittee on procedures and processes for the clearance of imported goods at the Queen Elizabeth II Quay at Cline Town.

"SLBF was the chief negotiator, chairing the talks," says Alpha Tanue-Jalloh, President of the Sierra Leone Importers' Association and an SLBF board member. "Because we were talking to the authorities we were able to coax out unanimous agreement. The business forum played a very important role there."

A year later, SLBF has also helped traders understand the intricacies of the general services tax, which has streamlined seven different taxes into one.

"It's just like when a child is born – you know he's coming but you don't know what he'll look like," says Tanue-Jalloh of traders' ignorance over the tax, which also elicited a two-day strike in January 2010.

because we've established we can work with all the key ministries and we give them the access they need."

SLIEPA operates with a staff of only 11, a small number by African standards considering most successful IPIs on the continent have about 30 employees. SLIEPA has contacted the top 50 companies in seven key sectors and is working on developing relationships with them.

"They're hitting their stride. Even the most sophisticated investor would be impressed at the level of intelligence and effort," says Ari Untracht at Tony Blair's Africa Governance Initiative (AGI), who worked with the government in cooperation with RABI and SLIEPA to help attract investment.

However, like many agencies of its kind in less developed countries, SLIEPA relies largely on donor support because the

"I'm not against paying tax I'm a Sierra Leonean I want this country to grow, but it matters how we do it. The SLBF has a tax working group, and through that we are teaching ourselves what GST is."



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Building the Pipeline of Potential Investors

The government in Sierra Leone has been keen to broadcast the opportunities in tourism, identified as a key potential growth area. SLIEPA has sought out investors for the sector, suggesting concrete opportunities with everything from beach resorts to tour operator entrants and island developments.

The sector looks promising, and efforts to promote it, award-winning:

SLIEPA and the National Tourism Board, which has received support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), won the 2010 Africa Investor Award for Tourism Promotion Agency and Tourism Board of the Year.

At the November 2009 trade and investment conference held in London, SLIEPA presented investment opportunities throughout the tourism sector, including that of privatizing the country's landmark business hotel, Cape Sierra. Following the event, tourism investor inquiries in SLIEPA's investment pipeline tripled.

government cannot afford to fund the agency's entire budget. As RABI Program support comes to an end, SLIEPA will need to raise money from donors to continue to promote investment in Sierra Leone.

Tourism

The RABI team, working with SLIEPA and the government, also helped increase investor interest in Sierra Leone's tourism industry. The initial aim of this work was to develop a strategy to restore the tourism sector to levels of success it enjoyed in the 1980s when more than 100,000 visitors came annually, drawn to the country by its pristine beaches, mountainous jungles, and captivating culture and history.

Sierra Leone wanted to capitalize on the momentum created from positive reports in international newspapers and guidebooks that celebrated its "breathtaking coastal grandeur," "magnificent powder-white" beaches and "the fun to be had in Freetown, the "prettiest town on the West African coast." Sierra Leone was named by Lonely Planet, the world's largest guidebook publishers, as one of the top 10 places to visit in 2009.

RABI established early on that a lack of investment in accommodation and other infrastructure was hurting tourism growth. To attract more tourists, the decision was made to develop a limited number of key sites and create clusters of services around them. Three areas were selected:

1. The beaches of the Western Peninsula
2. The culturally rich former slave trading point Bunce Island
3. The remote wildlife-rich rainforests of Tiwai Island and Outamba Kilimi National Park.

There were, however, problems with this strategy.

"The project was launched at the start of the global financial crisis. It was hard for many to raise capital for a new investment project. In Sierra Leone, the needs for additional infrastructure to be built by investors, still weak tourist arrival figures, higher cost of capital given the perceived risk, lack of clarity over land rights, and other factors made a tourism project in Sierra Leone, even in the Western Area, a difficult proposition for investors and financiers," says Maiko Miyake-Digbeu, the IC Advisory Services' Regional Program Manager, West and Central Africa, who led the tourism efforts.

Among the numerous challenges it addressed, the IC Advisory Services team support focused on improvements in land policy, which were being developed by the government and stakeholders. However, the lack of a tourism-friendly land policy proved to be insurmountable.

"We knew access to land was a huge constraint to tourism development, so we conducted a thorough legal review to understand the landscape," says Miyake-Digbeu. "Despite the initial assurance from the government, we concluded after a long, hard look that there was no uncontested state-owned land optimal for tourism development in Western Area."

"The creation of a "unified" land regime for all of Sierra Leone is a mid- to longer term project...(and) will require painstaking outreach and consensus building efforts," said Stephen Butler, an IC Advisory Services consultant from the University of Chicago, who advised the government on a proposed national lands policy.

RABI reacted to the situation by re-focusing its efforts on identifying how sector policy and regulatory and institutional elements constrained tourism growth, and on addressing some of the constraints. The team achieved the following:

- Reached out to other donors to look at how RABI could contribute to Sierra Leone's long-term tourism development.
- Worked with the National Tourism Board to draft an action plan for tourism development, which attracted a US\$1.5 million grant for implementation.
- Helped develop an action plan to launch the Sierra Leone Environmental Protection Agency and discussed conservation issues related to long-term tourism development with the European Union and the World Bank.



05. LEARNING FROM THE PROGRAM

The RABI Program and its pioneering approach have produced lessons that will speed development of more post-conflict countries in Africa and other emerging markets.

This section describes the lessons and explains why they are important. It then relates specific RABI Program operational experience that demonstrates the lesson so that others may draw parallels to similar challenges faced in countries where they operate.

Lesson 1 - Start with the quick-wins

Principle: Particularly in a post-conflict environment, tangible reforms that produce quick and meaningful results will attract support for a wider reform program. To achieve quick wins and demonstrable results, it is important to move swiftly from analysis and assessment to implementation.

Lesson 2 - Get ‘on the ground’

Principle: Having a team on the ground, and a budget to support them, speeds the implementation of reforms. The time has passed for measuring reforms in terms of what has been achieved officially; the process now involves having a team on the ground to follow through the actual implementing of reforms. This approach was taken in Sierra Leone, and now is part of every country program implemented by the IC Advisory Services.

Particularly in post-conflict nations, government capacity is often limited to a few individuals with heavy workloads and who are under tremendous strain to implement their agendas. Project teams must be prepared to stand alongside partners, step in and push into practice sound ideas.

Experience: RABI was one of the first programs in which the IC Advisory Services team was the implementing agent.

Placing staff within the government to expedite the reform process helped increase ownership and support for the process and offers much greater scope to react quickly to problems, large and small.

Lesson 3 - Nurture good relations with government and beneficiaries

Principle: Programs usually work best when government and other groups fully support reforms. Garnering support for reform demands intensive lobbying: champions with plenty of sway must be identified and supported. On occasion, persuasion does not work, and projects must operate from the top down.

Experience: President Koroma, elected in 2007 on a ticket to run the country along business principles, created a government sympathetic to the types of reforms supported by the RABI Program. He intervened to set the mood, whether it was by spearheading an agenda for change, visiting a port to oust corrupt customs officials and tax-avoiding importers, or delivering speeches to hundreds of investors to drum up support for a happier, wealthier Sierra Leone. High-level political backing for reform makes legal and regulatory changes easier, faster, and more permanent.

However, backing from the highest levels of government does not guarantee success. RABI learned an important lesson when seemingly uncontentious reforms provoked political stalemate and a strike. In 2007, Sierra Leone’s legal community united to oppose RABI proposals to end the requirement to consult a lawyer when registering a business. The Attorney General offered no support, and even the Chamber of Commerce, a champion for the business community, backed the Bar Association in support of the lawyers on their board. The IC Advisory Services team prevailed only by appealing to the Vice President, making the case for reform and isolating the narrow self-interest of the legal profession. The Vice President supported the reform and instructed the Attorney General to do the same. In the end, it was evident that the Bar Association had opposed the reform solely because they had not been consulted. The lawyers knew nothing about the broader reform program, and thought they were being singled out by the government and its foreign advisors.

The IC Advisory Services team now ensures broader communications are a part of each component, both informally and through public-private dialogue structures such as the Sierra Leone Business Forum.

Lesson 4 - Assist government capacity and coordination

Principle: The responsibility for reforms rarely lies within one ministry. Coordinating among several government ministries is often required to achieve reform. Any government running a country emerging from years of conflict is likely to lack resources and capacity to coordinate among all the parties to effect change as quickly or robustly as it might like.

Experience: Ministries and government bodies in post-conflict countries are often bogged down trying to obtain basic equipment, such as chairs and computers, or with hiring and training staff. The time and effort devoted to these tasks reduces their capacity to get on with their proper job of governing. RABI supported government reform efforts by cross-training staff at the ministries. For example, the program trained officials at the Ministry of Finance on tax policy, and placed a tax expert on site to work closely with them.

A dedicated RABI Coordinator was appointed to the Ministry of Trade and Industry to respond to the client’s needs, and consultants embedded within the Private Sector Advisory Unit of the Office of the President helped coordinate government-wide efforts to focus ministries on the same reform targets.

Lesson 5 - Be ready to adapt the timeline

Principle: In post-conflict environments, projects often move more slowly than planned. Certain delays may be beyond the control of project staff. Post-conflict countries lack sufficient human resources to cope with problems; political events (elections and cabinet reshuffles) can disrupt government planning and, consequently, reform activities.

Lengthy internal procedures to hire staff or to put in place the infrastructure and equipment necessary to carry out program activities can also cause delays.

Experience: Sierra Leone’s fluid political landscape forced the program to adapt to new faces and aims. The 2007 elections brought much of the business of running the country to a standstill for months.

“Nobody was thinking about the impact of the election, and 90 percent thought there would be no transition,” says Oluniyi Robbin-Coker, private sector advisor to the President.

A team was based in Freetown in late 2008, and a permanent office was set up in May 2009.

“RABI has taught us a huge lesson on how you can change laws, change processes, but it is the implementation part that counts and making it happen takes time and takes a lot of human resources from the donor,” says Mary Agboli.

Experience: Under RABI, addressing the procedures involved in business start-up registration involved legal and process change. Sierra Leone moved up the World Bank Group’s Doing Business rankings, and the government could point to a concrete achievement.



Change can also present unexpected opportunities. Following the new president’s embrace of the reform agenda, now managed by his own private sector advisor, the RABI Program responded and appointed a dedicated Doing Business Consultant within the Office of the President to support the government’s reform agenda.

Lesson 6 - Develop a robust communications strategy

Principle: A program’s achievements lose their impact if nobody knows about them. External communication plays a key role in the reform process – increasing awareness and helping government learn how to construct messages. Internally, the team requires a close relationship based on mutual trust and joint communications.

Experience: The RABI Program put communications at the core of its approach. The program used a variety of communication methods, including producing a video about the potential benefits of business start-up reform to build domestic support to hiring town criers to explain the benefits of paying taxes. In the areas of tax, investment promotion, reforming the business climate or overhauling business registration, RABI employed the mass media and small media to disseminate information about the reforms.

Open communications also helped improve the previously tense relationship between government agencies and the private sector. Channeling discussion through the Sierra Leone Business Forum, for example, helped to give real credibility to reforms and communicate them in partnership with government. Reaching out to private sector organizations helped build consensus to support the reform agenda. The IC Advisory Services team also met regularly with business associations spanning the formal and informal private sectors, including the Chamber of Commerce Industry and Agriculture, the Sierra Leone Indigenous Business Association (SLIBA), the Market Women’s Association, the Sierra Leone Importers Association, and the Sierra Leone Petty Traders Association.

In partnership with the World Bank Country Office, the team built a relationship with the nation’s media through the Network of Development and Economic Reporters (NEDER). The program facilitated business reporting training in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Mass Communications department at the University of Sierra Leone (Fourah Bay College), recognizing that with a better understanding of business and economic issues and how they link to the country’s overall development

goals, the media can champion key reforms and galvanize critical public support.

Internally, the team also built a working relationship with the World Bank Group. Weekly team meetings helped component leaders coordinate and share information to avoid duplication of efforts. Information was also shared through monthly reports sent to team members.

Lesson 7 - Foster donor coordination and partnership

Principle: Donor coordination is central to helping the government achieve optimal results and prioritize areas of focus.

Experience: The IC Advisory Services team strived hard to map the territory and establish how best each of its components can include and work alongside other donors.

RABI established good working relationships with several other donors and technical partners. Experts from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and from Tony Blair’s Africa Governance Initiative (AGI) worked alongside RABI in the Office of the President, allowing the projects to communicate daily. In addition, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) funded specialized training for SLIEPA staff, including technical support on developing policy documents and provided SLIEPA with both policy and business finance support.

DFID developed the private sector development strategy with the Ministry of Trade and Industry in conjunction with RABI. The African Development Bank helped a private investor investigate possibilities surrounding a sugar plantation investment, a market segment the RABI Program supported. The European Union worked with the National Revenue Authority and the Ministry of Trade, and overarching institutions such as the SLBF have benefited from support to individual members, such as that of GTZ for the Sierra Leone Indigenous Business Association.

IFC’s Conflict Affected States in Africa (CASA) initiative, a partnership between IFC, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway helped establish the Sierra Leone Private Sector Development (PSD) Donor Roundtable to coordinate donor support to private sector development in the country. The group, comprising PSD specialists from various donor agencies, meets regularly to coordinate their support for the government’s private sector development agenda.

The forthcoming Joint Assistance Strategy (JAS) for Sierra Leone, which will cover 2010 – 2013 in support of Sierra Leone’s Second Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper two (PRSP2), also unites the efforts of IFC, IDA and the African Development Bank. The three donors are partnering to provide a coordinated approach to respond to the government’s needs.

Lesson 8 - Establish monitoring and evaluation as a critical component from the outset

Principle: Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a critical tool to help the government demonstrate impact and tell its story to program beneficiaries, investors, donors or detractors. “The facts are what matter,” says Oluniyi Robbin-Coker. “M&E must run through the very veins of a project, from start to finish.”

A main challenge in a post-conflict environment is a lack of data and research – and a lack of capacity to file and find it. Collaborating with other donors and advisors to collect and organize information by running joint diagnostics can be useful.

Baselines are important because they focus efforts on a specific target. They also reveal existing constraints. Such efforts to seek out baselines form a critical learning tool and part of the planning strategy. For this reason, M&E needs to be seen as an integrated part of programs, startup, planning and implementation.

Experience: The RABI Program found it hard to establish data at the outset, and as a result hired a consultant (in 2010) to establish baselines retrospectively, six years after the project started.

A target for the tax component, for example, was to increase the number of formal jobs by 20 percent, an aim that has since been abandoned because there was no way to measure it. Data collection has regularly proved difficult, and government agencies could rarely provide information to help establish baselines.

“At the very beginning of engaging with the client, there should be an upfront effort to identify how that information is going to be collected over time and make sure that data collection and correction is part of it,” says Desiree Aidoo, an IC Advisory Services consultant who worked on RABI’s M&E from 2008 to 2010. “We have to spend more time working with government counterparts to develop their M&E capacity.”

Lesson 9 - Look to peers

Principle: Peer learning helps the client see the beneficial impact of reforms and demonstrates that reforms are achievable in countries that face similar challenges. Encouraging healthy competition among neighbours and other post-conflict countries also helps stimulate the reform process.

Experience: The President of neighboring Liberia is behind a big reform push and has created a reform committee that reports to her regularly. Liberia’s actions inspired Sierra Leone to set up a similar inter-ministerial body in 2009.

The World Bank Group’s *Doing Business* report rankings stimulated interest from the government, which was keen to do well in a competitive comparative field. Engaged governments can use such rankings as a tool to promote the country to both domestic and foreign investors, and as an easy way to map areas in need of reform and subsequent progress.



06. WRITING THE NEXT CHAPTER OF REFORM

When Sulaiman Kamara, now in his late 50s, arranged visas and travel for 18 friends involved in trade to try their hands at importing goods back in 2000, he ushered in a new chapter for business in Sierra Leone. Known as “The Godfather” for his role in prompting the Sierra Leonean entrepreneurs at the tail-end of the war, he took the group to Dubai.

“At that time no Sierra Leoneans were importing,” he says. “They were business people but they had never gone beyond Africa. I gave them travel expenses and organized them.”

Some came back with building materials, others with stationery, lace, shoes and other goods that filled two containers between them from the cash they brought with them. By the second trip, each was filling several containers of their own and several now import from China and elsewhere.

For Kamara, there is no question that Sierra Leone can do more in the future. “We are coming up fast,” he says.

competitiveness of small and medium enterprises, rebuild financial markets while building the appropriate financial infrastructure to support private investment and increase private participation in the provision and rehabilitation of infrastructure.

In addition, other donors have developed programs to support further improvements in the country’s investment climate. For example, the European Union has pledged its support for investment and export promotion; the United Nations Development Program, under its Enhanced Integrated Framework, is supporting eco-tourism development; and the World Bank is financing the development of a credit bureau.

Ultimately, the true test will be the Government of Sierra Leone’s own commitment to continue to push through reforms that will stimulate private sector development and create momentum for future growth.



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The current phase of the RABI Program is winding down and IFC is scoping for the next phase which will focus on sector specific interventions aimed at further increasing the environment for private sector investment in priority areas such as infrastructure and agriculture. Furthermore, IFC, through its Conflict Affected States in Africa Initiative (CASA), is implementing programs to strengthen the

“These reforms are helping to build investor confidence,” President Ernest Bai Koroma told hundreds of investors gathered in London. “But they are just the beginning, not the end, of our efforts – a down-payment if you will, on the pro-business, pro-reform agenda we are committed to pursuing in the years to come.

07. KEY RESULTS FROM RABI

1. Starting a Business:

With the passage of the General Law (Business Start-Up Amendment) Act 2007 and the Registration of Business Act 2007, RABI Program recommendations reduced the time and costs of registering a business and allowed for the simultaneous award of work and residency permits were enacted into law.

Impact:

- Time reduced from one week to 2 days. (Cost reduced from US\$1500 to US\$79)
- Total number of businesses (local and international) registered has more than doubled (from 369 in 2004 to 861 in 2009)
- Revenue collection from business registration has increased from 600 million Leones (\$150,000) in 2007 to 1 billion Leones (\$250,000) in 2009

2. Customs:

Implemented customs simplification procedures.

Impact:

- Reduction of documentation, elimination of unnecessary steps, and the introduction of a risk-based system that eliminates inspection of every shipment.

3. Tax:

Eliminated the requirement that new businesses pay a quarter of their estimated taxable income before they register as companies, and exemption scheme that allows compliant taxpayers to avoid advance tax at import.

Impact:

- Number of taxpayers increased by 40 percent (from 4,650 in 2008 to 6,593 in Q1 of 2010)
- Payment of taxes (rank): 160
- Number of payments per year: 29
- Time (hours per year): 357
- Total tax rate (% of profit): 235.6

Source: Doing Business 2010

4. Dealing with Construction Permits:

Improved the building approval process and reinstated phased inspections.

Impact:

- Cut the number of procedures for obtaining a construction permit. The country made getting

construction permits easier by streamlining the issuance of location clearances and building permits – the number of procedures for obtaining a permit remains 25 (procedures), 252 (days), 343.3 (cost-% of income per capita) . Sierra Leone’s Doing Business ranking in 2011 is 166, a vast improvement from Doing Business 2010, when it ranked 177.

5. Registering Property:

Lifted a ban previously imposed requiring the director of survey to authenticate the cadastral map before each transfer.

Impact:

- Sped up property registration. The Government lifted a moratorium on sales of privately owned properties-the number of procedures for registering a property is now 7 and this can be done in 86 (days) and costs 12.2 (% of income per capita). According to Doing Business 2011, Sierra Leone’s registering a property ranking has improved from 172 in 2008 to 169 in 2011.

6. Trading Across Borders:

Facilitated trade by eliminating the requirement for an export license.

Impact:

- Saved administrative time and cost, especially for small and medium sized enterprises.

7. Promoting Investment:

Delivered capacity development program to Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency, which is now operating efficiently.

Impact:

- To capitalize on the agribusiness subsector investment potential, SLIEPA issued an investment guide and other information about these opportunities to investors, including via overseas missions led by Sierra Leone’s President Ernest Bai Koroma to Brazil, Nigeria, India, China, Kuwait.
- SLIEPA organized the Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum in London in November 2009. The very successful, high-profile event, which had active participation of Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, investor George Soros, and Prince Charles, Prince of Wales, attracted over 600 registrants and succeeded in demonstrating that Sierra Leone is a peaceful,

government’s commitment to reform, and highlighting investment opportunities in the country’s strategic target sectors of tourism and agribusiness.

- Active investment leads have grown from four in the first year of operation to more than 100 as of June 2010. In the month following the Trade and Investment Forum, SLIEPA received an increase in total investor enquiries of 71 percent; with interest in investment in agriculture and mining increasing by 55 percent and 81percent respectively.
- A media outreach campaign yielded over 160 news articles between October 2009 and February 2010 in a range of international media, including BBC World Business Report, BBC World Service, The Economist, New York Times, The Times of London, CNN, Reuters, among others.
- Improved Web site performance with a 162-percent increase in traffic and a 61-percent rise in Google search results for search on “Sierra Leone Investment.”

8. *Creating a Platform for Public–Private Dialogue:*
The Sierra Leone Business Forum is now fully functional, independent organization, active in promoting issues related to tax modernization, financial sector reform, land rights, or other legal reforms, other important, business-oriented changes. Currently, the Forum is funded by grant monies provided under the RABI Program.

Impact:

- Held the Presidential Private Sector Forum in June 2008, the first broadly inclusive event to discuss and propose specific action on issues related to doing business in Sierra Leone.
- Effectively advocated for six laws or amendments to laws: Companies Act, Payment Systems Act, General Services Tax, Bankruptcy Law, Amendment to the General Law – Business Start-up, Registration of Businesses Law.

9. *Improved Doing Business 2010 ranking:*
Sierra Leone improved its overall ranking by climbing seven places to 149. Consistent year-on-year improvement by moving 11 places in two years (previously 156 in DB 2009 and 160 in DB 2008)

Impact:

- 20 place improvement in the DB rankings, from 168 (of 175) in DB2008 to 148 (of 183) in DB2010
- Deemed the quickest and easiest place to start a business in West Africa (2009)
- One of the top five countries in Sub-Saharan Africa for

investor protection (2009)

- Consistently ranks ahead of its neighbours in the Mano River Union

10. *Top performer in West Africa*

Impact:

- Received the 2010 Africa Investor Award for Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA) and Tourism Board (TB) of the Year: Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency/ National Tourist Board
- Sierra Leone was rated one of the top 10 places to visit in 2009 by Lonely Planet (the world’s largest publisher of travel guides)
- Bradt Travel Guide: Sierra Leone was launched in 2009 (Sierra Leone’s first-ever travel guide)

08. PROGRAM FACT SHEET

The Government of Sierra Leone, under the leadership of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and with support from UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the World Bank Group’s Investment Climate Advisory Services, implemented a broad program of reforms to improve the investment climate and address fundamental obstacles to private sector development in the country.

Cost-sharing: **between DFID and IFC**

Funding: \$7.76 million

Results: RABI achieved 10 results, at an average cost of \$538,186 each – less expensive than IFC efforts in Kenya and Madagascar, but more expensive than Rwanda, Mozambique, Sudan and Burkina Faso.

RABI TIMELINE

2004	Government of Sierra Leone asks for assistance with the development of its private sector	
2005	March	The World Bank Group studies barriers to investment, and analyzes restructuring and institutional development needs of Sierra Leone Export & Investment Corporation
	July	Removing Administrative Barriers to Investment (RABI Phase 1) Action Plan endorsed by the Cabinet of Ministers
2006		Sierra Leone Business Forum established, providing a private sector voice
	Jan	RABI Phase 1 project memorandum signed between DFID and World Bank Group’s International Finance Corporation; Full-time RABI Project Coordinator appointed
2007	March	Government passes bill establishing Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency; Government implements 11 of 15 customs simplification procedures recommended by FIAS
	June	Government passes legislation to simplify business start-up procedures
	Sept	New government formed under newly elected President Ernest Bai Koroma
	Nov	Government launches its Agenda for Change
2008	Feb	DFID and IFC sign MoU to extend the RABI Program for two years (RABI Phase III); IFC Advisory Services Coordinator, Mary Agboli, appointed and residing in Sierra Leone
	Oct	Presidency establishes the Private Sector Advisory Unit at State House
	Nov	Doing Business Reform Committee established within government
2009	March	SLBF becomes an independent, autonomous, locally owned and managed institution
	April	New Business Registration Centre (One-Stop Shop) opens
	May	IFC in-country office opens
	June	Doing Business reforms implemented: Four laws passed: Bankruptcy, Business Registration, General Services Tax, Payment Systems
	Nov	Sierra Leone Trade and Investment Forum led by SLIEPA and the Ministry of Trade and Industry
2010	Feb	SLIEPA launches Sugar and Palm Oil Outreach Strategies; Tourism: Proposed policies and procedures governing state land allocation
	March	DFID RABI funding ends, exits program SLIEPA becomes an independent entity under the auspices of the Ministry of Trade
	June	RABI program ends

TEAM MEMBERS

Mary Agboli
Imoni Akpofure
Desiree Allen Aidoo
Buffy Bailor
Nyama Bayoh
Simon Bell
Sheku Bockarie
David Bot Ba Njock
David Bridgman
Bruce Carrie
Laurent Corthay
Christopher Juan Costain
Alice Cowman
Kobina Daniel
Nouma Dione
Farrell Elliott
James Emery
Isata Gandi
Mamadi Gobeh-Kamara
Pierre Guislain
Julien Haarman

Rina Harpinder Oberai
Beat Heggli
Eduardo Hernandez
Zenaida Hernandez Uriz
Sabine Hertveldt
Benjamin Herzberg
Jumoke Jagun-Dokunmu
Sebastian James
Melissa Johns
Joanna Kata-Blackman
Marianne Kargbo
Etienne Kechichian
Jason Lee
Osongo Lenga
Jan Loeprick
Marita Karin Liebegut
Sean Mann
Lorretta Matthews
Maiko Miyake
Hermione Neville
Jason Hopps



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Peter Nuamah
Nana Yaa Ofori-Atta
Michael Opagi
Ana Maria Oviedo
Obed Pandit
Aminur Rahman
Shaela Rahman

Courtney Roberts
Umar Shavurov
Adama Sow
Richard Stern
Andrew Thorburn
Marisa Zawacki



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ANNEX



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List of acronyms used in this report:

United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID)
 International Development Enterprise Associate (IDEA)
 International Monetary Fund (IMF)
 National Association of Social Security Insurance Trust (NASSIT)
 Network of Development and Economic Reporters (NEDER)
 National Revenue Authority (NRA)
 Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General (OARG)
 Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)
 Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF)
 Sierra Leone Indigenous Business Association (SLIBA)
 Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency (SLIEPA)



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