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WOMEN AND PALM OIL PROCESSING IN SIERRA LEONE:

A CASE STUDY

by

JULIANA KONIMA CONTEH, B.A (Hons)

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Geography

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

Canada

September 1992

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A Case Study

Submitted by

Juliana Konima Conteh, B.A (Hons)

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

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September, 1992

ABSTRACT

The increasing participation of women in the informal sector during the era of structural adjustment programmes in African countries has so far been analyzed in relation to survival strategies. This thesis attempts to examine women's economic activities in the light of the attainment of both practical needs of survival and strategic needs of independence and empowerment. This is accomplished through a case study of palm oil processing in two villages, Mattru and Luawa, in Sierra Leone. First I explore the literature on structural adjustment and women, the informal sector, and palm oil processing. Second, a review of the economic crisis in Sierra Leone serves as a framework for analyzing women's activities in the informal sector. Third, the palm oil processing activity in Mattru and Luawa, Sierra Leone, is assessed, with a focus on the voices of the women, in terms of the following: Women's independence, cooperation among women and women's empowerment. The voices of the women indicate that the activity represents not only a source of overcoming the immediate need for survival; it provides a means through which their strategic gender goals can be pursued.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The general objective of this study is to examine and evaluate the involvement of women in the palm oil processing activity in the Jong Chiefdom in Sierra Leone and the way in which their activity has been influenced by structural adjustment programmes. Palm oil processing could be defined as an informal sector or income-generating activity carried out primarily by women. The term "informal sector" was apparently first used by the British anthropologist, Hart, as a way of organising his fieldwork with poor city dwellers in Ghana (Peattie, 1987; Hugon, 1990). Hart noted, in a paper published in 1973, that earning and spending in such a city do not readily fit the categories used by economists, and that government policy toward the urban economy has been counter functional. In Hart's view the factual question to be argued was this:

Does the 'reserve army' of urban unemployed really constitute a passive exploited majority in cities like Accra, or do their informal economic activities possess some autonomous capacity for generating growth in the incomes of the urban (and rural) poor? (Hart 1973;p.61).

He answers this question in the affirmative, noting that, "the chronic imbalance between income from wage employment and expenditure needs" (Hart, 1973;p.65), is met by a variety of more or less

desperate and ingenious expedients ranging from petty capitalism to theft, which, taken together, may be treated as the 'informal sector' (Peattie, 1987;p.854).

Hart was of the opinion that:

the distinction between formal and informal income opportunities is based essentially on that between wage-earning and self-employment (Hart,1973;p.68).

Where people who lack wage jobs are, over long periods, sustaining themselves through "informal" income-earning arrangements, and where the typical low-income wage earner may also be supplementing his/her earnings by a variety of other activities, the whole unemployment issue, Hart argues, loses its significance; and the "question of poverty and income levels in general becomes more relevant than the definition of under-employment" (Hart, 1973;p.84).

It was this reasoning which appears to have governed the thinking of the International Labour Office (ILO) mission to Kenya whose report on Employment, Incomes and Equality fairly launched the concept of the "informal sector" into its meteoric career in the world of policy.

The ILO structured its definition of the informal sector around an idea of "a way of doing things" (ILO, 1972;p.6), which was actually a bundle of enterprise characteristics

(discussed in chapter two) thought to be associated, and on many of which data was not readily available (Peattie, 1987; p.857). In Hart's account of it, the informal sector means no more than a range of activities in the subsistence economy of the urban poor. Participants in these self-generated activities are also participants in wage work. The category includes both earned income and transfers, for example, charity and theft.

Since Hart and the ILO, various studies have been done on the informal sector in both the urban and the rural areas (for example, Sethuraman, 1976; Mazumda, 1976; Charmes, 1990; Hugon, 1990), and a number of definitions have been introduced into the literature, the alternatives depending on the policy concerns of the various authors. The sector, however, remains a somewhat "fuzzy concept" (Peattie, 1987; p.856), and its definition is still open to debate as will be seen in chapter two.

The crisis in sub-Saharan Africa and the subsequent adjustment programmes undertaken by African governments under the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank have drawn attention to the issue of women's involvement in the informal sector. Although most studies on the informal sector do not single out structural adjustment programmes as the sole reason for an increase in this involvement, most of them point to it as a major factor (for example, Evans, 1989; Maya, 1988; Loxley, 1988; Tibaijuka, 1988; Green, 1988).

This study, however, intends to go beyond the reasoning that informal sector activities are being carried out by women solely as a means of survival. The basic argument is that the activities are enabling the women to do much more than merely satisfy their practical needs for survival. I argue in this study that the income obtained from the informal sector is providing women with the self-confidence and the independence which they need in order to pursue and achieve their strategic gender needs. Strategic needs are defined by Moser (1989), (drawing from Molyneux, 1985) as those needs that are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men,

and deriving out of this the strategic gender interest identified for an alternative, more equal and satisfactory organisation of society than that which exists at present, in terms of both the structure and nature of relationships between men and women (Moser, 1989; p.1803).

In contrast, practical needs are those needs which are formulated from the concrete conditions women experience in their endangered position within the sexual division of labour, and deriving from this, their practical gender interests for human survival.

Practical needs are usually a response to an immediate perceived necessity which is identified by women within a specific context. Women burdened with the primary responsibility for domestic work, child-care, family health and food provision, are faced with the practical need to earn an income through productive work. Income-earning activities

may satisfy these basic needs at first, but they may, in turn, provide a basis through which the strategic needs of the women can be achieved.

Using the case of women involved in palm oil processing in the two towns of Mattru and Luawa, the study will focus on understanding the reasons behind the increase of women's involvement in the informal sector of the Sierra Leone economy. It is basically an effort to ascertain the economic and political implications of this phenomenon for the women involved, and it arises from a critical need to explore the historical construction of gender and class, the nature of household exchanges, and forms of women's consciousness and struggles.

The issue of women's economic independence as symbolised by success in the informal sector has been little dealt with in literature on structural adjustment and women. Rather the approach is always to view the informal sector activities as something which women resort to because they cannot cope with economic deterioration and they have to supplement and subsidize their husbands' income (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989; Tibaijuka, 1988; Evans, 1988).

Women engaged in this sector are often passed off as illiterate or not well educated and as such they cannot get jobs in the formal sector. The tendency has been to view women as passive recipients of change and victims of forces they do not generate or control. Women are often pictured as part of

the reserve army of labour, being pulled in and out of the labour market merely as a result of capital's interest and strategies (Beneria,1983;p.7). This explanation, however, takes no account of women's own resistance and struggles that derive from a strategy of their own, although these may be mostly subject to significant constraints due to their frequent subordinate position in society.

The fact that the informal sector has seen a significant expansion during the era of structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa, that is, during the last decade, is regarded by the World Bank as a very positive development that illustrates the effectiveness of their structural adjustment policies. Specifically, it is said to illustrate the ability of economic deregulation to elicit a dynamic, entrepreneurial response even under very difficult circumstances (Bienefeld, 1988). This argument could be viable in the sense that anything people do voluntarily must represent the best available option that is open to them at the time.

However, an examination of the context within which these activities are created and within which they expand or stagnate, reveals that their significance cannot be derived from such a 'narrow and simplistic premise' (Bienefeld 1988, p.21). In fact, the rapid growth of the informal sector may have two, very different, implications. On the one hand, it may, indeed, represent a vitally important, positive development contributing to an expanding and open-ended

process of accumulation and growth; on the other hand, the same set of activities may merely represent a marginalized population's relatively desperate efforts to survive in the "nooks and crannies of an unstable, polarised and hostile environment dominated by economic actors on whom they are largely dependent" (Bienefeld, 1988; p. 21).

There is no doubt that structural adjustment has had negative effects on women in all the countries concerned and that women, in order to survive, have resorted to informal sector activities (Bienefeld, 1988; Evans, 1989; Tibaijuka, 1988; Maya, 1988; Loxley, 1988a). The problem, however, is that there is a possibility that informal sector activities are not just being regarded by women as a survival strategy. It is just possible that there are some other, subtle and underlying reasons for the growing participation of women in this sector. It must be realised that the informal sector existed before any structural adjustment activities were instituted, and would exist with or without structural adjustment.

It is difficult therefore, to isolate this question of associating some of the entries of women into this sector with structural adjustment. Maya (1988; p. 388) proposes that research into this topic may be done effectively in two ways. First, by statistically correlating the entries into the sector with structural adjustment events, or second, by questioning participants on their reasons for entering the informal sector. She argues that surveying participants in the

informal sector for reasons of entry is essential in order to isolate purely survival strategies from those activities which are aimed at empowerment and transformation.

Various reasons are given for the existence of informal sector activities. For example, Hugon (1990), sees involvement in informal sector activities as a means of circumventing laws and regulations; the result of an inappropriate legal framework, or a sign of the breakdown of the central government, and a response to underdevelopment and poverty. These apart, there is the possibility of the informal sector being used as part of a strategy which goes beyond survival to the transformation of existing social relations of oppression and disadvantage; a means of achieving economic independence, and hence earning more respect from both spouse and society.

As Elson (1990) argues, an economic crisis is not just a turning point for capital accumulation. It can also be a turning point for a whole range of social institutions and practices. Oppressed and disadvantaged groups might find that change creates conditions for new forms of struggle, not only to preserve pre-crisis social relations, but to restructure production and social relations and to forge new links between them. An economic crisis, she notes,

may produce new political configurations (understanding politics in a very broad sense), new alliances and new demands with some potential for changing the terms of the social, and economic restructuring... that is more favourable to oppressed and disadvantaged groups (Elson, 1990, p.5).

Some examples of transformation brought about by crisis that she cites includes the New Deal arising from the crisis of the 1930s in the USA; the Welfare State, from the crisis of the 1930s in Europe; and the Nationalist and liberation movements from the crisis of the 1930s in several parts of the South.

What appear to be survival strategies made necessary by structural adjustment policies may be evolving into transformation strategies. Women's increasing participation in informal sector activities is a step in improving the treatment that they get in society in general and in the household in particular. It signifies a move towards changing or restructuring gender relations both in the household and in society at large. As research by Davies (1979) shows, the informal sector is taking on a social security role for the poor; "the reserve army can now support itself".

Joeke (1987) points out the importance (to women) of earning money. She argues that receipt of direct money earnings by women marks an improvement in status. She cites three reasons for this within the household:

Paid work is perceived to make a higher contribution to the family's channelling of money to the household and so goes along with a larger say in household decisions; [second], payment of money can carry conversely a threat of withdrawal of that money, which gives the earner greater bargaining power within the household. [third], increased status confers better material provision, that is, increased claims on the share of consumer goods within the household (Joeke, 1987; p.21).

The entry and/or persistence of women in the informal sector can also be studied from the point of view of resistance. A spate of studies from Africa have shown circumstances where peasants, often women, have resisted in subtle ways some form of repression either by states or by other structures within the political economy. For example, Mackenzie (1986) shows how women in the coffee producing areas in a smallholding district in Kenya withdrew their labour from coffee production on their husbands' farms because remuneration for the crops was given via cooperatives to their husbands even though women did most of the work. Her work illustrates how Kenyan women formed self-help organizations to combat the changes in socio-economic structures of their society which have affected them in a negative way.

In another study Mackenzie illustrates how Murang'a women have adapted the customary practice of "ngwatio" to the modern metaphor of "harambee" to acquire some control over access to land and the product of their labour (Mackenzie, 1990). As Davidson (1988) notes, "Women's self-help efforts are providing an alternative to individual women's problem of land scarcity" (Davidson, 1988, p.172). Bienefeld (1988) also cites low morale, increased absenteeism, more moonlighting and reduced performances as common action by women in Tanzania in response to cutbacks in government spending on welfare.

One way in which survival strategies could develop into transformation strategies is through collective organisation

or participation. Using Wolfe's (1983) definition, Goulet (1989) sees participation as designating

the organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control (Goulet, 1989; pp.166-167).

Goulet argues that an oppressed group's refusal to accept its condition is always the latent bearer of affirmations of possible new orders. He argues that those who begin "by saying 'No' to their oppressors soon feel the need to utter some 'Yes' of their own" (Goulet, 1989; p.167). Thus, he continues,

even the spontaneous mobilization of a powerless group to defend itself against destruction bears within it latent seeds of organisation for multiple new developmental actions. What may start as a perfect survival strategy may develop into a strategy for empowering people to take control of their own lives, to obtain, or pressure others to obtain, some benefit from society at large or some particular group therein (Goulet, 1989; p.167).

Money makes people conscious of their strength, actual or potential. That strength may be utilised not only to resist injustices, but also to gain a deeper understanding of one's situation and consider alternative plans of action, including future or contingent action. As Taylor points out,

Structural adjustment policies may have brought to local people the realisation that they cannot depend on the state either to meet their basic needs or to further their development objectives. As a result, they are taking their destiny into their own hands to a much larger extent than ever before (Taylor, 1992; p.246).

Women's involvement in the informal sector could indeed be viewed as a survival strategy. And yet it is also necessary

to start asking other questions in a bid to ascertain the underlying reason for the persistence in and prevalence of the informal sector. The very poorest women, on the barest margins of survival, may be unable to do more than desperately seek to adapt to the adverse conditions through existing strategies. But for those able to survive, there may be the possibility of using their coping mechanisms towards strategies which go beyond survival to transformation of existing social relations of oppression and disadvantage (Elson, 1990).

1.2 THESIS ORGANISATION

The thesis has been divided into six chapters. Chapter two reviews some of the concepts I shall be dealing with throughout the work. The chapter examines, first, the literature on structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa and the way in which women have been affected by the policies, using studies on women and structural adjustment that have been commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Second, I consider the various definitions and perceptions of the informal sector and the conceptual problems that this leads to. Third, the literature on palm oil processing, and the role of women in the activity is discussed.

In a bid to place women's work and the ways in which it is affected in a broader context, chapter three examines the severe economic crisis that Sierra Leone has experienced during the last two decades, and the country's struggle with

the IMF and the World Bank to adopt and maintain structural adjustment policies. In chapter four, the results of the primary research carried out with palm oil producers in the two villages of Mattru and Luawa in the Jong chiefdom are presented and analyzed. The chapter gives details of the methodology used in the research, and identifies the problems experienced.

Chapter five discusses the potential impact of income-generating activities on women's position in society. The restructuring of gender and social relations through the independence and empowerment of women is examined, as well as the effectiveness of women's organisations in bringing about empowerment. The conclusion suggests guidelines and recommendations for future research with regards to the link between income-generation and the empowerment of women.

CHAPTER TWO

STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT IN AFRICA AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR:

A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is organised to review literature relating to structural adjustment, the informal sector and palm oil processing in Africa. The main focus is on structural adjustment because the study has been derived out of questions which arose from gaps in the literature on structural adjustment and its impact on women. The literature has mostly been centred around women's struggles for survival through the informal sector because of the hardships brought on by structural adjustment programmes. Studies have yet to focus on women's achievement of strategic gender needs through the income they derive from the informal sector. This study therefore focuses on the use of the informal sector by women as a means through which their practical and strategic needs can be met in spite of the economic hardships imposed by adjustment programmes.

Given this focus I first review research on women and structural adjustment in sub-Saharan Africa, following a brief background account of the economic crisis in sub-Saharan Africa, the consequent involvement of the IMF and the World

Bank and the Economic Commission for Africa's (ECA) alternative agenda. Although the price of adjustment has obviously been paid by most members of these countries, this thesis will focus on women and children for reasons that will become apparent later in the work.

Next I review literature on the informal sector. Emphasis will be placed on providing an understanding of the concept of the informal sector from its beginnings in the early 1970s and the various ways in which the term has evolved over the years. The extent to which gender issues and the rural informal sector are incorporated in the literature will also be examined. Finally, I will highlight the importance of palm oil both as an export commodity and as a major source of rural income for women in Africa over the years. I will argue that, apart from being a significant activity in the informal sector for women who are struggling to survive under structural adjustment programmes, participating in palm oil processing is also an important variable with respect to the achievement of strategic gender goals for women.

2.2 STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMMES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Since the beginning of the last decade, about forty African countries have pursued programmes of economic reform supported by balance of payments loans from the IMF and/or the World Bank, and shaped by the policy conditionality attached to these loans. The Fund and the Bank are, unquestionably, the

dominant sources of influence over African economic policy formulation at this point in time and are likely to remain so in the foreseeable future (ECA, 1989a; Loxley, 1988).

The fact that so many African countries should acquiesce in the wholesale encroachment on national sovereignty which is implied by conditionality is a measure of the severity of the economic crisis (Loxley, 1988; p.2). The depth of the crisis is manifested by the following symptoms: twenty-eight of the forty-three less developed countries are now in Africa; sub-Saharan Africa's Gross Domestic Product averaged only 0.4% growth per year between 1980-1987 and per capita income declined 2.6% per year over the same period (ECA, 1989a; p.5). Furthermore, agriculture and food production in general have declined and failed to keep up with the high growth of population. Many of the industries in Africa now operate well below capacity, and physical and social infrastructure rapidly deteriorated over the period preceeding the adoption of structural adjustment programmes. (ECA, 1989a, p.1).

The crux of the problem in sub-Saharan Africa lies in a chronic lack of congruence between domestic economies and the international economy. This means that, given existing structures of production and patterns of consumption, African countries are unable to earn the amount of foreign exchange required for continued steady growth in income per capita, let alone for full employment growth or steady improvements in social welfare (Bienefeld, 1988, p.3).

The causes of the crisis are partly external: adverse terms of trade, fall in export demand, rising debt service and havoc caused by drought (for example, Ghana in 1983) (ECA, 1989a; Loxley, 1988;). Domestic policy shortcomings are also, without question, a major contributory factor, as governments either failed to adjust to new external realities (Bienefeld, 1988; p.3), or pursued policies which themselves generated further economic difficulties (Loxley, 1990). Overvalued exchange rates, low prices for export products, unproductive investments and excessive state intervention are the most frequently cited policy failures.

African countries adopted IMF/World Bank adjustment programmes with broadly similar changes in economic policy aimed at the need to earn more and spend less. This was done through a series of measures viz, devaluation, movement to an auction system for exchange rate determination, increases in domestic currency prices for exports, reduced budget deficits, price liberalization and increased incentives to the private sector, a decrease in the size of the civil service and cutbacks in government expenditure (Loxley, 1988; Bienefeld, 1988).

The essence of this orthodox package lies in the heavy emphasis placed on competition and the market. The policies suggest that the difficult economic conditions that these countries face must be tackled by allowing market forces to play a more dominant role in the allocation of resources. This

ideology reflects the belief that the market is ultimately the best instrument for allocating resources because it takes into consideration both the strength of the demand for a particular good or service and the real opportunity cost of providing that good or service (Bienefeld, 1988). Because such neo-classical theory seems to work in the industrialized and wealthy North, it is assumed that it will not only work in the South, but will also be the solution to its problems.

Bienefeld (1988), however, argues that while the market works well in societies which use it to their advantage and who retain the capacity to exercise some significant control over its direction and priorities, that same market is inefficient in societies that are not in a position to regulate its operation effectively or to control the political forces that its operation generates. The very different structure of Africa's economy, its position in the world market and its specific history and culture, need to be considered in the implementation of such policies.

The 1980s have therefore been a decade of nearly continuous adjustment efforts in many developing countries; yet in most of them the decade has seen economic and social regress. Per capita incomes have fallen significantly in the regions affected, and, in spite of the adjustment efforts, most countries are

as far from being in a satisfactory external position from which they can resume economic growth as they were at the beginning of the decade (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989, p.21).

The falling incomes and rigorous adjustment experienced by most of these countries have been accompanied by a significant deterioration in human conditions.

After nearly a decade of adjustment, African economies are still exhibiting major imbalances. The debt burden has risen further and the external position of the countries has continued to deteriorate. Cuts in investment in infrastructure, the productive and the social sectors have reduced the economic growth potential. Continued increases in population and the pressure to produce subsistence crops for daily survival or for sale, have resulted in the inability to safeguard their livelihood base, and have further weakened the ecological balance (Tibaijuka, 1988; Evans, 1989; Loxley, 1990). As the ECA states, "increased poverty induces the poor to degrade further the physical environment as they struggle to eke out a precarious living" (ECA, 1989b;p.11).

Taking this argument further, Redclift (1984), links this sort of environmental degradation not only to poverty but to the international power structure and the division of labour. He points out that:

Poor people impose excessive strains on the carrying capacity of the natural environment because of the structural demands imposed on them. The need to increase cash income, repay debts and meet the necessities of the household impinge upon poor people while they are held in a vice by the terms of trade which govern inter-sectoral and international relations. As 'development' removes them from control over their own environment, this control is assumed by transnational companies and capital intensive technologies. As some activities, especially those of women, are transferred from the household to the market place, the environment is relocated not as part of a local system of production, but as a link in the international division of labour. (Redclift, 1984;p.130)

As a result of criticisms about the deteriorating human conditions created through structural adjustment programmes, UNICEF and other institutions are advocating "adjustment with a human face" (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart, 1988). UNICEF's argument is that the costs of adjustment are too great; that because poor households are unable to absorb these costs, there are bound to be absolute declines in the standards of living, and irreparable damage to children through malnutrition (Cornia, Jolly & Stewart, 1987;p.141-142). These authors have therefore proposed a series of measures designed to be added on to orthodox structural adjustment programmes to lessen or cushion their effects on social welfare. The emphasis of these alternative measures is on an appeal to humanitarian values. As Elson (1990) argues, the UNICEF approach:

supposes that more expansionary macro-economic policies are the answer, together with better sectoral priorities and more international policy coordination. [The report] does not situate structural adjustment within the context of global restructuring of capital accumulation [but views] households as objects of policy rather than potential actors in political processes through which social relations of oppression and disadvantage may be restructured (Elson, 1990;p.8).

There is a need for some fundamental shifts in policy before meaningful improvements could be achieved.

Recognising the need for a change in policies, an alternative to these orthodox measures has been put forward by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in the form of the African Alternative Framework-Structural Adjustment Programme (AAF-SAP) (ECA, 1989b). Contrary to the orthodox policy measures, the ECA believes that structural adjustment programmes as they stand are flawed because they fail to recognise or deal with structural deficiencies which characterise African socio-economic systems. As the ECA aptly puts it:

The model which underlies orthodox stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes emphasises almost exclusively the use of competitive-domestic and external- market forces. Such a model is essentially not adapted to the African situation which is characterised by weak production structures and imperfect markets. Also, the programmes' concentration on achieving internal and external financial balances ignores basic structural factors that are important for both economic growth and socio-economic transformation (ECA, 1989b;p.26).

The ECA contends that what is needed, instead, is a transformation from an exchange to a productive economy with the active involvement of all socio-economic groups (ECA, 1989b). Policy directions and instruments should be tailored to the individual needs of each country, with specific consideration of the uniqueness of that society's socio-cultural, political and economic background. The potential result of this proposal is illustrated in figure 2.1.

Fig.2.1: THE AAF-SAP Alternative

Source: ECA, 1989b; p.29.

In order for development to be sustainable, and therefore worthwhile, problems such as poverty, low productivity, inadequate development of human resources, and the lack of physical infrastructure and technology should be addressed. In other words,

the path of adjustment with transformation should aim at simultaneously strengthening the process of the generation, distribution and expenditure of national income (ECA, 1989b; p.28-29)

The ECA believes that 'adjustment with transformation' which seeks to establish a solid basis for development is necessary,

and will take place if the deeper structural weaknesses in the African countries are targeted. The ECA approach, if implemented, will be beneficial to women because it focuses on the operative forces which determine the level and structure of production as well as its distribution between various socio-economic groups. If transformation is to take place, women would need to be empowered in areas such as access to and ownership of land, access to capital and credit facilities, and control over their own resources.

These structural changes would lead to a greater recognition of women's contribution to the well-being of both the state and the household; and thus to a better 'status' in society.

2.3 EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PROGRAMME ON WOMEN

The Commonwealth Secretariat, in Engendering Adjustment for the 1990s, attempts to put into perspective the adverse effects of structural adjustment policies on women. It documents the adverse effects that economic crisis and adjustment policies in the 1980s have had on women, and "through them, society as a whole" (p.17). The report focuses on women in their "four" relevant roles viz, producers, home managers, mothers and community organizers. For each of these roles, the report identifies areas of potential impact of structural adjustment policies. In their role as producers the

report draws attention to the fact that the few women who are employed in the formal and agricultural sectors are being squeezed out with retrenchment and as more men lose their jobs. While this situation varies from country to country, in both the public and private sectors women are sometimes more prone to lose their jobs than men or "having lost their jobs, unlikely to gain others" partly because of the prevalence of the "male bread winner ethic" and the weakness of women as a pressure group (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989; p.55).

The report also highlights some of the problems women in agriculture face under adjustment. In spite of the fact that policy makers have sought to improve incentives for farmers under adjustment, women have often been neglected in terms of access to inputs, pricing policy and land reform. The report argues that there is substantial evidence to suggest that the full potential of agricultural incentives has not been realised because of the failure of policy makers to take account of the exact nature of women's role in agriculture.

Citing evidence from the Ivory Coast and Ghana, the report shows that the additional incentives have primarily benefited the producers of export crops (cocoa and cotton). The incentives have hardly affected the production of subsistence crops, which predominate in the poorest parts of each country and in which women are most heavily involved (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989;p.59).

The high prices of food, education and health services which accompany adjustment policies of devaluation, removal of subsidies and increase in user fees have affected women in their role as home managers. Most of them have had to change their consumption patterns by purchasing cheaper and less nutritious foods. As mothers, (and often as carers of old or sick relatives), women are affected by the cutbacks in government expenditure on education and health, by the decline in household incomes and by the increasing time they have to devote to income generating activities (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989; p.66).

Lastly economic crisis and structural adjustment have both increased the need for women to cooperate among themselves in community activities, and also made it more difficult for them to do so, as the increasing burden of work has intensified demands on women's time.

The Commonwealth Secretariat proposes a broader approach to adjustment by focusing attention on women's concerns and needs under adjustment programmes. It argues that the adverse effects of the adjustment policies "were not necessary", and suggests that efforts be made to create adjustment policies that would protect the role of women and "enhance rather than diminish their contribution to economic and social welfare" (p.18). In order to achieve this, the report recommends that the crisis should be dealt with in another way:

the crisis of restructuring should be turned to opportunity - the opportunity of regaining momentum for women's advance and setting the stage for further progress in the decade ahead, just as earlier the second world war and the struggle for independence provided a context favourable for three decades of advancement for women (1989;p.18).

The Secretariat believes that:

It is only by recognising the economic necessity of protecting the social base, particularly as it affects women, and by incorporating these concerns into policy, that adjustment can achieve the desired results (1989;p.4).

The report, however, gives a very dismal view of women under structural adjustment as passive victims. It is guilty of the conception of women as suffering, without any option and without doing anything about it.

The section on the informal sector is particularly depressing. The report states that "adjustment policies have dual effects on the informal sector, each acting to depress earnings" (1989;p.620. On the one hand, income-generating opportunities lessen with the decline in formal sector jobs and incomes; and on the other hand, the numbers in the sector increase as a result of formal sector retrenchment and more people desperately seeking some sort of livelihood (1989;p.62).

Although this might be true in the sense that the increasing number of people in the sector will create a glut in the market and consequently create competition, (for instance, as happened in Latin America where it is estimated that average earnings in the informal sector fell by over a

quarter during 1980-1985 (1989;p.62)), the fact that women are earning more money in this sector should not be ignored. This fact is mentioned (although casually) later in the report: "in Zambia, the importance of women's informal sector earnings to total family income has increased dramatically in the 1980s" (1989;p. 23).

What is striking in this report is the lack of evidence from actual baseline or participatory research. Although a lot of reports from different areas have been put together, it is not clear how those pieces of research were carried out. The fact that the increasing importance of the informal sector to women is barely mentioned is indicative of this fact. This is unfortunate as it is the results of such a report that decision makers use to formulate policies. More time is spent in analyzing statistical data than on doing participatory research and getting the women's point of view. The victim is perceived as passive and should remain so whilst policies are made on its behalf.

Elson (1990) makes a more rigorous theoretical analysis of women's position under structural adjustment. Her work differs from that of the Commonwealth Secretariat and UNICEF in that it presents a critical evaluation of the 'survival' role that women are envisaged as playing. Elson argues

for a gender-aware approach to economic policy and to the household, and suggests that strategies which are adequate to women's needs must focus beyond economic restructuring to a restructuring of the social relations which constrain women (Elson, 1990;p.1).

Elson maintains that structural adjustment policies are one-sided, involving,

the destruction of real economic activity, and attempting to reconstruct new forms of production without a corresponding destruction of financial capital, and a corresponding reconstruction of international financial systems and international financial flows (Elson, 1990; pp. 3&4).

Structural adjustment programmes, she continues, should go further than a piecemeal country by country adjustment of internal economic structures, to an adjustment of the private international financial system. Without this commitment, conditions of economic crisis will likely persist for the foreseeable future in many parts of the world.

Elson agrees that, indeed, structural adjustment programmes have had negative effects on poor households, with women and children being affected the most. But she disagrees with some aspects of the alternative approach proposed by UNICEF. The advocates of Adjustment With A Human Face (1988) do not concentrate on the issue of empowering the poor. They prefer to talk about "protecting the vulnerable", their argument being that structural adjustment programmes could be redesigned to reduce the costs to poor households and enhance their capacity for survival during periods of economic crisis. The authors are concerned with protection, survival, adjustment, but not with transformation. Public expenditure is to be restructured and better targeted, but the social relations of the state are not discussed. (1990; p. 9). Elson's

argument is that

if the objective is the restoration of higher growth rates and the creation of a more humane society, then this requires some degree of transformation of social relations of production and reproduction. Adjustment with a human face thus has to be linked with strategies for struggle as well as for survival (Elson, 1990;p.9).

In her discussion about women's needs Elson calls for a gender aware approach which begins from the "intermediate needs that women themselves express, and analyses the interconnection between those needs and strategic gender needs" (1990;p.13). She sees a "connection between resource availability for poor women and greater equality between men and women; between greater resource availability for poor women and the empowerment of women" (ibid). The link she makes between this goal and the market is particularly strong:

If women can sell their labour or their products and get a decent cash income of their own, this lessens their economic dependence upon men, increases their economic value and may increase their bargaining power within the household. Access to a decent income of their own tends to be highly valued by women, not only for what it buys but also for the greater dignity it brings" (1990;p. 14).

The problem with this approach, however, is that she does not follow this up with an in depth discussion of ways in which women can get goods to sell. She focuses a lot on the state and on the 'politics of consumption' which is one part of the question. But a study of the relations between the informal sector and empowerment should probably have followed the theoretical analysis.

Alison Evans' study The Implications of Economic Reforms for Women in Zambia is one of the most detailed micro-level surveys of the impact of structural adjustment policies on women. Her objective was to examine the distributional implications of the economic recovery programme in Zambia for women and her work draws on surveys done in both the urban and rural areas (with a focus on the latter). She found out that in the urban areas, stagnant formal sector employment, rising consumer prices and falling real wages have "contributed to the expansion of own account or self-employment activities in the informal sector" (Evans, 1989;p.357).

Her data indicate that a large number of women participate in the informal sector (see Table 1). The women are "generally from lower income households and are either supplementing their husband's (or their own) formal sector wages or are providing the main source of income as heads of households" (Evans, 1989;p.357). From the survey, Evans found that the women within this sector, lacking the resources or skills to develop their earning capacity, were mostly confined to petty trading of fruits, vegetables and home processed foods for very low returns.

In contrast to men, therefore, the majority of these women - young and old - are permanently entrenched in low-level trading for want of better and more lucrative employment opportunities and these conditions have worsened since the economic crisis in Zambia. She, however, goes on to say that

the informal sector is an essential source of income for women in joint households as well as where women are heads of households.

TABLE 2.1

WORKING POPULATION BY EMPLOYMENT STATUS
LUSAKA URBAN 1985

Employment Status	Male %	Female %
Employer	3.1	1.5
Own-account worker	15.9	31.6
Paid employee	79.0	60.0
Unpaid family worker	2.0	6.9
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Cited in Evans (1989) Lusaka Urban Labour Force Survey, 1987.

Evans' survey found that economic reforms have had mixed effects in rural areas. Drawing on micro-level studies (Evans and Young, 1987; Munachonga, 1986), she contends that the effects of the reforms are highly variable between and within households. For example, small-scale farm households which are able to grow hybrid maize (for which producer prices were increased) have been better off since the reforms, compared to households which grow only the 'traditional' staple crops i.e cassava, millet and sorghum. However, the study by Evans and Young in Northern Zambia indicates that the benefits of improved maize income do not accrue evenly within these households, since household members possess different degrees of bargaining power (Evans, 1989;p.37-38). Men tend to be in

direct control of maize income and generally make the decision on how that income is to be spent. Although women provide more than 50% of the labour time for maize, they have only minimal control over the maize income or subsequent expenditure (ibid,1989;p.38). The women normally control income from the sale of other less lucrative crops, which have not been affected by the policy changes.

In real terms therefore, the value of 'women's income' has failed to keep pace with 'men's income' and this has direct implications for household consumption patterns (Evans, 1989, p.38).

Evans' work also indicates that rising consumer prices and shortages of essential commodities have affected women both as household managers and as direct consumers. Data from Munachonga's (1986) survey suggest that women in the rural areas were doing 'piecework' directly in exchange for food and commodities that had become increasingly expensive and more difficult to find in rural shops.

Women were finding it difficult to cope with the increasing demand for crops (for example, hybrid maize production) as they were often poorly endowed with labour. They therefore had smaller cultivated areas and relied on crops and activities that required less labour generally and less male labour in particular.

One positive trend with respect to women's income was the case of rising cash income which was found amongst women

producing home-brewed beer (Evans, 1989;p.48). In fact one piece of research by the Adaptive Research Planning Team in the Northern Province of Zambia showed that during 1985/6, in three sample areas, beer production was the most lucrative source of off-farm incomes, and more lucrative than most on-farm activities and more so than all on-farm activities except for sales of maize and beans (Evans, 1989;p.48).

The increase in beer production was not without its negative effects. It led to a decline in household food stocks because of the increasing amounts of maize and millet used to produce the beer. There was also a rise in the level of domestic conflict due both to the rise in beer consumption and to the increase in income under women's control.

Evans' study is important in that it highlights the increasing involvement of rural women in informal sector activities. Contrary to the belief that rural households are able to meet most of their subsistence needs from own production, Clark and Keen, (cited in Evans 1989) observed that the subsistence farming sector:

has borne the brunt of the recession in all aspects. There is still considerable migration to the towns and those left behind (often female-headed households) cannot provide the labour needed for farming, non-farm and wage labour activities and usually cannot afford to employ labour. Their poverty is compounded by the shortage of labour resources (Evans, 1989;p.39).

The tremendous amount of informal sector activities going on in the rural areas could be linked at a conceptual level to a

need for a change in social and economic relations.

The study by Evans and Young (1987) also brought out instances of the intensification of the struggle between women and men in the household. This was in relation to the process of intra-household income allocation and control. The labour allocation survey revealed that:

a major interest among men in cultivating hybrid maize was to gain direct control over cash income ... Men tended to control the disposal of the crop (to the marketing union) and to organise spending of any profits either on large purchases for the household, or on themselves, or to reinvest in maize by purchasing inputs for subsequent seasons (Evans 1989;p.42).

Evans notes that some wives received a proportion of maize profits for purchasing clothes for themselves and their children. This share of profits was however, totally inadequate to meet all the needs of the women. Although "women were more or less in direct control of any income accruing from the sale of other food crops" (Evans,1989;p.42), the income from these other crops was well below what was earned from selling maize, and in any case "the purchasing power of such income was declining as crop prices failed to keep pace with the prices of processed and manufactured goods" (ibid). It is this sort of situation that led to women's withdrawal of their labour in Kenya, as documented by Mackenzie (1986).

Tibaijuka (1988) conducted research in Tanzania for her paper: The Impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes on Women: The case of Tanzania's Economic Recovery Programme.

Unlike Evans' study, Tibaijuka concentrated in the urban

areas, basing her analysis on a household sample survey in Dar es Salaam. The study indicated that 86.7% of the population in Tanzania live in rural areas; of these 97.8% engage in farming and are responsible for most farm operations both in food and cash crops; and yet, rural women also engage in non-farm economic activities to earn cash incomes. Such activities include petty trading, beer-brewing, production of handicrafts and as hired labour. Some women have also been working through informal (and formal) cooperative groups in activities such as communal farming, small-scale industries, in bars and beer halls, restaurants, shops, lodgings, poultry keeping, weaving and so on.

From her surveys, she found that the proportion of urban women employed in the formal sector was 14%. 73% of the women in the survey were either working at home or in the informal sector, and 13% were self-employed. After isolating the minimum household expenditure per day in Dar es Salaam, Tibaijuka concluded that the entire wage can only support 14% of the minimum food requirements. This goes to confirm the (by now well known) fact that none of the households in Dar es Salaam, low income or high, lives on its income. She sees women as being particularly adversely affected because "it is the woman who is responsible for the actual day to day management of the home" (Tibaijuka, 1988;p.37).

The results of her surveys in the city therefore showed that women are the most active participants in "income

generating activities" (IGAs), her term for the informal sector. 70% of the 134 women interviewed were involved in some kind of an income generating activity including staple farming, vegetable gardening, petty trading and beer brewing/selling. Using the data in table 2.2, she argues that the fact that the reported minimum earnings are close to the minimum wage shows that women find it worthwhile to undertake income generating activities in which "they are fairly successful" (Tibaijuka, 1988;p.38).

TABLE 2.2: LEVELS OF MONTHLY INCOMES REPORTED BY SAMPLE WOMEN FROM IGAs, DAR ES SALAAM, NOV. 1988.

Shs/month	Frequency	%	cumulative %
1,000	19	31.1	31.1
2,000	15	24.6	55.7
3,000	7	11.5	67.7
4,000	7	11.5	78.7
5,000	5	8.2	86.9
6,000	4	6.6	93.4
7,000	3	4.9	98.4
90,000	1	1.6	100.0
Total	73	100	

Source: Tibaijuka: Survey Data, Nov, 1988.

Her conclusion is that the workload of urban women has

increased tremendously in urban areas from a state where most women were merely housewives working in the home to a stage where they have to put up with long working hours close to those put up by their sisters in rural areas" (Tibaijuka, 1988;p.42).

Lacking in both studies is the follow-up of these 'informal sector' or 'income generating' activities to

discover the politics underlying them. It is not enough to say that women are experiencing difficulties and that they are doing certain things as a direct response. It is necessary to explore exactly what these women are doing, how they do it, how they feel about it and the advantages/disadvantages that they see in what they are doing.

Evans (1989) had an excellent opportunity to make such a link. Although she took notice of the fact that in the areas studied, hybrid maize income was largely under male control despite the fact that women supplied proportionately more labour time in its production, she does not attempt to make any connection between such social and economic relations and the switch to informal sector activities, either as a survival strategy, or as a resistance strategy. Since beer production was obviously the most lucrative source of off-farm income, and more lucrative than most on-farm activities (Evans, 1989;p.43), it would have been interesting to follow this up and try to discover any other reason besides structural adjustment, for the switch.

Maya's study in 1989: Structural Adjustment in Zimbabwe: Its Impact on Women, although concentrated in the urban area too, is one of the few that does not come out with a specific conclusion that the increasing involvement of women in the informal sector can be solely attributed to structural adjustment policies. Maya recognises that the sector existed as a matter of necessity for various reasons some of which may

be linked to structural adjustment policies. For example, from her surveys she found that because of the removal of food subsidies,

for the low income urban groups it had become vital for women to supplement their husband's income. However, as this had been the practice for those women even during the period of food subsidies, it is not possible to link their entry into the informal sector with the removal of the subsidies, although it obviously did make the need to seek a supplementary income even more acute (Maya, 1989;p.46).

The sample study by Jassat & Jirira (1987) to which Maya makes reference (Maya, 1988;p.48), does not entirely support the view that women entered the informal sector to supplement their husbands incomes. The study indicates that 67% of women entered the informal sector for purposes of gaining personal income, not supplementing family income; and,

even for the 33.3% of women who participated in this sector, it cannot be said that they did so out of the desire to gain extra income for the family more than out of the desire to gain original personal income and to exercise their own right to engage in gainful employment (Maya, 1988;p.48).

Maya, however, also fails to actually identify at least one lucrative informal sector activity and follow up its workings. Although, as noted earlier, her study is based on the urban area, the questions she raises with regards to women's involvement in the informal sector are very pertinent and it might be possible in the future to do similar surveys in the rural areas and follow up the issue into some more detail.

My study is not intended to refute the argument that the recently increased influx of women into the informal sector is linked with structural adjustment; or that it does have its disadvantages. Rather, it intends to use these as a stepping stone to a deeper analysis of the informal sector itself and the internal politics within it. Particularly, I am concerned to take the argument further and link women's activities in the informal sector to the achievement of their practical and strategic needs.

2.4 THE INFORMAL SECTOR

In order to understand precisely what is meant by the informal sector, the objective of this section is to identify the parameters of the informal sector, beginning with the conceptual and definitional problems the term has faced since it was first devised. The review will end with a working definition of the informal sector for the purposes of this study.

The concept of the informal or non-structured sector was first launched in the early 1970s by the International Labour Office (ILO) and the publication of its classic Kenya report: Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya. This report emphasised the fact that depopulation in rural areas and the resultant growth in urban areas did not give rise to high open unemployment as was previously thought, but rather to the development of

small-scale activities which provided rural migrants and urban dwellers who were unable to find jobs in the formal sector with a means of living and surviving.

The research done at this time consequently focused on the informal sector as an important source of employment (Hart, 1973; Weeks, 1975). Depending on the country and the context, the sector was shown to represent between twenty and sixty percent of non-agricultural or urban employment in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Charmes, 1990;p.10).

Although some interest was shown from the outset in the small scale enterprises and their potential, the prevailing idea at the time was to reduce the sector in size gradually. The fact that informal sector employment was important and that it played an essential role in cushioning the effects of rural depopulation was recognised (for example, by the ILO Report); yet the sector was regarded as a "last resort" and a necessary stop-gap, and for any progress to be achieved it had to be reduced in size (Charmes, 1990,p.10; Hugon, 1990, p.70).

With this kind of situation it was thus very difficult to persuade governments to accept the concept and almost out of the question for agencies to propose any initiatives in this sector. The prevailing development theories at that time which focused on industrialisation "at any price", large scale investment projects, high technology, for example, were contrary to such a "cheap" type of development.

Two decades later, in the aftermath of the oil shocks, Third World indebtedness, austerity policies and structural adjustment, attitudes towards the informal sector have changed considerably. With the possibility of getting employment in industry or the modern sector diminishing and with growing numbers of non-agricultural labour force, most job creation now occurs in the informal sector. The sector thus appears as a "new panacea, a miracle cure to be applied as often and as widely as possible" (Charmes, 1990; p.11).

The focus in sub-Saharan Africa and among donor nations has changed from attempts to reduce to attempts to promote and expand the growth generated in this sector. Against a background of financial constraints, of major projects which have become white elephants, and of the inefficiencies of large organisations (Hugon, 1990, p.71) the informal sector is now seen as

an alternative development model demonstrating that the market can succeed where governments fail and that small is indeed beautiful (ibid, p.71).

The approaches adopted by public authorities and aid agencies have changed radically. Present policies now take account of the informal sector and some are indeed entirely devoted to it. This is evidenced by the following:

First, in 1987 the World Bank made the informal sector, the dynamism it demonstrates, and the support it requires the central theme of its next report on long term developments in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 1987). Second, a growing number

of African states are attempting to define the outlines of a policy to support or promote the informal sector; a number of countries have also asked their institutes of statistics to conduct comprehensive national surveys of this sector with the aid of multilateral funding (For example, Guinea, Niger, Mali, Zaire) (Charmes, 1990, p.11). Third, at the October-November (1987) session, the International Conference of Labour Statisticians proposed for discussion by representatives of member countries, a draft statistical definition of the informal sector. The intention was to allow harmonised collection of data at international levels (ILO, 1987).

Although the term 'informal sector' is now widely used, it still remains a hotly debated term which has provoked much discussion. The concept of the informal sector has been associated with poverty, unemployment and underemployment from the time it was first devised. This is unfortunate because although these phenomena may overlap, as Charmes argues, "their intersection is not always, or even often, the essential aspect of what is now by general agreement known as the informal sector" (Charmes, 1990,p.11). The ambiguity apparently originated with the concept itself, and in the successive and sometimes contradictory definitions which were given to the term.

The issues of unemployment and underemployment which were associated with accelerated urbanisation were highlighted by the World Employment Programme. From observations of the fact

that the modern or formal sector (particularly industry) was not able to absorb a growing human resource-power, it became obvious that earning opportunities outside the formal sector had to be found in order to ensure survival. The informal sector thus became a generic and practical term covering all such survival strategies employed by the poor, deprived and uprooted, and in Hugon's words, "the marginal elements of society" (Hugon, 1990,p.70). Defined as disguised unemployment by most economists, the informal sector was a pocket of underemployment with low productivity and low-pay activities which merely served to reproduce the labour force (Charmes, 1990). It was simply the urban transposition of rural underemployment. It was thus natural that the sector should be associated initially with marginality and poverty.

Much of the research, especially in Latin America, took this view, using lifestyles and poverty as its subject of study; and the family, the household or the individual as its unit of observation (Hugon, 1990; Charmes, 1990;). Other concurrent research took a different direction, however, especially in Africa where the enterprise, establishment or activity was taken as the unit of observation and methods of organisation or management as the subject of study (Geertz, 1963). It was the hope that the informal sector, or that part of it which could be "modernised", could be a productive means of absorbing surplus human resource-power.

Since the ILO report on Kenya, a number of studies

following one or other of these paths have been made, thus preventing the emergence of a clear and simple definition of the phenomenon, while the inappropriateness of the concepts and the restricted samples limited the conclusiveness of the findings (Hugon, 1990; Charmes, 1990). There are several definitions of the informal sector, and most can be linked with identifiable schools of thought. The "multi-criteria" definitions, which are generally inspired by the classical theory of competition, view the informal sector as an illustration of the market economy, pure and perfect, but segmented, i.e, not directly linked to the official modern market.

The ILO report on Kenya posed the best known of these definitions. It includes seven criteria, for example, ease of entry, unregulated and competitive markets, reliance on indigenous resources, family ownership of enterprises, small scale of operation, labour intensive and adapted technology, skills acquired outside the formal school system (ILO, 1972; p.6).

Although all of these criteria come together to define a competitive market, some of them are rather complex and cannot be reduced to simple observation. Some authors have therefore made attempts to break them down into simpler and more specific criteria. For example, Sethuraman (1976) gives the following as conditions for membership of the informal sector: employment of no more than ten persons, non-application of

legal and administrative regulations, employment of family members, no fixed working days or hours, no institutional loans, production intended for the final consumer, less than six years of schooling for workers, and, for certain activities, no use of mechanical and electrical energy, and the semi-permanent character of the activity.

The structuralist definitions, which refer to the informal sector as petty production, on the other hand, place more emphasis on the interrelations between the formal and informal sectors. The role played by petty commodity production in the development of capitalism and the determining influence of capital requirements on its existence and vigour are the main aspects of analysis. The informal sector is thus defined by proponents of this approach as:

a pool of labour from which the modern sector takes what it requires and rejects what it no longer needs; as a place of reproduction of the labour force with the lowest cost (Charmes, 1990,p.13).

However, the conventional division of the labour market into "wage employment" and "self-employment" obscures the variety of forms of working relationship, especially the extent to which individual workers and small enterprises may be harnessed to the needs of large enterprises without a legal employment relationship (Hugon,1990; p.14).

The classification into stable wage-work and casual work is intended to form the basis for a focus on the relationships between large and small firms, between firms and workers and between the state and the labour process. Thus, instead of

dividing employment into the two conventional categories (wage employment and self employment), the structuralist definition identifies a continuum stretching from "stable wage-work" to "true self-employment", giving particular attention to the intermediate categories and transition processes along the continuum.

Bromley and Gerry describe this continuum as "casual work", and divide it into four categories: "short-term wage work", "disguised wage-work", "dependent work", and "true self-employment" (Bromley and Gerry, 1979; p.5). These categories distinguish alternative relations of production, as they affect the individual worker. They also have ramifications at the aggregate level in terms of the types and structure of firms and the composition and nature of social classes.

The categories along the continuum are described by Bromley and Gerry as follows:

1. **Short-term wage work:-** This is recognised as "wage-work" in law but does not carry all of the benefits which are associated with long-term wage work. There is no assurance of continuity of employment, and the job is often paid and contracted periodically e.g by the day, week, month or season.
2. **Disguised wage-work:-** With this type of work a firm or group of firms directly appropriates part of the produce of a person's work without that person legally being an employee. One example is the case of workers who perform specific

productive functions in their own homes in return for a payment by the job or piece. This is defined as sub-contracting in many countries. Usually, a firm supplies its disguised wage-workers with equipment, credit and/or raw materials as a means to increase their production and to tie them more securely to the firm.

3. Dependent Work:- With dependent work, the worker is dependent upon one or more larger enterprises for credit, the rental of premises or equipment, sole supply of raw materials etc. There is normally an appropriation process through the payment of rent, the repayment of credit for example, although this is not as clear and direct as in the case of the disguised wage-work. A typical example is the taxi driver who operates someone else's vehicle, keeping what he · she can earn over and above a fixed rental and running costs.

4. True self-employment:- This is where a person works independently, obtaining an income without engaging in wage-working or dependent working. The truly self-employed worker must rely on inputs provided by others, or the receipt of outputs by others, and on a system of payments in goods, services or money (Bromley and Gerry, 1979;p.9). Thus the truly self-employed worker is dependent upon general economic and social conditions, and particularly on the supply and demand situation for his product.

These categories, although certainly ambiguous, provide a richer and more appropriate focus for studies of contractual

relationships, economic linkages and changes in employment structure, than the more conventional dualist distinction between wage-work and self employment.

The two types of analysis described above involve the description of a certain number of features and yet it is not clear whether all or only some or even just one of these features or conditions must apply at any one time, for an activity to be considered part of the informal sector. In fact, the main criticism which may be made of the concept concerns not so much the dualist character, but the ambivalence of the situations and the heterogeneity of the activities which the concept covers.

The ambivalence results from the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to state that an individual is engaged in an activity in the informal or the modern sector and that he or she is engaged in only one activity in this sector. Indeed, the employees of large enterprises or the public sector now frequently engage in own-account activities and the same applies to wage earners in the informal sector. The dichotomy between the informal and modern sectors thus immediately loses some of its significance.

The heterogeneity of the sector is also very significant: this involves activities which may be illegal or clandestine (moonlighting), carried out in the street ("in the open sun") or at home, and sometimes in small enterprises close to or at least having access to the modern sector (Charmes, 1990;

Hugon, 1990). The range of activities is broad and requires detailed analysis in order to distinguish subsistence survival activities from those which allow accumulation of savings and inflexible and evolutive activities and to determine the role and scale of each of these component elements.

Given the definitional problems of the informal sector, it is difficult to come up with a working definition for the purposes of this thesis which incorporates palm oil processing. As Hugon (1990) argues,

the debate on the criteria to be used to define a field, in order to construct surveys or investigate the dynamics of small-scale activities is not solely academic. It flows from the great variety of object and methods (Hugon, 1990;p.72).

For the purposes of this study, the informal sector will be defined (as in the ILO report) as a sector which is characterised by the following; ease of entry; use of local resources; small scale of operation; highly labour intensive; skills acquired outside the official school system; and markets that are totally unregulated and open to competition. Palm oil processing fits well into this category, fulfilling all the criteria.

The dwindling employment opportunities for women and their increasing financial burden due to structural adjustment programmes are enough incentive for women to participate more fully in the informal sector. Oil palm is a local resource which women can use without going through the rigours of official channels. It is easy to participate in the processing

of palm oil, the only problem being the availability of funds. The household is usually the unit of production, with labour provided by family members. No specific skills are required to process palm oil and the marketing of the oil is totally unregulated and competitive. The entrepreneurs of this activity are dependent on macro-economic and social conditions for the success of their enterprise.

2.5 WOMEN AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The literature on the informal sector, until recently, has been focused on the activities of men in the urban areas. The ILO report of Kenya, for instance, based its analysis of the sector on surplus male migrant labour which had to be employed somehow. As such the activities that are mostly defined as being in the informal sector (for example, Hart, 1973; Sethuraman, 1976; Hugon, 1990; Charmes, 1990) are those that are linked with manufacturing, sales and services like taxi-driving, black-smithing, garages and carpentry, all of which are male dominated.

Also, the studies on the informal sector have been more concerned with distinguishing urban informal sector activities from those activities in the formal sector. For a long time the differences between the rural and urban informal sectors were neglected. Planning towards the promotion of the informal sector therefore concentrated on male dominated activities in the urban areas. For example, Hugon (1990) argues that:

Knowledge of the dynamics of small urban activities is crucial to understanding the self-perpetuation of urban growth and the maintenance, to some extent, of urban living standards despite the wide spread crisis in the modern sector (Hugon, 1990;p.73).

However, the economic crisis and structural adjustment programmes in developing countries have helped to bring about a change in focus. Writing on the deteriorating living standards of the poor and disadvantaged, several authors (for example, the ECAa, 1989; UNICEF, 1988; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989) are concentrating on the plight of women and their work in both urban and rural areas. With stagnating formal sector employment opportunities, and the male bias in employment structures, these authors were forced to look at ways in which women are surviving such economic hardships. The role of women in the informal sector has therefore been widely recognised.

Evans' (1989) study of the Zambian urban labour force, for example, indicated that:

informal sector activities expanded during the period of Zambian economic reform [1985], and during that time the proportion of persons working on their own-account was twice as high for women as that for men (Evans, 1989;p.339). (Table 2.1).

The experiences of women in the informal sector have been different from those of men. Women working in the urban informal sector for example, work as petty retail traders, as market women, as prepared-food sellers or as family workers in household-based enterprises. As data from Evans' study in

Lusaka, Zambia, show, there is a clear gender division of labour in the urban informal sector:

Male operators dominate the more lucrative businesses such as electrical and mechanical repairs, tin-smithing, carpentry and related trades, grocery stores, tailoring and other small manufacturing enterprises. Female operators are concentrated in petty marketing, mainly of food and related items (Evans, 1989;p.339).

In the rural informal sector too, men are mostly involved in manufacturing (Charmes, 1990;p.26) whilst women concentrate on food processing, soap-making and crafts. Due to the fact that male dominated informal sector activities are "more lucrative" (Evans, 1989;p.339), the majority of women in the informal sector are considered to be:

on the borderline of survival, supplementing family income if they are part of a married household, and providing family income when they are unmarried, divorced or widowed. In most countries, they suffer a host of handicaps: the burdens of child-bearing and child-rearing, sex discriminatory legal disadvantages, social disadvantages that include inferior education or complete lack of access to formal education, lack of access to resources and skills, and the cumulation of income-generating and unpaid household tasks (Lubell, 1991;p.100).

Women participating in the informal sector are also generally disadvantaged by lack of access to business credit. Among the particular constraints on access by women to credit are collateral requirements "where ownership is legally vested in male household members but not in females" (Lubell, 1991;p.100). Rarely do banks and other formal credit institutions lend to self-employed women or their informal sector businesses. The lending institutions cite:

the high transaction costs and risky nature of such enterprises, because of the sector in which [the women] operate, as well as their small-scale, low capitalization and their lack of financial records or formal management training (Lubell, 1991;p.100).

It is also relatively easier for male entrepreneurs in the informal sector to obtain loans from government-sponsored financial institutions as for example, is the case in Freetown, Sierra Leone (Lisk & Stevens, 1987;p.196).

The literature on the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989; Evans, 1989; Tibaijuka, 1988) contends that women are meeting their practical needs for survival as a result of their activities in the informal sector. Furthermore, growing awareness of the problems of women has led to the initiation by governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) of many small pilot projects to support economic activity by women. For example, a review of the issues and of some project experiences was published in a Ford Foundation supported issue of World Development (vol.17, no.7, July 1989) on expanding income-earning opportunities for women in developing countries. The discussion touches on themes like access to credit and empowerment. This was all, however, related to planning. What has been neglected in the literature is the measure of success from the informal sector, leading to the pursuit by women of strategic goals of empowerment and independence. This is probably due to the fact that the notion of empowerment to offset the double

disadvantage of being poor and female entails reshaping the legal environment and "implies the organisation of associations of women traders and producers to act as pressure groups" (Lubell, 1991;p.101). More attention needs to be put on specific informal sector activities which enable women to go beyond practical needs to the achievement of strategic needs through their independence and empowerment.

2.6 WOMEN AND PALM OIL PROCESSING IN WEST AFRICA

One activity that has proved to be beneficial to women in the rural informal sector in West Africa is the processing of tropical oil, mainly palm oil. This section focuses on the importance of palm oil production to rural women with regards to employment, survival and independence. P a l m o i l processing is one of the oldest activities among women in West Africa. The palm tree grows wild in most countries and in colonial times a major effort was made to cultivate palm trees on plantations. Colonial governments showed interest in oil palm production as it supplied their (mostly British) agro-based industries with material inputs for the production of cooking fats, margarine, candles, soap and lubricating greases (Mbanafoh, 1992;p.1). This phenomenon explains the appreciable jump in palm oil exports in Nigeria from 45,508 metric tons to 183,360 metric tons, between 1900 and 1960 (ibid;p.2). Palm oil was also exported from countries like Ghana and Sierra Leone.

In West Africa, palm oil is known to be used for medicinal purposes. The bulk of the oil, however, goes into the major uses for food preparation and for industrial production. Palm oil is the main cooking oil used in most of West Africa for preparing several dishes, and for frying. Its nutritional value lies in the presence of vitamin A by which it promotes general growth and helps vision, especially in dim light. The oil is also used locally in the preparation of soap.

In industries, palm oil is used as raw material in the manufacture of a number of consumer items such as baking fats, soaps and detergents, candles and dyestuffs (Micah, 1990;p.91;). An important by-product from palm oil processing is the palm kernel from which palm kernel oil (or nut oil as it is locally known) is produced. Palm kernel oil is used as supplement for palm oil, particularly for frying. It is also used as a traditional treatment for ear infection.

The processing of palm oil is a specialised female task in West Africa. In many cases, apart from cutting down of the fruit bunches, all other post-harvest operations are done by women. Although this work has been done on a regular basis, however, the overall production from the system in most countries indicates that less than half of the potential yield from the cultivated area is being realised (Stevens, 1985; p.301).

In Ghana, for instance, a major handicap that rural women have faced in recent years in the preparation of soap is the inadequacy of the supply of palm oil (Date-Bah, 1984;p.231), Micah (1990) estimates the current internal demand for palm oil in Ghana at between 80,000 and 100,000 metric tons per annum (Micah,1990;p.91). Based on an annual growth in demand of three percent, Ghana's demand for palm oil is estimated at about 200,000 metric tons by the year 2000 (ibid).

Similarly, in Nigeria, in 1985, whilst the projected domestic demand for palm oil was 1,012,000 metric tons, the projected domestic production was only 515,000 metric tons, leaving a gap of 494,000 metric tons (Mbanefoh,1972;p.2). The demand for palm oil now has to be met through domestic production by women as most governments cannot afford to import oil.

It is widely accepted that the failure to realize the potential production of palm oil is due mainly to two factors:

1. The system of palm fruit production. This pertains to the development and adoption of high yielding varieties of oil palm, farm management, supply and application of inputs etc.
2. Technological use. It is believed that there is a great need for technological use in palm oil processing in rural areas in Africa.

Because of this, the studies done on palm oil processing have all focused on improved technologies. There are hardly

any available studies documenting the process by which the women organise and do their work. If the number of women involved in palm oil processing is increasing (for example, in Sierra Leone) it must surely be due to reasons that go beyond survival. In spite of the back-breaking work during the harvesting and processing of the fruits, women still choose this activity over others. One thing that is certain is that a substantial amount of income is generated from this activity. The income gained guarantees women a level of independence and sense of confidence that only personal income can bring. This independence provides the confidence needed to pursue strategic gender goals in the home and in the community.

The literature on palm oil processing among women has failed so far to pursue such issues of women's independence and the measure of success especially with respect to structural adjustment policies. It is certainly necessary to deal with ways whereby women's productivity in palm oil processing could be improved using technological innovation (Micah, 1990; Stevens, 1985; Carr, 1985). Prior to the introduction of technology, however, the activity should be assessed to determine whether it is enabling women to achieve their strategic gender needs. Technology may, in fact, prove to be detrimental to the women if they are not empowered enough to fend off men who might be drawn to the activity because of the available technology.

Studies have shown that even in regions where technology is available, it has not been adopted by the women (Carr, 1985, p.116; Stevens, 1985; p.309). Giving women access to improved technologies that can relieve them of many back-breaking under productive chores on the farm and in the home, and help them to increase their labour productivity is undoubtedly of great potential benefit to rural women and their families; but if the realisation of these benefits is to be ensured, there is still much research to be done on the factors involved in their introduction, acceptance, use and impact.

The review of the literature on structural adjustment, the informal sector and women has given rise to questions which will form the basis to my inquiry.: Are women, in the face of dire economic circumstances under structural adjustment programmes, just struggling to survive through their activities in the informal sector, or are they satisfying both their practical and strategic gender needs through these activities? Why are women persistent in the informal sector? How can planners in governments and donor agencies extend their focus from analyzing coping strategies of women to ensuring and encouraging strategies which go beyond survival to transformation of social relations?

CHAPTER THREE

LOCATING THE CRISIS IN SIERRA LEONE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The past two decades have witnessed the gradual decline in the fortunes of the Sierra Leone State, thereby eroding the living standards of the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans. The impact of the crisis and the capacity to cope vary from one social group to another. However, the most vulnerable groups have tended to be the urban poor, children, women and aged who live off their savings or on pensions.

In the case of women as a social group, their role within the Sierra Leone society has meant that they bear the brunt of the economic crisis. They are also the hardest hit by the negative impacts of the IMF/World Bank stabilization and adjustment policies. Not only are women expected to continue their role as social and biological producers, but these roles have become more burdensome in the milieu of crisis. Women now have to increase their physical effort to maintain the family, by redoubling both their remunerated and non-remunerated tasks. They have to continue to organise the household under more stringent and chaotic conditions.

In June 1986 the boldest structural adjustment programme ever pursued in Sierra Leone was introduced, at the instigation of the IMF, following an earlier series of unconcluded programmes. In principle, determining the impact of the programme on the poor, especially upon women and children, requires the investigation of its impact upon:

- (a) the incomes of low-income households. These can be directly affected via changes in wages or in employment opportunities on the one hand, and via changes in agricultural terms of trade on the other;
- (b) the price and availability of consumption items, especially food, important to low income families; and
- (c) levels of government expenditure, especially in the social sectors, affecting vulnerable groups.

Adequate data do not yet exist, however, in order to address each of these issues satisfactorily. Nevertheless, evidence (for example, Longhurst, Kamara and Mensurah, 1988) does suggest that the selective introduction of the structural adjustment measures and the process of adjustment itself have led to a further deterioration of the living standards and general welfare of the poor. Although it is difficult to separate the effects of adjustment policies from other influences on the economy, such as seasonal factors, linkages can and have been made, and it is my intention in this thesis to attempt to identify the relationship between women's present work and the adjustment policies.

This chapter is divided into three sections: Section one situates women as a distinct gender category in the Sierra Leone society. The section discusses the status of women in Sierra Leone in respect of the following: Women's role in the labour force, their access to and control over land, and women's economic and political independence. In section two, I focus on the nature of the crisis facing the economy and the society of Sierra Leone, the causal factors of this crisis as well as policies which have been taken to arrest the situation, leading to the long and painful route to the International Monetary Fund's/World Bank's structural adjustment conditionalities. In section three I identify the impacts of these policies on women in Sierra Leone, their coping strategies and the effects on their future position in society.

3.2 PROFILE OF WOMEN IN SIERRA LEONE

Women constitute fifty-one percent of the total population of about four million and at least thirty-five percent of the economically active population in Sierra Leone (Lisk and Stevens, 1987;p.182). Three quarters of the Sierra Leone population is rural, of which over half are women (Government of Sierra Leone, 1987).

The position of women in Sierra Leone is variable, influenced by their level of independence, their religious orientation and ethnic group. Traditionally, women are not

regarded as co-owners of the family farm in their own right, but in a subordinate role as unpaid family workers making a contribution to the household economy. Women are legally minors under customary law and as such they have limited rights to the use of land relative to men, under the communal land tenure system. However, marriage contracts under customary law obligate men to provide their wives with a piece of land "to grow vegetables for the daily consumption of their families" (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.21).

These "traditional" practices have been greatly modified through colonialism, christianity and education. The structure of gender relations is now defined more by religion than custom. For example, in the Southern Province which is dominated by christian practices, women have more independence than their sisters in the North where muslim practices are very rigid. Among some ethnic groups in the south (for example, the Mende and the Sherbro), there is a considerable measure of female autonomy and freedom. Women have access to (though not always control over) land and in most cases they have control over the products of their labour in so far as they determine what to produce, the market prices for their surplus and how to spend the money earned. Among the Mende, women, together with men, control labour, land and capital and have access to religious and political power. Women also head households and sections of ruling descent groups and serve as trustees for land and other communal property (Kaplan et

al.;1976;p.91-92; Little,1967; Hoffer,1972;p.151-164).

Traditionally, women operate in separate economic spheres from men. The labour process is characterised by a division of labour by gender, especially for the production of rice (the staple food) and other secondary food crops. In rice farming systems, for example, men supply the bulk of labour in the early part of the growing season, mostly for tasks that are physically demanding (brushing, tree-felling, ploughing and fencing), while women dominate in most of the activities from planting to harvest. Thus men's farming activities are very likely to involve women in some way, while women often have farming responsibilities in which men participate only minimally.

Women often work longer hours and their work involves the more tedious areas of production (Steady, 1985;p.50) (Table 3.1).

TABLE 3.1: MEN AND WOMEN'S WORK IN RURAL SIERRA LEONE

Men	Women	Both
Cut, burn bush	Plant cassava and	Scare birds
Hoe swamp for planting	sweet potatoes	Harvest rice
Hoe mounds for cassava	Transplant rice	Build houses
and sweet potatoes*	seedlings	Make fish
Broadcast seed*	Weed upland farms	nets
Hoe seeds into land*	Harvest vegetables	Distil
Plant rice nurseries	Plant kitchen	spirits
Fence farms	gardens	Market
Set traps in fences	Thresh rice	Make medi-
Make farm shelters	Parboil rice	cine
Cut palm fruits	Hull rice	
Build boats	Dry and preserve	
Fish at sea	crops	
Tap palm wine	Make dry season	
Tailoring	gardens in swamp	
Blacksmithing	Farm groundnuts*	
	Collect wild food	
	and medicine*	
	Make vegetable oil	
	Care for young and	
	old	
	Keep compounds clean	
	Make mats and baskets	
	Fish in rivers	
	Dry fish	
	Make salt	
	Cook	

*Other sexes may do this.

Source: Lisk & Stevens, 1987;p.188.

There has not been any detailed study on the time budget of these women, but available evidence seems to suggest that they spend about eight to nine hours a day during the peak rice-farming season on the farms. They spend the rest of the day fetching water and firewood, cooking, doing household chores, as well as engaging in income-generating activities. Sometimes they have to travel long distances on foot to fetch

firewood and water, and to trade (Stevens, 1985;p.285).

Men and women often have separate responsibilities in the home and this depends on the 'financial status' of the family. Women are often responsible for growing food crops for subsistence consumption throughout the year, and in many cases the woman makes a greater contribution to maintaining the family's material needs. Women's incomes are becoming increasingly vital in meeting these needs as a result of inflation and the fact that economically, the majority of men are not better-off than women.

Because of the greater responsibilities, women have found themselves getting involved in more off-farm income generating activities. These activities usually involve food processing. Basic items of the typical Sierra Leonean diet such as vegetable oils (palm oil, palm kernel oil and coconut oil), cassava products (fufu and gari) and smoked fish are mainly produced by the female members of rural households. Other activities in which women are involved include tie-dyeing soap making, and petty and large-scale trading. For example, when surplus food is produced, it is often women who market it. Women control the marketing of foodstuffs by generating and sustaining a system of long-distance trade involving wholesalers, semi-wholesalers and retailers. Above all, rural women have to combine their role as producers with their domestic roles as housewives and mothers.

National statistics on women's contribution to the labour

force, however, under-represent the large numbers of women actually engaged in productive work. They only reflect official labour force participation and not tasks like child minding, agriculture, housekeeping and trading in the informal sector.

In many rural areas, women's work has been intensified through the out-migration of men. The discovery of diamonds, iron-ore and rutile in the Eastern, Northern and Southern provinces respectively, effectively transformed the rural areas into labour reserves. The consequent depletion of agricultural labour from these areas led to a decline in the level of agricultural production throughout the country and an increase in the demand for food (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.22-23).

Beoku-Betts argues that:

the mining industry severely affected the structure of gender roles in the rural economy. For example, the employment of male migrant workers at subsistence wages often meant that women's participation in the production of food crops and in the daily maintenance of their families was intensified. Their labour also served as a means of supplementing the subsistence requirements of their families which could not be met by the low and insufficient wages paid the migrant workers on the mines. The attraction of the mines also meant that customary male obligations to clear land for subsistence farming was often neglected, with less land being cleared or with land being ploughed that was not fully fallowed. This caused low productivity of crops, depletion of the soil and [of particular relevance to women] very little marketable surplus for those who wanted to seize advantage of the expanding labour market to produce more crops for sale (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.23).

Sierra Leonean women have also been active in traditional and modern politics. In the traditional political system,

women have held executive political offices as chiefs and paramount chiefs (Hoffer, 1972;p.152). In 1970 women headed ten of the eighty-one chiefdoms in the southern part of the country (Kaplan et al.; 1976;p.91-92). Currently, twelve of the 146 paramount chiefs in the country are women. There are also a number of indigenous women's associations with religious, cultural, economic, mutual aid and political functions. A number of them promote women's issues and provide avenues for the development of female leadership. Some have served as auxiliaries to the government in the implementation of several development projects, particularly in the field of education and training (Steady, 1985;p.50).

The deteriorating economic situation in Sierra Leone in the last two decades has worsened the position of women in the country. Structural adjustment programmes have generated negative effects which have directly affected women and children. The nature of this crisis and its impact on the vulnerable population of Sierra Leone is the focus of the next section.

3.3 NATURE AND CAUSAL FACTORS OF THE CRISIS

In the late colonial and early post-independence era (1950-1972), Sierra Leone experienced an average annual growth rate of 7%, which was one of the highest among the economies of the West African sub-region. This growth was accompanied by rising incomes in the agricultural, mining and manufacturing

sectors (Zack-Williams, 1990 p.1). During this period, mining and agriculture remained the twin pillars of economic growth, particularly in the export sector. For example, between 1960-70, agriculture accounted for 33% of GDP, whilst mining accounted for 18%.

In 1969, diamond export alone accounted for 69% of the total value of all exports. Other features of the period include: a relatively low level of inflation (averaging below 5% annually in the period 1960-70); the relatively low balance of payments deficits; and low budget deficit of Le 3 million for the decade or 1.3% of GDP (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (MDEP), 1991; p.123). The period was also marked by large scale public infrastructural investments in road and factory building, designed to foster the government's policy of "open door" so as to attract foreign capital.

However, by the mid-1970s the growth rate achieved in the 1960s and early 1970s started to slow down, due to external and internal factors. The country's economic performance after mid-1970 became poor on most macro-economic indices. By the early 1970s the growth rate had slumped to around 3% a year, and by the second half of the decade, GDP had sunk to under 2% a year (Kamara et al., 1990; p.4 & p.12). After 1980, the economy experienced a steep decline as shown in Table 3.2.

TABLE 3.2: AVERAGE RATE OF GROWTH PER CAPITA 1970-1985

Period	1970-75	1975-80	1980-85
Growth rate	-0.9	-0.7	-5.6

Source: Adapted from Zack-Williams, 1991; National Accounts Statistics: Analysis of Main Aggregate 1985, UN.

The external factors, which cannot be analyzed in isolation from the domestic ones, included the shock to the economy as a result of OPEC oil price increase after 1973, when the Arab Oil Producing Countries used oil as a political weapon against western countries for their seemingly tacit support for Israel. Ironically, this action instead generated internal inflationary pressure and unleashed negative effects on the balance of payments of most developing countries including Sierra Leone. For example, Table 3.3 shows the deficit in Sierra Leone's current account which appeared to be manageable up until the early 1970s, after which it rose dramatically.

TABLE 3.3: BALANCE OF PAYMENT SITUATION FOR SELECTED YEARS 1963-86.

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>VALUE IN \$M</u>
1963	-17.1
1968	-2.0
1970	-15.9
1974	-60.9
1978	-112.0
1979	-179.1
1980	165.1*
1982	162.2*
1984	-22.8
1986	126.0**
1987	-24.3

* The surplus in these years was the product of inflow of loan capital designed to build the infrastructure for the hosting of the Organisation of African Unity conference in 1980.

** The surplus in this year was due to SDR provided by the IMF structural adjustment fund.

Source: S.Kamara et al., 1990; p.10 & 16

The strain on the balance of payment was worsened by the deteriorating terms of trade of the country's major exports. For example, in 1977 the price of a ton of cocoa on the international market was US\$ 3,000, but by 1986 it had slumped to US\$ 600. There was not only a deterioration in the unit value of exports such as cocoa, but there was also a decline throughout the 1980s in the total volume of leading exports. Total volume of cocoa exported fell from 12,500 metric tons in 1983 to 8,600 metric tons in 1986 (MDEP, 1991;p.122).

A similar fall was recorded for palm kernels, as well as diamonds, the latter being the leading export earner accounting for 35% of total export earnings in 1986. This fall was primarily due to the fall in export prices (MDEP,1991;p.123). Recorded diamond exports dropped from 2

million carats in 1970 to 595,000 carats in 1986, and a derisory 48,000 carats in 1988 (MDEP, 1991; p.123). The fall in diamond exports indicates the depletion of the alluvial deposits, as well as the government's inability to control the smuggling of gem stones out of the country.

Similarly, the deteriorating terms of trade, plus the depletion of rich iron ore deposits at Marampa, led to the Sierra Leone Development Company (DELCO) ceasing production of iron in 1975. This was a major blow to the national economy and led to a decline in the social and economic activities of the local inhabitants of Marampa. DELCO had provided employment opportunities and other social amenities for the local people of the district, as well as having contributed immensely to the export earnings of the Sierra Leone economy (Zack-Williams, 1991; p.4).

The crisis, particularly after 1980, brought about a sharp decline in economic performance: growth fell sharply as economic activities in the mining, agriculture and manufacturing sectors stagnated. Taking 1980 as the base year, real GDP fell to approximately 83% and 73% in 1984 and 1989 respectively (Kamara, 1990; p.15).

The fall in economic activities was not reflected in a fall in consumption, and as such there was a rapid decline in savings and investments. For example, total government public expenditure on health fell from Le 12.9m in 1980 to Le 4.3m in 1986, and to Le 2.7m in 1989 (in September 1988, 36 leones =

1 United States dollar; in January 1992, 450 leones = 1 United States dollar) . Similarly, real expenditure on education fell from Le 34m in 1974 to Le 10.2m in 1986 and slumped to Le 6.0m in 1989. Thus, by the end of 1989, Sierra Leone's external debt was in excess of \$1,000m or 128% of GDP (Kamara, 1990;p.20), with little debt servicing ability during the 1980s.

An obvious consequence of the downturn in economic activities was the fall in government revenue, leading to the crisis in recurrent budget. For example, in 1972, the government received 20% of GNP in recurrent revenue; by 1978 this figure had fallen to 17.8% (Kamara, 1990; p.25). However, this fall in government revenue was not reflected in government expenditure which continued to rise right through the late 1970s and 1980s as shown in Table 3.4.

TABLE 3.4: GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE FOR SELECTED YEARS IN US\$M

Year	Revenue	Expenditure
1970	16.0	15.2
1975	14.8	16.9
1976	13.2	16.5
1978	21.4	32.1
1979	18.7	16.8
Average	16.5	19.9
1980	18.1	31.4
1985	7.8	19.5
1986	8.3	23.4
1988	9.8	17.3
1989	8.9	15.9
Average	11.8	24.0

Source: Kamara, et al., 1990, p.17.

The table shows that the problem of recurrent budget deficit became worse after 1975, and by the 1980s it had assumed crisis proportions. In the period 1980-89, Government expenditure exceeded revenue in every single year. This is partly due to the inflated bureaucracy which is designed to fuel the patron-client relationship on which politics is based (Fashole-Luke, 1988).

For example, at the insistence of the IMF, the wage bill was reduced in the financial year 1988/89 by Le 634m, or 40% of the total wage bill of the civil service, with the disappearance of "ghost workers". This is the term used to refer to workers who were no longer in the civil service but whose salaries continued to be drawn by corrupt officials. The government has set up a series of secret surveillance operations to uncover these officials. The reduction in the wage bill was, however, achieved without any significant rise in unemployment (Zack-Williams, 1990; p.4). The return of "ghost workers" in 1989/90 saw the budget over-spent within six months of the financial year (Government of Sierra Leone: 1991/92 Budget Speech; p.2).

The net result of this budget crisis was to increase the money supply, thus unleashing hyper-inflation. By the late 1980s, inflation was running at 171% per annum (Kamara, 1990, p.26); the figure now stands at 124% (Conteh, 1991, p.645). As it will be shown later, the inflationary pressure thus generated is partly the result of measures

implemented by the Government to correct the imbalance in the economy.

The internal factors contributing to the crisis also include the low prices paid to peasant producers for export crops they sold to the state regulated monopoly, the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board (SLPMB). Sierra Leone is bordered by two countries with links to hard currencies: Liberia (US\$) and Guinea (CFA Franc). Because of the lower prices offered by the SLPMB, farmers smuggled their goods across the Liberian or Guinean border, where they not only received better remuneration, but were paid in "hard" currency (Longhurst, et al., 1988; p.26).

Perhaps the most important reason was the Government's lack of financial discipline. Public confidence in the economy was seriously undermined by lack of accountability and the inability of the Government to deliver essential public services. Economic mismanagement and institutionalised corruption tended to intensify leakages of state secrets and smuggling (Zack Williams, 1991; p.4). This last point deserves more than a passing comment as it goes a long way in explaining the current state of affairs in Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, the post-colonial state's central role in the economy, making provision for human resource training, building infrastructure, administering commodity exports, determining policy towards local and foreign businesses, allocating mining licences, import licences and

foreign exchange has made access to its decision making mechanisms a fundamental aspiration of its literate and educated elite spearheaded by its more politically committed members (Government of Sierra Leone, Education and Development Sector Study, 1979; p.8). Such people develop patron-client followings in their competition for, and use of, state power because: (a) they do generally and perhaps genuinely feel a sense of obligation to their ethnic commitments and original 'backers' both in the educational and political stakes; and (b) they need to consolidate support by making available tangible 'rewards' (Fashole Luke, 1988; p.70).

If the basic structure of the economy was created under colonial rule, much of the responsibility for its current predicament has to fall on the Steven's regime which was in power for seventeen years after independence. Having spent a number of frustrating years in opposition, Siaka Stevens developed a finely honed sense of the uses and intricacies of patronage. Having also seen the army intervene, initially at the behest of the defeated Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) government, to deny him the victory his party had so narrowly won in the relatively free elections of 1967, he was better placed than any of his rivals to manipulate the system of patronage (Sesay, 1979; Kamara; 1988; Johnson; 1988). He not only incorporated leading SLPP politicians into his All People's Congress (APC) after assuming power in 1968, but also cultivated clientelist relations with the leadership and other

well-placed individuals of potential opposition groups: the army, labour unions, the intelligentsia and with less success, the students (Fashole-Luke, 1988; P.71).

In foreign policy, Stevens and other key figures in the APC were broadly pro-western in sympathy, life-style and outlook. Not of particular strategic importance, and being one of Africa's smaller states, Sierra Leone is not a 'mover and shaker' in regional let alone international politics. But Stevens has been a loyal member of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the latter having the object of sub-regional economic integration (Sesay, 1981; p.5). The Mano River Declaration, which aimed to enhance economic cooperation with Liberia, was signed in 1973. Guinea subsequently joined the union (Sesay, 1981; p.5).

Relations between Stevens and the military regimes which emerged in Liberia and Guinea after the assassination of William Tolbert and the death of Sekou Toure became strained however. Stevens showed a tendency to shun regimes of a revolutionary kind especially those led by young military officers such as Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings in Ghana, Captain Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso and President Haile Mengistu in Ethiopia. He preferred those regimes, such as Dawda Jawara's in The Gambia, Daniel arap Moi's in Kenya and Kenneth Kaunda's in Zambia, which like his, adopted more pragmatic approaches to government (Fashole-Luke, 1988; p.72).

Further afield, Steven's courted foreign aid assistance from wherever it could be obtained: the Arab Gulf states, China, the European Economic Community (EEC) countries, the Soviet Union and the United States. Hence, in 1982, for instance, Sierra Leone established diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and ratified the Islamic Conference Charter (Fashole-Luke, 1988; p. 72). Economic necessity, rather than religious conviction is the explanation. President Steven's presence at Franco-African summits and Commonwealth gatherings can be explained in similar terms. As documented by Parfitt (1984) for the case of EEC assistance, and by Riley (1989) for rice projects under the United States PL480 programme, even foreign aid was dispensed as patronage. Countries which have a record of insistence on the use of aid for well-defined development activities, such as Canada and Sweden, were not courted.

From the mid-1970s to his retirement in 1985, Stevens' authority, maintained as much by fear as by patronage, was unchallenged. But the price of political stability achieved in this manner has been quite high. The consequences (very familiar in sub-saharan Africa) are seen in a range of arenas, skewing development efforts and undermining more effective means of resource mobilisation and distribution.

3.4 THE LONG AND PAINFUL ROUTE TO THE IMF

In 1979, the cost of staging the OAU conference in 1980 forced the government to its first major encounter with the IMF. Under this agreement the Government received a one year balance of payment support to the tune of US\$ 26 million, to tide it through what was seen at that time as a short term balance of payments problem. This was the first major loan obtained from the Fund by the Sierra Leone government, although, earlier in 1977, a rescheduled loan of US\$ 39 million was obtained from the Paris Club.

In 1980 a three year extended agreement was concluded with the IMF for purchases to the amount of US\$ 200.4 million (Government of Sierra Leone: Economic and Financial Policy Framework (EFPPF), 1990/91-1992/93, 1990; p.2). This agreement was, however, suspended in the following year due to default in the payment of the amount owing to the Fund by the government.

In 1983, there was yet another agreement under the Fund's compensatory funding facility, by which the Government of Sierra Leone obtained loan facilities for purchases to the tune of US\$ 22.3 million. The following year saw the signing of a year's standby support programme of US\$ 51.9 million, but this too was suspended after only \$19 million had been utilised (EFPPF, 1990; p.2).

The flotation of the leone was the major element in the Standby Arrangement agreed with the IMF. The package also

included decontrol of the prices of basic consumer goods, removal of subsidies on rice, petrol and kerosene and substantial increases in the producer prices of the major export crops of coffee, cocoa, palm kernels and ginger. The producer price of rice was also increased. Other reforms to be introduced included the privatisation of rice imports, tightening of fiscal and monetary policies, the introduction of competitive interest rates and the reform and restructuring of public enterprises. Major reductions in daily paid labour in the Ministries of Works, Agriculture and Health were also demanded. Finally, foreign exchange surrender obligations were to be reinforced (EFPP, 1990; p.6). This agreement, like the previous ones, had to be abrogated by the Fund due to both the inability of the Government to honour its debt to the Fund and because of Government's fear of the social and political consequences of implementing all the conditionalities prescribed by the Fund.

All the above agreements were signed during the regime of the late Siaka Stevens whose decision to quit politics in 1985, and to hand over power to his chosen successor, the Force Commander Major General Momoh, was seen by many as an opportunity for a younger person with the vigour and discipline needed to correct the economic ailments of the country, and to implement the Fund's conditionalities. Momoh, who has often described his regime as "the new order" Government, strived at first to distance himself from the by

now discredited administration of Siaka Stevens. It was with this new found vitality that the Momoh regime entered into negotiations with the IMF in 1986. In November of that year, the first long term structural adjustment facility with the Fund was concluded. This was preceded at the behest of the IMF and included "the most ambitious set of reforms....intended to reverse the economy's rapid deterioration since 1980" (Kamara,1990,p.35).

This agreement consisted of a year's stand by agreement, and three-year concessional funding to the tune of SDR 40.53 million under the Structural Adjustment Facility, in return for certain conditionalities which included the following:

- 1) The introduction of a flexible, market-determined exchange rate. This "floating exchange rate" resulted in massive devaluation of the currency within a very short period of time;
- 2) Liberalisation of trade;
- 3) Reduction in the size of the bureaucracy, and government expenditure;
- 4) The removal of subsidies on essential commodities such as petroleum products and rice;
- 5) De-controlling the retail trade, and the ending of the state monopoly in the importation of rice;
- 6) Increase in the producer price for major cash crops;

The government was also expected to honour its debt obligation to the Fund (Kamara, 1990;p.35).

The aim of the agreement was to achieve equilibrium of the balance of payments, exchange rate stability, increase in export earnings as well as the expansion of the import-substitution sector. As far as the Fund was concerned this was a "complete package" and failure to implement any part of the deal would lead to suspension of the agreement. However, in April 1987, after only SDR11.58 million had been used from the drawings, the agreement was suspended by the Fund, because of what the Fund perceived as poor performance. Credit ceilings, domestic and external arrears, government expenditure and the level of bank financing had not been contained in ways agreed to under the structural adjustment programme (Government of Sierra Leone, Budget Speech, 1991/92; p.4).

In general, the interests of the powerful business community had been the main influence on how, and to what extent, the adjustment measures were implemented (EFPPF, 1990; p.1). First, the surrender of foreign exchange by exporters was not properly enforced. The tendency to hold foreign exchange increased as the currency depreciated. Second, the floating of the leone saw sharp price rises for all commodities, irrespective of foreign exchange content: changes in the exchange rate were transmitted literally overnight to markets. Third, the subsidies on rice and petrol were phased out within six months of the float. Thus, the poor faced higher prices for their staple food, lacking the privileged access to rice available at "official" rates. Yet those with

such access to the distribution of rice in bulk were able to make substantial profits by hoarding (Longhurst, et al., 1987; p.16).

The impact of these measures had farther reaching effects than earlier attempts to rectify the economy. In particular, the floating of the currency and its subsequent depreciation, as well as the removal of subsidies, fuelled inflation, which as we have seen, was running at over 170% in 1987. This further reduced the standard of living of most Sierra Leoneans, weakened the social and economic infrastructure, and intensified the scarcity of essential commodities (ibid;p.17).

In terms of prices, especially for food, the urban poor have probably been harder hit than the rural poor. The removal of the subsidy on rice and floating of the leone led to an increase in the official price of rice from Le 85 per 50kg bag prior to June 1986 to Le 340 in March 1987 (Longhurst, et al., 1988; p.27). But underprivileged people would never have access to rice at this price and would be more likely to pay Le 500 per bag. A cup of rice, usually the form of purchase by the poor, increased over the same period from Le1.00-1.50 to Le4.00. All other food prices also rose: palm oil from Le3 to Le12 per pint and meat from Le14 to Le45 per pound (ibid,p.27). The all item Freetown Consumer Price Index(CPI) for the low-income group rose steadily from 1516.2 [1978=100] at the end of the second quarter of 1986 to 4743.2 by April 1987-an increase of 213% (MDEP,1991; p.6). All commodities

rose in price, including housing.

A comparison of wages and prices carried out by the Sierra Leone Labour Congress shows how wages in the formal sector have been eroded by price rises not only since June 1986 but over the last six years. In spite of a four-fold increase in nominal wages, the real wage had declined by 1986, to 26% of its level in 1980 (Sierra Leone Labour Congress, 1986; p.5).

Urban families find themselves more at the mercy of the market than rural families although they have more opportunity to trade and diversify income sources. Rice is the staple in urban Sierra Leone and it appears that opportunities for consumer diversification to other foods, such as cassava, sorghum and legumes, are limited: surveys of the market in March 1987 showed that other food items were equally expensive (Longhurst, et al., 1987; p.17).

Families have therefore had to cut down severely on the quantity and quality of their diet. Some families have responded by going into a wide range of business, and petty trading has expanded substantially. Absenteeism of government officials has increased as they try to supplement their incomes and spend more time searching for rice (Zack-Williams, 1990; p 4).

Rural families also faced higher prices immediately following the currency floatation. Transport costs increased markedly: the withdrawal of the petrol subsidy resulted in a

doubling of its price between June 1986 and February 1987 (Zack-Williams, 1990;p.4). Perhaps paradoxically, rice has always been cheaper in Freetown than in the rural areas because of the government subsidies aimed at helping urban populations, especially civil servants and members of the armed forces.

Following the liberalisation of the exchange rate, some essential items (such as wire for rodent traps) were priced out of reach of most farmers. Incomes were seriously reduced, and the practice of foraging for bush yam (a 'famine' food) normally carried out by the poor immediately prior to harvest (July) had become a common strategy at planting time (April) (MDEP, 1990; p.127).

The availability of social services has also shown a decline over the last six years. Shortages of essential commodities-petroleum, medicine and primary school textbooks are acute. The supply of basic services such as power and water is erratic. Even currency notes are scarce. Schools and hospitals lack even the most basic supplies such as books and drugs. Provision of public services has suffered greatly, and an increase in the incidence of poverty and malnutrition is widely evident, especially among children (EFPPF, 1990; p.1).

The flotation of the leone accelerated this trend. In some parts of the country the cost of medication increased far in excess of the CPI or the devaluation of the leone in 1987: for instance; aspirin increased in price from 2 cents to 10

cents per tablet and chloroquine from 4 cents to 40 cents per tablet (Longhurst, et al., 1988; p.29). Health workers, teachers and other public sector workers worked for months without pay, thus producing widespread demoralisation and a subsequent fall in the quality of services offered. With hospitals being deprived of basic drugs and other facilities, private clinics charging prices well beyond the means of the average wage earner flourished. Not surprisingly, the country has one of the worst health records in the world with life expectancy at thirty-five years for women and thirty-three for men; infant mortality rates of between 233-250 per 1,000 live births; 24% of children are chronically undernourished; and 30% under-weight. Eighteen percent of children die before their first birthday, and 23% die before their fifth birthday (Zack-Williams, 1991; p.4).

At the political level, there was wide-spread concern about policies which were designed to make things better, but in fact ended up impoverishing the vast majority of the people. Workers demanded increases in wages in order to make up for lost purchasing power, while several politicians made anti-IMF speeches. President Momoh's "new order" regime's credibility with the people was at stake, with many people quickly contrasting the former Siaka Steven's regime more favourably (Zack-Williams, 1991; p.7).

It was the fear of the social and political consequences of a rapidly run down economy without any safety net that

forced the Government to slow down the pace of implementation of the conditionalities. The potential for unrest was a stark reality for Momoh who emerged as leader of the party without having a strong base within the party; and who had to depend on the "young turks" of the Akutay group (an ethnic cabal) to bolster his support (Zack-Williams, 1991; p.7).

Also, shortly after his assumption to power, Momoh had to deal with an attempted coup d'etat, resulting in the execution of one of his vice presidents. Thus there were countervailing forces working against the full implementation of all the conditionalities of the Fund. By April 1988, the programme had been abandoned, and the country was declared ineligible to utilise the Fund's resources, due to the building up of huge arrears.

Meanwhile, in order to tackle the ever worsening economic situation, the Government decided to adopt gradually a number of the traditional adjustment measures demanded by the Fund, only this time at its own pace, the intention being to prepare the ground for another visit to the Fund. In December 1989, an IMF team visited Freetown with the aim of helping the Sierra Leone authorities implement a package of fiscal, monetary and exchange rate measures and to assess their effectiveness.

About a week after the visit from the Fund, the President broadcast to the nation the government's intention to implement certain immediate measures. These included:

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- 1) A curb on government expenditure;
- 2) The introduction of mini-austerity budget in January of the following year;
- 3) The sale of special treasury bills to the non-banking sector at a significantly high interest rate, i.e, over 45% in order to mop up excess liquidity;
- 4) An increase in the special deposit the commercial banks hold with the central Bank, and a decision that the former should be free to determine their lending rate;
- 5) The implementation of exchange reforms involving the introduction of the complete liberalisation of the exchange system and a market determined exchange rate;
- 6) The decontrolling and raising of the prices of petroleum products with immediate effect in order to reflect the increase in the excise duties and the prevailing exchange rate, as well as the privatisation of their procurement;
- 7) The repeal of the economic sabotage act which was designed to stop hoarding of the local currency and to undermine the "parallel" market in foreign currency. This was seen as a hindrance to normal commercial activities;
- 8) There was also a commitment from the Sierra Leone government to make significant repayments to the Fund for outstanding arrears;
- 9) The elimination of most price controls.

The objectives behind these policies were to reduce inflation, to mobilise domestic savings in order to support

growth, and to improve efficacy of policy instruments. The strategy was to limit the growth of the money supply and restrict the expansion of credit particularly through public borrowing from the central bank.

The government has begun to implement most of these policies in anticipation of the structural adjustment facility from the Fund. First, the currency was devalued from Le 44/US\$ to Le 65/US\$ on March 31, 1989 and further to Le 120/US\$ on January 15, 1990. A market-determined exchange rate was introduced on April 25, 1990. Second, all import and export licences were abolished in December 1989, except for gold and diamonds which are maintained for monitoring; annual export licences for these commodities are issued without restraint to qualified firms and individuals, although license fees are substantial. Third, the import entry permit and the requirement that letters of credit be opened at a commercial bank in Sierra Leone have been abolished.

Fourth, the importation of rice was privatised and the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board's (SLPMB) monopoly on coffee and cocoa trade was eliminated. Private traders were permitted to purchase coffee and cocoa from growers at market-determined prices. Fifth, the restrictive "emergency regulations" of November 1987, which attempted unsuccessfully to prevent currency hoarding and the unofficial export of diamonds, were formally lifted in June 1989. Sixth, in December 1989, to strengthen the fiscal position, excise

duties on tobacco, beer, and petroleum were increased, some subsidies were reduced, and recruitment of non-essential personnel was frozen; it was reaffirmed to avoid any extra budgetary expenditure in the future. Seventh, to absorb excess liquidity, a large number of treasury bills was sold to the non-bank public at an attractive discount rate, and all commercial bank interest rates were raised by at least 10 percentage points in December 1989 and by a further 10 percentage points effective April 2 1990, to 46 percent per annum on deposits of over nine months duration (EFPP, 1990; pp.2&3).

The Government is determined to intensify these efforts and to carry out a comprehensive economic reform programme in the context of a policy framework covering the period July 1990-June 1993. This policy framework, prepared in collaboration with the staffs of the IMF and the World Bank, aims at establishing the foundation for a buoyant economy, which will make more efficient use of existing resources and whose growth would benefit the majority of Sierra Leone's people (EFPP, 1990; p.4; Budget speech, 1991/92; p.5). The policy framework has five basic objectives:

- (i) to achieve an annual average rate of GDP growth of about 5%;
- (ii) to achieve and maintain a stable macroeconomic environment by, inter alia, lowering the rate of inflation (annual average) from nearly 90% in 1989/90 to 15% in 1992/93;
- (iii) to reduce the current account deficit of the balance of

payments (excluding grants) from 15% of GDP in 1989/90 to 9% in 1992/93, regularize relations with creditors, and eliminate the need for exceptional financial support by June 1994; (iv) to redefine and reduce the role of the public sector while restoring the Government's capacity to provide basic services; (v) to create an economic environment conducive to private sector development with a predictable, transparent and fair regulatory framework (EFPF, 1990; p.6).

The introduction of the current adjustment measures in Sierra Leone is too recent to effectively assess their impact. But the limited evidence available does suggest that they have worsened rather than improved the precarious position of the poor. Nor have measures set up the incentives for expanded land cultivation, increased crop production and export promotion that were sought (Government of Sierra Leone, Budget Speech, 1991/92; p.3). To achieve this, greater attention should have been given to the timing of increased producer prices vis-a-vis that of devaluation.

Measures to protect the poor were most frequently discussed in donor circles in terms of the provision of compensatory mechanisms - particularly the use of food aid. For example, it was envisaged that food aid would be used to provide support to newly redundant workers, to help settle them in rural areas (MDEP, 1985/86; p.124). Such measures may be useful in alleviating some of the immediate problems of the poor, although the food distribution mechanism requires

substantial reform.

However, support which will succeed in increasing their production and incomes will require changes in the structure of the SAP. Such changes would need to recognise the nature of local political conditions and would require institutional reform going well beyond mere privatisation. In this context compensatory programmes are essentially short term and palliative rather than transformative in their effects.

3.5 STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT POLICIES AND WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The adjustment programme has, without a doubt, had adverse effects on the employment and income-generating capacity of women. The participation of women in the official labour force seems to have declined steadily since the mid-1970s, in spite of the fact that the female component of the population has remained slightly higher than that of males. Commenting on the growth of the labour force in the intercensal period (1963-1974; Table 3.5), the report of the 1978 ILO/JASPA Employment Advisory Mission noted:

What is surprising is that the number of females in the labour force showed almost no increase over the whole period. The number of working females declined considerably and the numbers not working increased by as much. The decline in the number of working females is indicated to be in agriculture which could not be true as by all accounts the majority in rural areas work (ILO/JASPA, 1981;p.15)

TABLE 3.5: LABOUR FORCE IN 1963 AND 1974 (000S)

Work Status	1963						1974				Total	
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female			
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Working	576	95.4	331	99.1	907	96.7	705	91.7	262	72.8	967	87.4
Not working	28	4.6	3	0.9	31	3.3	66	8.3	73	27.2	139	12.6
Total	604	100	334	100	938	100	771	100	335	100	1106	100

Source: ¹Adapted from Lisk and Stevens, 1987;p.184: Population Census, 1963 and 1974

It is difficult to understand how the female participation rate, according to official statistics, could actually have declined from 45 to 32 percent for the period under review. As explained by Lisk and Stevens, what could possibly have occurred is a significant decline in the proportion of women actively looking for wage employment (Lisk & Stevens, 1987;p.184). The difficult economic circumstances of the country since the mid-1970s, have served to depress the employment market further, making it harder for women, who tend to have lower educational levels than men, to obtain gainful employment in the formal sector. As a result,

women, who perceive their employment chances as poor, voluntarily exclude themselves from labour force statistics, claiming not to be actively looking for wage employment when asked about their work status..., and engage in non-wage employment in the informal sector (Lisk & Stevens, 1987;p.184).

An ILO-sponsored (1977) sample survey of the urban (Freetown) informal sector shows the distribution of female entrepreneurs in the sector by main activity. (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6: Distrubution of Female Enterpreneurs in Informal Sector by Main Activity (1978).

ACTIVITY	NO.	%
Food and tobacco	22	8.9
Textiles and manufacturing	3	1.2
Wearing apparel	12	4.9
Leather manufacturing	1	0.4
Footwear manufacturing	1	0.4
Furniture manufacturing	3	1.2
Metal product manufacturing	1	0.4
Retail trade	155	62.8
Repairing trade	1	0.4
Restaurants and cafes	43	17.4
Professional services*	5	2.0
Total	247	100.0

Note *Education, health, social services

Source: Lisk & Stevens (1987);p.196.

Although there are no comparable official statistics available for the period after 1974, there is little reason to believe that the situation has changed. With increasing under employment, lower incomes and falling standards of living among female (as well as male) producers, female employment in traditional small-scale production and urban informal sector activities tends to have increased. Women are, however, now facing increasing competition from men, who would otherwise have been employed in the wage sector, in such traditional female dominated activities as petty-trading, food processing, market gardening, and handicrafts (Lisk & Stevens,

1987;p.185).

Nevertheless, many urban women are still self-employed in the informal sector, largely as petty traders and sellers of cooked food. In this regard they play an important role in providing urban consumers with easier access to essential foods and services, both through their stalls being located conveniently near to offices and residential areas and through their long opening hours.

Compared to the formal sector businesses and industry, the informal sector has not received much official support and encouragement for its development and expansion. Intervention by government to strengthen its linkages with the formal sector has taken the form of assistance mainly to those activities that are dominated by men; for example, tailoring, metal work, repair services and wood work (Lisk & Stevens, 1987;p.196).

Male entrepreneurs engaged in those activities have, for example, benefited from government contracts, and some have even obtained loans from government-sponsored financial institutions. No such assistance has been given to women petty traders, food sellers or restaurateurs (Lisk & Stevens, 1987;p.196). The informal sector has, nevertheless, remained buoyant, and continues to provide urban women with a much needed source of income.

The situation in the rural areas has been more difficult to assess. The government believes that:

the adjustment programme is likely to result in a relative improvement in the income of a large part of the rural population, compared with that in the urban areas. The expected increases in agricultural production as a result of de-control, liberalisation of marketing and improvements in roads- coupled with the impact of a more realistic exchange rate- will result in higher incomes for farmers, even though they will be affected by increases in fuel, transport and input costs. They will also benefit from increased social services expenditures in rural areas (EFPF, 1990;p.13).

The effects of these agricultural policies are not, however, differentiated by gender and do not take into account the disadvantaged position of women regarding access to and control of products from the land. The crops whose prices have been increased i.e, cocoa and coffee, are grown predominantly by men. Women therefore stand to gain very little from such policies.

Another factor is that the promised benefits from improved roads and social services have yet to be realised. Transportation networks are still lacking in several parts of the country because of poor roads. In a survey of selected women's groups in Sierra Leone, one of the problems that all the women in the groups identified as a hindrance to their income-generating activities was poor roads, and lack of adequate transportation (Hyde & Sargie, 1991;p.110).

Rural women have therefore found it almost impossible to survive such a crisis by relying solely on their agricultural activities. The women have had no option but to draw on the resources available to them i.e agricultural products, in

order to find alternative strategies for survival. With the demand for land and no increase in the prices of their agricultural products, women have turned mostly to food processing as an alternative source of income.

For example, whilst previously cassava was grown as a "famine food", it is now being grown on a large scale because it is used to process food products such as gari, fufu and cassava bread. Laundry starch is also produced. Other food items which are now being processed for sale include ogiri (prepared from sesame or benniseed), beans, groundnut and maize. Dried beans are milled and used to prepare snacks such as akara, olele and bean pudding. Milled groundnuts are used to make groundnut stew and snacks such as kanya and groundnut cakes. Dried maize is milled and used to make ogi porridge and agidi, which is a substitute for fufu. These foods are sold in the markets or at road-side stalls.

Oil is another item that is widely produced in the rural areas for the market. Palm oil, palm kernel oil and coconut oil are processed by women using traditional methods. Although palm oil is the major oil used in cooking, coconut oil and palm kernel oil are often used as substitutes especially when the price of palm oil increases in times of low supply. The fact that women have turned fully to participating in informal sector activities should not just be seen as a move to lessen the impact of the negative policies of structural adjustment programmes. The persistence of women in business, despite the

many disadvantages in society indicates their unwillingness to succumb to a state of desolation. Their activities are enabling them to survive the crisis and also to transform gender and social relations.

The next chapter uses palm oil processing to provide a case study of an activity that rural women have engaged in in large numbers for income-generating purposes during the era of structural adjustment. The significance of this activity to women in respect of enabling them to meet their strategic needs through their independence and empowerment will be brought out through the women's voices.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PALM OIL PROCESSING ACTIVITY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

As already indicated, the objective of the research is to find out why women's involvement in the activities of the informal sector is increasing rapidly. The need to earn income has been the primary reason given for the initiation of business activities, and there is no doubt that the economic crisis in Sierra Leone has created the need for women to earn extra income. The study, however, intends to go beyond investigating this practical reason of earning money for subsistence, to explore whether other, more strategic, goals play a part. The significance of income-generating activities to women goes far beyond the obvious; the money that the women earn could enable them to achieve other goals which are more strategic than practical, and which will result in improving their general influence in the home and in the society i.e gender relations. Using palm oil processing as a case study, this chapter explores the reasons behind women's involvement in income-generating activities in the informal sector in Sierra Leone and how their activities have been affected by structural adjustment policies.

The chapter will focus on the process by which the women got involved in the activity; why they decide to continue; and how they are coping in the midst of the present economic crisis in the country. Their perceptions on what they do is the crux of the matter, as it is only through the women's voices that the significance of the activity to them may be understood.

The chapter is organised into sections with themes dealing with the following: methodology; methods of data analysis; the study area; socio-economic background of the respondents, and the main findings of the study. The section on the main findings is further divided according to the following themes: reasons for involvement in palm oil processing; capital requirements and credit facilities; access to palm fruits; the role of social networks; the methods of processing palm oil; marketing; problems and perceptions. These findings will form the basis of discussion in the subsequent chapter on the implications for gender relations, women's independence and the significance of cooperation among women which are the catalysts to empowerment and the achievement of strategic goals.

4.2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study has been designed to follow the strategies and goals of much feminist research - a methodology that allows for researchers to study women in an

interactive process without the artificial object/subject split between researcher and researched.

Feminist methodology is distinguished from other methodologies by three basic features: research based on women's experiences; the "view from above" replaced by a "view from below"; and a move away from the idea of "value-free" research (Harding, 1984; Mies, 1983; Oakley, 1981).

In direct contrast to other social science research methodologies, feminists aim at using a methodology that will end the exploitation of women as research objects. Research is done for women and not on women. Women are placed at the centre of the study and they are neither compared to, nor measured against normative (male) standards. What matters most are women's experiences. Westkott (1979) defines such a dialectical relationship between the subject and object of research as intersubjectivity or participatory research.

Participatory research methodology calls for the researcher to be involved as much as possible in the activities of the women, observing and, if possible, taking part in their meetings and discussions. Interviews should be conducted mainly at the women's working places, when the women are at work, allowing for participatory observation. The researcher should also conduct the interviews in the form of a discussion, allowing the women to ask questions and to correct any distortions or misinterpretations, thus widening the consciousness of both the researcher and the researched.

In cases where the household is the unit of production, the discussions should involve all the household members involved in the activity (including children provided they are allowed to participate in adult discussions).

Westkott (1979) advocates that, wherever possible, a researcher using feminist methodology should aim for such intersubjectivity which enables the researcher to compare her work constantly with her own experiences as a woman and a social scientist, and to share it with the researched, who can then add their opinions to the research.

Feminist methodology seeks to abandon the indifferent, disinterested, alienated attitude towards the "research objects" which traditional methods use in their attempts to achieve "value-free" research results. Mies (1983, p.120) argues that such a relationship between research subject and research object does not facilitate the exploration of the "invisible" areas; for example, women's social history, women's perception of their own situation, their own subordination and their own resistance. Participatory research enables the researcher to adopt what Mies (1983;p.121) refers to as "conscious partiality".

Conscious partiality, she explains, not only conceives of the research objects as part of a bigger social whole, but also as part of the researchers themselves; i.e the researcher becomes part of the research. The demands of conscious partiality and "reciprocity" consequently lead to the

replacement of the "view from above" by the "view from below". The traditional hierarchical research situation defeats the very purpose of research, creating an acute distrust in the "research objects" who feel they are being interrogated. The data thus gathered often reflect 'expected behaviour' rather than real behaviour (Mies,1983; Klein,1983;). The view from below is necessary because the needs and interests of the majority of women must be the yardstick for the research. Feminist methodology aims at research which would be instrumental in improving the women's lives in one way or another - research for women rather than research on women.

Funding constraints prevented me from going into the field and thus I was faced with particular difficulties in implementing research based on the above ideas. As far as possible, these were dealt with in the following ways: My mother, with whom I discussed the objectives and methodology, was chosen to administer the questionnaire. The questions were designed to be open-ended so as to ensure mutual input by both the researcher and the researched (Appendix 1). My mother was chosen because she works with and in the community, is respected and trusted both as a community leader and a native of the town, and thirdly, she is also a palm oil producer. It was reasonable to expect that she would be in a good position to conduct participatory research based on sincere sharing and discussion of problems and perspectives on the business.

An effort was made to maintain conscious partiality,

using very loosely structured interviews in which the women were free to ask personal questions and information of the researcher. As a member of the "palm oil processing community" herself, the hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched was eliminated. The concern about confidentiality was also a major consideration in the choice of the interviewer. As community leader and head of the women's church organisation, she has earned the reputation of being a trustworthy confidant. The women were not obliged to give their names but they did anyway. In order to ensure maximum confidentiality therefore, I will use fictitious names to refer to specific women or to specific instances. Where questions of a personal nature were asked, the women were given the option to decide to answer or not. It was hoped that, as is generally the case, they would not divulge any information with which they did not feel comfortable. The interviews were all taped with the full knowledge of respondents and sent back to me for analysis.

Due to the fact that I am dealing with women's work and its problems and potentials for further development, in this chapter the research questions will be explored as perceived by women through their experiences. In this way, the research attempts to be research for women, in accordance with feminist methodology. An attempt will be made to identify problems affecting women in their work, and to recommend ways in which these problems could be alleviated, paving the way for women

to pursue more strategic goals.

I acknowledge the fact that the research does not meet the ideal feminist methodological concerns in terms of being fully participatory, in that I did not go into the field myself. An effort will, however, be made to ensure that the women get feedback on the findings. In acknowledgement of their contribution, arrangements have been made to assist each of these women financially in the next producing season. Each will be provided with some money to purchase an extra ton of fruit. It is also my intention to continue to work with these women on any follow-up research that will be done on this particular activity in their community.

4.3 THE STUDY AREA

A total of twenty-five women were interviewed from two villages, Mattru Jong and Luawa in the Jong Chieftdom (Figure 4.1). The original vegetation of this region i.e tropical forest, has been replaced by farm bush due to repeated clearing and burning. Oil palm grows wild in such areas and palm oil has always been an important commodity in the region. Until 1979, there was also a government owned oil palm plantation about five kilometres from Luawa (seven kilometres from Mattru). The plantation cultivated improved varieties of palm trees. These hybrid trees are small, which makes harvesting easier; the mesocarp is also thicker and yields twice the oil of a wild palm (Swindell, 1969;p.78). An oil

mill on the plantation produced oil for use in government industries; and palm kernels which were sold to the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board for export, principally to the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Swindell, 1969;p.78). Local workers (chiefly men) were employed from the two villages to work on the plantations, but these men were not allowed to process the fruits for their own use. The only palm oil processing going on locally therefore, used fruits from the wild palms.

FIGURE 4.1 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN SIERRA LEONE

A series of operational problems including funding constraints from the government and damaged equipment led to a closure of the mill in 1979. This closure had a huge impact on the inhabitants of Mattru and Luawa. The plantation workers were laid off and the villages were left with this huge plantation in the vicinity. A decision was made by the chiefdom administrators to make the plantation fruits available to any interested buyer. The closure of the mill also coincided with the worsening of the economic crisis in the country as a whole. Since rural people have only their agricultural resources to rely on for alternative sources of income, a few people started to use the palm fruits from the plantation to process palm oil on a larger scale i.e for the market. Men were as involved as women in the beginning, but for unknown reasons, in time, women were left almost totally in control. As the cost of living continued to rise, the need for extra income became critical. More women (most of whom were already engaged in other types of income-generating activities such as dress making, crafts, market gardening, sale of local foodstuffs like donuts and pancakes) felt pushed into this lucrative activity. Palm oil processing is now the most important income-generating activity for women in this area.

The study area is located in the south-western part of the country where Islam tends to have less sway, and where rural women tend to be politically influential, holding

political offices such as chieftaincy (Richards, 1986). Even though traditional laws and customs still prevail, gender relations are more flexible here than in other areas, and women play a greater role in decision-making both within the household and in the community. For this reason it is particularly important to examine women's reasons and perception about their work in the informal sector.

4.4 METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data were primarily analyzed qualitatively rather than quantitatively for the following reasons; First although nearly three quarters of women in these villages are involved in palm oil processing, only a small sample of twenty-five women was interviewed. It would be inappropriate and inadequate to use such a small sample to generalise about palm oil processing activities in the area. Second, the thesis focuses on process: how a particular activity is done, and the way in which this affects the women involved. This objective demanded indepth interviews which addressed women's perceived and actual needs and constraints, and gender relations and power relations within the household and in the community as a whole. The small sample and in depth interviews enabled me to do just that. What the women had to say was very important to them and to my purposes in doing the research. The interviews, apart from being in depth, were also lengthy. Each lasted between one and three hours, and was often repeated to

achieve rigour.

4.5 PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

Several difficulties were encountered in doing the research. First, because my mother was the research assistant, she spent more time interviewing the older women (most of whom were her friends) with whom she could relate in a better way. This meant that many of the stronger responses came from the older respondents. The fact that my mother was involved in palm oil processing may also have influenced the research in a major way. It is possible that some respondents assumed that my mother already knew the answer to certain questions and so failed to mention them. The choice of women and the type of responses would have been different if the research assistant was younger and not involved in the activity.

Second, the interviews were conducted in Mende, the language of the respondents. This posed a problem in translating the questionnaire findings into English. Although Mende is my mother tongue, I found myself often having to deal with a "deeper" form of Mende, a dialect common to older people, which includes a lot of anecdotes which were used to convey meaning.

A complete and accurate understanding of these anecdotes was crucial to understanding the discussions fully. To deal with this problem, I sent copies of sections of the tapes which I had difficulties with, back to my mother for

translation and sometimes for clarification. In another sense, having the interviews done in Mende was one of the main strengths of the work, as it enabled the participants, both the interviewer and the interviewed, to discuss the issues in a relaxed manner, and to convey their feelings adequately. Anecdotes are a culturally acceptable way of expressing an opinion. Mende people use stories to illustrate a point or teach a lesson. Anecdotes provide a better understanding of issues because they convey a deeper meaning of their reality. The interpretation of the anecdotes told by the women provided a richer insight into the issues which were discussed.

A third problem was that on some occasions during the interviews, the interviewer decided to omit some questions, passing them off as irrelevant to the issue being explored. Fourth, on one occasion the interviewer conducted interviews with two co-wives at the same time. There is a possibility that the answers were distorted, as the stories may have been altered. Although she re-interviewed one of the wives later on, some important pieces of information may have been lost.

Fifth, in the absence of regular income brackets, determining the social status of the women was difficult. This was eventually accomplished by looking at social indicators like house size and the type of materials used in their construction, style and quality of dressing and personal possessions as is frequently done in research in rural Africa (for example, Dei, 1992;). On this basis, all the women were

classified as regular working women, slightly above the poverty line. One of the women had a husband who was wealthy and had an important social position.

4.6 SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

The interviewer endeavoured to include in the sample women of different ages and socio-economic status. Thus out of the twenty-five respondents, ten were younger women (aged fourteen to nineteen years) still in secondary school and fifteen were aged over twenty years. Three of the women had been involved in the business since 1982. Ten of them entered the business at various times between 1984 and 1988 and the remaining twelve became involved since 1989. This last group includes the students who basically had a dire need to earn personal income.

In order to ensure a broader spectrum of society, other factors such as marital status and the presence or absence of children were also taken into consideration. Five of the women who were still in school were single and had no children, whilst the other five were single mothers and had never been married. The adult sample was divided into: women married and cohabiting with spouse; women married with husband living elsewhere; and widowed or divorced women.

TABLE 4.1: MARITAL STATUS

Marital status	Percentage of women
Single-without children*	20
Single with child/children*	20
Married-living with husband	40
Married-husband away	8
Widowed/divorced**	12

* refers to teenage students

** refers to adults

N=25

All the respondents had some form of basic education (Table 4.2). Five had basic primary education and could at least write their names; ten had been to secondary school, although they had not necessarily graduated, and could understand or speak some English; four had attended a vocational institute and were equipped for some other kind of profession; and six had been to teacher training colleges and were either primary or secondary school teachers.

Table 4.2: EDUCATIONAL STATUS

Educational status	Percentage of women
Primary	20
Secondary	40
Vocational institute	16
Training college	24
University	0

N=25

Because palm oil processing is a seasonal activity, all the respondents had some other form of occupation. 40% were students; 20% were primary school teachers; 4% were secondary

teachers; 8% were nursing aides in the local hospital and 7% were housewives (who claimed they had no occupation).

All the twenty-five women lived in households of more than ten people including their children. All of the 80% of respondents with children sent their children to school and were almost totally responsible for their maintenance. The students all lived at their natal home but those students with children were responsible for part of their keep, including food, clothing, and medical bills. The other 20% without children were also responsible primarily for clothing, uniforms and books for their personal use. The older women fared somewhat differently. Eight of the married women living with their spouses had some of the responsibility shared. For instance, Anna, the middle class woman was only fully responsible for clothing for herself and the children. Her husband took care of the medical bills, school fees, uniforms and books. They had a shared responsibility for food, with Anna providing most of the vegetables which she grew in her backyard.

The other two married women who lived with their husbands, however, carried most of the responsibility of running their homes. Dinah, married for over thirty years, claims her husband has never paid school fees for any of their seven children. He did not believe in the value of education and hence did not care. Naturally, Dinah was also responsible for the attendant expenses-books, uniforms, shoes etc. Her

view of this was that she really had no option. As she put it,

Nyahah gboto jormoi ma hungo e guu boyei ma.
Translated literarily from Mende: a man who desires
to have many wives should be ready to pay the bride
price.

Since she wanted her children to go to school, she had to cover the costs. The two married women with absentee husbands got the occasional remittances of money from their husbands. This was, however, irregular and sometimes totally absent. The onus of supporting the home therefore rested squarely on the women alone. At the time of conducting the interviews none of the women had had any remittances for almost eight months.

4.7 MAIN FINDINGS

The questions, chosen in relation to the palm oil processing activities in the region, were divided into seven sections, each intended to bring out different aspects and perspectives of the business. Since the primary purpose of the exercise was to listen to the women, in presenting the questionnaire findings, I will attempt, as much as possible, to use the women's voices directly, in translation. Where literal translation proves difficult, I will add the Mende words as spoken.

The general topics in the questionnaire, each intended to bring out some theme, were as follows: reasons for involvement in the palm oil business; capital requirements and credit facilities; access to palm fruits; role of social networks; the methods of processing palm oil; marketing; problems and

perceptions.

4.7.1 REASONS FOR INVOLVEMENT IN PALM OIL PRODUCTION

The questionnaire dealt with detailed accounts of the women's involvement in palm oil processing. One important question asked was how and why they got involved in the business. The objective of this question was to find links, if any, to the structural adjustment problem: how their present decisions have been affected by the economic crisis, fuelled by structural adjustment policies, in the country. As was expected, varied reasons were given for initial entry into the business, but money remained the most important reason.

One of the most interesting themes that emerged from these answers is the fact that none of the women actually said that they needed an income generating activity because of a need to 'supplement' their husband's income. The idea of supplementing husband's income was never mentioned. These women all spoke as individuals in their own right, with their own needs and responsibilities. Excerpts of the interviews with a few women serve to illustrate this:

Dinah:

Occupation: -

housewife (her classification); I also do market gardening, trade in foodstuffs like donuts and pancakes. I use the proceeds from this to provide food and school fees for my children.

Reason for doing the palm oil business: -

I started when I saw that others were making money from it, and it was a good business

Manei:

Occupation:- Primary school teacher

Marital status:- Married and living with husband

Reason for starting palm oil business:-

Everybody around me was doing it and making profit from it. I decided to try my luck too"

How have you benefited from this? -

Oh, in a lot of ways. I pay my children's school fees; I can afford to feed and clothe myself and my children and I can live well. Life has been better since then. And besides, this is a more reliable source of income.

Gbessay:

Occupation:- housewife

Marital status:- married and living with husband

Reason for doing business:-

"Na Kema a piyei ta mia Nduahun a piyei", meaning, Nduahun does what Kema does.

(In the Sande society (which I will explain in section 4.7.4), Kema is the name given to the first initiate and Nduahun is the second initiate, All initiates are supposed to follow the leader, Kema, in whatever has to be done.

...people around me were producing palm oil and making money; I decided to follow suit.

Has it paid off? -

A lot; I have been able to help those I am supposed to help. I even managed to rebuild my mother's house which was burnt down. Yes, I thank God for the business.

The above responses were given by the older women. The younger women did not have as many responsibilities and concerns. With the exception of those with children, the other young women were mostly in the business because of the material gains they would get from the income.

4.7.2 CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS AND CREDIT FACILITIES

The questions about the source of initial capital to start the business also brought surprising answers. None of the women, not even the students, ever took an official loan (e.g from banks) to start their business. In fact, only three respondents loaned money from their cooperatives known locally as osusu.

Osusu are rotating credit associations in which a group of people contribute simultaneously to a collective fund but withdraw individually and by rotation. Many women participating in income-generating activities belong to these osusu clubs which are usually informally and democratically run and are popular because of their social as well as their economic function. The operation of most osusu clubs requires minimum bookkeeping and red tape. Members usually meet once a week in an atmosphere of conviviality to make their regular contribution and to congratulate the member whose turn it is to "draw". The operation is based on social relationships of goodwill and trust which help to sustain an obligation to save regularly. There is no limit on the size of these clubs but usually the larger the membership the more effective the club will be in providing loans.

Fifteen women, including the students, loaned initial capital from their relatives - husbands, parents, aunts, uncles; while the remaining seven used funds accumulated from previous businesses or work. None of the women interviewed

ever had any thoughts of going to official credit unions for a loan. Their reasons were very similar: many believed they would not be considered for a loan because they had no collateral. To quote Massah, a divorced woman,

Peneh borgor mia a nge, nya mayia eh leway,
literally translated, I am a penny with a hole; I
cannot be tried in a court of law; meaning, I am
not credit worthy.

Others knew they had to have an account in the local bank to be eligible for a loan. The rest just did not understand the process and were afraid to get involved. The alternative methods they all took seemed to have worked out well for them. At the time of the interviews they had all paid back their initial loans and were operating under their own steam.

4.7.3 ACCESS TO PALM FRUITS

More people could engage in this activity because palm fruit is available to any one who can afford to purchase. Agnes, a single (separated) woman likens access to the plantation to the theory of 'Joe Tongbei'. 'Tongbei' is the Mende word for 'snatch'. The game of tongbei involves a pact between two or more people, allowing the other person to keep anything he/she is able to snatch away from you. Items snatched mostly include food and toys. The person ending up with the most snatched items is hailed "Joe Tongbei". Owned by the government, the quantity of fruit obtained from the plantation depends on the ability to purchase.

4.7.4 ROLE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

Obtaining the fruit is one thing; but processing it to obtain the oil is a totally different and more difficult task. But for the fact that the women are very well organised, none of the business ventures would have been successful. In the words of Musu,

Sande ngomeh njorgor mia, bi bi bah deh ma gah, ah
bi deh ma gah.

In translation, one good turn deserves another.

Here Musu is referring to the cooperation that is part of belonging to the Sande society. Sande or Bundu are secret societies that are exclusively women's groups and are completely autonomous. The groups are not dependent on funding from the government or any other agency. Women are solely in control and most of their funds are obtained from the initiation ceremonies they perform for young girls. The functions of these societies go far beyond merely educating and preparing young girls for marriage and womanhood as is generally believed. The societies also serve as cooperatives and political associations. They sometimes also serve as a refuge for women who use the initiation season as a time to get away from the men and to be on their own.

Cooperation is a major requirement for every member and members often rely on one another to help out in time of need. All the women interviewed belong to this society which has a head woman known as the 'gowej'. When a member requires assistance in doing anything, she goes to the gowej who

summons a meeting in the 'kpangui', the sande bush. The work to be done is then discussed and arrangements made for help to be rendered. The woman who is being helped out usually hands out small cash payments and food for the duration of the work.

Sande has served as an institution for the promotion and protection of women's rights and has given women considerable freedom to run their own affairs and to develop solidarity with each other. Most sande leaders are also important community heads and have the authority to regulate disputes. In many rural communities, sande has served as the main source of obligatory mobilisation of women, providing a basic foundation for the creation of more secular types of women's associations.

Kinship plays a great part in labour allocations. Women are usually very willing to help each other out as it is another way of making money. Cooperation is the very basis on which the traditional Mende society is built. Dinah, for instance, is very grateful to her children and her male kindred for helping her out. Although she always pays them, both in cash and with food, and sometimes "in oil", she finds it reassuring to know that they are always willing to help out. These support systems and the cooperation are necessary to ease the work burden. The support networks are not confined to the processing of palm oil, since women must also perform other chores in the home. Often, a friend or relative will offer to look after another woman's children while the latter

is busy processing. Networks are also very important in the marketing of palm oil as shall be seen in section 4.7.6.

4.7.5 OIL PALM PROCESSING

The women spoke at length about processing (the most difficult part of the activity) and all of them basically process the same way. After the fruit is harvested, it is transported to the home and piled outside in the compound, or for some women, in trenches specially built for that purpose. The fruit is covered with palm, banana or plantain leaves, or sometimes, with empty rice bags and left in the sun for four or five days to make the fruit easier to remove from the cob. After the fruit is separated from the cob, the process begins to separate the pulp from the kernel. Basically, one of two methods is used. In the first method, a small quantity of water is sprinkled on the fruit which is left to dry in the sun for a couple of days. The fruit is then boiled in forty-four gallon drums or in earthenware pots for a minimum of eight hours, and then it is crushed by foot in trenches or pounded in mortars. (The process is known in Mende as seketee). Men are often hired to help at this point as this is the hardest part of the job. Payments are usually negotiated before work begins and food is also provided by the woman.

Crushing breaks the outer skin and disengages the oil from the fibre. (When treading is used, hot water is added afterwards). After the mixture is allowed to cool, the women

rub the nuts and fibres between their hands and squeeze out the chaff by hand. The water/oil mixture is put in a pot and left to boil until the oil begins to float. The oil is then scooped off with a small bowl and put into containers.

The second method is known as fermentation. In this method the palm fruit is sprinkled with water to soften it and buried in holes for some days. The fermented fruit is then pounded in mortars and squeezed or trodden on by foot. The processing then continues as in the first method.

Oil produced by fermentation is clear and is locally referred to as masanki. This method requires less labour as fermentation helps disengage the fruit from the cob. Oil produced by boiling the fresh fruit is bright red in colour and it is of higher quality. It, however, requires more labour and more fuel for boiling, before and after crushing. The women often use the boiling method because the price of the palm oil in the local market is determined by its colour, taste, consistency and flavour. It will fetch a higher price if it is red and has a pleasant taste and smell, and good consistency. Only one of the women regularly produced palm oil using fermentation. No reason was given for this.

The women do not all process on the same day. They would decide to help each other out on different days to make the work easier. This arrangement also makes them work faster and produces larger quantities of oil. Usually the host would be responsible for the feeding and any added tips she can afford.

Family members and friends not involved in the palm oil business also help out and they are paid and fed.

Cooperation is very important in this business as nobody can do it alone. Where help is not available, the woman resorts to hired help. Anna found this part the most burdensome. She often has to hire men to help out because she processes large quantities of fruit. She says cash payment is usually not enough for most hired help. She also has to feed them to their satisfaction otherwise they would abandon the job. This is one of the reasons why the women decide to help one another out.

Mamei likes working with other women because she can "gain knowledge about other matters". The women also use this time working together to discuss personal problems and devise strategies on how to better cope with life in general. Anna cites one instance when the women, whilst working together, discovered that they were being given smaller and smaller quantities of fruit for the same amount of money. When Dinah (the woman with the longest experience in the business), first started in 1982, the cost of the fruit was le 100.00 per ton (US\$ 0.05). The price is now le 7000.00 per ton (US\$ 14.00). In 1982 she could get one hundred and twenty bunches of fruit per ton. That has now been reduced to seventy bunches per ton. The women decided at that time to confront the farm managers about the issue.

Modern technology is not something any of the women can afford although they would very much appreciate having it. As Ruth laughingly put it,

Yor ndunya e loh ni a beh beh indah?.

In translation, Who in the world would not like to do things with minimum effort?.

Any form of modern technology would involve added expenses and the cost of maintenance would be great. At present, there is no one using any form of modern technology in the region. All the processing is done using local methods. It is the women's hope that some assistance in this direction would be given them by the government or some other agency. Their current methods of processing involve a lot of waste and the nuts are not pressed to their full capacity. The methods are also labour, fuel and time consuming. Although there was no mention of this, with technology men would probably become interested and gradually take over palm oil processing from the women. Any plans to introduce technology should therefore consider the opinions and needs of the women.

One of the problems affecting the processing is the price of the fruit itself. With a minimum of five tons of fruit to produce a drum of oil it is obviously getting more difficult to process. Consequently, almost half of the women are thinking of buying the processed oil and reselling it. The profit is smaller but it involves very little work and there is less pressure involved. Another disadvantage in buying processed oil is that the women would not have access to the

by-products of the fruit, such as the kernels, (from which palm kernel oil or nut oil is produced), the shells and chaff (used as fuel for cooking especially in the rainy season). The shells are also used to resurface local bridges.

4.7.6 MARKETING

Marketing is the key to the success of any business venture. From the survey data, it is apparently because of the excellent marketing opportunities for palm oil that so many women are encouraged to continue in the business. Local demand for palm oil is very high especially in the rural areas where most of the government mills have been shut down. Even where the mills are still functioning, the palm oil produced is used mainly for industrial purposes. Demand for palm oil for domestic purposes is therefore met by the local producers, the business women. The question of an adequate market is therefore not a problem. What most women do, however, is sell their oil outside the producing area, mainly in the urban centres where palm oil is not produced and the prices are higher.

Others who cannot afford to transport the oil (often in forty-four gallon drums or in individual gallons), normally sell by the pint in the local market. Young children frequently help their mothers by selling the oil either in the market, or advertising it along the streets. Children also help to collect firewood and to keep the fire going during the

boiling of the fruits by fanning. Selling by pint brings in more profit but it is slow and the money is difficult to accumulate as it comes in small amounts.

Networks are very important in the decision as to where and how to sell. The decision to sell outside the region depends on whether the women have a place not only to stay but also to store their oil until it is sold. It also depends in other cases, on how many other business people the women know and can trust to sell their oil for them. One woman, Ruth, had to sell her oil in periodic markets and at home because she "does not know anyone in the cities with whom she can stay and whom she can trust".

Length of stay in the business also plays a great role as it determines the extent of the network. Consequently, the younger women and newcomers to the business sell at home whilst the older and more experienced women often sell in markets outside the region. For example, Anna, who produces large quantities of oil is so established that she has regular "customers" coming to the village in vehicles to take the oil away. Some of these buyers are middle-people who in turn sell the oil in the urban areas.

Dinah, Massah and Musu, on the other hand, put their drums/gallons of oil in vehicles to be taken to distributing stores in the cities. The store keeper is paid a standard, pre-arranged, sum of money but all the profit from the oil is sent back to the women in the village. The cost of the

transportation is shared by the three women, making it less expensive. Trust is definitely an important factor in this kind of arrangement and although mishaps sometimes occur, the networks are so firm that things often go well.

Ruth, Princess and Rita, who are still in school, say that they take their oil to periodic markets (often every other Friday) held in a village about 32 kilometres away. Competition is keen in such markets but they claim their oil sells because of its higher quality.

The women with such organised networks however have the disadvantage of having to wait for prices to reach their peak in the cities, often in December and again in the rainy season, between June and August, before their oil can be sold. This is the period when they rely on their other income-generating activities (for example, Dinah engages in market gardening and petty trading; Massah in soap making and tie dyeing; and for Musu, making and selling handicrafts, embroidered tablecloths and bed sheets). Other activities that women engage in in this region include palm kernel production, cassava processing, coconut oil production, gara (tie) dyeing, soap production, shallow water fishing and handicrafts. Palm oil is produced throughout the year, but the peak production seasons are between September and October after the rice harvest, and again in April, before the next planting season.

Often, during the producing season, there is a glut of oil in the market as everyone is either processing or knows

someone who is. Prices fall during this time and hoarding is common. Only the most desperate people sell their oil during this period. Palm oil is non perishable and since the quantities produced by each individual are really not that large (often a maximum of twelve drums per woman during each production season), the oil can be stored in homes or, in one instance, in a store owned by a rice dealer. Last year, for instance, because of the unrest brought about by rebel incursions into the east and south of the country (the study area being in the south), "oil did not go far", as Yewa notes. She usually sold her oil outside the region. She continues:

Because of the war buyers were afraid to come into the region and we were also afraid to take our oil far away for fear of being attacked on the way.

As a result, all of the women, even Anna, were forced to sell their oil locally, often at reduced prices. Anna and Dinah said they tried to hoard the oil for a while, but they were forced to sell as the new producing season arrived.

There is no evidence of tensions among local producers or even from the government. The palm fruits are readily available to a buyer; the fruits are not restricted by quotas. Also, because the women have various marketing systems and the product is non-perishable, there is often no competition. There is no pressure or disturbance from government agencies either because domestic demand is totally served by local production. Where the government owns mills the oil is used for industrial purposes.

There are, however, increasing numbers of women involved in the activity. According to the women, this growth is due to the increasing awareness of the need to earn extra money in order to survive the deepening economic crisis in the country. The increasing numbers, as mentioned earlier, do not generate competition. The women who sell their oil in the local market pay taxes to the authorities in the form of market dues. Those who sell their oil outside the region leave the payment of the taxes to the final distributor. The cost of this is covered in the composite payment for the service. Some women sell their oil from their yards at home. There was no indication that such women paid taxes.

4.7.7 PROBLEMS AND PERCEPTIONS

The twenty-five women interviewed identified few problems apart from the fact that the fruit is becoming more expensive and transportation costs are getting higher. With the increase in the price of fuel due to the removal of the petroleum subsidy under structural adjustment, transportation has become a real problem for all of the women because not only does the finished product have to be taken to the markets (for those who sell outside the region) but the fruit, after being harvested, has to be brought home. The farm from which they get the fruit (formerly a government owned mill) is about twelve kilometres away and that poses a problem especially for the women who have no male help whatsoever for transportation.

The costs of labour therefore have to be incorporated in the final price of the oil and this has a bearing on all consumers.

Because of the high cost of the fruit, the women are often faced with the difficult choice of processing less fruit and therefore getting less oil. The demand is always there, but the cost of production is increasing. Half of the women interviewed are thinking of a long term career in palm oil, but not in the processing. They would rather buy the finished product from other women who produce and resell in other regions.

This alternative is, however, hindered by the problem of transportation. The roads are in very poor condition and often inaccessible in the rainy season. Fuel costs are high and vehicles are few and unreliable. The women would welcome help from the government in providing better roads and adequate transportation networks.

Although there is a lot of profit in the business it is however becoming increasingly difficult to continue, especially for younger and poorer women because of the ever rising costs of the fruit and the labour involved. Still all of the women say they would expand their business if only they had enough money. With all the difficulties involved, they still consider it a worthy venture.

As far as the increasing economic hardship in the country goes, the women were only concerned about the the ability to

increase the capital. As Anna says, "the fruit becomes expensive; labour is expensive because the labourers have to live too; transportation is expensive; and so without money, we sometimes have to produce less". Asked how her business was being affected by the current crisis, Lucy, a school teacher, was also very concerned about the higher costs of the fruit, the labour and the transportation. She lamented the fact that vehicles are not readily available and the roads are badly in need of repairs. But, put in Yema, Lucy's co-wife, "things have always been hard, and what is happening is nothing new; if only I had more money, I would expand my business. Money takes care of all problems".

Although none of the women mentioned her husband during the discussions, when asked specifically about husband's objections, the women responded that they faced no objections. "How can he object to me making money, when he cannot support me?" said Theresa, a married woman with an absentee husband. Some men even helped provide the initial capital. They also helped in some aspects of the processing, like harvesting and transporting the fruit. None of the women, however, indicated a willingness to share the business with her partner. "Me nar one man geng", says Musu. This is a krio jargon, meaning "I am a one man gang".

The issue of who controls the income from this business is very important. Only one of the respondents claimed that her husband controlled the money. She, however, has another

business on the side which her husband does not know about, and she uses those funds for herself. The rest of the women (even the students) are in total control of their money, and although the men refused to buy the usual goods (like the occasional clothes for festive occasions) because the women had money of their own, there seemed to be no tensions because of this. Naturally, however, the women felt compelled to help in the daily management of the home and very little of their money was spent on themselves personally. Still, the sense of independence that comes with the territory is something they all cherish and would not trade for anything else. The women's words convey this as in the following examples:

From Yewa:

Although it is not much, the little I get from this business is mine, and no one can take that away from me.

From Theresa:

I no longer have to ask someone for every little thing I need. I can take care of myself and my children.

From Anna:

It is always a good thing to have an income of your own, however small. You never know what might happen in the future.

Some were even happy to be in control of the home as that gave them an edge over what went on. Dinah, who had successfully put her seven children in school, summarised this aptly:

women engage in this business because it brings prosperity to the home; it enables us to help our children and others in need; it enables you to be a person.

The responses varied significantly with age. The younger and

single women also more than welcome the idea of being self-sufficient as that meant they did not have to have a relationship with a man just to survive. The responses of these younger women were, however, not as forceful as those of the older women, who could probably look back to the times when they did not or could not control their incomes.

Although "having" a man is considered respectable in Sierra Leone society, women are increasingly making the opposite decisions. Once the women realise that they can be financially independent, their outlook towards life changes.

4.7.8. CONCLUSION

The picture that emerges from these interviews is one of a group of women, totally immersed in an activity because of what they can achieve through it. These are women seeking ways of earning more and more money so they could survive and be independent in a country which is plagued by economic crisis. Instead of depending on others (spouse, parents, kindred), these women have opted to venture out on their own. In spite of the hardships and difficulties they face, one could sense a measure of pride in their voices as they talk about what they do. None of the women claimed to be unhappy or felt trapped by the business. There is a genuine sense of achievement and satisfaction in their voices. The implications of these findings, in relation to the literature identified in chapter two, will be the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S WORK AND THEIR EMPOWERMENT

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four presents the palm oil processing activity as described by the women in the Jong Chiefdom. The data show that women are meeting their practical needs of surviving an economic crisis through their activities in palm oil processing. This chapter goes on to discuss the case study material presented in chapter four with respect to my main argument that palm oil processing has indeed provided the means whereby these women can meet their strategic gender needs.

The chapter is divided into two sections. In order to illustrate why the informal sector is critical in the study area, the first section examines the economic climate in the Jong Chiefdom. This is done prior to analyzing the case study material to show why women in this region cannot make a decent living from agriculture. The section focuses on government agricultural policies which preceded structural adjustment, and which have helped to intensify the negative effects of adjustment policies. In this section I will discuss the

following: the struggle between women and men over land; the effect of mining policies on the allocation of land and specific government agricultural policies which have neglected women's needs in the production process, and thus pushed women from the land. I will also identify the specific policies of structural adjustment which affect women's work in palm oil processing in the study area.

Section two is an analysis of the case study material. Having drawn attention to the fact that women in the study region really have no option but be involved in the informal sector, I argue that the informal sector is providing not just the basic survival needs of the women, but has proved to be a link to the empowerment of women through the achievement of strategic goals. I argue that the women in the case study are meeting both their practical and strategic needs as illustrated through the following points: independence as result of personal income; cooperation among women; and relationships with family and community members.

5.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR FOR WOMEN IN THE JONG CHIEFDOM

The struggle over land in the Jong Chiefdom during the last few decades has been such that farming has taken a secondary place to food processing especially among women. This situation can be attributed to the combined effects of problems over land tenure, mining policies and export

cropping.

5.2.1 DEMAND FOR LAND

As noted earlier in chapter three, customary law in Sierra Leone regards women as legal minors, to be represented by their father, husband or male relative in public disputes. As minors, women do not have equal rights to the use of land under the communal land tenure system. (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.21). Men acquire land through patrilineal inheritance. Under the communal tenure system, land belongs to the chiefdom with the chief as legal guardian. Land is leased to male household heads and rights to farm the land are passed on from fathers to sons.

With men in control over land, the increased focus on export cropping by the government has meant that less land is available for women to grow crops for which they are responsible i.e food crops. Recent trends in the acquisition of land for agricultural cultivation in Sierra Leone suggest that the expansion of export cropping has taken over much of the land formerly used for the cultivation of upland rice and other food crops (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.28). Many households are having to buy rice and vegetables, particularly in the months of July to September when food stocks are at their lowest. Since the export crops are mostly grown by men, women have had to move away from farming to other more lucrative forms of income generating activities in order to meet their household

and family responsibilities.

One of the reasons given for this is that enough land has not been made available to grow food crops. Many male farmers are often not prepared to clear enough land just for planting rice, because, given the current lower rate of producer prices, it is cheaper to buy rice and then grow export crops such as cocoa and coffee, which are more profitable (Beoku-Berls, 1990, p.29). Under these conditions, few women have access to enough land for independent farming. Although there are no detailed studies on access to land in the Jong Chiefdom, micro-level studies in the Northern and Southern Provinces attest to the reality of this situation and there is no indication that the situation in the study area is any different.

In one study in the North, it was found that though most women were allocated small farms to cultivate rice and other food crops, less than half of those studied were found to earn cash from these activities or to be able to meet their responsibilities from this production (Karimu and Richards, 1980). Another study in the South found that for those women who had access to land for cultivation (i.e in 60% of surveyed households), the size of the land varied from one third to one half the size of land men had access to (Tommy, 1980). Thus women are often discouraged from cultivating the land, and move instead into food processing in the informal sector.

5.2.2. MINING POLICIES

In the study area, the struggle over land is intensified by the policies of the Sierra Rutile Mining Company. Sierra Rutile Limited, a fully owned subsidiary of World Resources Corporation of Dayton, Ohio, U.S.A, has control over reserves of rutile which at the present rate of production will last for another thirty to forty years. The company's Special Exclusive Prospecting Licence (SEPL) covers an area of 11036 square kilometres over five chiefdoms in the Moyamba and Bonthe Districts in the South and South-Western parts of the country. The study area, situated in the Bonthe District, lies within this lease area (Figure 4.1). The activities of the mine, which has been in operation since 1954, involve flooding vast tracts of land, some of which is fertile agricultural land. The company pays taxes and royalties to the Sierra Leone Government and makes surface payments to the paramount chiefs (who are the legal trustees of the land) in each of the chiefdoms within the mining area. As stated in the Minerals Act (1958):

...the company shall endeavour to make satisfactory arrangements with the owner or occupier [of the land], if other than the government, for payment of a fair and reasonable compensation for any prospective damage done to any crops, buildings, trees or works therein... The compensation payable by the company shall be based on the estimated monetary amount (or value) of the damage to be done to the crops, buildings, trees or works on the land. Any compensation with reference to the fact that the owner will be deprived of the use and occupancy of the land is included in, and covered by the surface rent payable (Government of Sierra Leone (1958); Minerals Act, ch.196,no.9).

The farmers therefore have little control over the land.

The mining company has the right, without further permit or licence, to mine out the land within its lease area. The Minerals Act requires that the mining company:

takes such reasonable measures for the prevention or reduction of soil erosion caused by its operations, or reasonable to restore any area used for prospecting or mining operations by the replacement of the surface soil, the filling in of worked areas, the removal of any tailing or other dumps or heaps caused by such operations, and such other methods as may reasonably be required; and upon service of such order, the provisions thereof shall be deemed to be covenants and conditions of the lease and rights of licence concerned (Minerals Act (1958); ch.196,sect.85).

An interview with the company horticulturist in 1988 indicated that full reclamation of land has yet to be considered (Beah, 1988). Presently, only about a hundred acres of land have been marked for reclamation, and even so, it is purely on an experimental basis. The reclamation involves the planting of timber trees and fuel wood with nitrogen-fixing abilities to replenish the soil. It is also hoped that leaves and twigs from the fast growing timber trees will decompose in the rainy season and add nutrients to the soil. Before mining activities began in the region, agriculture was the major economic activity and a large amount of farmland was available. Now, after nearly thirty-five years of mining, the available farmland is drastically reduced. The landscape has been physically marred and laid bare. In some places there are absolutely no soil horizons; the land is an unorganised mass

of parent material combined with whatever soil that covered it in its undisturbed state (Beah, 1988;p.21).

In other places, the resultant material is pure sand and gravel. In addition, the landscape is ridden with pools (referred to as "wet pits") (Beah, 1988; p.21). The compensation paid to farmers for the loss of their farmlands and their homes is neither adequate nor satisfactory. In recent years, therefore, men have been reluctant to cultivate vast areas of land for fear of losing the land to the mines. Most of these men have migrated to work in the mines, leaving the women behind. The women have also mostly withdrawn from farm labour and concentrated on small vegetable gardening plots behind their houses and other forms of off-farm income generating activities.

5.2.3 LACK OF CONTROL OVER THE LABOUR PROCESS

Historically, the organisation of labour in rural production has been gender specific i.e, men performed tasks like burning, brushing, and clearing the land for planting, while women did the planting, weeding and post-harvest operations. Since the colonial period, however, a number of structural factors have caused changes to take place. The most important of these factors are: first, the increasing concentration on export crops by male farmers who find it fairly profitable; and second, the increasing out-migration of young men from rural areas to work as wage labourers in the

mines and in urban areas.

Under these circumstances, much of the farm work is undertaken by women farmers (many of whom are de facto heads of households), and food crop production is declining. For example, a study of three Limba villages in the Northern Province found the ratio of adults by gender to be 1,611 females to 1000 males (Moseley, 1978). These female-headed households are usually very poor and lack the capital to hire labour for land clearing. They are also more likely to experience greater restriction in acquiring land for farming because of customary practices favouring men (Moseley, 1978). This situation is likely to have become worse with current structural adjustment programmes which focus on cash cropping.

A related issue is that while the current focus on agricultural development has significantly increased the labour input of both men and women in rural Sierra Leone (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.20), the effects have not necessarily been felt in the same way by each gender category. Citing a study conducted in the Eastern Province (Klomberg and Von Riessen, 1983), Beoku-Betts notes that among upland rice farming households,

women were participating more intensively in tasks that were formerly performed exclusively by male household members (for example, burning, clearing, ploughing). It was also found that male farm labour was increasingly withdrawing from tasks formerly jointly performed by male and female labour (for example, harvesting). At the same time, female tasks were observed to remain unaltered and not much hired labour was being employed to relieve them of their increased workload (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.29).

Again although these studies were undertaken in other regions in the country, there is reason to believe that the same situation applies to the study area where similar circumstances i.e land tenure, mining and the focus on export cropping exist.

5.2.4. INADEQUATE TRAINING FACILITIES FOR WOMEN

The training of women as farmers and as extension workers has suffered from serious neglect in most countries in the Third World and Sierra Leone is no exception. Since most of the training programmes are based on imported models from western societies, they often carry western-middle class assumptions that a man should be the bread winner and real decision-maker in a household and that a woman's place is in the home. Training and technology transfers have, therefore, been focused on men rather than on women. Contact through extension services with farmers is generally poor, and usually non-existent for women farmers.

A significant proportion of the extension trainees acquire technical knowledge in tractor maintenance,

mechanisation and tree-crop husbandry, activities that are of more interest to men than to women. Areas such as vegetable cultivation and home management, which are of greater interest to women, are not given much emphasis.

In spite of some effort made by the government during the Women's Decade (1975-1985) to train more women as extension workers, Beoku-Betts' survey carried out in the Eastern Province found that by 1983, only 48 women had graduated from the programme as compared to 522 men (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.30). Overall, since 1980, only 5% of the 644 agricultural extension workers produced at the three technical colleges have been women. Beoku-Betts also found that the recruitment and retention of female extension workers was mitigated by a number of factors:

Many of the trainees came from a secretarial background and found the working conditions difficult to adapt to. They also viewed their work with women farmers as an additional workload, because they had to carry the regular workload of an extension worker as well as work specifically with women in such areas as nutrition and sanitation education, literacy and vegetable gardening etc. Furthermore, this work was being done without any extra incentives or benefits provided such as motor bikes to facilitate their work. Several women complained of the difficulties they experienced in obtaining loans through the project to purchase some form of transportation. Many also complained of harassment from husbands of women farmers who felt that their authority was being undermined by the presence of female extension workers on the farm (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.30-31).

5.2.5. LACK OF MANAGERIAL POSITIONS FOR WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Another important issue is that very few women hold top decision-making roles relating to agriculture at the policy and planning levels in the government. An FAO report indicated that in 1983 there were only two women of Agricultural Officer grade involved in extension work and they were involved in rice and vegetable production in the Northern Province and Western Area (Helm, 1983; p.14). Beoku-Betts also notes that in 1985, only one woman was employed in the Ministry of Agriculture as a Principal Agricultural Officer and one woman as an Agricultural Officer within the Eastern Integrated Agricultural Development Project (Beoku-Betts, 1990; p.30). Apart from these, the majority of women in the Ministry of Agriculture are in clerical or secretarial positions. If women are in decision-making positions, they could redirect extension and credit programmes towards activities that are more beneficial to women farmers. Women farmers may also find it easier to approach other women in managerial positions about problems they face in their work.

5.2.6 LACK OF CONTROL OVER INCOME AND CAPITAL

The ability of women to control the products or income earned from their agricultural labour is severely constrained within the present framework of agricultural development policy in Sierra Leone. Institutional and socio-cultural barriers are major impediments. Most of the work that women do

as farm labour in food or cash crop production is viewed as part of their customary obligations to the household, and, therefore, goes unpaid. In some households, women might receive payment for helping with cash crop production, while in others they may be given a small gift or money to buy cloth when local festivities occur. Evidence from other provinces in the country illustrate this. For example, Beoku-Betts found in her study area in the Eastern Province that:

some women who were not being adequately remunerated for their work in cash crop production were stealing some of the produce and processing and selling it to earn cash income for themselves. In fact, cases were being taken up in the local courts by husbands who were suing their wives for the theft of their harvested cash crops (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.31).

The current structure of agricultural development programmes also militates against women farmers. Most women cannot qualify for loans under these projects unless they are represented by a male relative or spouse (Lisk & Stevens, 1987; Stevens, 1985; Beoku-Betts, 1990). Thus in the Magbosi Agricultural Development Project in the Northern Province, out of a total of 6,400 members in 1983, only 600 registered project members were female (Heim,1984; p.8).

Beoku-Betts also observed that in the Eastern Integrated Agricultural Development Project, many men, who wanted to obtain more credit and technological inputs from the projects, often listed their wives, daughters and female relatives as members of a group applying for the loan (Beoku-Betts, 1990;p.31). This action effectively eliminated any chance for

those women to qualify for credit to farm independently and under these circumstances, women would not be able to have a say in how the loan was spent. For the most part, enough effort has not been made by the government or private lending institutions to inform women of credit facilities or to facilitate their access to it. Most banks are reluctant to give loans without assured security, which most small-scale business women do not have.

These negative agricultural policies have served as push factors for women away from farming to non-farm activities. Participation in non-farm economic activities such as petty trading, production of soap, palm oil, tie dyeing, is now common for most rural women as they can keep the income from these activities.

5.3 ANALYZING THE EFFECTS OF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT ON PALM OIL PROCESSING

The women interviewed did not make specific links to structural adjustment policies as being responsible, at least partly, for their problems. Nevertheless, drawing from the crisis in Sierra Leone, and the way in which the crisis has been deepened by adjustment policies, it is possible to make connections to these problems through the following:

5.3.1. DEVALUATION AND INFLATION

One way in which the palm oil processing has been affected by adjustment policies is through devaluation and consequent inflation. As the value of the leone to the dollar drops, inflation rises and prices of goods and services sky rockets. It would, of course, be a mistake to attribute the current high rate of inflation to devaluation alone, because, as noted earlier, inflation in Sierra Leone was high even before the policies were launched. However, in a situation of frozen wages and employment, and when subsidies on food and inputs have been dropped, the persistent high rate of inflation resulted in an erosion of real incomes and most households find it difficult to cope with the rising cost of living.

As the women mentioned, the price of the palm fruit has increased over seventy times since 1984. One of the reasons advanced for this in the official circles is that with the improved varieties of palm trees being grown, the fruit now yields more oil per ton and as such the women should not lose anything by buying smaller quantities than before. The women of course do not agree that there is an increase in the quantity of oil produced per ton of fruit and the astronomical costs of the fruit are really affecting their ability to produce.

5.3.2. RISING COSTS OF LIVING

Inflation affects not only the price of the fruit but the price of everything else about the business. Labour costs have increased drastically, fuelled by the rising costs of living - basic commodities, food, cooking and household energy.

The women complain of the high costs of labour, especially to the men who are hired for the more difficult tasks. It would seem that these added costs would be reflected in the final market price of the oil. The problem with this, however, is that with the already high cost of food items, any additional costs would render the product almost impossible to buy. Although the price of the oil has obviously increased (from le 3.00 in 1988 to le 12.00 per pint in 1991), the women are careful to keep it within reasonable limits.

5.3.3. REMOVAL OF SUBSIDIES

Another way in which palm oil processing has been affected by adjustment policies is through the removal of subsidies on essential commodities such as rice and petroleum. The price of petrol doubled between June 1986 and February 1987 following the withdrawal of its subsidy.

The official (government rate) for a gallon of petrol is currently le 1000.00 in Freetown and could cost anywhere between le 1000.00 and le 1500.00 in the provinces. In such situations, hoarding is common and remote rural areas could see petrol prices as high as between le 2000.00 and le 2500.00

per gallon. With such astronomical costs, coupled with the poor conditions of the roads, a lot of vehicles have been taken off the routes and transportation has become a real problem.

5.3.4. INADEQUATE TRANSPORTATION

The women in the survey cited transportation costs and availability as one of their most pressing problems. The reduction of social services means that roads are not likely to be repaired in the near future, especially in a 'remote' rural area like the study area. The unreliability and often unavailability of transportation means that most of the women who would otherwise have sold their product in other towns (where prices are higher) are forced to sell at home for lower prices. With almost everyone producing palm oil in the region, selling at home often leads to a glut in the market and women are forced to cut back on production, thereby affecting their incomes.

5.3.5. INCREASED HOUSEHOLD BURDEN

The removal of subsidies on basic food items such as rice increases the women's burden of taking care of their homes and their children. As mentioned earlier, it is a paradox that rice has always been cheaper in the cities than in the rural areas where people are expected to grow enough rice for subsistence.

This becomes even more of a problem because most women are not growing rice any more, and most men are also switching over to growing major export crops like cocoa and coffee or palm kernels for which producer prices are higher (Beoku-Betts, 1990). The women are faced with the problem of either buying at the present cost of le 10,000.00 per bag, or switching to other foods such as cassava and legumes which are often grown on their small farms. Women who do not grow these crops find that even these alternative foods are getting equally expensive, cutting into their incomes.

5.3.6. COSTS OF EDUCATION AND MEDICAL CARE

The reduction of social services under structural adjustment programmes affects the price of school fees, books, uniforms, and health costs for children. The survey showed that all the women who had children had a pressing desire to provide them with education. Much money will be needed for this if present trends continue, and it is vitally important that their income-generating activities continue to prosper.

5.4 ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDY

5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous section has shown that agriculture can no longer adequately provide women with the means to ensure their livelihood, and yet there is increased responsibility for women to ensure household reproduction, hence the influx into

informal sector activities. Palm oil processing has turned out to be a major source of income for a large number of women in this region. The main question discussed in this section is whether, through processing and selling palm oil, these women are meeting their strategic needs. I argue that apart from the fact that these women are surviving the crisis, i.e meeting their practical needs, women are also, through the income got from palm oil processing meeting strategic gender needs. This point will be argued around three main points: women's independence as a result of personal income; cooperation among women; and gender relations with family and community members.

5.4.2 WOMEN'S INDEPENDENCE

The empowerment of women is in large measure achieved through economic independence. As the data indicate, the desire to earn personal income was the main reason for which the women in the survey began processing palm oil for sale. The need for extra income was not only for their immediate survival i.e to provide food, schooling and medication for themselves and their children; the need went beyond survival to a desire for independence. It is probably important to re-state Yema's response which clearly illustrates this point:

although it is not much, the little I get from this business is mine, and no one can take that away from me.

This statement is a fierce demonstration of resistance against the common status quo, i.e female subordination in some areas

of life. Yewa and the other women have realised that through their capacity to meet their financial needs, they have earned the right to be independent. This sense of freedom in a way can be seen in Theresa's statement that she no longer had to depend on someone else to provide her needs. Using the income that she got from processing and selling palm oil, Dinah succeeded in putting her seven children through school. Her opinion of her work is that it "enables you to be a person".

This statement very aptly illustrates the women's feelings. Apparently Dinah and the other women are aware that a woman is only regarded as a minor by the society; any respect a woman gets is in the capacity of "somebody's daughter" or "somebody's wife". The women are also aware that this whole relationship changes with a woman's financial independence. Almost immediately, social relations change; the woman is now a "person", with the respects and most of the privileges accorded a man. She becomes a symbol to be emulated by other women, something which most men resent.

The statement is an indication that the women have always been aware of the struggles between gender. They have never been comfortable being considered as minors. The single women, for instance, acknowledged the fact that being self-sufficient meant that they no longer needed a relationship with a man for the sole purpose of survival. This probably accounts for the high level of budgetary autonomy among these women as indicated, for example, by the fact that none of them was in

a situation where household expenses were shared. Each woman expressed her own responsibilities and her need to carry out those responsibilities. Whether or not a man was involved in her life no longer determined her survival. As such all but one of the women were in control of their incomes.

In the one situation where the woman's income was controlled by her husband, the woman's need for independence was apparent as she conducts other business "on the side", the proceeds from which she controls. The very fact that this woman ventures out to seek her own source of private funds indicates her awareness of the strategic need to be independent.

The level of remuneration that women get from participating in income generating activities goes a long way in shaping their views of themselves. The level of budgetary autonomy leads to a change in women's perception of "traditional" relations and hence to a desire for transformation of gender relations and social structures. Palm oil processing has provided the women in the survey with a means through which these relationships can be transformed as will be illustrated in the following section.

5.4.3 RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The fact that women yearn for and revel in their independence indicates a change in gender relations both within the household and in the community. The notion of

domination/subordination which is pervasive in western feminist scholarship (for example, as Stamp (1989);p.24 notes) is not an applicable analysis in the case study context. There is, rather, a neutral complementarity between certain male and female roles in the society. This is illustrated by the women's attitudes towards their work. Although palm oil processing is also done by men, the women do not consider themselves as competing with the men or, more importantly, as being disadvantaged because of this.

On the contrary, these women often find ways of dealing with their problems. For example, the most difficult parts of the processing are harvesting and transportation of the fruits from the farm to the homes. In dealing with this problem, the women hire men to perform these tasks for a fee. In their opinion, men's labour can just as well be hired and there appear to be no problem with this. Again, only two of the married women indicated that their husbands helped to harvest and transport the fruit. The rest of the women spoke as if their husbands were never even aware of their work. Throughout the processing, the women hire male labour as needed and payments are made accordingly. The dichotomy between male and female tasks is certainly becoming blurred and so is the perception of gender differences.

A second reason for this analysis is the fact that none of the women faced opposition from their spouse or kinsman for engaging in oil palm production. None of the women ever had to

"ask for permission". Out of the twenty-five women, only one of them got the initial capital from her husband. The rest of the women loaned from friends, relatives, their osusu, or used their own funds. If women really considered themselves as being subordinate to men, there would have been more secrecy and apprehension about what they were doing; or at least there would have been an indication of permission having being sought and granted.

The change in gender relations can also be perceived through the way the women view their intimate relationships with men. A woman is considered as respectable if she is married or controlled by a father, brother, or kinsman. The single women in the survey have apparently realised that economic independence also means social independence. Women can be socially accepted without a husband as long as they have money to support themselves.

The fact that some women described themselves as "divorced" is another indication of change. In customary law a woman who has been divorced or widowed has to be "under the control" of a man to be respected in the society. What seems to be happening now is that women no longer deem it necessary to seek male protection. If they can meet their financial needs and obligations (needs which apparently men cannot provide) then the women might as well live separately.

5.4.4 COOPERATION AMONG WOMEN

The palm oil processing activity, as performed by the women of Mattru and Luawa, is basically done on an individual basis. The women did not get involved in the activity as a group, and they do not presently work as a group. Each woman has her own reasons and time of involvement. There is, however, a high degree of cooperation among these women, and a sense of belonging together, even if only as people on the same quest.

There are two types of cooperative avenues in these two villages. These are the sande society and the osusu credit unions. As mentioned earlier, the sande secret society is almost a national organisation of women which is present in every community in Sierra Leone. It is not specific to the study area and its activities go way beyond palm oil processing. Every adult woman involved in palm oil processing is a member of the sande society, but not all members of the society are involved in palm oil processing.

Nevertheless, the importance of the sande to women's empowerment can hardly be overemphasised. Through its regulatory mechanisms and powerful rules, the sande society has been an organisation through which the rights of women could be promoted and protected. Because of the fact that most leaders of the sande society are also important community heads, sande has served in many rural communities as the main source of obligatory mobilisation of women, often providing a

basic foundation for the creation of other types of women's associations.

In the study area, the sande society has provided an avenue through which women can cooperate with each other in every stage of the activity; the processing, marketing and credit. The fact that oil palm production depends solely on women's manual labour means that cooperation becomes even more important to their success. Through the sande women can contact each other and can hold private meetings in the kpangui; they can mobilise and protest injustices without being hampered by men. The autonomy of the sande thus provides an avenue through which women plan, pursue and achieve strategic gender goals.

The osusu club, like the sande, is also a branch of a nationwide credit association. The clubs are common among women who participate in income-generating activities outside the formal sector, thus serving as savings and credit institutions. It is easier for women to get loans from their osusu clubs because they contribute regularly to the funds. The osusu club in the study area welcomes every woman who can afford the regular payments. The main function of the club is to provide credit for its members.

As Mackenzie and Taylor (1989) point out:

Credit, by enabling peasants to expand and develop income-generating activities and by supporting health charges and school fees, could be a vital tool for empowering the rural poor to cope with the consequences of the current crisis. By so doing, credit from local cooperative credit unions could serve as vital instruments for achieving development from within and below (Mackenzie & Taylor, 1989;p.133)

Women put their savings from the palm oil business in the credit unions, often to avoid the predatory attitudes of their husbands. The osusu clubs in turn effectively utilize their deposits as loans to their members. The effectiveness of these clubs is, however, limited. The clubs are generally unable always to meet their members' demand for credit, because of their very limited financial resources.

Perhaps the most important issue relating to the existence of these osusu clubs is their role in the stimulation of development initiatives by their members. The osusu clubs provide an avenue for informal women's meetings where the women meet and discuss their financial options. Because of the confidence it generates in women through the assurance of credit, however small, women can engage in business ventures that would otherwise have been impossible. Women who work individually no doubt have the ability to succeed. It has, however, been proved (for example, Nkhoma-Wamunza, 1992;p.209-210) that women are more articulate and focused when working as a group. The women in the study area are using the sande society and osusu clubs to enhance their dignity, budgetary autonomy, and bargaining power. The

membership of women in these organisations is, therefore, leading to their empowerment, and thus to a transformation of their society.

5.4.5 CONCLUSION

Most of the literature on women and income-generating activities in the era of structural adjustment fails to draw on the linkages between women's economic activities in the informal sector and their potential for empowerment. Women are rather portrayed as being hopelessly trapped in the struggle for survival and the need for supplementing husband's income. There is no mention of how these income-generating activities may actually have contributed to women's "emancipation" and renewed sense of personal achievement. My research findings indicate that although structural adjustment policies have indeed influenced and affected women's activities, they have also provided a means by which women, through the initial need to survive, have become more enterprising in the informal sector. By taking on income-generating activities, women are indeed increasing their workload and stress; but they are also becoming innovative and are developing informal support systems as they struggle for the betterment of their families' and their individual livelihoods.

The women in the survey are obviously meeting their practical gender needs of providing food and other basic necessities for their families in this crisis period. They are

also achieving strategic needs of autonomy and control over their resources and a greater say in the household. Through the processing and sale of palm oil, these women have achieved economic independence and stability and the ability to decide how to spend their money. These strategic gender achievements have been made possible by the confidence brought about by empowerment through economic independence. These achievements should be hailed and encouraged by the government and non-governmental organisations. The next chapter recommends possible actions which can be taken to improve the capacity of these women to generate income and in the process empower themselves to pursue more of their strategic gender goals.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 CONCLUSION

The study focused on women's increasing involvement in the informal sector in countries besieged by structural adjustment programmes of the IMF and the World Bank. The main argument has been that women's activities in the informal sector have enabled them to achieve both their practical goals of surviving the crisis, and strategic goals of independence and empowerment.

Using the activities of the women in palm oil processing in the Jong Chiefdom in Sierra Leone as a case study, the study brings out, through the women's voices, the importance of informal sector activities to women. The study makes a link between the empowerment of women and their economic activities in the informal sector. The acquisition of personal income changes the relationships between men and women both in the household and in the society. If women's perceptions about their capabilities are changed, they can achieve or aspire to achieve, more strategic goals. Empowerment through the generation of personal income will ultimately lead to a transformation of social relations; of suppressive customs and

traditions; to a better "status" and acknowledgement of the role of women in the society.

Empowerment can be achieved single-handedly, but it would be a long and arduous process and might not even be effective in terms of transforming social relations. Cooperation is the key to empowerment, as it leads to mobilisation for specific problems and social issues. The women in the study area use their sande and osusu groups as a strategy to mobilise and fight to protect their strategic interests. Women's work in the informal sector should therefore be recognised and encouraged not just as a struggle to survive, but as a link to autonomy and financial independence.

In order for women's work to be fully recognised, changes are needed in government policies concerning women in agriculture and in the informal sector. Women should be able to obtain decent incomes whether in agriculture or in other sectors of the economy; they should be able to make the choice as to where to work and not be forced into a sector because of lack of alternatives.

In the aftermath of the Women's Decade, it is not easy to draw any clear-cut conclusions as to what positive efforts have been made to facilitate the empowerment of rural women in Sierra Leone, in spite of the attempts to revitalise the agricultural sector and to encourage the expansion of income-generating activities involving women in rural areas. The government of Sierra Leone has certainly demonstrated goodwill

through its endorsement and call for various measures which reflect the general consensus of the Women's Decade. An example is the proposed policy of the government to expand and integrate the role of women in development through education and training, development of skills and increased earning opportunities in keeping with the spirit of the Women's Decade. There is now a nation-wide interest in women's studies in Sierra Leone and this has resulted in the formation of many governmental and non-governmental organisations.

However, most of the policies proposed have yet to be explicitly elucidated and put into action. Nevertheless, considering the fact that women constitute 51% of the total population of about four million, and at least 35% of the economically active population (Lisk and Stevens, 1987; p.182), and to the extent that they contribute significantly to the Gross National Product, it is hard to see how they can continue to be treated as structurally separate from overall development strategies. It is, therefore, quite opportune at this time to make recommendations of specific areas where appropriate policies could be instituted to facilitate the empowerment of women within the goals of stated development objectives. It is also hoped that this survey will activate Aid organisations and the numerous national and international non-governmental organisations working in the country to assess their programmes and move towards concerted and collective efforts. This study therefore puts forward the

following recommendations:

1. ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EFFECTIVE WOMEN'S BUREAU

Perhaps the most critical area that needs urgent attention is an efficient national machinery which can coordinate the activities of women's organisations and which can identify, monitor and document information about the experiences and responsibilities of women in the society. Certainly the establishment of a women's bureau would draw attention, at the national and policy level, to the felt needs and interests of women. It would also strengthen women themselves by raising their level of awareness through political struggle and mobilisation efforts to pursue their goals. Since income-generating activities are widespread and popular, the women's bureau could have a unit within the Ministry of Social Services staffed by women with expertise in the study of gender issues and in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of income-generating activities.

2. STRENGTHENING RURAL WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

It is also important to strengthen the organisational capacity of grassroots women's organisations through constructive assistance and legislative measures. Such groups are often constrained by negative socio-cultural attitudes about women, a lack of knowledge about their civil rights, weak links with other regional and national women's groups,

and poor management strategies.

3. IMPROVING STATISTICAL AND QUALITATIVE DATA BASES

A critical issue which needs to be addressed is the lack of statistical and qualitative or historical data which differentiate, by gender, labour force participation and conditions in agriculture and income-generating activities. The establishment of a comprehensive statistical data base covering all economic sectors is crucial. Such a data base should contain baseline and follow-up data and should be able to adequately assess problems and priorities of women in income-generating activities.

Apart from statistical data, there is also a need for qualitative data which reflect the historical and cultural specificity of gender systems in the society, and which can show the processes through which these relationships have been transformed. As recommended by Stamp, such information would need to be collected through archival research, interviews, observation and use of secondary sources (Stamp, 1989). The establishment of a data base which takes account of gender as an analytical category in the development process would therefore assist policy makers and planners to make more realistic assessments, and to plan more appropriate programmes which reflect existing conditions and potentials in the income-generating sector.

4. EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME-GENERATION

There is also the need to optimise the use of women's productive capacity and to increase their employment and income-generating options. This is an area which needs new legislative measures and institutional support programmes. For example, efforts should be made to change socio-cultural images of domestic work being perceived as women's work. Steps could also be taken to prepare more women for work in wage employment in rural areas and to set up their own autonomous businesses, through improved credit facilities and training in management and accounting.

5. RECONSTRUCTING MACRO-ECONOMIC POLICIES WHICH AFFECT WOMEN

The impact of macro economic policies, especially structural adjustment policies on the ability of women to cope with the current food and economic crisis in the country requires some redirection on the part of the government. In the informal sector, much of the work that women do and the conditions under which they do it are directly or indirectly shaped by policies which encourage indebtedness, export commodity production and reduced flexibility and self autonomy of the economy. While some women may benefit through improved income or employment, the majority are adversely affected. The ability of women to provide for the needs of their families is thus seriously challenged.

6.2 FUTURE RESEARCH CONCERNS

This study ends with the following questions which concern areas where more research is needed in order to facilitate a better understanding of the issues raised:

1. How can women be aided in improving their productivity in the informal sector during this era of structural adjustment? The need to optimize the use of women's productive capacity and to increase their employment and income generating options has been recognised by the government of Sierra Leone in the aftermath of the Women's Decade and since the Lagos Plan of Action. What is needed now is implementing strategies to bring this about, focusing on specific activities in which women are involved. How should this be done?
2. What should the role of technology be in the bid to improve the quality and quantity of women's work in the informal sector?

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Appendix

RESEARCH GUIDELINES

GENERAL TOPICS:

- Project and objectives
- The activities
- Inputs and credit (labour & fiscal)
- Achievement(s)
- Options
- Perception and attitudes

INTRODUCTION

1. Can you give me your approximate age?
2. Are you married or single?
If married, are you (a) living with your husband;

(b) living alone (away from husband);

(c) separated;

If single, are you (a) divorced;

(b) widowed;

(c) engaged to be married;
3. Have you ever been to school?
4. If yes, what is the highest level you reached (primary,
secondary, college/university)
5. What is your occupation?
6. Social status (middle class, relatively upper class or
working class) To determine this you can take attributes like
type of housing, attire, civic duty etc.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

7. How many of you live permanently in your house? 1d?

8. How many children do you have?

Give their (a) ages (b) sexes?

9. How many of them go to school?

10. What is your financial burden in the home?

e.g do you pay for (a) food

(b) firewood

(c) clothing for children

(d) health care

11. Do any of your children work with you in this business?

12. Do you contribute towards the education of your children?

13. What do you actually do towards the children's education?

PROJECT AND OBJECTIVES

In this section, I would like the women to give a detailed account of their involvement in the palm oil business. Since my main interest in the topic is to have a historical account of changes in the activity, I need to have the women identify a point which they consider a landmark in their activity; a point when things changed for them, either for better or for worse. For instance, you can say to the women: "looking back on your business since you started, can you identify a point or time when there was a perceptible change, e.g in the production, access to materials, marketing etc? and then, "try to give a comparative account of the business as it was before

this important point and as it is now. Which time was for the business and why? One important point of emphasis should be any change in the degree of control over palm trees and how this has changed over time.

You can use the following questions as guidelines to help you obtain the right responses.

14. what year did you go into Palm oil business?
15. How did you get into the business? (e.g was your mother or other relative in the business; were you introduced by someone, etc?)
16. What is the source of your capital?
17. How large is your business (how many drums, gallons, bottles of oil do you produce per season)?
18. Before you started this oil business what were you doing to earn money?
19. Why did you decide to go into this palm oil business?
20. How do you get the palm fruit?
21. How easy is it to get access to the palm trees or fruits?
22. Who owns the plantation from which you get your fruit?
23. What other products can you get from the palm tree that can earn you some income?
24. Do you participate in the production of these other items?
25. How do you process the oil? describe the techniques that you use?
26. What are the difficulties you face in the processing?
27. Do you use any form of modern technology?

28. Do other people help you from or outside the family? what do they do? Do you pay them? How do you pay them?
29. Is there anything you would like changed about the processing?
30. What is the hardest part of the job?

Marketing

Marketing, as you know, is very important to the success of any business venture. As with the production, I would like to place a keen emphasis on changes in marketing arrangements over time. Is the market local (within the production region, e.g, Jong chiefdom) or is it external say, in Freetown or even abroad? how is the marketing done (You really need to emphasize the idea, if any, of networking: does the woman, e.g, sell her oil through agents to marketing boards; does she do it all by herself, say, in the local market; what are her marketing networks? It would help if you tried to get as detailed information as possible on how the marketing is done. Below are some more examples of possible questions: Please do not limit yourself to these questions - ask as many questions as necessary to give you the answers you want.

31. Have you noticed fluctuations in oil prices?
32. How many gallons of palm oil do you sell after one production?
33. Do you sell your oil immediately after production?
34. Do you sell your oil locally?

35. How do you sell the oil?

36. Are there adequate transportation networks for marketing your product?

37. Are you satisfied with your marketing networks?

how did you form your marketing networks?

38. Do you have storage facilities?

39. How long can you keep the oil for?

40. Do you have problems selling your oil?

41. Where would you rather sell your oil, locally or externally?

42. When is your best selling season?

43. What is the demand for oil in the region and the country in general?

44. Is the demand equal to the supply?

45. Is there a glut in the market at times?

46. What do you do in the event of reduced demand ?

47. Is there any competition between local business and the government? (this question refers to tensions, e.g over marketing, that may exist between the government sponsored oil palm production plants and the local small scale type of business that women in this region are doing).

48. Do you get support from (a) other businesses;

(b) the government?

Do you get pressure from (a) other businesses; (b) from the government?

49. Do you pay any form of tax to the local authorities for trading in oil?

50. Do you have plans to own a palm oil plantation yourself?

51. How do you intend to do this?

52. How do you intend to get both land and funds for such a project?.

53. What are some of the problems that you encounter?

54. How much profit do you make? (Give approximate figures)

55. How is your business affected by the general economic situation in the country? (This, I know, is a very broad question. It is obvious to everyone that the increasingly worsening economic situation is affecting everyone, in business or otherwise. What I really want to know is the specifics. The woman can refer back to the central question of change over time.

Is it getting increasingly difficult to say, market the product because of a reduction in demand or increase in prices; or alternatively, is she getting more money now as a result of price increases?)

Inputs and credit

Money is a crucial factor in the success of any business. It is therefore important to know the source of income for the women. Have they, for instance, ever received a loan in any form whatsoever? If so, how much was the loan and what were the conditions under which the loan was approved? Was the loan

sufficient? You should really try to find out any sources of loans that the woman has ever used. Again the following questions should only serve as guidelines:

56. Did you have to get a loan to start the business?
57. Have you ever had a loan before?
58. Where did the loan come from?
59. Can you state the specific or approximate amount?
60. Did you need a collateral for the loan?
61. Do you have access to loan facilities right now?
62. Have you always had access to loan facilities?
63. Does the Mattru Rural Bank give loans to oil producers?
64. Do you have access to the loan facilities of the Mattru Rural Bank?
65. Do you get any form of assistance from any government agency or private organisation?
66. If you were asked to make a request for assistance from government or private organisation, what exactly would you ask for?

SOME INFORMATION ON THE HOUSEHOLD

67. How many of you are engaged in palm oil business in your household?
68. How many wives has your husband?
69. Are your mates also involved in the oil business?
70. Is your husband also actively involved in this oil production?

71. What kind of assistance do you receive from your husband in your oil business?
72. Do you still have time to perform your usual household chores?
73. Do you keep your income?
74. How much control does your husband have over your earnings from the oil business?
75. Do you have plans to increase the quantity and/or quality of your oil production?
76. How would expansion affect:
- your labour and inputs
 - your 'other' duties
 - your relationship in and out of the home with your husband, co-wives, etc.

Perceptions

77. Why has palm oil production become so popular amongst women in this area?
78. Do you ever meet with other women to discuss common problems?
79. Are men actively involved in this oil business?
80. Are you in partnership with anybody in this oil business?
81. Do you know of husbands that are in partnership with their wives?
82. Do you know whether this partnership thrives very well?
83. Do you enjoy having your own business all by yourself?

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84. Do you think you are getting enough gains from this business?
85. As a woman how do you feel owning your own money?
86. Do you think your husband is pleased that you have your own money?
87. Does your husband feel his authority threatened by your present economic position?
88. Would you like to work for the government; e.g teaching or as a secretary?
89. What are your views regarding such jobs?
90. Has your status in the community improved with income?
91. Has your extra income affected your relationship with your husband? (bargaining power etc)
92. In your opinion, are there other options or alternatives to this palm oil business?
93. If there are options, would you prefer any?
94. How do you really feel about this business you are in?
95. Has your level of investment gone beyond the level of sustenance?
96. What are your perceptions concerning the future of this business?

END

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FIN