



SLARi

COMMERCIALIZATION AND AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT POLICY



Dr. Isata Kamanda

Deputy Director-General

**Commercialization and Agribusiness
Development**

Introduction

Agricultural commercialization is a multifaceted process involving the transition from subsistence-oriented farming to market-driven production systems, where decisions regarding inputs and outputs are primarily guided by profit maximization and market demand. This transformation is widely recognized as a critical pathway for poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth, and improved food and nutrition security, particularly in developing economies.

For a research institution such as the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), which is mandated to generate agricultural innovations and technologies, fostering agricultural commercialization requires a deliberate and structured policy framework. A comprehensive Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Policy is therefore essential to guide the systematic translation of research outputs into viable products, services, and enterprises.

This policy articulates SLARI's commitment to converting scientific research into tangible economic and social benefits by strengthening agricultural value chains, promoting private sector engagement, and facilitating the adoption and scaling of improved technologies. It also aims to empower key stakeholders within the Agri-food system including farmers, agribusinesses, cooperatives, and processors through capacity building, partnerships, and market-oriented innovation.

By aligning research priorities with national development goals and market opportunities, the policy positions SLARI as a catalyst for agribusiness development, job creation, and sustainable agricultural transformation in Sierra Leone.

Rationale for a Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Policy Aligned with SLARI's Mandate.

➤ Bridging research and Impact:

Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute has developed and adapted improved varieties and production technologies for key crops such as rice, cassava, sweet potato, groundnut, maize, cowpeas, and soybeans, but a commercialization policy methodically transforms these research and innovation outputs into marketable products thereby income-generating opportunities.

➤ **Strengthening Priority Value Chains:**

Rice, cassava, maize, sweet potato, groundnut, cowpeas, and soybeans are strategic food and industrial crops in Sierra Leone. A commercialization policy aligns SLARI's research with a functional seed system, agro processing and market development, ensuring these crops move beyond subsistence production to commercial scale.

➤ **Supporting Food Security and Nutrition:**

SLARI's research on rice, cassava, maize, sweet potato and groundnut contributes to national food and nutritional security, while cowpeas and soybeans enhance dietary protein and soil fertility. Commercialization enables wider adoption of these crops, improving availability, affordability, and nutrition outcomes.

➤ **Promoting Agribusiness and Private Sector Participation:**

The policy creates pathways for private seed producers, processors, and small and medium scale businesses to adopt and scale SLARI technologies for rice and cassava processing, maize milling, soybean and cowpea value addition.

➤ **Enhancing Farmer Incomes and Livelihoods:**

By linking SLARI's improved varieties to markets, the policy supports smallholder farmers to increase productivity, reduce post-harvest losses, and access higher-value markets for cassava, maize, cowpeas, and soybeans.

➤ **Aligning Research with National Development Goals:**

Commercializing SLARI's priority crops supports import substitution, rural employment, and youth and women Agri-preneurship, directly contributing to Sierra Leone's agricultural transformation agenda and the Feed Salone Strategy.

➤ **Ensuring institutional sustainability:**

The policy enables SLARI to generate revenue through technology licensing, partnerships, and advisory services related to rice, cassava, maize, sweet potato, groundnut, cowpeas, and soybean innovations, strengthening the institute's long-term operational capacity.

Key Components of Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Policy.

Effective commercialization and agribusiness development policies typically encompass several interconnected elements as stated below:

Intellectual Property (IP) Management and Protection: The goal is to secure exclusive rights to innovations, making them attractive for private sector investment and development within Sierra Leone's agricultural sector. For the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), effective intellectual property management will help reduce commercial risks associated with adopting locally developed technologies, enhance technology transfer, and support structured engagement with seed companies, agribusinesses, and development partners.

By clearly defining ownership between SLARI and its researchers, and by establishing transparent procedures for disclosure, evaluation, protection, and research outputs, SLARI can negotiate equitable licensing agreements that facilitate scaling and market penetration. This approach ensures that publicly funded agricultural research is transformed into commercially viable products and services, strengthens national agribusiness development, and delivers sustainable productivity gains and income opportunities for farmers while contributing to food security and economic growth in Sierra Leone. Here are some areas The Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) plays a central role in developing and promoting agricultural innovations that drive national food nutritional security and economic growth.

- By implementing effective intellectual property (IP) management, SLARI can secure exclusive rights to its research outputs, making them attractive for private sector investment and development.
- Clear policies on ownership between SLARI and its researchers, along with transparent procedures for disclosure, evaluation, protection, and licensing, enable the Institute to mitigate commercial risks, facilitate technology transfer, and engage effectively with seed companies, agribusinesses, and development partners. This strategic approach ensures that publicly funded research is translated into commercially viable products and services, strengthens agribusiness development, and generates sustainable productivity gains and income opportunities for farmers, thereby advancing Sierra Leone's agricultural sector.

Funding and Investment Strategies (Aligned with SLARI)

Effective commercialization of agricultural research requires sustained financial investment beyond initial research grants. In alignment with the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), funding and investment strategies should support the translation of research outputs into scalable, market-ready innovations that contribute to national food nutritional security, farmer livelihoods, and agribusiness development.

➤ **Internal Seed Funding**

SLARI may establish or strengthen internal seed funding mechanisms to support early-stage commercialization activities. These funds can be used for proof-of-concept development, prototyping, field validation, market assessments, and preparation of business and scaling plans. Priority should be given to innovations with clear relevance to Sierra Leone's agricultural value chains.

➤ **Government and Development Partner Grants**

SLARI will actively leverage national, regional, and international public funding programs that support research commercialization and innovation. Comparable models include programs such as Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR), which promote collaboration between research institutions and private enterprises to move technologies from the laboratory to the market. Similarly, partnerships with donor-funded initiatives, development banks, and international agricultural research programs can provide commercialization support aligned with Sierra Leone's development priorities.

➤ **Competitive Research and Innovation Programs**

Engagement with agriculture focused funding mechanisms similar in intent to the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative and Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education can support applied research, sustainable agriculture innovations, and farmer-centered technologies. SLARI should prioritize programs that integrate research, extension, and commercialization outcomes.

➤ **Venture Capital and Private Investment**

Where appropriate, SLARI will encourage engagement with private investors, impact investors, agribusiness firms, and venture capital partners interested in funding scalable agricultural technologies and enterprises. Public-private partnerships may be structured to ensure that commercialization efforts remain inclusive and aligned with national agricultural development goals.

➤ **Cost Recovery and Revenue Reinvestment**

Policies will outline mechanisms for managing revenues generated from licensing agreements, royalties, service fees, and equity participation in spin-off enterprises. In line with SLARI's mandate, recovered funds will be transparently reinvested into research, innovation infrastructure, capacity building, and future commercialization activities to ensure long-term institutional sustainability.

Entrepreneurship and Innovation Ecosystem Development

Beyond the commercialization of individual technologies, sustainable agribusiness development will require a supportive entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem that nurtures entrepreneurial talent, strengthens collaboration, and accelerates the translation of research into market-ready solutions. In alignment with the mandate of the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), this policy seeks to create an enabling environment for agricultural innovation and enterprise development.

Training and Education

SLARI shall promote training and capacity-building initiatives to equip researchers, students, and staff with essential entrepreneurial competencies. These initiatives may include workshops, short courses, mentorship programs, and practical learning platforms focused on entrepreneurship, agribusiness development, market analysis, and intellectual property (IP) awareness. Strengthening these skills will enhance the ability of research personnel to identify commercialization opportunities and engage effectively with the private sector.

Networking and Community Building

SLARI shall facilitate networking and partnership platforms that connect researchers with agribusinesses, farmers, processors, investors, development partners, and policymakers. These platforms may include innovation forums, stakeholder dialogues, field days, and partnership events designed to encourage collaboration, knowledge exchange, and co-development of market-driven solutions. By serving as a convening hub, SLARI will help bridge the gap between research outputs and market needs.

Pilot Projects and Demonstration Activities

To reduce risks associated with early-stage commercialization, SLARI shall support pilot projects and demonstration activities that validate the technical, economic, and social viability of new agricultural technologies and practices under real-world conditions. Such initiatives may be implemented at the existing research stations, on-farm demonstration sites, or in collaboration with agribusiness partners. Successful demonstrations will facilitate investor confidence, farmer adoption, and scaling of innovations.

Policy and Regulatory Engagement

Effective commercialization and agribusiness development require an enabling policy and regulatory environment that supports innovation, protects public interests, and facilitates the transition of research outputs to the market. In alignment with the mandate of the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI), this policy emphasizes proactive engagement with policymakers and regulatory authorities to strengthen the national framework for agricultural innovation and commercialization.

Engagement with Policymakers and Regulators

SLARI shall actively engage with relevant government ministries, regulatory agencies, and legislative bodies to advocate for policies that support agricultural research, innovation, and commercialization. This includes promoting sustained investment in agricultural research and development, streamlining regulatory approval processes for new technologies and products, and reducing administrative barriers that delay market entry.

Supportive Regulatory Frameworks

SLARI will contribute technical expertise and evidence-based research to inform the development and refinement of regulations affecting agricultural inputs, technologies, and agribusiness enterprises. Particular attention shall be given to policies that encourage sustainable agricultural practices, climate-smart innovations, and inclusive value chain development.

Facilitation of Technology Transfer Mechanisms

In collaboration with government partners, SLARI shall support the adoption of flexible and innovative mechanisms for technology transfer and commercialization. These may include adaptive contractual arrangements, public–private partnerships, and pilot regulatory approaches that enable testing and scaling of new agricultural technologies while ensuring safety, quality, and compliance with national standards.

Policy Coordination and Advocacy

SLARI shall work with farmer organizations, private sector actors, development partners, and civil society to identify policy gaps and advance coordinated policy actions that accelerate the commercialization of agricultural research outputs. By serving as a trusted technical advisor, SLARI will help ensure that national agricultural policies are informed by scientific evidence and aligned with market realities.

Agricultural Commercialization in Practice (Aligned with SLARI)

The implementation of the Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Policy will be reflected in practical, impact-oriented applications across key agricultural sectors. SLARI’s research and innovation activities will prioritize commercialization pathways that enhance productivity, sustainability, and value creation within Sierra Leone’s agricultural system.

Crop and Livestock Improvement

SLARI shall support the commercialization of improved crop varieties and livestock technologies that demonstrate enhanced productivity, resilience, and nutritional value. This includes crop varieties with higher yields, improved resistance to pests and diseases, and better tolerance to climate stress, as well as improved livestock breeds, feeding

systems, and management practices. Commercialization efforts will emphasize farmer adoption, seed and breeding system development, and partnerships with input suppliers and producer organizations.

Sustainable Agriculture Technologies

SLARI shall promote the development and commercialization of agricultural technologies that enhance environmental sustainability and climate resilience. These may include precision agriculture tools, bio-pesticides, soil fertility management innovations, water-efficient irrigation systems, and climate-smart farming practices. Commercialization pathways will prioritize technologies that are affordable, scalable, and suitable for smallholder farming systems, while supporting long-term environmental stewardship.

Food Processing and Value-Added Products

SLARI shall support innovations in agro-processing, packaging, and product development that add value to agricultural commodities and respond to market and consumer demands. This includes improved post-harvest handling technologies, processing methods that reduce losses, and the development of new or enhanced food products and profiles. Partnerships with small and medium-scale agro-processors, cooperatives, and private enterprises will be encouraged to facilitate market access and enterprise growth.

Agricultural Policy and Commercialization Research

SLARI shall conduct and support research that examines the impacts of agricultural commercialization pathways on rural livelihoods, food security, gender equity, and economic development. Evidence generated from policy and commercialization research will inform institutional strategies, national policy dialogue, and the continuous refinement of commercialization interventions. This research function will ensure that commercialization efforts are inclusive, evidence-based, and aligned with national development goals.

Challenges and Considerations in Commercialization and Agribusiness Development

While commercialization offers significant opportunities to translate agricultural research into socio-economic impact, it also presents a range of challenges that must be carefully managed. In implementing this policy, the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) recognizes the following key considerations:

Long Development and Adoption Cycles

Agricultural innovations often require extended periods for research validation, field testing, regulatory approval, and farmer adoption. These long development cycles demand sustained financial investment, institutional commitment, and long-term partnerships to ensure successful commercialization outcomes.

Market Volatility and Risk

Agricultural markets are inherently volatile and influenced by factors such as climate variability, global trade dynamics, price fluctuations, and changing consumer preferences. These uncertainties pose risks to agribusiness ventures and may affect the commercial viability of research-based innovations.

Access to Capital

Securing adequate financing remains a major constraint, particularly for early-stage agricultural technologies and start-up enterprises. Limited access to risk-tolerant capital can delay or prevent promising innovations from reaching the market, underscoring the need for blended financing approaches and public-private partnerships.

Regulatory and Compliance Challenges

The commercialization of agricultural products and technologies often requires navigating complex regulatory frameworks related to biosafety, quality standards, environmental protection, and food safety. Lengthy and costly approval processes may discourage innovation if not adequately streamlined and supported.

Equity, Inclusivity, and Social Impact

Ensuring that commercialization efforts benefit a broad range of stakeholders—including smallholder farmers, women, youth, and marginalized communities—is a critical consideration. SLARI recognizes the importance of inclusive commercialization models that strengthen family farming systems, promote equitable value chain participation, and contribute to rural livelihoods and food nutritional security.

Conclusion

Agricultural commercialization and agribusiness development are essential for translating scientific research into practical, market-based solutions that address national and global agricultural challenges. Through strategic management of intellectual property, effective technology transfer diversified funding mechanisms, entrepreneurship ecosystem development, and proactive policy engagement, SLARI will maximize the impact of its research investments. By adopting this Commercialization and Agribusiness Development Policy, SLARI reaffirms its commitment to innovation, sustainability, inclusivity, and economic transformation. The policy provides a foundation for strengthening linkages between research and markets, driving agribusiness growth, and contributing to a resilient and prosperous agricultural future for Sierra Leone.