

appropriate foods for young children. **Women and girls in all their diversity** are particularly constrained by lack of access to strategic resources (for example land), learning opportunities and lower levels of human capital due to traditional expectations on division of gender-assigned roles in family and society. Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) support modalities are not prevalent in Sierra Leone, despite good results for women's economic empowerment and local conflict prevention at grassroots levels. **Young and unemployed women and men** generally lack skills towards sustainable employment either by enterprises, large companies, or even for on- or off-farm self-employment.

Private sector is dominated by micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).³² Micro and small enterprises have limited access to finance to strengthen their producer networks; to upgrade their production (or sometimes even to maintain broken machinery or invest in stable energy solutions) or to diversify into other, profitable products, such as infant food, waste processing or into formal exports. Medium and large enterprises are formal players with processing and manufacturing facilities. They often aggregate and establish nucleus farms to supplement sourcing. Various models exist for securing supply, including land rental and estate establishment, purchase from smallholder producers through formal or informal arrangements. There is lack of clear regulations defining such models, leading to an uneven power dynamic where off takers often dictate prices to farmers. A few large companies exist within each of the selected value chains; they report challenges to grow, impeded by insufficient finance and land, unreliable electricity, high tax rates, burdensome customs and trade regulations and a general poor eco-system for doing business³³.

MSMEs are key driver for employment and jobs creation, it is estimated that a typical soap factory, employs 18-20 permanent workers, while small gari processors employ 2-3 permanent workers and the same number in day labourers. **Oil palm** processors produce crude oil, which can be used for inputs into a vibrant national and regional market for soap and associated products or for cooking oil, although artisanal processing methods are generally preferred for cooking oil processing due to the colour and consistency of the oil. Soap is produced both by large manufactures and small enterprises. Many small enterprises exist, including several who use kernel oil as a substitute for crude palm oil or as inputs into animal feed value chains. However, they operate inefficiently, with poor extraction rates, expensive and cumbersome supply chains and polluting processing technologies. **Cassava processors** are numerous and varied in terms of scale and size at the national level, with stronger FBO and cooperative structures observed. Processors in this segment primarily focus on gari production, which has a lengthy production cycle and often remains only half-mechanized due to limited power availability. **Infant food processors** are few and operate mostly as small private infant food processing factories registered as sole proprietorship businesses, limited liability companies, or community owned factories (for example, one is owned and run by a mother-to-mother support group). Infant food processors in the country are constrained by limited access to raw materials, low production capacity, low consumer and nutritional knowledge, lack of availability of modern equipment (including packaging and labelling equipment), weak infrastructure and lack of access to finance. Furthermore, limited linkages of value chain actors and lack of capacity building materials and opportunities on the formulations, shelf-life and hygiene practices further limit the sector.

With some success, SME **accelerator labs** in country have been supporting development of the private sector. These accelerators provide tailor-made and hands-on support to companies (selected through, for example, calls for proposals) to improve their business plan, as well as providing opportunities to boost operations and strengthen managerial capacities. They support supply chains and producer networks, economic and financial analysis for bankable business plans. Other important players for private sector development include the **Sierra Leone Chamber of Agribusiness Development (SLeCAD)**; and the Cassava Growers Association but are all small institutions and bear a considerable risk of limited capacity.³⁴ Strong **NGOs/CSOs** support grassroots mobilization,

³² There is no single definition of **enterprise** or SME in Sierra Leone. The SMEDA act defines small enterprise as having annual turnover less than SLL100 million (US\$8,500) and medium enterprise as having turnover larger than this but less than SLL500 million (US\$42,680). The Small and Micro Taxpayer Regime in turn defines SME as having a turnover between SLL10 million (US\$850) and SLL350 million (US\$29,876) for the purposes of taxation. For this Action, enterprises are defined it as *any registered business or commercial entity engaged in economic activities, including production, trade, or services and of small or medium size. They don't necessarily have limited liability.*

³³ Ease of doing business ranking was 163 in 2020.

³⁴ Both are implementation partners under other EU AAPs and other projects of development partners, with which partnerships may be established; but care should be taken not to overburden the organizational structures artificially nor to hinge private sector development upon shoulders of organizations which are not in themselves representative and highly inclusive of farmers.