

My Laidlaw Final Reflection

The project: Leadership learnings, experiences, reflections, stakeholders, sustainability and significance

Growing up in Guinea, I knew how people lack food to eat. I chose this project out of that curiosity because I wanted to know why Guineans are hungry despite the country's natural resources including fertile land and rain. I decided to explore this topic through the Laidlaw Program by learning more about agriculture and then focusing on how the Guinean agriculture system works, including the challenges it faces. Furthermore, this project was also about exploring how the causes of food insecurity are framed by different stakeholders in the Guinean society and abroad including the government, farmers, peasants, citizens, international organizations, and NGOs.

I divided the independent research into two phases: desk research (2023) and field research (2024). In 2023 including the summer, I explored the agriculture sector in a broad sense and Guinea specifically through the websites of the World Food Program, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and Guinea's Agriculture Ministry website.

This independent research enabled me to consider Agriculture as part of my Brown University experience. I took the Farm Planet course taught by Professor Mindi Schneider, who also is my faculty mentor. This class taught me a lot about agriculture and policy. I learned about how Bretton Woods institutions are involved in the agricultural sector, the pros and cons of traditional vs. modern agricultural practices, the challenges within the sector like seed discrimination, and interestingly, how structural adjustment affected and is affecting the agriculture sector for many countries. These notions prepared me significantly for constructive conversations with my interviewees.

In my field research for Leadership in Action (LiA) in Guinea this past summer, I collaborated and discussed with a range of food stakeholders in Guinea including smallholder farmers, non-farmers, government officials, and experts. I visited over six farms located in two different regions of the country. I met and listened to incredible and resilient people who are passionate about agriculture. I found that communities are cooperative and welcoming even better than I knew before. Thus, I realized they love very much discussing issues related to food insecurity. These talks included the agricultural challenges mainly focused on the low production of food and causes of food insecurity. The effect of food insecurity is apparent almost everywhere within families, and even on the streets. A real food desert is noticeable due to both lack of food accessibility and availability. Therefore, people were willing to talk to me because of the relevance and visibility of food insecurity in Guinean society.

Through my interaction with the stakeholders, I found that relationship plays a vital role in research. For example, I learned about *the Etats Generaux de l'agriculture et de leverage* "General States of Agriculture and Livestock" from the first person I interviewed. This was a national event (July 3rd to July 5th, 2024) and the first time such an event happened in the Guinean agricultural department. I would not have known about it otherwise and this event became vital for my project. Practically all stakeholders came from different regions of the country including farmers, breeders, and government officials, NGOs, international organizations like the FAO, and entrepreneurs. Additionally, both Ministers of Agriculture of

Rwanda and Sierra Leone were present with many other guest speakers and experts nationally and internationally.

This event taught me a lot about the state of agriculture in Guinea. Through it, I was able to understand some of the most critical problems that the agriculture sector faces in particular, and governance in general, through listening to different panelists. A farmer I interviewed had told me that, in Guinea agriculture is mostly viewed as a practice of unsuccessful people. He said, “When someone became unsuccessful they advise he/she to return to the village and do farming.” But, a promising fact about food security I noticed at the event was how young people are now getting into the field, which is gradually changing how agriculture used to be viewed.

In my discussion with some agricultural officials, I noticed how the government is not doing much to attract people into the agricultural sector for potential investment and high local food production. I was surprised to learn that the country, since its independence 66 years ago, still lacks a viable agricultural land policy, despite its natural agricultural resources.

In my perspective, the initiative of the Guinean agricultural ministry to organize such an event for the first time in history was salutary. Experts and participants provided useful recommendations and shared how their countries are solving problems related to food security. However, the pessimism for many participants was the concretization of those recommendations by the governments. Among the issues I heard frequently and noticed during this summer were the lack of structuration/regulation of the sector of agriculture, and the lack of transparency of the sector's officials, including conflict of interest, favoritism, and corruption around ethnic, social, and political lines.

I believe it is possible to achieve food self-sufficiency in Guinea. Therefore, the country needs transparent equitable governance, integrity and most importantly a high awareness of its population to overcome challenges and focus on progress and the potentiality within the agriculture sector. Moving forward with this research on food insecurity in Guinea, it will be crucial to understand how agriculture is taught in Guinean institutions, and how food insecurity impacts are reflected in the population's health. This can be done by targeting schools, universities, and hospitals.