



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 3 • October 2022



MESSAGE FROM THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR

Like the previous two years, colleagues, we started this year with fears over the COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to shape how we do things. We were still worried about the science of the pandemic and how we interact going forward. However, I am happy to note that our in-person UN Townhall for all staff which took place earlier in the month, and for the first time in a very long time, indicates that we have learnt how to live with the disease.

Whilst the pandemic is still with us, thanks to the extremely high vaccination rate amongst all staff, we are now able to meet with friends and colleagues from our UN agencies, funds and programmes in Sierra Leone. If you have not been fully vaccinated, I encourage you to do so, including taking your booster shots. Let me also congratulate and commend you for the work that you continue to do, as international civil servants, in the pursuit of global peace and stability, and in Sierra Leone, particularly as we all work toward supporting the development aspirations of the country and the 2030 Agenda.

Continue on page 2

CONTENTS

1. UN Sierra Leone awarded Best Country Results Report for Africa
2. Celebrating the UN @ 77
3. UN Country Team emphasizes commitment to Peace and Inclusion
4. UN Country Team in Sierra Leone holds workshop on Human Rights Due Diligence Policy
5. From Risk to Role Models: Evidence of Peace-Building Impacts from Joint Monitoring Visit to Youth at Risk Project Communities
6. Spotlight on Sierra Leonean Innovator who made his Country's First Solar Car from Local Materials
7. 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights held in Freetown
8. Sierra Leone: How school feeding empowers parents to grow and sell vegetables
9. Increasing resilience in Susan Bay community
10. Women's Consortium to address financial challenges in digital finance for underserved markets set up
11. Empowering Local Communities in Falaba to Address Transhumance-Related Conflict
12. UN Network on Migration in Sierra Leone holds retreat, validates work plan
13. Closing the WASH gap and supporting better hygiene practices in communities





As the Resident Coordinator, I am fully aware of the effects of the global crunch and the Ukraine-Russia crisis on your financial emoluments, especially the national staff. We face difficult economic conditions, with rampaging inflation and drastic currency depreciation. The UNCT is actively following the matter, and together with the OMT, we are making all the necessary efforts to raise the issue at the highest level. However, we all know the UN has policies and bureaucratic processes. I cannot make promises, but we are exploring all options.

We all know we are in the election season, and colleagues have political viewpoints. I must remind you, however, that we are all international civil servants with responsibilities and codes of conduct regarding elections, including our personal use of social media. To support this country effectively, we, UN personnel have to respect diverse opinions, protect our integrity, and remain professional at all times to retain our credibility as the neutral, objective and impartial global body. As UN personnel, we carry these core values wherever we go, whatever we do, 24/7.

We have also listened to your feedback on the UN Clinic, and a comprehensive review was undertaken. I thank everyone who completed the survey in support of this. On security, we know colleagues were worried during the unrest on 10 August and felt that security-related communication could have been better. I want staff to remember that not everything on social media is always 100% accurate and credible. So, the RC and UNDSS have a responsibility to investigate, triangulate and verify all information before making recommendations and taking action.

Our duty of care is to you, our colleagues, the most prized asset of our organization.

Thank you.



UN DAY DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS EVENT

Photos credit – Alfred Fornah @IOM



Cutting of the anniversary cake: L- R: Her Worship the Mayor of Freetown - Yvonne Aki-Sawyers, Minister of Planning & Economic Development - Dr Francis Kai-Kai, Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation - Professor David Francis, Resident Coordinator Babatunde Ahonsi, Deputy Dean of the Diplomatic Corp (High Commissioner of the Federal Republic of Nigeria) - H.E Henry John Omaku & Embassy of Ireland Charge d'affaires (Head of Irish Aid) - Carol Hannon.



United Nations Resident Coordinator Babatunde Ahonsi delivering remarks at the UN@77 Government of Sierra Leone & Development Partners' reception held on October 25 in Freetown



In attendance at the UN@77 reception: L- R: Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation - Professor David Francis, Her Worship the Mayor of Freetown - Yvonne Aki-Sawyers, Minister of Planning & Economic Development - Dr Francis Kai-Kai. At the back were – Ministers of Political & Public Affairs - Ambassador Foday Yumkella and Minister of Technical and Higher Education - Dr Alpha T Wurie.



The One Family People (The Walpolian) provided entertainment at the reception



UN @77 STAFF CELEBRATION



UN staff in Sierra Leone participated in a 5KM Walk in observance of UN@77 (Photo John Sesay@UNFPA)



Heads of Agencies and the rest of the UN family at the Family Kingdom on UN Day (Photo Mohamed Kanu @UNDP)



A Booth display showcasing the work of the agencies and a t-shirt design competition formed part of activities marking UN Day, and the RC and HoAs were the judges. (Photo UN Women)



UN work on display during the Booth exhibition at Family Kingdom (photo- UNOPS (left) UNDP (right))



UNOPS won the 5KM UN@77 Run for male



UNICEF won the 5KM UN@77 for female



UN Sierra Leone awarded Best Country Results Report for Africa

A selection panel of Regional Development Coordination Office (DCO) Directors and their teams and DCO HQ have adjudged the 2021 Annual Results Report produced by the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone as the best in Africa, together with Cabo Verde. This was disclosed in an official communication sent to UN Resident Coordinators informing them of the decision and indicating,

“we are very proud of your leadership, of your RCO colleagues, and your UN teams for this achievement”.

The Annual Results Report for each region, including Sierra Leone, was selected, as best practice, in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals UN Results Report Guidelines. The winners comprehensively reported on system-wide results in the implementation of the Cooperation Framework, they made full use of UN INFO as a result reporting tool, with quality and evidence-based reports and easy-to-read/ grasp infographics and visuals, and above all, the reports were submitted on time.

The UN Resident Coordinator Mr Babatunde Ahonsi, who was in New York to attend the Resident Coordinator’s Global meeting, joined other winners to receive their awards at a short ceremony at UN headquarters on 18 October 2022. Describing the 2021 Annual Results Report as a report card, Mr Ahonsi, in his Foreword to the Report in April, said the stock-taking of the Cooperation Framework “speaks to the UNCT Sierra Leone development advances in 2021, notwithstanding the shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic and its socio-economic impact and other challenges.”

At a ceremony in Freetown in April attended by the Vice President of Sierra Leone, development partners, members of the diplomatic partners, civil society and implementing partners, Mr Ahonsi, on behalf of the UNCT, presented the Report to the Government. He highlighted key achievements of UN support to Sierra Leone in 2021, including the 36 per cent increase in children enrolled in basic and secondary education from 2020 to 2021. UN Country Annual Result Reports are critical tools for accountability and transparency on results of UN support to member states to facilitate the achievement of their national development aspirations in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.



UN Country Team emphasizes commitment to Peace and Inclusion

Representing the UN Resident Coordinator at this year's programme marking the International Day of Peace in Freetown, UNFPA Country Representative Nadia Rasheed highlighted the UN Country Team's (UNCT) commitment to supporting efforts to promote peace and inclusion in Sierra Leone. In her statement at the International Day of Peace Symposium organised by the Independent Commission on Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) at the



Resident Coordinator a.i & UNFPA Country Rep, Nadia Rasheed delivering remarks on behalf of the UNCT (photo @RCO)

Bintumani Conference Hall on September 21, she said the day "signifies a core value for the founding of the United Nations and reflects our shared aspirations for building peaceful and inclusive societies that are free of all forms of discrimination." The Resident Coordinator ad interim congratulated the Government of Sierra Leone for ratifying the ICPNCSL Act 2020 that established the Commission, describing this as "an important step in reaffirming commitments and further advancing a positive drive towards the actualisation of a peaceful and united Sierra Leone. Recognising the critical role that next year's multi-tier elections can play in advancing peace and national cohesion in the country, Ms Rasheed informed the gathering of the existence of the national Elections Steering Committee with the Resident Coordinator representing the UNCT in that Committee.

Furthermore, she said that UNDP and UNICEF signed an MOU with the Ministry of Political and Public Affairs to create an enabling environment for the conduct of peaceful elections and for strengthening social cohesion. "UNDP has also supported the National Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone on their regional briefings for Ward Electoral Committee Members." Additionally, she said UN Women supported the review of the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and is assisting in the development of its third National Action Plan.



Resident Coordinator a.i & UNFPA Country Rep, Nadia Rasheed & other colleagues at the Peace Day event in Freetown @independent Commission on Peace & National Cohesion)

According to the RC ai, there is also a further commitment on the UN's part to continue providing technical and other advisory support to this process. Ms Rasheed hoped that through collaboration and support from other development partners and stakeholders, the opportunity the elections present to build on the gains Sierra Leone has made towards peace and national cohesion will be seized by all actors. Earlier at the event, Ambassador of the European Union to Sierra Leone, Mr Manuel Muller, said that peace needs all our engagement, "especially if there is something to heal, inclusiveness is of the highest importance. The Irish Ambassador, Claire Buckley, said that by treating each other equally regardless of political, ethnic, social and economic status, "we build a better world for our children". She welcomed the decision by the organisers to give the global theme a domestic focus "End Tribalism, Build Peace and National Cohesion". Political and Public Affairs Minister Ambassador Foday Yumkella, who represented the Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, stressed that the country has a common ground when it comes to tribalism. He said where there is no peace, there is no development and emphasised that efforts should be made to ensure peace in the country. He concluded, that "we want to leave a better Sierra Leone behind". A short skit from students and a peace song by local musicians formed some of the high points of that day's programme, including the symposium held afterwards.





UN RC Babatunde Ahonsi flanked by HoAs, co-facilitators and other UN colleagues at the HRDDP Workshop

UN Country Team in Sierra Leone holds workshop to mainstream Human Rights Due Diligence Policy

Members of the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone held a two-day workshop on the United Nations Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) at the Radisson Blu Hotel in Freetown with support from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights earlier in October. Opening the session, UN Resident Coordinator Mr Babatunde Ahonsi underscored the importance of mainstreaming HRDDP across programmes of UN entities in the country.

In 2011, the Secretary-General issued the policy and instructed all United Nations entities considering or supporting non-UN Security Forces to comply with it. According to Mr Ahonsi, “when providing support, the UN must take deliberate action to safeguard and preserve its legitimacy and credibility as a global organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights and to the development and respect of international law.” He added that the prevention of human rights violations and the protection of civilians, together with respect for international human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law, are fundamental principles underpinning any peace, security, and development effort. A briefing note shared ahead of the workshop indicated that each UN entity contemplating providing support to non-United Nations security forces should conduct a risk assessment beforehand.

This will enable the entity to identify and mitigate the risks involved, including any risks that the recipient forces might commit grave violations of international humanitarian, human rights, or refugee law. Senior Human Rights Advisor Mr Christian Mukosa said, “the HRDDP sets out due diligence measures that United Nations entities are expected to take within the scope of their mandates, to ensure that the support that they provide to non-United Nations security forces is consistent with the purposes and principles of the Organization in the Charter and its responsibility to respect, promote and



A cross section of participants at the workshop

encourage respect for international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law”. The RC hopes that now that the workshop has ended, UNCT members will be better equipped and familiarized with HRDDP provisions and concepts, and the mapping of UNCT’s support to Sierra Leone’s security Forces finalized. He also indicated that a draft General and Preliminary Risk Assessment Framework (GPRAF) would be adopted and an SOP on the operationalization of HRDDP made available.

He also stressed the importance of ensuring that an HRDDP coordination mechanism such as a Task Force/Working Group is established within one of the existing UNCT coordination mechanisms, “with relevant focal points/members identified and quickly operationalized”.



From Risk to Role Models: Evidence of Peace-Building Impacts from Joint Monitoring Visit to Youth-at-Risk Project Communities

The old 'barray' in Talia community, Kenema district, is crowded and brimming with excitement as youths, elders, and children gather to the sound of women chanting and drumming and take a seat on benches and the barray's lower outer walls. A young man stands up, takes a deep breath and speaks.

He used to be one of the most notorious criminals in the community, he says – in fact, one year ago, he probably would have stolen these visitors' phones already! Everybody laughs and claps.

The comment is directed to a high-level visiting delegation that included the Minister of Youth Affairs Mohamed Orman Bangura and accompanied by the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Dr Theresa Teneh Dick, the FAO Representative Saeed Abubakar Bantie, UNDP Representative Pa Lamin Beyai, and UNFPA Representative Nadia Rasheed. It was a joint monitoring mission in August to communities targeted by the pilot project 'Empowering Youth-at-Risk as Resources for Sustaining Peace and Community Resilience in Tonkolili and Kenema Districts. With funding from the United Nations Peace-Building Fund, the project is implemented by FAO, UNDP, and UNFPA in close collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone and supported by implementing partners NAYCOM, NACCED, Caritas Bo and Makeni, FINE-SL, and Center for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL).

The young man in Talia continues his testimony: He is the chairman of the community's Youth-at-Risk beneficiary group, and his life has changed. Along with many other youths, he used to be on the streets – involved in theft, other crimes, and violence. Now, they are engaged in productive activities in the communities. They are taken seriously, and the tension and mistrust in the relationship with families and other community members have been replaced by mutual respect.

A young woman stands up and boldly tells her own story: She used to be a sex worker on the streets every night. Now, she spends the whole day working on the farm, where the group is cultivating almost 5 hectares of maize to support feed production for the project's poultry farm. When she returns to the community at night, she is too tired to go out looking for men, drinking and smoking. Supported by the project's VSLA and training activities, she has been able to save some money to invest in petty business activities to make ends meet while waiting for harvest season, and she got a lot of new knowledge on health, gender roles, and how to act in the community.

Having listened to the beneficiaries' testimonies, the community elders confirm that they have changed. They are no longer involved in risky and anti-social behaviors, and crime and violence in the community have been reduced. Stakeholders and youths are now working hand in hand: The project supports the construction of a community centre, and the chiefs and beneficiaries are on-site everyday monitoring and supporting the contractor's work.

The community leadership expresses its total commitment to supporting the continued change process of the youths. However, the chief points out a challenge – the project only targets 21 youths in Talia, but the number of youth-at-risk in Talia and surrounding communities much exceeds that number - there is a need to scale up the project and reach out to more youths.



Visiting Talia youth maize farm with FAO-R Saeed Bantie, UNFPA-R Nadia Rasheed, UNDP-RR Pa Lamin Beyai, Kenema District Youth Council Chairman Alhaji Mansaray and Hon. Minister of Youth Affairs Mohamed Bangura (Photo @FAO)



Engagement of Youth @ Risk beneficiaries, stakeholders and other community members in Talia, Kenema district (Photo @FAO)

Talia is among 18 communities targeted by the project across the two districts. The pilot project engages 418 'youth-at-risk' (46% women) – young people associated with cliques and gangs, a phenomenon labelled a major emerging security threat by the Office of National Security. The project works to empower and reintegrate youth at risk by providing increased possibilities for them to participate in decision-making processes and secure their sustainable livelihoods. They do so through behaviour change campaigns, capacity building, training, provision of agricultural inputs and support to community infrastructure.

The project furthermore advocates for and supports institutional reform and increases trust and confidence between youths and state and local authorities by strengthening the capacities of security and civilian authorities at the national and local levels to deal with youth-at-risk issues adhering to respect for human rights and dignity. During the field visit, the Ministers and Heads of Agencies visited five project communities in Tonkolili and Kenema. The project's peace-building impact was evident, and very positive feedback and a high level of motivation were expressed by both beneficiaries and community stakeholders, who also echoed the appeal of Talia: To extend the project to more youths across the country.

The youth-at-risk beneficiaries – who used to be among the most marginalized in their communities – are now engaged as role models, disseminating peace messages to other youths in their own and neighbouring communities.



Spotlight on Sierra Leonean Innovator who made his Country's First Solar Car from Local Materials

In a decade when layers of uncertainty are interacting to create new kinds of uncertainty, 24-year-old Emmanuel Alie Mansaray, a young innovator and self-taught Sierra Leonean engineer found his passion for re-imagining the future after he first built a locally made solar-powered tricycle for persons with disability, and a 600-watt soundless fuel-free generator in 2018.



24-year-old Emmanuel Alie Mansaray, a young innovator and self-taught engineer from Sierra Leone found his passion for re-imagining the future. (Courtesy @UNDP)

In 2021, Emmanuel built an easy prosthetic limb prototype for amputees and pitched it under the Assistive Technology Category during the UNDP Social Goods Summit where he emerged as the runner-up. In early 2022, he made a prototype rechargeable portable solar powered light for school pupils living in homes without electricity, powering a few households during experimentation.

Emmanuel is super excited with a mixed feelings of success which he believes has brought him steps closer to his goal, and a sense of hope that young people have a critical role to play as key actors for future-smart development. Receiving the news that his story was successfully featured in the global movie of grassroots innovators; Emmanuel was shocked to learn that he was going to be part of the world premiere and launching of the documentary in New York.

Mr Mansaray believes that the event will bring him new opportunities to network with other innovators and development partners beyond his continent, while he inspires other young folks from his country to unlock their potential by responding to local challenges. He also believes that leveraging the collaboration with #forTomorrow Initiative, UNDP Accelerator Lab and Hyundai will help him achieve his current and future innovation career goals.



First Sierra Leone made solar-power car from trash and recycled materials. (Courtesy @Emmanuel Alie-Mansaray/Innovator)

Unveiled at the Walter Reade Theater in New York City on 15th September 2022, his new recognition came after he developed the first locally made solar-powered car from trash and recycled materials in 2020. This event was held in proximity to the United Nations General Assembly, co-organized by the UNDP Accelerator Labs, the world's largest learning network on sustainable development, and Hyundai Motor Company. "There are so many challenges in my country. However, I still see potential and tons of opportunities around these challenges now being compounded by daily uncertainty," said Emmanuel Alie Mansaray.

Emmanuel has been working hard since 2018 to contribute to solving development challenges by discovering and building prototypes for testing and scaling. In 2019, Emmanuel's prototype was identified and validated by UNDP Sierra Leone Accelerator Lab during its nationwide grassroots solution mapping exercise. As a high-potential innovator enrolled in a 6-month (July-December 2018) Design and Entrepreneurship.





Youth participants at the Conference Photo @UNFPA

10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights held in Freetown

In line with its transformative agenda of accelerating progress towards ending gender-based violence, UNFPA, on behalf of the UN Country Team provided support to the convening of the 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights (ACSHR) which was held in Freetown from 27 June to 1 July. The biennial conference, convened by the African Federation for Sexual Health and Rights and hosted by Purposeful Sierra Leone in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone, was

attended by various UN colleagues, UNFPA delegates from West and Central Africa, East and Southern Africa, and the Arab States regions. Fabrizia Falcione, Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa, led the UNFPA delegation to the Conference. UNFPA supported the hosting of a Youth Pre-Conference, a platform for the voices of young people from across the continent, on June 27 and 28, and facilitated the participation of 175 young people in the conference. Held under the theme of 'Accelerating the Elimination of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Africa', the conference brought together civil society, governments, UN Agencies, human rights activists, and development partners for a dialogue on a common approach to ending violence against women and girls in Africa. Speaking at the opening of the Youth Pre-Conference, UNFPA Representative Nadia Rasheed told over 350 participants from 41 countries that the conference was "an incredible opportunity to connect with other young people and with distinguished experts and decision-makers from across the continent. It is an opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills, to be exposed to different perspectives, and to fuel your advocacy on the issues that you are most passionate about.

"UNFPA, she said, was committed to working with stakeholders including governments, civil society, and youth-led organizations towards accelerating progress to end GBV and creating spaces for young people's voices to be heard on all issues affecting them. Sierra Leone's Minister of Youth Affairs, Hon. Mohamed Orman Bangura, in his remarks at the Youth Pre-Conference, underscored the critical need to invest in young people and promote dialogue and understanding across cultures and generations that would advance human rights for all people. "To ensure that development policies work for everyone, we must use human rights as our foundation. We must promote and protect the human rights of all young people, especially the most vulnerable ones," Minister Bangura said.

During the Conference, Ms Falcione, joined an expert panel at a high-level breakfast convened by the First Lady of Sierra Leone. She also participated in a panel of experts for a discussion on the theme of 'Bodily Autonomy, Reproductive Justice and Violence against Women and Girls.' "I am truly proud of UNFPA's support of the Conference. The transformational energy from grassroots, civil society, and the movements made by people from all walks of life is today concentrated in one spot thanks to the 10th Africa Conference on Sexual Health and Rights. Young people, including young girls, are vocal in claiming their rights, their space, and a life free of all forms of gender-based violence and harmful practices where sexual and reproductive health and rights are granted to all," said Ms Falcione.

Closing the conference on July 1, President Julius Bio disclosed plans by his Government to enact a new Safe Motherhood and Reproductive Health Act that would decriminalize abortion in Sierra Leone. "I am determined to break the culture of violence against women and girls in this country and to work with you to make Africa safer and freer for all of us," he assured the audience.

Sierra Leone: How school feeding empowers parents to grow and sell vegetables

The women of Tawuya farmers group, in the Kambia district of northern Sierra Leone, like to sing as they work. Harvesting sweet potato leaves at sunset one Tuesday, their chorus praises the merits of working with the World Food Programme. WFP recently introduced its home-grown school feeding model here, inviting farmers groups to grow crops for children's lunchtimes. Farmers supply the very school their children attend and where they work as volunteer cooks.



Women of the Tawuya community in Kambia district have a new source of income in harvesting fresh potato leaves. Photo: WFP/Michael Duff

WFP created a means for us women to earn money regularly," says group member Adama, who has seven children. "It is hard to find money in Tawuya. We come three times a week to pick potato leaves or eggplants, or peppers and cucumber. What the schools' order is what we supply, then we get paid on Fridays."

This year, WFP trained 70 women here to prepare tastier, healthier, safer meals by, for example, applying the right amount of oil and salt while not over-cooking the leaves. I watch as the women quickly fill two buckets with mounds of leaves that are chopped and cooked with a touch of palm oil, peanut paste, dried fish, salt, onions, and fresh pepper. The dish is served with cereal and legumes daily. Providing this daily meal creates an incentive for parents to send their children to school in one of the country's most food-insecure areas. Money, of course, is hard to find anywhere in Sierra Leone, one of the world's least developed countries, with over 65 percent of the population living below the poverty line (US\$1.25 per day). In June, the country stood out in the region for its highest rise in food prices, at 62 percent, and fastest decline in local currency value, over the past five years. Such developments, exacerbated by the Ukraine crisis, have eroded the purchasing power of consumers, leading to concerns over people's access to food and quality of life.

To stimulate local agriculture and improve children's nutrition through school feeding, the Government of Sierra Leone launched a school feeding policy last year emphasizing the homegrown model. WFP supported the development of this policy, and then began a pilot, to guide and advise the Government on what home-grown school feeding could look like. WFP supports farmer groups to grow more diversified food while connecting them to a reliable market: schools. WFP's approach encourages the community to fully participate in and own the programme so it can be sustained. WFP supplies schools with dedicated cash for them to purchase vegetables from the farmers so to ensure vegetables appear on the children's plates. The Tawuya women are now able to meet more of their needs and are able to keep more food in the house, Adama says. In addition to providing the group with high-yield seeds, fertilizers, and farm tools, participants have learned how to make compost to nourish land organically. The soils of Sierra Leone are not naturally fertile enough to sustain prolonged crop production and productivity including rice, a staple that the farmers' groups also supply to the schools. "We have sweet potatoes, eggplant, okra, maize and rice in the nursery over there," says Adama. "[And] we have a large cassava garden a distance away from where we can harvest more leaves."

Fellow group member N'yayh Sankoh says, "The school works well for us mothers and we are happy." The women sing again as they hurry home before it gets dark, pacing through thickets, palm forests and patches of the marsh. They only harvest at dusk. They keep their harvest on the roof overnight so that it is fresh when they deliver it to the District Committee school early in the morning. Come Friday, pay isn't much once distributed among the group's 24 members – typically, each one earns less than the equivalent of US\$8. However, the women say, it has changed their lives. WFP is implementing the home-grown programme in collaboration with the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Government in 17 out of nearly 1,000 schools it supports with school feeding. It is a pilot intended to inform the Government, whose new school feeding policy emphasizes a transition to the home-grown model.

Increasing resilience in the Susan Bay community

The United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) is working with the government of Japan to help the largest informal settlement in Freetown, Sierra Leone build back better after devastating fires.

Susan's Bay has been battling the devastating impact of fires that injured more than 400 people, displaced more than 7,000 people, and destroyed most of the settlement's infrastructure.



Photo credit: Drainage cleaning exercise at Susan's Bay Community © Victoria Kamara

For the residents who stayed, overcrowding, poor sanitation and a lack of access to water have made them more vulnerable to the spread of diseases like COVID-19. The rainy season makes these issues even worse.

Using almost \$2.3 million in funding from the government of Japan, UNOPS is working with Freetown City Council and Sierra Leone's National Disaster Management Agency to increase Susan's Bay's resilience to disasters.

As part of the project, UNOPS will design and construct a biogas energy system that uses food waste to produce electricity for the community and biodigester toilets, which turn waste into organic manure that can be used as fertilizer.

UNOPS will also rehabilitate stairways and drainage areas as well as connect existing water mains to communal taps and tanks. This will give Susan's Bay residents access to clean water. "When disaster strikes this community, the toll on its residents is usually high. This project will provide immediate relief to at-risk people while strengthening the community's long-term resilience," according to Ifeoma Charles-Monwuba - UNOPS Director and Representative in Ghana.

"Since most of these disasters cannot be predicted, it is important to invest more in building resilience and enhance the ability of the vulnerable to anticipate, respond to and effectively recover from its effects," said H.E. Hisanobu Mochizuki, Ambassador of Japan to the Republic of Ghana and Sierra Leone.

"This project will further contribute to mitigating emergency risks through resilience-building, ensuring that no one is left behind. It is our hope that these communities will emerge stronger and more resilient and will have the capacity to recover more quickly," said Babatunde A. Ahonsi, UN Sierra Leone Resident Coordinator.

Over 300 community members have been recruited to clean drainage areas, which mitigates flooding in the community – helping Susan's Bay to build back better.



Women's Consortium to address financial challenges in digital finance for underserved markets set up

In Sierra Leone, most financial institutions in the country are concentrated in the Capital, Freetown and secondary urban areas like Kenema and Bo, leaving most people in other parts of the country cut-off from the formal financial system. Reasons include the high operating cost for institutions going into the rural and underserved areas of the country.



Financial service providers have also not yet established a business case and sustainability plan for going into remote locations. Deploying innovative agent models holds promise to overcoming this challenge. With this challenge in mind, UNCDF is partnering with Orange Mobile Finance (SL) Ltd in a consortium of "Orange Money", Mosabi and Empire Solutions. The consortium was set up to address specifically the four main challenges to financial inclusion in Sierra Leone: the lack of financial access points; the limited number of women agents; the low levels of financial literacy and the lack of access to credit. The project aims at improving the distribution of digital financial services in Sierra Leone by leveraging innovative agent models, financial literacy, and digital credit with a focus on women, youth and low-income segments.

Orange Money's current female-to-male agent ratio is approximately 4%. At the same time, some recent research suggests that more representation of women agents could lead to higher female uptake and usage of digital financial services. This project presents an opportunity to improve gender balance in agent networks, which could support women's empowerment within the communities. Although there has been some work done to increase consumers' knowledge and capacity to make informed financial choices, more needs to be done to increase the confidence and trust of customers in banks and financial institutions at large. There is still limited awareness and understanding of financial products and services, and low levels of financial competency among the population.

The lack of access to credit for entrepreneurs especially for the vulnerable segment such as women, youth, and the low-income population remains a challenge in Sierra Leone. In a recent UNCDF project with the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI) to map the digital and entrepreneur ecosystem, the report noted that over 50 percent of entrepreneurs interviewed cited the lack of access and availability of affordable finance as the main challenges to the growth of their businesses. For 65 percent of the businesses, the major source of start-up capital was their personal savings. Other common sources were loans and gifts from family and friends. These findings are consistent with the "State of Entrepreneurship report" in Sierra Leone which showed that 64 percent of entrepreneurs reported access to finance as the biggest obstacle.

Over the next ten months, 2,000 new mobile money agents will be recruited and trained of which 50 percent will be women. In addition, 500 inactive mobile money agents will be reactivated of which 20 percent will be women. 10,000 customers will also be offered financial and digital literacy training sessions online via the Mosabi EdTech platform. Out of this number, at least 2000 will benefit from a digital loan product offering that will leverage algorithms refined to suit the target segment: women, youth, and low-income population.





Cattle herders in Falaba (Photo @IOM)

Empowering Local Communities in Falaba to Address Transhumance-Related Conflict

Ibrahim Sorie Sesay is a cattle herder and at the same time a crop farmer. He is the current Chairman of the Falaba District Council (FDC) in northern Sierra Leone. According to Ibrahim, officials of FDC and other community stakeholders have been very supportive in mediating conflict between herders and crop farmers in the district. Each chiefdom and towns in Falaba have committees of stakeholders,

so whenever there is a conflict between crop farmers and cattle herders, the chief dispatches committee members to evaluate the situation and engage the parties involved to broker peace. “There have been several incidences of transhumance-related confrontation between crop farmers and cattle herders in Falaba Districts. This is more intense during the dry season as some cattle sometimes cross the border on both sides, straying into farmlands in search of food and water,” says Ibrahim.

Recent years and months have witnessed increased conflicts involving cattle herders and crop farmers in Falaba District in Sierra Leone and Faranah Prefecture on the Guinean side. Tensions arise whenever cattle eat up cultivated farmlands or destroy crops. Cases of retaliation have also been reported involving, for instance, stealing or killing livestock. Climate-induced movements of cattle increasingly amplify community tensions, as climate change introduces weather variations impacting traditional transhumance patterns and putting additional pressure on the harvest. These tensions are occasionally exacerbated by fractured communication within and between key stakeholders due to limited means of communication across the region, as network coverage and communications channels are scarce. Although conflicts have been persistent, violence has de-escalated over the recent period. In large part, this is attributed to the growing acknowledgement of the need to de-escalate and prevent conflict dynamics, including practices such as the destruction of crops.

“These issues are becoming increasingly critical and require coordinated efforts across stakeholders to inform, discuss and prevent potential conflicts. Through a regional intervention bringing together IOM Guinea and Sierra Leone teams, we are working to collect data and deliver community-oriented solutions, together with World Food Programme and Talking Drum Studio, to prevent tensions and strengthen social cohesion across border areas” said Ludvik Girard, IOM Sierra Leone Head of Programmes. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP), Talking Drum Studio (TDS) are joining forces to implement a cross-border intervention funded by The UN Peace Building Fund, which aims at enhancing peaceful co-existence between cattle herders and crop farmers in Falaba District and the Faranaya Prefecture in Guinea.

IOM activities include border management support and targeted efforts to establish data-collection mechanisms to inform transhumance patterns and facilitate critical policy and strategic decision-making. In Sierra Leone, IOM is supporting the Falaba District Council (FDC) in the establishment of a data and migration unit to facilitate an understanding of migration patterns related to transhumance and support capacities to prevent conflict across Falaba. “Importantly, the establishment of the data unit foremost is to enhance community ownership and community proactive intervention. We are hoping that, as a result of these efforts, more information will be collected and shared for the council to be informed in a timely manner” said Dr Emmanuel Kallon, National Project Officer, Data and Reporting at IOM Sierra Leone.





An engagement with official of the Falaba District Council (Photo Credit @IOM

In Faranah on the Guinean side, data is regularly collected by community agents with the IOM Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT) operational in three of the sub-prefectures of Faranah. The TTT collects key data on transhumance, to provide information related to the internal and transhumance movements along the corridors observed in Falaba District and Faranah prefecture. Collecting information is key to facilitating early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms. The intervention will also allow finalizing the construction and refurbishment of several border posts, including Koindukura in Falaba District in Sierra Leone and Heremakonon in the Faranaya prefecture on the Guinean side. These posts facilitate the orderly movement of people and goods across the border.

“The establishment of the Migration data Unit at the District Council is timely and would be relevant to address information gaps relating to transhumance conflict in the district. And also the construction of reliable, sustainable border infrastructures at Koindukura will not only enhance border security in this area but it is as well important for economic development” said Mr Ibrahim Sorie Sesay, Chairman of the Falaba District Council.



UN Network on Migration in Sierra Leone holds retreat, validates work plan

On 18th and 19th March, the United Nations Network on Migration (UNNM) in Sierra Leone held its retreat at the Place Resort in Tokeh, in the Western Area Rural District. The retreat was attended by UN Agencies to validate the UNNM 2022 Workplan and discussed thematic/programmatic areas of interest for multi-agency action in the migration sector in Sierra Leone.

UN colleagues from various agencies at the retreat (photo @IOM)

In his brief opening statement, the former Head of office at IOM Sierra Leone, James Bagonza acknowledged the effort of network members to participate in the retreat. He added that: “members can use the retreat as an opportunity to deepen their knowledge and leverage support of the UN system for the effective implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM).”

During the 2 days retreat, participants discussed migration issues and identify solutions across network members on how agencies can work together to address migration-related challenges such as irregular migration, gender, and protection challenges on various issues including trafficking. Participants also shared their thoughts and ideas on emerging migration issues and how migration can be integrated into agencies’ program design. “The retreat was necessary and insightful. It provides us the opportunity to review and share valuable inputs to the network annual work plan. Also, being that migration is a cross-cutting issue, it availed us the opportunity to discuss interesting migration topics” said Peter Koroma, Program Specialist, Population and Development at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Sierra Leone.

The United Nations Network on Migration for Sierra Leone (The Network) was established by the United Nations Country Team to facilitate effective, timely, and coordinated UN system-wide support to Sierra Leone on migration governance, including on the implementation, follow-up, and review of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The UNNM promotes migration policy that supports the well-being of migrants and societies in a coherent, holistic, and balanced manner, including policies and their implementation that are aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2020-2023 (UNSDCF), the SDGs, the African Union Migration Policy Framework, the 2063 Agenda, and other sub-regional initiatives, while supporting progress in implementing all the GCM’s 23 objectives.

Closing the WASH gap and supporting better hygiene practices in communities

Thirteen-year-old Musu has known from an early age that her family needs a consistent supply of clean water for cooking, cleaning the house, bathing, doing laundry and other household chores.

From age six, the impressionable young Musu has often woken up at the crack of dawn to join her grandmother and other women and girls from Walter Karoo Community in Hastings, in the Western Area Rural District, to trek five kilometres each day to fetch water from the nearest water source.



From an early age, Musu walked more than 5km to get to the nearest water point to fetch water for the family. ©unicef/sierraleone/2022/mutseyekwa

“After the long walk and then carrying the heavy bucket, my neck and feet would be very sore, and I still had to go to school, where I sometimes have to make another journey to fetch water for the school,” says Musu, whose facial expressions show the burden she has borne in her young life. Musu’s grandmother, also has vivid memories of how difficult it has been to keep her four young grandchildren clean and healthy amid limited supplies of clean water. “After we heard the messages about Coronavirus, we all knew that we had to keep lots of water for the children to wash their hands regularly, but this was difficult,” says Ms. Isatu, as she explains the dilemma of having the knowledge about the benefits of handwashing but being unable to put this knowledge into practice.

While the Sustainable Development Goal for water and sanitation, Goal 6, calls for universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030, this target is still far from the reach of many families in Sierra Leone. According to the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017, only 18 per cent of the population in Sierra Leone spends less than 30 minutes to get to an improved source of water, and for 33 per cent of the population, it takes them a journey of up to 3 hours to reach an improved source of water. Since 2020, UNICEF has worked to bridge the water and sanitation gaps in Hasting Community in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

With support from the Government of Iceland, UNICEF installed and expanded the water supply and reticulation systems at 11 healthcare facilities, and this work was extended to ensure that 12 communities surrounding these health facilities, including Walter Karoo Community, also have access to clean water and sanitation. Through this huge undertaking in Hastings, more than 3,000 families are today within easier reach of clean and safe water. “UNICEF is pleased that communities in Hastings now have increased access to safely managed, clean water for the most vulnerable children and their families,” says Bishnu Timilsina, UNICEF Chief of WASH. “Making water accessible to families is a critical and sustainable public health intervention, which will help in preventing the spread of hygiene-related diseases, including COVID-19.” With new water taps in place at Walter Karoo Community, the journey to fetch water is no longer a daunting task for Musu and her grandmother. Within a five-minute walk, a full bucket of clean drinking water and another to help them carry out their household chores and practice good hygiene is available for Ms Isatu and her grandchildren.



Ms. Isatu teaches her young granddaughter, Adama, how to properly wash her hands with soap and running water ©unicef/sierraleone/2022/mutseyekwa

“We are very happy to be able to sleep longer hours as we do not need to wake up very early to beat the traffic at the old water source,” says a joyful Ms Isatu, as she takes her young granddaughter through the steps of proper hand washing with soap and running water.

Ms. Isatu was pleased to add that just a few months ago, this basic practice of handwashing with soap, was a luxury that they could not afford. She is happy that her grandchildren will be protected from illnesses through the regular washing of their hands with clean water.





SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

