



UNITED NATIONS
SIERRA LEONE



COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS

Sierra Leone
2023



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ACRONYMS

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
ACHPR	African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
ACRWC	African Charter on The Rights and Welfare of the Child
AIDs	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
APC	All People's Congress
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
BTI	Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index
CCA	Common Country Analysis
CEDAW	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women
CFSVA	Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis
CH	Cardre Harmonise
CLD	Centre for Law and Democracy
COVID 19	Corona Virus Disease
CPA	The Criminal Procedure Act
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRDP	The Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
DRRM	Disaster Risk Reduction and Management
ECDE	Early Childhood Education Centre
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ECSL	Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone
EITI	Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FGC	Female Genital Cutting
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
FSMS	Food Security Monitoring System
FX	Forex Exchange
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GIR	Primary Gross Enrollment Rate
GoSL	The Government of Sierra Leone

ACRONYMS

GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRBA	Human Rights Based Approach
IBBSS	Biological Behavioral Sentinel Survey
ICCPR	The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICT	Information and Communications Technology/Technologies
IHME	Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation
IMF	International Monetary fund
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
IWRM	Integrated Water Resources Management
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MCC	Millennium Challenge Compact
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MICS	The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
MoH	Ministry of Health
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MRU	Mano River Union
MTNDP	Medium-term National Development Plan
NACP	The National Aids Control Programme
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NDMA	National Disaster Management Agency
NEET	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NLe	New Leones
NMP	National Integration Master Plan
NORMS	National Outcome Routine Mapping Survey
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PWDA	Persons with Disabilities Act
PWSL	Prison Watch Sierra Leone

ACRONYMS

QR	Quick Response Code
RMNCHH	Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health
RREP	Rural Renewable Energy Project
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SHRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
SIC	Special Investigation Committee
SLANGO	Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations
SLCS	The Sierra Leone Correctional Services
SLE	The Bank of Sierra Leone
SLIHS	Integrated Household Survey
SMEs	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises
SOMC	Sexual Offence Model Court
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infection
TIP	Trafficking in Persons
TVET	Technical and Vocational Training
UASC	Unaccompanied and Separated Children
UN	United Nations
UNC	Universal Health Coverage
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
UNMM	United Nations Network on Migration
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
UPR	Universal Periodic Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	United Nations World Food Program
WOE	World Economic Outlook



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Common Country Analysis (CCA) report is an independent, forward-looking, analysis of Sierra Leone's positioning towards realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national development priorities. It provides an evidence base for future UN development programs, critically looking at interconnections among development challenges. Guiding principles of UN development programs, including Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), a human rights-based approach (HRBA), and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) are considered throughout this CCA.

Sierra Leone has a population of approximately 8.8 million, with an annual population growth

rate of 2.2 percent. Seventy-five percent of the population is below age 35, and 40 percent are below age 15. About 44 percent live in urban areas. Population growth puts continued pressure on the country's limited natural resources, including forests, waterways, and ecosystems. The 2019 income poverty rate (provisional) for rural areas is 80 percent vs. 27 percent for urban areas, showing a large disparity based on geography. This is also true for the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI) which captures acute deprivations in health, education, and living standards. Only 43 percent of women aged 15–49 are literate and 59 percent of men.

unsafe abortion, child marriage and female genital mutilation increase the risk of maternal mortality. Malnutrition continues to be a significant contributor to infant morbidity. An upward trend in severe child food poverty between 2019 (34.5 percent) and 2022 (46.5 percent), is aligned with the worsening of key diet diversity indicators.

Youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services are not accessible to a vast majority of young people. Twenty-one percent of all pregnancies occur in the adolescent population (29 percent in rural areas vs. 14 percent in urban areas). Current barriers to family planning include limited access to services, inadequate knowledge on methods, and social and religious norms.

Sierra Leone has an under-capacitated mental healthcare system, particularly for children and adolescents. This limits the ability to address growing substance abuse among youth. Use of the synthetic drug Kush trended alarmingly upward between 2020 and 2022. The availability of treatment and rehabilitation centers, as well as community and social services, is insufficient.

HIV and AIDS is a public health threat, with the national HIV prevalence rate estimated at 1.7 percent. Women are more vulnerable than men to acquiring HIV during sexual intercourse for reasons of biology, and the rate among females aged 15–49 years is double that of males in the same age group. Notably, the number of people living with HIV on ARV treatment has doubled over the last three years.

Access to the a 'basic level' of water services has been slowly progressing, currently at about 63 percent. There is a need for improved systems for equitable water distribution within communities, including rational pricing systems that support system maintenance. The proportion of the population with access to 'basic sanitation services' is about 31 percent.

The Free Quality School Education policy increased access to education and prompted a 69 percent increase in basic education enrolment. However, learning outcomes present a considerable challenge and only about 62 percent of teachers are qualified for the level they are teaching, substantially lower in rural areas.

Sierra Leone is characterized by irregular migration patterns, mostly male youth driven to go abroad by factors that include lack of economic and social opportunities. Trafficking in Persons is another concerning category of migration, including forced labor trafficking largely towards the West Africa, Middle East, and Gulf regions. There is also

forced labour trafficking within Sierra Leone and widespread practices of domestic child trafficking.

Based on 2019 data, 43 percent of women aged 15–49 had experienced physical violence in the '12 months preceding the survey,' one of the highest rates in West Africa. Prevailing attitudes about gender and social norms contribute to an environment that hinders prevention and response. The proportion of women who have undergone FGM/Cutting was 83 percent in 2019 (DHS survey), among the highest in the world.

More can be done to advance child protection in Sierra Leone, as 87 percent of children aged 1 to 14 years experienced some form of violent discipline in their household in 2017, compared to 65 percent in 2010. Child Labour affects 38 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys aged 5 to 17. Many children work under hazardous conditions, such as in mining or fishing, or are subject to sexual exploitation.

SOCIAL DIMENSION

Sierra Leone has a heavy burden of communicable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and vaccine-preventable diseases, although there have been improvements to disease monitoring, prevention and treatment in recent years. Constraints to quality health services include a shortage of skilled health workers, inadequate diagnostic equipment and health facilities, frequent stock-outs of essential medicines, and weak health information systems. Transboundary disease transmission in humans is a serious public health threat and outbreaks have caused devastating consequences not only on humans, but on animal stocks.

Although improving, Sierra Leone has had some of the poorest maternal and child health outcomes in the world. High rates of adolescent pregnancy,



ECONOMIC DIMENSION

The economy is fragile and relatively undiversified which contributes to economic instability. Agriculture made up 58 percent of GDP in 2022, followed by the services sector at about 32 percent. Growth is dominated by informal trade, while high-productivity sectors struggle to grow. The mining sector is the country's major foreign exchange earner, but the contribution to GDP can vary from year to year depending on the global market prices for key export items.

Insufficient food consumption affects about 55 percent of the population and reliance on food imports is a major risk to food security. Almost one in three households is severely food insecure and 71 percent are spending more than 75 percent of their total overheads on food. While roughly 58 percent of land is arable, only 15 percent is actively used for farming, predominantly subsistence farming. A 2021 national dialogue on agriculture identified key challenges around production that include, limited farmer education, minimal uptake of improved seeds and fertilizers, lack of mechanization, and lack of post-harvest storage facilities.

Access to finance for agriculture investment and entrepreneurship is challenging due to issues such as low lending to the private sector, knowledge gaps around agricultural finance on the part of lending institutions, and perceived risk from high default rates. Agricultural insurance products are limited.

A Blue Economy strategy was developed to advance ocean-related sectors and activities, as the country has an abundant endowment of fish and fishery products. Fishery exports have the potential to contribute more than \$30 million to GDP annually, (excluding value addition), and to employ more than one million people.

Underemployment is a significant challenge and is highest among youth, who have limited skills for the formal labor market. Enrollment in Technical and Vocational Education and Training is low, largely due to cost as most are private. There are fewer institutions in rural areas and the curricula are not always aligned to labor market needs. Limited Non-Formal Education and adult education exists, typically with classes in basic literacy, numeracy, and livelihood skills. Despite the high demand for these programmes, there is little government spending, and most are funded by donors or NGOs.

Twenty-eight percent of the overall population have electricity access, but only 4.9 percent in rural areas, well below the 47.6 percent average for Sub-Saharan Africa. Renewable solar energy capacity has huge potential and would enable economic growth in key sectors such as post-harvest processing and ICT. Workable financial models are important for providing reliable funding streams for future operation and maintenance of solar mini grids.

Only 22 percent of the population in Sierra Leone are currently using mobile internet and ICT skills are low, particularly among young women. Challenging geographical landscape, inadequate connectivity infrastructure, and competition for public resources are all contributing factors. E-commerce and online business promotion are in a very early stage.

ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

Sierra Leone is endowed with rich natural resources crucial in sustaining health, wellbeing, livelihoods, and the economy. While there are laws and policies in place for environmental protection, major challenges are weak implementation, (including to address illegal and indiscriminate mining and logging activities), corruption and absence of inter-sectorial coordination, and gaps in expertise and capacity of staff in relevant government agencies.

Reversing/halting land degradation and promoting sustainable land management presents a major opportunity. Deforestation is directly contributing to water shortages, loss of soil fertility, soil erosion and landslides, and biodiversity loss. Rural migration to Freetown and related urban expansion has increased pressure on the Western Area Peninsula National Park that provides urban water resources.

Energy consumption in Sierra Leone is dominated by biomass fuel (72 percent of the population) and inefficient cooking methods are widespread. The current consumption of firewood and charcoal for cooking is unsustainable and the problem will further be aggravated by projected population growth.

The country has abundant water resources but needs to strengthen policies to safeguard the integrity of surface and underground water resources and to build institutional capacity for data collection. Water pollution is rising from point and non-point land-based activities. Population growth will put more stress on water use if integrated water resources management approaches are not put in place.

Facilities for managing pollution and waste have

not expanded at the same rate as the growing population, especially in urban areas. Large volumes of plastic and other solid waste make their way into streams and the ocean.

Sierra Leone is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world with the least readiness. Weather-related hazards include seasonal flooding and recurrent flash floods that impact coastal areas, agricultural fields, and low-lying areas. Human and economic losses from disasters will be lessened by improved capacity at community level to support risk reduction, planning, and response, as well as enhanced national-level monitoring, forecasting, and early warning system capabilities.

Coastal communities, with ecosystems that support livelihoods and tourism, face coastal erosion due to sea level rise. Forest-dependent communities that rely on charcoal production lack alternative livelihoods for forest conservation. Agricultural Communities will face temperature and rainfall variations and need to adapt agricultural practices due to changing water requirements and the need to control for pest and disease outbreaks.

GOVERNANCE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Sierra Leone has ratified key international human rights treaties, but violations continued to be reported, including those related to domestic violence, harsh and life-threatening detention conditions, forced labour, child trafficking, FGM, and child labour, especially in the artisanal diamond and gold mining sectors. Implementation of the 2011 Persons with Disabilities Act is impeded by lack of a strategy or policy and overall resource scarcity.

Corruption is considered to exist across all levels of government and is cited as a significant obstacle to foreign investment, as well as a constraint on public service delivery and economic development. Even so, the country has improved in recent years on the global Corruption Perception Index.

The Judiciary has expanded to new geographic areas, but its resources and facilities are overwhelmed by the growing demand for access to expeditious justice services. Protracted trial proceedings, punctuated by indefinite adjournments, limit access to justice in marginalized communities and for vulnerable populations. Many accused persons are unjustifiably remanded and correctional centres have the perennial problem of overcrowding.

The 2022 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act mandates at least 30 percent of public and private jobs (companies > 25 employees) for women and the government has started establishing gender units in key government offices. The percent of women in Parliament increased from 15 percent in 2018 to 30 percent in 2023, and from 19 percent to 34 percent for Local Councils. The 2022 Customary Land Rights Law is also positive, as it gives women an equal right to own and use family land.

Sierra Leone has made great progress over the past decade in decentralization, advancing to one of the more stable democracies in the region. Sustaining this requires the cooperation of regional and local authorities and ensuring that Local Councils receive fiscal resources and technical support to govern effectively. Traditional power structures continue to have significant influence and exist in parallel to democratically elected Local Councils. Political Marginalization of Youth is an issue, as it is challenging for youth to run for office and participate in political processes due to the high costs, which is especially true for young women.

Voting in the June 2023 national elections was mostly peaceful, however official results were questioned following accounts of observed irregularities, including concerns by international observers on transparency of the election results tabulation process. Following a mediated dialogue, the re-elected incumbent government and the opposition party signed an agreement setting up a cross-party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies to review current frameworks.

A new Medium-Term National Development Plan was launched by the Government in early 2024, rooted in the SDGs and Agenda 2030. It identifies the 'Big 5 Game Changers' that will be most strategic for socioeconomic transformation in the next seven years. These include Feed Salone (boosting agricultural productivity), Human Capital Development, Employment Scheme (youth jobs), Enhancing Public Service Architecture, and Technology and Infrastructure.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

With an overall scarcity of data on many social and economic issues in the country, UNCT program specialists pooled their knowledge to identify groups that should be the focus of an LNOB analysis. This analysis forms a companion document to the CCA and used a mixed methods approach to profile groups left behind, the difficulties they face, and the root causes of them being left behind. Many of these groups are predominantly impacted by poverty, especially multidimensional poverty and deprivation issues. They also often face discrimination for reasons such as gender, age, disability, and status as homeless or an adolescent mother.

Addressing the deprivations these groups face requires targeted, people-centred approaches,

an improved governance environment, and ensuring that LNOB groups participate in discussions around solutions. Government and other development partners should apply a human rights-based approach to protect against actions that interfere with fundamental freedoms and dignity of individuals and populations. This would be advanced by development of relevant indicators and collection of more disaggregated data for LNOB groups.

Several actions are proposed to ensure duty-bearers are accountable for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights and that individual rights-holders know how to claim and to enjoy their human rights.

MACRO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the country's positive economic growth pattern and caused the economy to shrink by 2.2 percent in 2020. Economic recovery was then severely hindered by the sharp rise in imported food and fuel prices due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and intensified price control measures were put in place. As of September 2023, the annual inflation rate was more than 50 percent, and for food products, more than 60 percent.

Government borrowing to cushion pandemic impact and stabilize prices has severely constrained spending on public services, while also increasing the cost of borrowing for private sector actors. The country is at high risk of debt distress with a public debt stock-to-GDP ratio reaching 96 percent in 2022, up from 79 percent in 2021.

Although the country is rich in mineral resources such as gold, diamond, bauxite and iron ore, it has attracted little foreign direct investment since gaining independence due to political instability and socio-economic problems. The most significant flows of external funds to Sierra Leone come in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA), which has gone largely to support basic services. To advance the SDGs across all dimensions, there is a great need to expand domestic sources of SDG finance and to attract more international private finance.

CROSS-BORDER ISSUES

The borders in Sierra Leone are porous and this creates challenges for border management, especially given the widespread lack of resources for border control operations. As a result, border communities are hubs for criminal gangs and smuggling operations, including wildlife and mineral smuggling. Informal cross-border trade is the main source of livelihood for borderland communities. Most cross-border traders are women, often exposed to harassment, extortion and crime from itinerant people, unemployed youth and officials at the border crossing points.

There is a high risk for cross-border disease spread, with limited capacities for early detection, reporting and management of public health threats at many formal and informal border crossing points. This risk is compounded by the possibility for transboundary animal diseases.

The sub-region is endowed with valuable natural resources that include forests, water resources, and globally important flora and fauna. While

environmental treaties provide a framework for cooperation and action, effective management of cross-border ecosystems requires concerted efforts at the national and regional levels, along with active participation from local communities and stakeholders. There are financial and capacity limitations, as well as weak governance structures and enforcement of environmental protection laws.

There is great untapped potential for increased trade between Sierra Leone and other countries in the sub-region, but a significant constraint is poor road quality and lack of other transport options.

The range of cross-border challenges underscores the need for enhanced regional cooperation through the Mano River Union (MRU) sub-regional multi-lateral organization and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Sierra Leone can leverage UNOWAS support to strengthen border security, intelligence sharing, and joint operations with neighbors.

CROSS-BORDER ISSUES

The last chapter discusses gaps and opportunities towards SDG realization, organized around topics that illustrate interlinkages among the three dimensions of sustainable development. The chapter also presents several overarching observations as follows:

POVERTY

The country's Multidimensional Poverty Index shows that two-thirds of the population are multidimensionally poor. Insufficient spending on public services limits health, education, and other social services that promote wellbeing and economic growth.

INEQUALITY

There is significant inequality between urban and rural environments on measures of poverty and food security. Expansion of infrastructure in these areas, including roads, energy, and IT connectivity would address the root causes of many deprivations.

PRESSURE ON NATURAL RESOURCES

The country's natural capital is needed to sustain the population and can also provide ongoing streams of revenue for economic development and poverty reduction if sustainably managed. Protection measures are especially important in light of population growth.

LACK OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Sierra Leone's economy is relatively undiversified, and this contributes to economic instability. Agriculture, fisheries, and manufacturing, as well as mining and natural resources (if sustainably managed), provide a good basis for diversification and growth.

FOOD SECURITY

Food security has worsened over time and the reliance on imports to meet food requirements is a major risk. A transformed agriculture sector could have a significant influence on poverty-reduction and counter inflationary effects and support improved nutrition outcomes.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

There is a need to accelerate actions and finance for climate adaptation in: Agriculture and Food Security; Environment and Natural Resources; Fisheries and the Coastal Zone; Infrastructure; Disaster Preparedness and Management; Water Resources; and Public Health.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is a major driver of rural to urban migration and a main reason that youth turn to drug use and embark on irregular migration. Current systems for providing youth with life and job skills are failing to reach most youth in the country.

FISCAL STABILITY

Maintaining fiscal discipline will be crucial in restoring macroeconomic stability and reducing the debt burden. To complement this, it is vital to fully implement recommendations outlined in the country's Integrated National Financing Framework, including climate finance.

GOVERNANCE

Corruption is considered to exist across all levels of government and is cited as a significant obstacle to foreign investment; it also impacts public service delivery and economic development. This requires continued efforts to address corruption and increase transparency.

MAINSTREAMING RIGHTS

Some rights holders are not aware of how to claim rights and are not supported in this by the culture and justice sector. Raising awareness among rights holders and capacity building among duty bearers is recommended.

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Children face challenges linked to financial limitations pervasive in society, but also due to failure to enforce existing protection measures and shift harmful social norms. Adolescent girls face early marriage, FGM, and inadequate access to SRHR.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To better address the needs of LNOB groups, a people-centred approach, improved governance environment, and ensuring that LNOB groups participate in discussions around solutions are recommended. Root causes relate to poverty, deprivation, and discrimination.

There is a need to strengthen national capacities to address SDG data gaps, including the use of geographically segmented data, and sex and age-disaggregated data to address gender-related gaps and issues of exclusion. Improved data will support effective analysis and planning.

UN development activities should target multiple levels in society for transformative change:

- 1. Individuals** – empower individuals and businesses with information and tools for more control over advancing their rights and economic potential.
- 2. Communities** – build potential for community development by fostering inclusivity and building knowledge and capacity on relevant issues.
- 3. Government Enabling Environment** – support a government with requisite skills and knowledge, trusted by citizens, to effectively deliver key public goods and services.
- 4. SDG Finance** – increase financial flows from domestic and international sources by developing multiple financing mechanisms to complement public finance.

Among the risks analyzed, those most prominent in terms of Likelihood and Potential Impact relate to: Increased inter-party tension over constitutional and legal reforms; drug abuse, youth marginalization and unemployment, particularly of most vulnerable groups; increased rural-urban divide and irregular migration, particularly of young people; and, over-exploitation of natural resources (timber, over-fishing, land, mineral, sand, etc.) that impacts on sustainability of resources, particularly drinking water.

INTRODUCTION

The Common Country Analysis (CCA) report is an independent, forward-looking, analysis of Sierra Leone's positioning towards realization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national development priorities. It was prepared collectively by the UN Country Team (all UN agencies, funds, and programs with ongoing activities in Sierra Leone), with inputs from a range of national stakeholders, including Government, private sector, civil society, development partners, and academia.

A comprehensive CCA is prepared every 4 years, just prior to preparation of the UN's multi-year Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), and then updated annually to reflect new developments and trends. This 2023 CCA is a comprehensive version intended to support prioritization of interventions in the upcoming UNSDCF for the years 2025 to 2030.

It provides the evidence base and analytical foundation, taking into consideration underlying root causes and interconnections.

Guiding principles of UN development programs, including Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE), a human rights-based approach (HRBA), and Leave No One Behind (LNOB) are considered throughout this CCA. The HRBA approach is used to further the realization of human rights and contribute to the development of the capacities of 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations and of 'rights-holders' to claim their rights.

A companion LNOB report focusses on specific groups in Sierra Leone that are not sharing equally in the country's development path, due to discrimination, socio-economic status, vulnerability, and other factors.



CHAPTER 1

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sierra Leone is a West African coastal country with a population of approximately 8.8 million¹ and an annual population growth rate of 2.2 percent.² 75 percent of the population is below age of 35, and 40 percent below age 15 while only 3 percent are age 65 and older. Up to 44 percent of the population lives in urban areas. Life expectancy at birth is 59 years for males and 62 years for females.

Sierra Leone has 4 political regions divided into 16 districts, and there are also 190 traditional chiefdoms that were first established under British colonial rule. Since the cessation of the civil conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone has made important progress in building peace and strengthening state institutions. However, significant development challenges remain.

To better understand these challenges, and their root causes, this chapter overviews the 3 dimensions of sustainable development, beginning with the social dimensions, followed by the economic and environmental dimensions. It continues with a fourth sub-section devoted to political and governance topics.

1.1 SOCIAL DIMENSION

This section discusses social dimensions of sustainable development, including poverty, health and nutrition, education, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), migration, and social protection schemes. It presents evidence-based analysis of progress and challenges on various issues. Related information on Government of Sierra Leone's policies, strategies, and initiatives is included in Annex 1.

1.1.1 POVERTY

The fight to eradicate poverty and inequality is central to the country's effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Using the most recent poverty data available, Figure 1 shows the progress Sierra Leone has made to reduce income poverty over time -- from 82 percent in 1989 to 53 percent in 2011, but then an increase of about 4 percent through 2018, underscoring the gains as a result of crises which included the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak (2014-2015), the flood and Freetown mudslide (2017). A complement to the measure of income poverty is the multi-dimensional poverty index (MPI), which captures

acute deprivations in health, education, and living standards that a person faces simultaneously. Notably, the incidence of MPI in rural areas is more than twice that of urban areas (see Figure 2), underscoring the deprivations and difficulties rural communities face daily as they strive to meet their needs. Unfortunately, no more recent data on poverty (either income or MPI) is available to reflect the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on poverty rates. This points to an important data gap to be addressed in regularly assessing progress on SDG 1.

INCOME POVERTY HEADCOUNT (%)

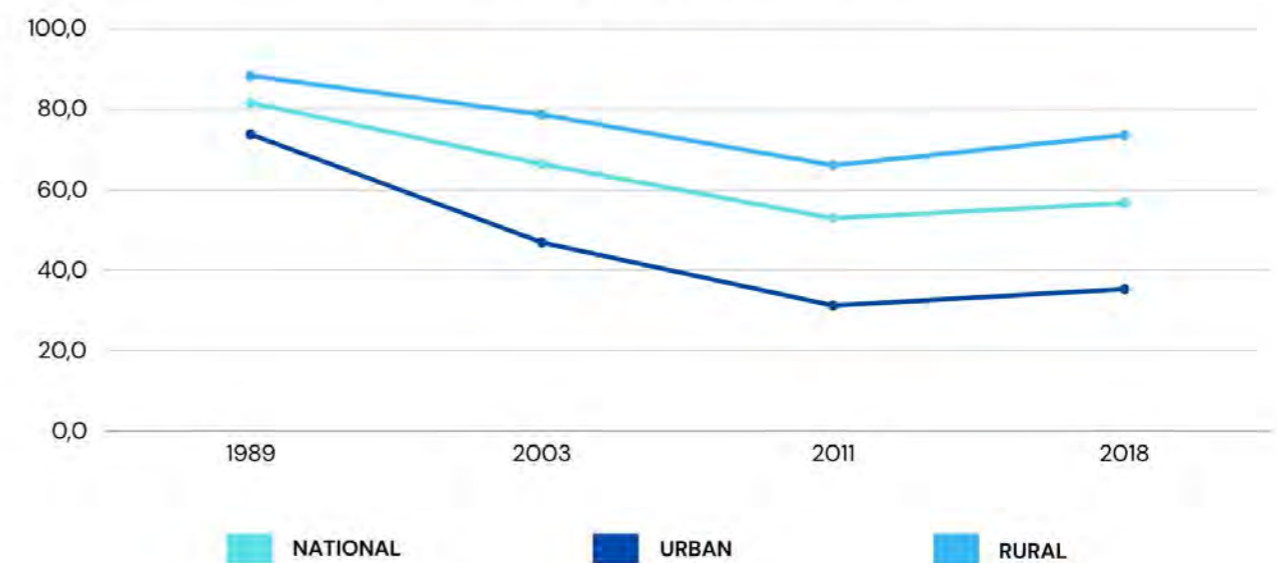


Figure 1: Income Poverty Trends (1989 - 2018) National, Urban, and Rural

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone/World Bank: Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey Reports, 2011 and 2019

¹ <https://www.unfpa.org/data/world-population/SL>

² World Bank, 2022 World Development Indicators for Sierra Leone

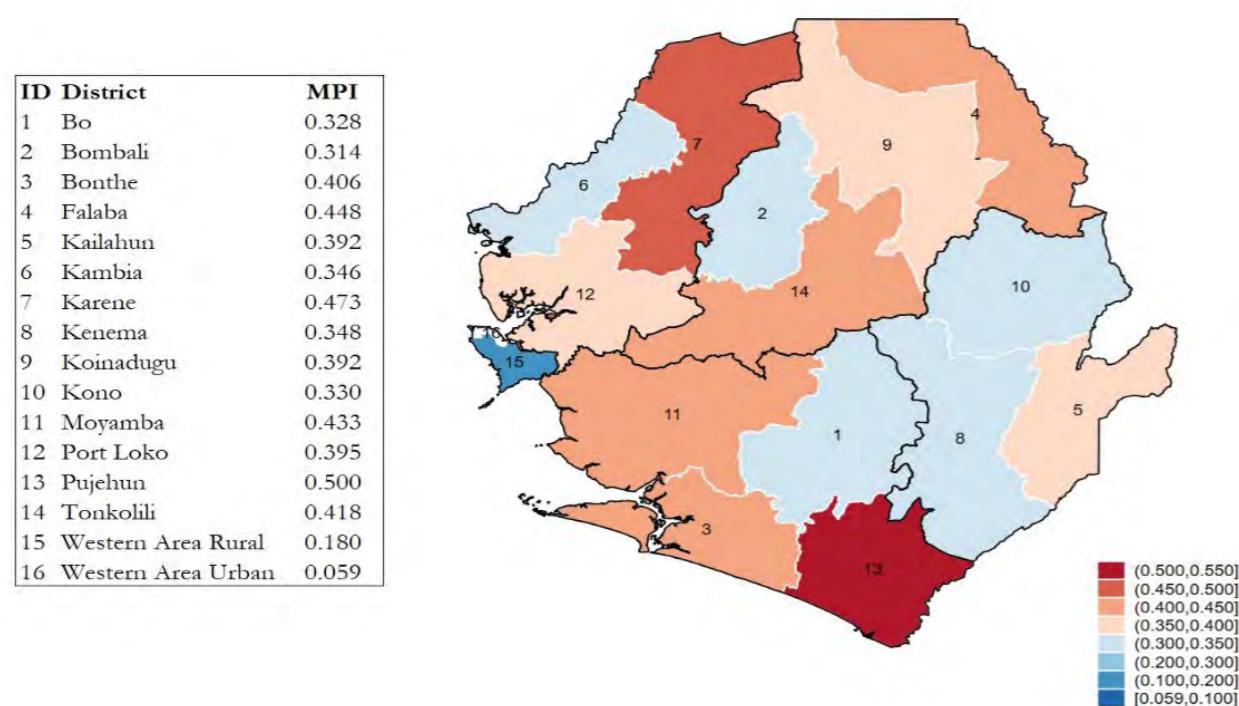


Figure 2: Sierra Leone's MPI Headcount Scores by Districts, 2019

Source: Statistic Sierra Leone, 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) Report. Freetown. October 2019.

Both income and MPI poverty show poverty rates as significantly higher for larger-size households. For example, income poverty rate for household size 1 to 3 members was 16 percent compared to those with 8 or more members at 71 percent (2018). The education level of the household head also impacts the rate of income poverty as follows: no education (67 percent), primary (58 percent), secondary (30 percent), and university (5.3 percent).^{3 4 5 6 7 8 9}

The incidence of child multidimensional poverty is high in Sierra Leone: 66 percent of the children living in Sierra Leone experience at least 1 social or material deprivation and are therefore multidimensionally poor.

There are some specific elements that contribute to poverty among women, including limited skills and knowledge (often more so than among male counterparts); unfriendly market structures that concentrate women in lower paying and time-consuming work; restricted access to capital and credit; patriarchal norms of property ownership and inheritance; discrimination in the public domain; and weak and unequal trade and economic patterns.¹⁰

Looking now at income inequality among the population, the country's rate is worsening over time. The overall Gini coefficient moved from 0.33 in 2011 to 0.37 in 2018, more towards the maximum inequality value of 1.0. The 2018 breakdown figures also note geographic differences, ranging from 0.35 in Freetown to 0.30 in other urban areas, and 0.27 in rural areas.

³ Government of Sierra Leone (2001) Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Freetown.

⁴ Government of Sierra Leone (2005) Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, Freetown.

⁵ Statistic Sierra Leone (2019) 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) Report. Freetown.

⁶ UNDP-Sierra Leone (2019) Multidimensional Poverty Index, Freetown

⁷ UNDP-Sierra Leone (2023) Multidimensional Poverty Index, Freetown, draft

⁸ World Bank (2014) A Poverty Profile for Sierra Leone, 1818 H Street NW, Washington DC 20433 https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/poverty_profile_for_sierra_leone.pdf

⁹ World Bank (2021) Sierra Leone 2021 Economic Update: Welfare and Poverty Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic, 1818 H Street NW, Washington DC 20433, www.worldbank.org

¹⁰ USAID, 2019

The delivery of social protection is fragmented and not well coordinated amongst national institutions and development partners, compounded by the lack of financial and human resources, as well as infrastructure to deliver policies, programmes and projects. As a result, social protection coverage is

1.1.2 HEALTH AND NUTRITION

This section presents key information on health and nutrition in Sierra Leone, with many challenges that impact not only individuals, but also the country's overall social and economic development. There is heavy burden of communicable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, and vaccine-preventable diseases. Yet, non-communicable diseases, including maternal, perinatal and nutritional conditions, comprise 58 percent of all diseases. Improvements to disease monitoring, prevention and treatment have reduced the burden of many communicable diseases.¹¹ For example, malaria rates have dropped 39 percent from 2016 to 33 percent in 2021.¹² However, diarrhoeal diseases and acute respiratory infections remain a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among young children.

The government increased the national budget allocation to health from 7.5 percent (2018) to 11 percent (2022), remarkable progress towards the Abuja Declaration target of 15 percent. Nonetheless, the health system faces long-standing and chronic challenges spanning governance, health financing, human resources for health, and service delivery. There is a shortage of skilled health workers, inadequate diagnostic equipment and health facilities, lack of medical products, and frequent stock-outs of essential medicines in public health facilities. The country's Universal Health Coverage (UHC) rate is at 39 percent in 2019. However, it is still lower than the average index for Sub-Saharan Africa (51 percent.)¹³ Geographic access to health services has improved in the past 10 years as the country

very low, as reflected in The Country Policy, and Institutional Assessment Social Protection rating at 3.5 (2022), one of the lowest in the subregion. Existing social safety nets are considered inadequate to protect the most vulnerable.

invested in health infrastructure, however, the quality of services and financial access remain serious barriers. Access in hard-to-reach areas, such as island communities and remote rural areas, is lower than in other parts of the country.

Transboundary disease transmission in humans is a serious threat to public health and transboundary animal diseases¹⁴ are prevalent in Sierra Leone. Outbreaks recorded in the animal sector have caused devastating consequences on animal stocks, agricultural food productivity and food security. The country's geography and climate make it particularly vulnerable to Zoonotic disease risks, and this is further exacerbated by increasing levels of land degradation

¹¹ Non-communicable diseases country profiles 2018 ISBN 978-92-4-151462-0, World Health Organization 2018

¹² World malaria report 2022 at World malaria report 2022 (who.int)

¹³ UHC_Highlights_AFRO_Dec2023.pdf (who.int)

¹⁴ Transboundary animal diseases are defined by FAO as those diseases that are of significant economic, trade and/or food security importance for a considerable number of countries, which can easily spread to other countries and reach epidemic proportions.

Malnutrition continues to be a significant contributor to infant morbidity and mortality. Although most young children consume breast milk, they lack sufficient intake of animal-source foods, fruits, legumes, or vegetables, heavily relying on grains. Only 23 percent of children aged 6-23 months meet the minimum dietary diversity standard. The upward trend in severe child food poverty between 2019 (34 percent) and 2022 (46 percent), is aligned with the worsening of key diet diversity indicators.

Sierra Leone has had some of the poorest maternal and child health outcomes in the world. The Government has declared maternal mortality a public health emergency and the country has realized a 74 percent reduction in Maternal Mortality Rates between 2000 and 2020.¹⁵ Most maternal deaths occur in health facilities, indicating challenges with quality

of care, compounded by inadequate healthcare infrastructure or referral at too late a stage for care. Maternal deaths are estimated to account for 36 percent of all deaths among women aged 15 to 49 years. However, only 25 percent of all deaths are reported through the vital statistics system, and no comprehensive cause-of-death information is available. High rates of adolescent pregnancy, unsafe abortion, child marriage and female genital mutilation increase the risk of maternal mortality.

Neonatal, infant and under-five mortality have all reduced significantly in the last 10 years as illustrated in Figure 3. Causes of under-five mortality include inequalities in risk of death for under-five children are based on socioeconomic characteristics, such as urban-rural, gender, maternal education and wealth.

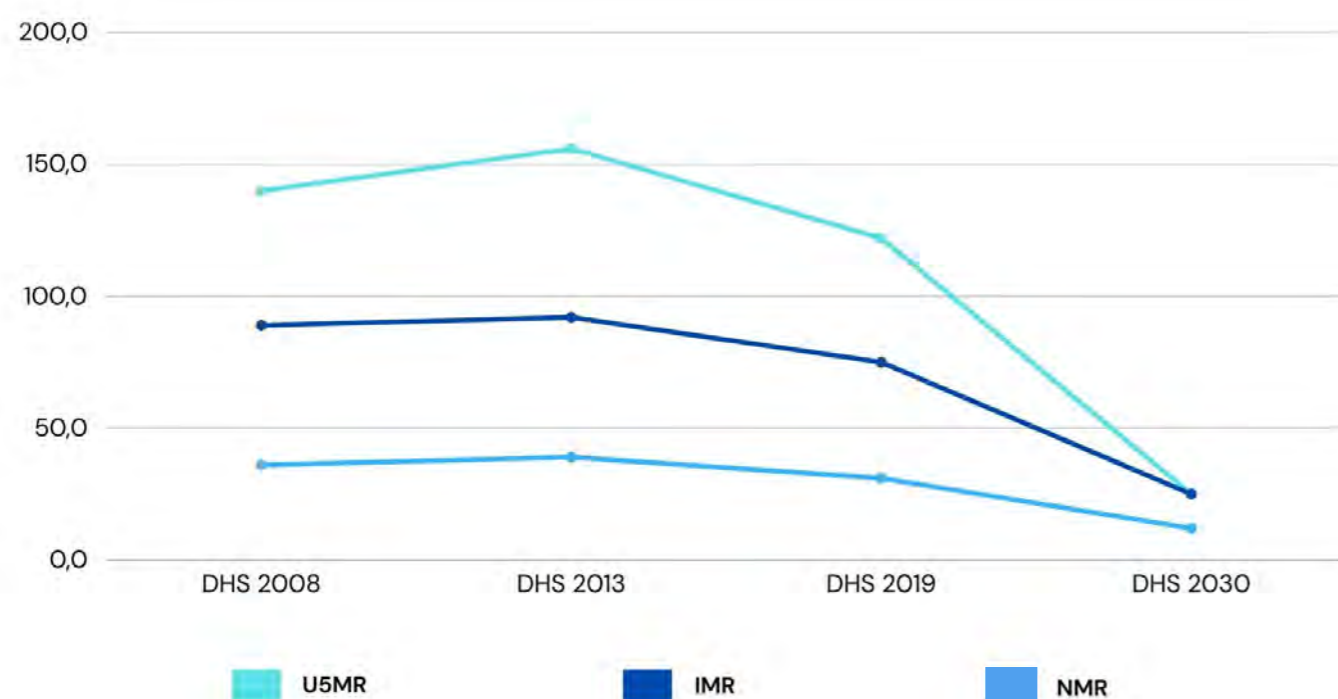


Figure 3: Trends in Mortality According to SL-DHS
 Source: DHS 2008, DHS 2013, DHS 2019.

National HIV prevalence is estimated at 1.7 percent, however HIV prevalence among females aged 15-49 years (2.2 percent) is double the rate among males (1.1 percent). Adolescent girls and young women aged 15-24 years are 3 times more likely to be infected with HIV than their male counterparts. The 2021 Biological Behavioral Sentinel Survey (IBBSS) indicates HIV prevalence is highest among female sex workers (12 percent).

Although the number of people living with HIV on treatment have doubled over the last 3 years, the perennial stock-out of HIV commodities because of poor quantification, delayed container clearance at the port, the inefficient procurement

ADOLESCENT REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

According to DHS (2019), 21 percent of pregnancies occur in the adolescent population. However, the percentage of 15-19-year-olds who have given birth or are pregnant with their first child has decreased from 28 percent in 2013 to 21 percent in 2018. Rural adolescents are more likely to have had children than urban teenagers (29 percent versus 14 percent). Adolescent mothers are more likely to experience adverse pregnancy outcomes.

Access to age appropriate, gender responsive, curriculum based comprehensive sexuality education is linked to lower rates of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage which in turn is linked to higher rates of school completion for girls. Yet, youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services are not accessible to a vast majority of young people. The scaling up of comprehensive sexuality education underway

and supply chain management systems coupled with the poor logistic management systems continue to limit access to HIV services. The HIV testing coverage for pregnant women was 80 percent in 2022 and pregnant women who received ART to prevent mother-to-child transmission was estimated at 69 percent.

The country has developed elaborate national strategic plan and treatment guidelines, yet the quality, scale and scope of HIV services delivery even in the 6 high burden districts (Western Urban, Western Rural, Port Lokko, Bo, Bombali and Kambia) remains a challenge.

should contribute towards improved uptake of sexual and reproductive health services.

The modern contraceptive prevalence rate for all women increased from 21 percent in 2013 and 24 percent in 2019, but is still low overall. Unmet need for family planning for married women aged 15-49 remains high at 25 percent and rises to 28 percent for adolescent girls aged 15-19 (DHS, 2019). Barriers to family planning include limited access to services, low quality of information and services, inadequate knowledge about available methods, social and religious norms, and misconceptions about family planning. Fear of side effects and opposition from partners or family members also discourage many women from using contraception and contribute to high rates of discontinuation.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

There is an under-capacitated mental health system, especially when it comes to services for children and adolescents. To help address these concerns, a Presidential Advisor for Mental Health was recently appointed, and a mental health secretariat was launched. Estimates on the prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents (age 10-19) suggests that Sierra Leone has slightly higher rates of mental disorder than other West and Central African Nations with an increased risk of increased risk of suicidal behaviours. The opening of the first specialist child and adolescent mental health unit at Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital in 2021 is a step forward to solve this issue but this type service needs to be expanded to improve access and help address stigma and cultural understandings of mental health.

The misuse of alcohol or drugs in Sierra Leone, including substances like nicotine, caffeine, prescription drugs, and illegal drugs is increasing in Sierra Leone, predominantly among young people. The main illegal drug consumed is cannabis, however, the consumption of synthetic

cannabinoid, also known as Kush or K2, trended upward between 2020 and 2022. Tobacco and alcohol use by young people is often the gateway to use of other substances and both are widely available. While marijuana-related mental health cases presented to the Kissy Psychiatric Hospital in Freetown dropped during the three-year period of 2020 to 2022, Kush-induced cases increased twenty-fold. There are insufficient treatment and rehabilitation centers, as well community and social services, available to address the problem.

Figure 4 shows key demographics of substance abusers based on admissions to hospital. The majority are in the 20-24 and 25-29 age groups. Students comprise 40 percent of those admitted and the unemployed comprise 33 percent. Of all persons admitted, 92 percent are male and 73 percent live in urban or peri-urban areas. The executive director of a Freetown-based non-profit working with youth¹⁴ said that unemployment and depression are the two primary reasons why a lot of young people turn to drugs and alcohol. Many see it as a temporary solution to their economic problems.

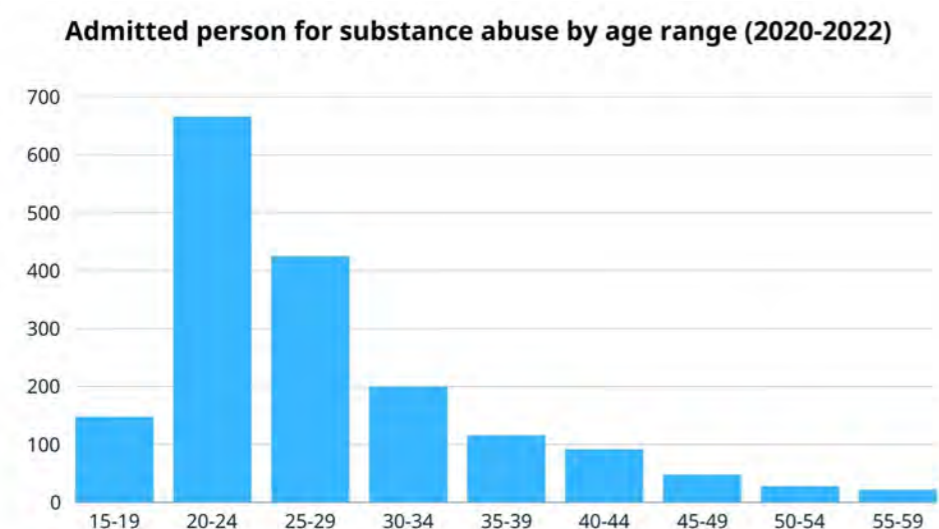


Figure 4: Ages of Persons admitted for Substance Abuse
 Source: Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital

1.1.3 WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

Sierra Leone has taken important steps to improve quality and access to water, sanitation and hygiene including through the legal, policy and governance framework. Access to basic level of water services has been slowly progressing, from 60 percent in 2017 to 64 percent in 2020.¹⁶ (See Figure 5) However, if progress continues only at this rate, Sierra Leone will not be able to meet universal and equitable access by 2030. Geographic disparities in access exist. 12 percent of the urban population has access to 'improved water services', but only 9.2 percent of the rural population, placing those in rural areas at increased risk of water-borne illnesses.¹⁷ Access to water with 'low contamination', the next best

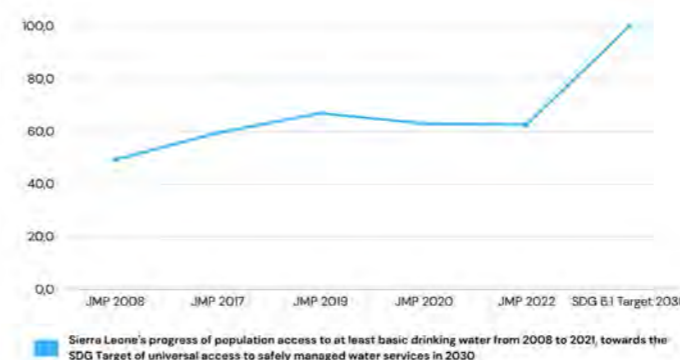


Figure 5: Positive trend of population with access to at least basic drinking water services

Source: JMP WASH data for Sierra Leone, using JMP 2008⁸⁵¹, JMP 2017, DHS 2019⁸⁵² JMP 2020 and WASH NORM 2022 data.

Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=SLE>

The proportion of the population with access to at least what is classified as 'basic sanitation services' is limited to about 31 percent, and less than half of that includes fecal sludge management.¹⁸ Included in the remaining 69 percent are 25 percent of the population that practice open defecation, the worst of the sanitation categories.

Sierra Leone has set up community councils to involve local communities in decisions and priority-setting on WASH matters, however, they remain limited in implementation and influence partly because incentives for participation are low¹⁹ and most projects are managed at a national level.²⁰

Persons with disabilities face additional challenges for WASH access. According to the 2022 National Outcome Routine Mapping Survey (NORMS), 79 percent of functional water systems are not accessible for persons with disabilities, and only 2.7 percent of persons with disabilities find their household's latrines useable and accessible.²¹

The situation of WASH in schools is poor, as 24 percent of schools still have no sanitation services of any kind.²² Even where toilets exist, the quality is low. There are also limited handwashing facilities in schools, with 50 percent of schools not having any hygiene services.²³ Many adolescent girls drop out of school because it is difficult to obtain sanitary pads, especially in rural areas. Increasing the coverage of Menstrual Health Management services in schools, would contribute to retention and reduction of absenteeism among adolescent girls.

¹⁴ Forum of Sierra Leonean Youth Network.

¹⁵ UN Estimates, 2023

¹⁶ JMP WASH data for Sierra Leone, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=SLE>

¹⁷ JMP WASH data for Sierra Leone, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=SLE>

¹⁸ MICS 2017, pp.15, 275.

¹⁹ JMP WASH data for Sierra Leone, 2020. Available at: <https://washdata.org/data/household#!/table?geo0=country&geo1=SLE>

²⁰ Key Informant Interview with Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Freetown, 24 November 2022. ²⁰

²¹ Thematic Focus Group Discussion, WASH, 24 November 2022.

²² NORMS Survey, 2022.

²³ JMP WASH in School data, 2021.

²⁴ Ibid.

1.1.4 EDUCATION

The Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy launched in 2018 led to a 69 percent increase in basic education enrolment, with 51 percent girl pupils. This surge was challenging for delivery of equitable and quality education, as the number attending schools has put pressure on the system and performance of learners is low. For example, 81 percent of Grade 2 students scored zero on reading comprehension as demonstrated by the National Early Grade Reading and Mathematics Assessment in 2021. Funds for teacher salaries are in crisis, many teachers remain unqualified untrained, and public confidence in education has plummeted. The largest obstacle to improving education services is lack of funds to support the sector, given the overall fiscal situation of the country, as discussed later in this report.

The 2022 Annual School Census revealed that only 62 percent of teachers were qualified for the level they were teaching, with qualified teachers more scarce in remote schools. The pupil-to-teacher ratio set out in the country's Education Sector Plan (ESP) is 40-to-1. Yet, in 2022, pre-primary schools had an average 43-to-1 Pupil to Qualified Teacher Ratio, while primary schools had 63-to-1. Districts of Kono and Falaba both had above 100. In 2022, only 29 percent of the teaching workforce was women, well below the 45 percent average for primary level teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The scarcity of adequately qualified special needs educators presents a learning barrier for some children with disabilities. Furthermore, many schools, particularly in rural areas, lack essential building accessibility features such as ramps and handrails. Data concerning the educational experience of children with disabilities is not readily available to fully assess their challenges.

There are many children who are not attending school. In 2018, there were an estimated 524,000 children out of school, which represented 22 percent of all children aged six to 18 years. There is no established mechanism to identify the children unable to attend school, resulting in an inability to target them with supportive assistance to complete their education. There are disparities based on family income. In the wealthiest quintile, 39 percent of children aged 7 to 14 exhibit foundational literacy skills as compared to only three percent in the poorest quintile (MICS, 2017).

Progress has been made on ensuring that Sexuality Education is part of education cycles at different levels. At the senior level comprehensive sexuality has been included in the curriculum as a standalone subject, however, it is not compulsory so learners may elect to not study the subject. At the Basic education level comprehensive sexuality education has been introduced into the curriculum.

The education sector has established strategies to enhance emergency prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery in the education sector, and to eliminate corruption in the education system. It is also working to bolster data and technology use to improve education service delivery.

²⁴ 2022 Annual School Census.

²⁵ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Education Sector Plan 2022-2026.

²⁶ MBSSE, Teaching Service Commission: A Comprehensive Situation Analysis of Teachers and the Teaching Profession in Sierra Leone, 2018.

²⁷ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, p.9.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Out of School Study 2021, CGA Technologies.

³⁰ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Education Sector Plan 2022-2026

ADULT EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Advancing options for Adult Education and Training are crucial to address youth underemployment, recognized as a contributing factor to social challenges such as drug abuse, irregular migration, children being raised in poverty, and the likelihood of social unrest during periods of economic crisis.

According to DHS 2019, only 43 percent of women aged 15–49 are literate, compared to 59 percent of men in the same age group. Disaggregated rates range from 19 percent for women from households in the lowest wealth quintile to 86 percent for men from households in the wealthiest quintile. Non-Formal Education (NFE) and adult education are provided through Community Learning Centres and adult learning centres, typically with classes in basic literacy and numeracy, as well as livelihood and life skills training. Despite the high demand for these programmes, there is very little government spending on NFE and adult education, and the regulatory framework is weak. Most of the programmes are funded by donors or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

An expanded network for Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) can be a means to address youth underemployment. Yet, the Education Sector Plan 2018-2020 noted that TVET enrollment is low, largely due to the cost of attending TVET institutions, the majority of which are private and profit-making.³¹ A Ministry of Education plan recognized the need to expand TVET access and found geographic disparity in TVET locations, with urban areas having far more institutions than other areas. It also noted that less than a third of TVET instructors are adequately trained in their technical disciplines.³²

Some issues include outdated curricula that are not aligned to labour market needs and insufficient capacity (financial, organizational, and infrastructural); limited links with industry; poor quality of instruction and limited responsiveness to labour market needs.³³ There is limited access to basic materials, tools, equipment and a shortage of qualified TVET instructors. Priority sectors for TVET to address labor market shortages were identified in a national report as: agriculture and agribusiness; tourism and hospitality; fisheries and marine resources; engineering (including construction); renewable energy; mining, oil, and gas, and manufacturing and services.³⁴

³¹ National Council for Technical and Academic Awards: 2021 Survey Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institutions for Sierra Leone, 2022.

³² Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, p.37.

³³ GoSL, Mid-Term Development Plan 2019 – 2023 p. 25.

³⁴ National Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Policy for Sierra Leone, GoSL 2019.

1.1.5 MIGRATION

Sierra Leone is characterized by significant irregular migration patterns, mostly comprised of male youth seeking to enhance their socioeconomic status abroad. 57 percent of Sierra Leoneans across all age groups have considered emigrating to some degree, with economic considerations cited as the most important push factor.³⁵ Lack of economic and social opportunities, as well as social norms that limit youth participation in community decision-making, are drivers expressed by returned migrants and border community stakeholders.³⁶ Sierra Leone is a major country of origin of migrants ending up in vulnerable situations. In 2023, IOM assisted the return of 1107 adults (393 female, 714 male) and 265 children, although lower than the 2022 figures.

Access to qualitative and quantitative data on internal and cross-border migration in Sierra Leone, is hindered by limited institutional capacity to collect, analyse and properly disseminate migration related data, making this a priority activity. IOM supported the installation of the Migration Information and Data Analysis System (MIDAS) at major border points and trained on system use, but more action is needed in this area.³⁷

Trafficking in Persons (TiP) is another highly concerning category of migration. There are widespread practices of child trafficking within Sierra Leone itself, as well as trafficking towards West Africa, the Middle East, and Gulf regions for adults and children under different forms of exploitation. Traffickers generally recruit with the promises of education or well-paid jobs, however, persons are often used as domestic workers and some experience sexual exploitation from their employers.

Sierra Leone is a country of origin, transit and destination for migrant workers. Despite its importance for economic development, labour migration has not been adequately mainstreamed into development policy in Sierra Leone, although some positive steps are outlined in Annex 1. There is limited coherence in existing migration-related laws, mainly due to the absence of coordination among the various departments and agencies dealing with migration-related issues in Sierra Leone.

³⁵ Sanny, Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye et al. 2019. Afro Barometer, In Search of Opportunity: Young and Educated Africans Most Likely to Consider Moving Abroad. Retrieved from https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/migrated/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r7_dispatchno288_looking_for_opportunity_africans_views_on_emigration1.pdf

³⁶ Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking and People Smuggling in Sierra Leone: A report of the Joint field assessment by International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Office of National Security (ONS); May 2017.

³⁷ IOM. 2023. Strengthening the Capacity of the Government of Sierra Leone in Border Management. Retrieved from: <https://www.iom.int/project/strengthening-capacity-government-sierra-leone-border-management>

1.1.6 VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Based on DHS 2019, 61 percent of women aged 15 – 49 had experienced physical violence ‘in their lifetime’, and 43 percent in the ‘12 months preceding the survey.’ This represents a marked increase from the 2013 figures of 56 percent and 27 percent, respectively. The rate of physical violence continues to be one of the highest in West Africa, and the rural prevalence rate (64 percent) is higher than the urban rate (57 percent). Only 40 percent of women who have experienced violence have sought help to address that violence, 26 percent of women who have experienced an STI

symptom have not sought medical advice or any form of treatment.

Looking specifically at sexual violence, according to the latest DHS (2019), around 7.4 percent of Sierra Leonean women aged 15-49 had experienced sexual violence, down from 10 percent reported in 2013. Figure 6 shows further details on this improving trend by age group. Notably, the sharpest decrease in rates of sexual violence is amongst adolescents aged 15 – 19 years old.

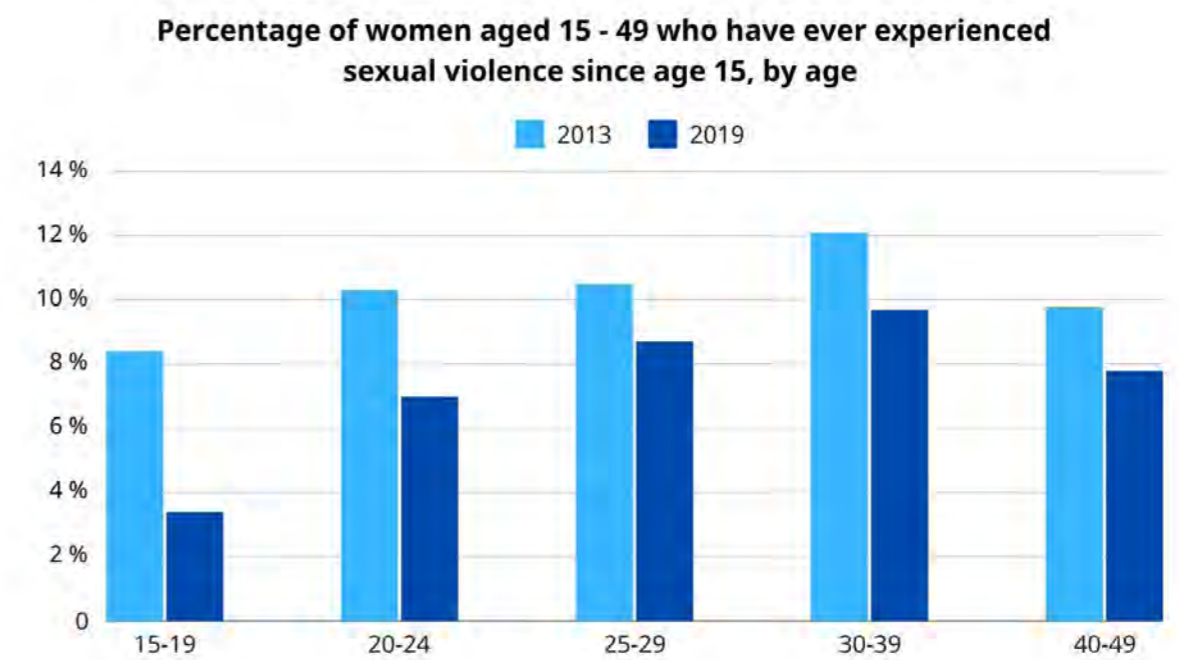


Figure 6: Percentage of women aged 15 - 49 who have ever experienced sexual violence since age 15, by age.

Source: DHS 2019

In 2019, the President declared a state of emergency on sexual and gender-based violence and the Sexual Offence Act was amended to strengthen sentencing. Prevailing attitudes and gender and social norms however contribute to an environment that hinders gender-based violence prevention and response. A recent survey on gender-based violence in Sierra Leone

(Afro Barometer, 2022) highlighted that domestic violence is often regarded as a private matter that needs to be resolved within the family instead of making it a criminal matter involving law enforcement, and that women are likely to face criticism or harassment if they report violence to the police.

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What the graph does not illustrate are reported cases of sexual penetration against minors in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone National Police' General Annual Crime Statistics Report shows that reported cases of rape against a child were 3,252 in 2019,³⁸ 3,091 in 2020, and 2,001 in 2022.³⁹

While no local data is available, research indicates that girls with disabilities face greater risks of gender-based violence,⁴⁰ engaging in survival sex with community members, with increased exposure to HIV and higher rates of severe neglect compared to boys with disabilities.⁴¹ Additionally, it can make it more difficult for girls to report violence and abuse against them – and to be believed by relevant authorities.⁴² Additionally, children with disabilities are at higher risk of experiencing online sexual abuse and exploitation, including involvement in child sexual abuse material.⁴³

Violence and especially gender-based violence is acknowledged to be a problem in Sierra Leone, including in the school environment.⁴⁴ The 2021 Out-of-School Study noted that sexual violence in and around schools is a main barrier to school attendance, especially for girls. In the annual school census of 2022, 152 schools reporting incidences of SBGV, an increase from 101 schools in 2021.

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/Cutting) is common in Sierra Leone and can be predominantly attributed to social and cultural norms. While the proportion of women who have undergone FGM decreased from 90 percent in 2013 to 83 percent in 2019 (DHS), Sierra Leone still ranks among the highest in the world. Based on DHS 2019, 61 percent of women aged 15-19 have been circumcised, as compared to 95 percent of women aged 45-49.

A particular challenge is the high number of women in the country who believe FGM should continue, as it has been found that women are more likely than men to support the continuation of the practice. Women who are circumcised are more likely than those who are not circumcised to believe that FGM should continue (63 percent vs. 30 percent) and that it is required by their religion. There is higher support for the practice to be discontinued among younger generations. Rural women are more likely than urban women to believe that FGC is required by their religion (50 percent and 34 percent, respectively) and that FGC should be continued (66 percent and 47 percent, respectively). DHS 2019- p. 332 (Table 17.9)

³⁸ Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone., The State of Human Rights in Sierra Leone 2019, 2019, p. 35. Available: www.hrc-sl.org/Annual_Reports.aspx, accessed 13 March 2023.

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ UNICEF, 2013

⁴¹ UNICEF 2005

⁴² UNICEF FACT Sheet, Children With Disabilities, https://www.unicef.org/media/128976/file/UNICEF_Fact_Sheet_Children_with_Disabilities.pdf, August 2022

⁴³ DeafKidz International, WePROTECT Global Alliance, and Childhood USA, 'The Sexual Exploitation and Abuse of Deaf and Disabled Children Online', accessed 23 June 2022.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Education Sector Plan 2022-2026 p.3.

Marriage before the age of 18, which is common in Sierra Leone, is an infringement of girls' human rights and undermines the realization of their full potential and their contribution to a stronger society. However, it is positive to note that while the rate remains very high, child marriage declined from 51 percent in 1994 to 30 percent in 2019, and marriage before they age 15 declined from 21 percent in 1994 to 9 percent in 2019 (Figure 7). While these trends are encouraging, they are not fast enough to end child marriage by 2030.⁴⁵ DHS 2019 disaggregated data show that girls from poor, rural families are most likely to be married before the age of 18. Factors that may contribute to this include adherence to tradition, a limited range of life options and lower education.

While adolescent pregnancy rates have also declined steadily in the last decade, they remain high with and 1 in 3 women aged 20-24 giving birth by the age of 18 (DHS, 2019).

⁴⁵ <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/sierra-leone/health-statistics/sl-adolescent-fertility-rate-births-per-1000-women-aged-15-19>. Adolescent data portal- UNICEF: <https://data.unicef.org/adp/> UNICEF (2022) Child Marriage in West and Central Africa: A statistical overview and reflection on ending the practice. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-in-west-and-central-africa-a-statistical-overview-and-reflections-on-ending-the-practice/>

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were first married or in union before age 18, by wealth quintile, education and residence (DHS 2019)

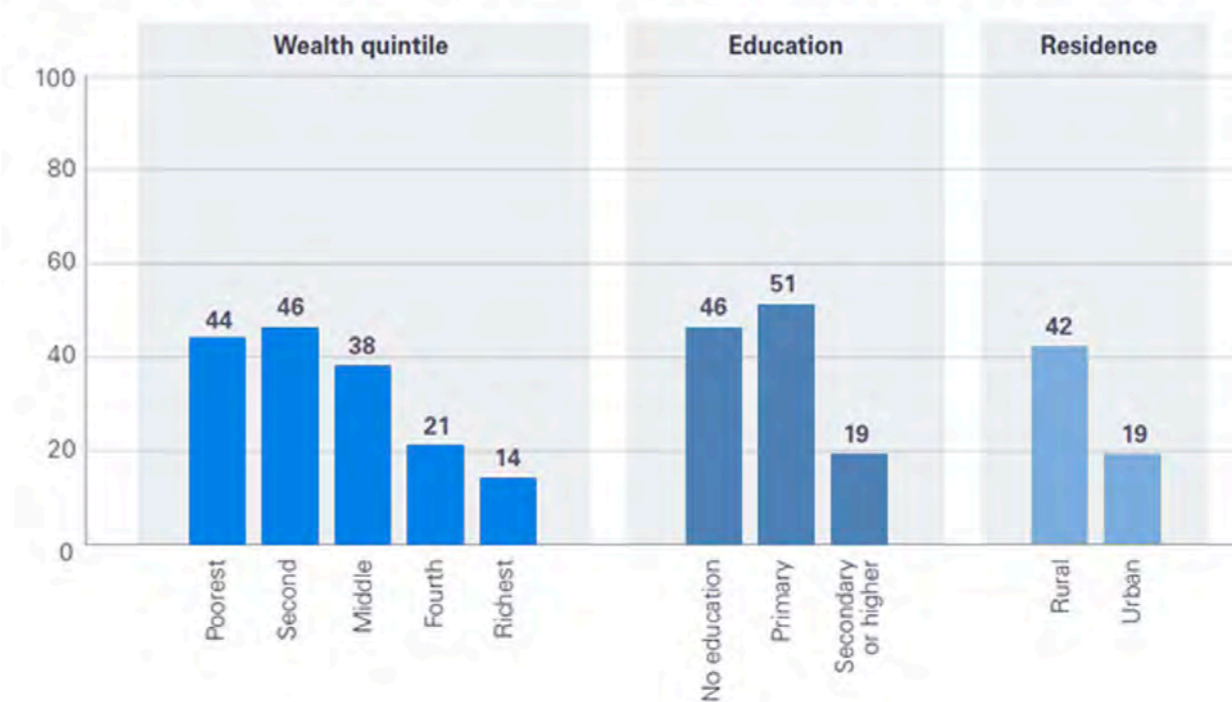


Figure 7: Percentage of women aged 20 – 24 who were first married or in a union before age 18, by wealth quintile, education and residence.

Source: DHS 2019

1.1.7 CHILD PROTECTION

Many children in Sierra Leone are exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation, and vulnerabilities are particularly acute for adolescent girls. Violent discipline is widespread and is increasing. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) shows that 87 percent of children aged 1 to 14 years (almost same for male and female) experienced some form of violent discipline in their household in 2017, compared to 65 percent in 2010. Experiencing violent discipline at a young age can harm the emotional, psychological, and physical development of the child. Children exposed to violence are more likely to have difficulty performing well at school and adopt negative coping strategies, such as alcohol and drug abuse and resort to violence and aggressive behaviour themselves.

Global evidence says that children with disabilities are disproportionately affected by child protection concerns such as unnecessary family separation, all forms of violence both in-home and in-community, and sexual exploitation and abuse. They are also less likely to be registered at birth, more vulnerable in humanitarian situations, and are overrepresented in residential institutions. Other individual characteristics, such as gender or displacement, can further compound and exacerbate these inequalities among children with disabilities.⁴⁶ While there is no specific data for Sierra Leone on violence experienced by children with disabilities, 2022 global estimates found that they are more than twice as likely to experience violence than other children.⁴⁷

Data from the Family Support Unit (2023) shows there is a declining trend of children classified as victims of crime, as 3,949 were recorded in 2022 (835 males, 3,114 females), down from 5,343 overall in 2019. The most prevalent category of crimes against children are that of sexual violence (98 percent of against girls), followed by physical abuse (58 percent against girls). Child protection, justice, and reporting mechanisms for child victims

commonly do not take account of the needs of children with disabilities.

CHILD LABOUR AND TRAFFICKING

Child Labour affects nearly 1 in 2 children aged 5-17 (38 percent of girls and 40 percent of boys) and nearly one-third work under hazardous conditions, such as in mining or fishing industries, or are subject to sexual exploitation (MICS 2017). Hazardous work can result in physical, cognitive, and psychological damage, including permanent disability. Child laborers are likely denied their right to education, which creates a vicious cycle of socio-economic disadvantage which can persist over generations.⁴⁸ The Sierra Leone Out-Of-School Study 2021 indicated that children aged 12-14 are more likely to be involved in child labour (classified as working more than 28 hours a week) than other age groups.

Child labour is often linked to child trafficking, which takes several forms in Sierra Leone. The country is a source, transit, and destination country for child trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. Sierra Leone also has a traditional system called men pikin, meaning foster care in the local language, in which family members send children to relatives in urban areas with promises of better educational opportunities. However, some children are instead subjected to forced labor and exploitation.

⁴⁶ United Nations Children's Fund, *Seen, Counted, Included: Using data to shed light on the well-being of children with disabilities*. UNICEF, New York, 2021. <https://data.unicef.org/resources/children-with-disabilities-report-2021/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.unicef.org/media/128976/file>
UNICEF percent20Fact percent20Sheet percent20:
percent20Children percent20with percent20Disabilities.pdf

⁴⁸ Beegle, Kathleen, Rajeev Dehejia and Roberta Gatti, 'Why Should We Care about Child Labor? The education, labor market, and health consequences of child labor', *Journal of Human Resources*, vol. 44, no. 4, Fall 2009, pp. 871-889

1.2 ECONOMIC DIMENSION

This section begins with a discussion of the macro-economic environment, including economic diversification and then expands into a more detailed discussion of key economic sectors, including agriculture and food security, mining and services.

1.2.1 RECENT MACRO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

Sierra Leone has had political stability since the end of the civil conflict in 2002, and this contributed to a growing post-conflict economy that was outperforming West Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa averages⁴⁹ until several shocks occurred, including the Ebola epidemic and a decline in iron ore prices in 2014, both of which led to a significant reduction in GDP.

GDP growth was predicted to reach 4.5 percent for the 2-year period of 2021–2023, driven mainly by agriculture and mineral-related production. However, the COVID-19 epidemic disrupted the growth pattern and caused the economy to shrink by 2.2 percent in 2020, with the tourism, manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors suffering the most, something discussed further in a later section. The economy experienced a slowdown with global supply chain disruptions, exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities and undermining stability. Figure 8 shows current and projected growth per capita.

Following the COVID-related shocks, the country's economic recovery was severely hindered by the sharp rise in global food and fuel prices in the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the pass-through effects on domestic prices. These impacts, combined with the depreciation of the local currency, resulted in extremely high annual inflation (51 percent as of August 2023) that will likely remain in double digits for the near future, given the price trends of imported commodities. The simultaneous crises have crippled economic growth and made it difficult for the government to

maintain fiscal stability. Figure 9 shows inflation rates over time.

The level of public debt has risen steadily, and financing even basic government service delivery is a challenge. Contributing factors are lower-than-expected tax revenues to finance government programmes, weakening of the Leone against the US Dollar, and rising interest rates for borrowers.

Economic growth is expected to decelerate from 3.6 percent in 2022 to 2.7 percent in 2023, due to continued global pressures, before recovering to 4.7 percent in 2024.⁵⁰ This limited growth rate and a decline in macroeconomic fundamentals threaten to increase the poverty level in the country.

Public expenditure was the main driver of 2022 economic growth, on the demand side, as private consumption was limited due to the eroding purchasing power of households.

⁴⁹ Sierra Leone was among the fastest growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa with annual average growth rate of 10 percent between 2009 and 2013. Although driven by the extractive industries.

⁵⁰ IMF and World Economic Outlook 2023 reports.

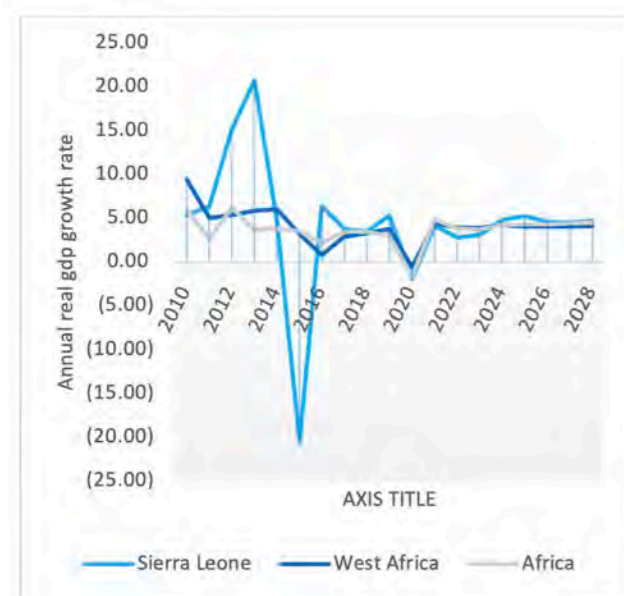


Figure 8: Growth per capita (2010-2028)
 Source: Authors - data from the IMF WEO 2023

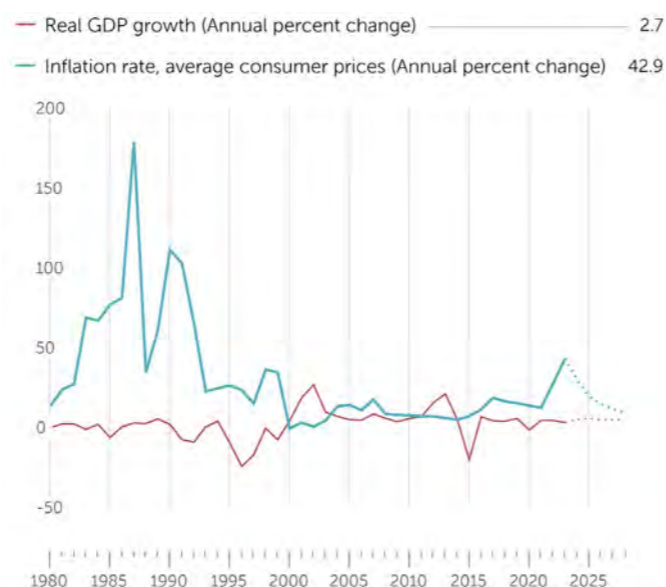


Figure 9: Inflation rate in Sierra Leone
 Source: IMF WEO

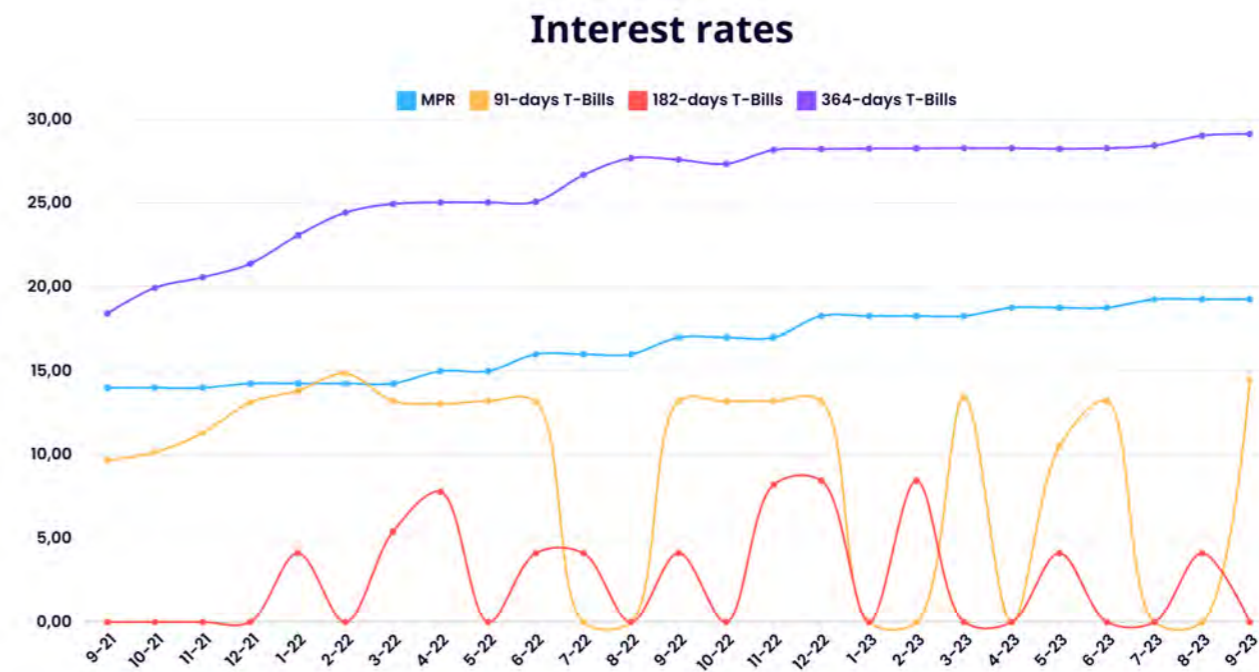


Figure 10: Monthly Interest rates in Sierra Leone from September 2021 to September 2023
 Source: Bank of Sierra Leone

FISCAL, MONETARY, AND ECONOMIC POLICY ACTIONS

Government borrowing to cushion the pandemic impacts and stabilize prices have reduced the already narrow space for government spending in productive and social sectors, while also potentially increasing their cost of borrowing for private sector actors. Figure 10 shows the trends in interest rates over time. Presently, Sierra Leone is at high risk of debt distress with a public debt stock-to-GDP ratio reaching 96 percent in 2022, up from 79 percent in 2021.⁵¹ Debt service payments, including amortisation, were equal to 37 percent of domestic revenue and accounted for 20 percent of total government expenditures as end of June 2022.⁵²

The increase in the Non-Performing Loans ratio to total loans among commercial banks (11.59 percent in Q4 2022), is concerning as this exceeds the prudential limit of 10 percent. This considers all bank loans, both to public and private sector.

Total government expenditures continue to rise more than revenue mobilized from all sources, with one reason being the continued provision of fuel and electricity subsidies. As a result, there will be continued government reliance on concessional and grant financing in the foreseeable future, as well development of non-debt mechanisms to finance investment in key sectors. These measures will coincide with measures to develop domestic debt markets to reduce external financing and reduce the risk of debt distress.

Recognizing the need to seek public financing alternatives for the long term, the government has prioritized key policy reforms, including measures to strengthen the country's tax administration and eliminate costly tax exemptions. Government is also targeting interventions to reduce inflation, contain debt, and increase overall resilience to external shocks. Actions include tighter spending controls,

improved spending efficiency, strengthened governance, improved debt monitoring and reporting, and enhanced budgeting procedures.

Intensified price control measures are crucial to contain inflationary pressure (see Figure 11 for inflation rate trends) and curtail harmful speculative behaviours following redenomination of the currency in 2022. The redenomination was expected to increase the velocity of money and transactions, reduce risk associated with carrying large volume of funds, and improve the management of payments and ATMs. However, the implementation has caused some transactional challenges. Some consumers and businesses in the informal sector initially struggled with the change in conducting transactions, whilst businesses in the formal sector have had to adjust their operating systems, incurring additional administrative costs.

⁵¹ Due to (i) the sharp depreciation of the Leone (67.3 percent year depreciation at end-2022), and (ii) the high 2022 fiscal deficit which led to substantial additional domestic borrowing, largely through 364-day T-bills (IMF, 2023 report).

⁵² Government of Sierra Leone, 2022 report.

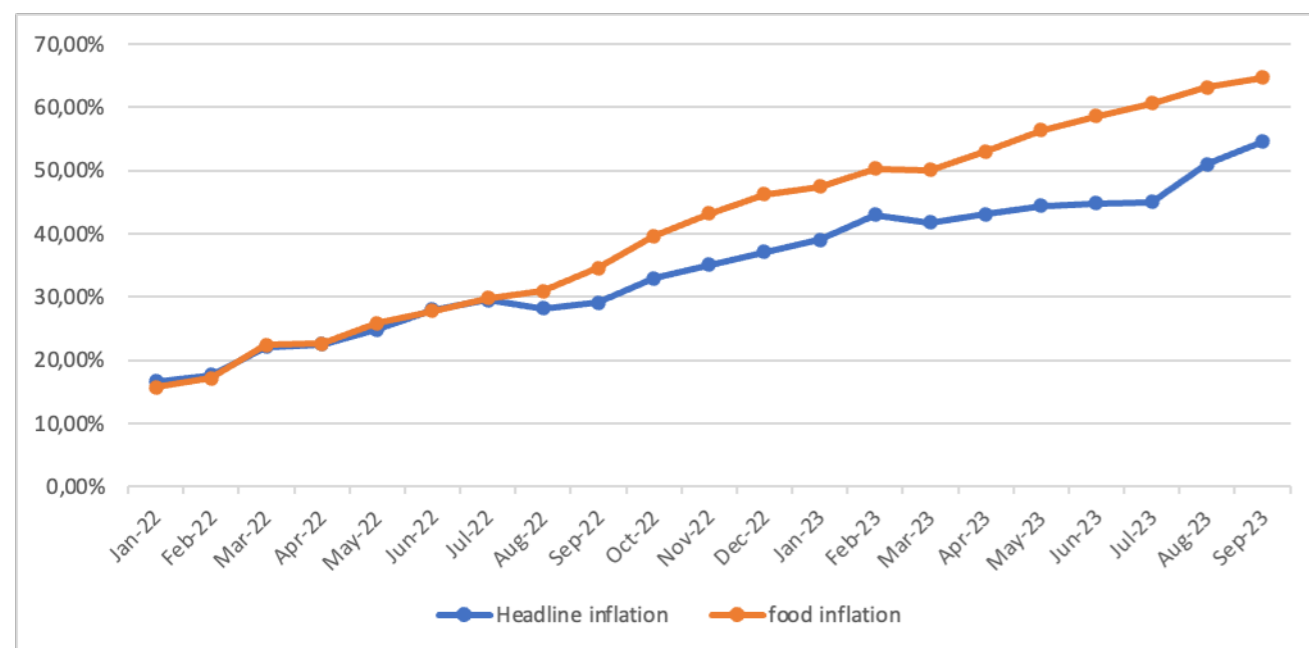


Figure 11: Overall inflation and food inflation (January 2022-September 2023) in Sierra Leone.

Source: Authors' construction from Statistics Sierra Leone 2023

The external sector has remained stable in the last few years, supported by increased capital inflows from development partners and the diaspora to address crises, and measures by authorities to stabilize the exchange rate for import of essential items. Even so, the gross international reserves of the BSL declined in the first half of 2023, due to increased payments for debt service and imported goods and services.

The Bank of Sierra Leone recently introduced two facilities to provide foreign exchange (FX) to essential commodity importers, addressing acute challenges they faced in accessing FX from commercial banks during periods of price increases. These two facilities supported import of rice, sugar and flour and fuel.⁵³

To stabilize the exchange rate, interventions to control inflation maintain manageable debt levels, and enhance monetary policy, will need to be enacted. Policies that are export-oriented and foster import substitutions will also be key to economic stability.

As macroeconomic stabilization measures are taken, potential impacts on vulnerable populations will need to be analysed and considered. Minimizing the risks to disadvantaged groups requires building resiliency and strengthening social protection programs.

⁵³ IMF, 2022 report.

GOVERNMENT REVENUE AND SPENDING

An overview of Government receipts and expenditure outlays and share of GDP 2018-2022 is illustrated in Figure 12. Throughout this section, and exchange rate of 22.5 New Leones to 1 US dollar (USD) has been used and all figures with an M represent millions. Total domestic revenue collected during January to June 2023 amounted to USD 204,000 M (5.9 percent of GDP), reflecting a deficit of USD 7,400 M from the target. Total domestic revenue for 2023 is projected at USD 471,000 M (13.1 percent of GDP). Total grants received from development partners amounted to USD 49,000 M. Total grants are projected to reach USD 164,000 M in 2023. Total expenditure and net lending for January to June 2023 amounted

to USD 431,000 M (12.3 percent of GDP). Total expenditures and net lending are projected to amount to USD 813,000 M (23.3 percent of GDP) by end of the year. The overall budget deficit excluding grants is estimated at 6.4 percent of GDP. The deficit including grants, is estimated at 5.1 percent of GDP as at end June 2023.

For the 2021-2023 period, the overall fiscal deficit has improved. Fiscal consolidation saw revenues and grants increase by USD 409,000 M to USD 600,000 M (in nominal terms) while total expenditure increased from USD 544,000 M to USD 672,000 M, respectively.

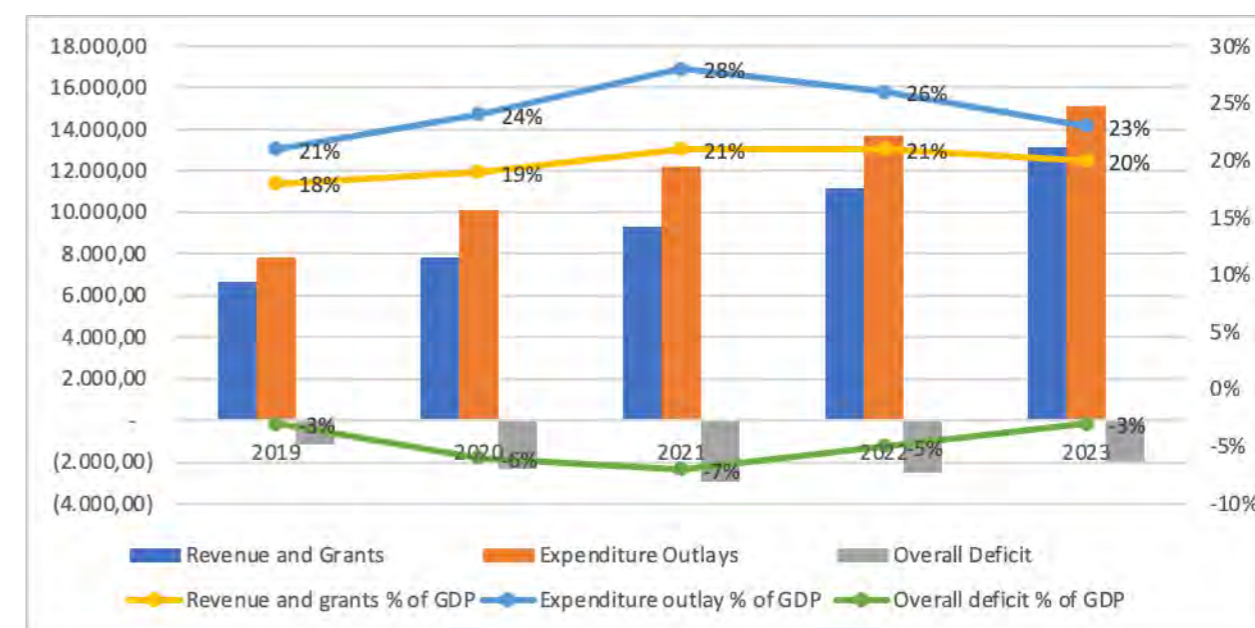


Figure 12: Overview of Government receipts and expenditure outlays (in millions of New Leones) and share of GDP 2018-2022.

Source: Authors' construction from Ministry of Finance

IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS AND INDIVIDUALS

According to a recent United Nations Development Program (UNDP) - Statistics Sierra Leone study, 86 percent of households reported that their income was negatively affected by global crises. These challenges are perceived as being associated with increased prices of fuel and food (29 percent for each factor), followed by scarcity of fuel (22 percent), and scarcity of food (21 percent). Fuel price impact is most pronounced in the western urban area, which includes the capital of Freetown.

High transportation costs resulting from higher fuel prices affect businesses and the movement of goods and people. Fares for public transport (used by most of the population) have become more cost prohibitive and impede the movement of many, including living in remote areas and wanting to travel to population centres for trade and services and students studying away from home.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION

Sierra Leone's economy is fragile and relatively undiversified with few dominant sectors that support global competitiveness. The lack of diversification contributes to economic instability. Agriculture, fisheries and manufacturing, as well as mining and natural resources (if sustainably managed), provide a good basis for further diversification

Agriculture made up more than half of GDP in 2022 at 58 percent. The sector had positive growth in 2022, rising to 3 percent from 2.5 percent the year before, and was the largest contributor to overall GDP growth at 40 percent. It consists primarily of smallholder farmers who participate in subsistence farming with very little value addition. A transformed agriculture sector could have a significant influence on poverty-reduction and counter inflationary effects

The services sector is the second largest, contributing 32 percent to GDP in 2021, an increasing share of the economy. The sector

Intra-household tensions stemming from income and livelihood pressures place women and girls at increased risk of gender-based violence and economic strain experienced by women-led households can make them more vulnerable to exploitation.

When the level of income reduces or when prices increase, the share of food expenditure as a proportion of total expenditure also increases. For poor households this means reducing expenditure on other essential non-food items and services, such as education and health, eating less or eating less preferred foods that are cheaper.⁵⁴ 71 percent of the population spends more than 75 percent of their income on food and 25 percent on all other essential needs, indicating severe vulnerability to price shocks or even small increases.⁵⁵

grew by 2.9 percent partially due to continued steady growth in communications and public administration. Growth, however, is driven mostly by migration from rural to urban areas and the dominance of informal trade. The fact is that high-productivity sectors struggle to grow and growth in productive trade services was limited.

The mining sector is the country's major foreign exchange earner, mainly due to the high output of iron ore and diamonds. These exports make the economy highly vulnerable to fluctuation in commodity prices and global demand. While the sector accounted for 10.2 percent of GDP in 2016, this can fluctuate widely from year to year depending on international prices of minerals and materials. For example, the share of GDP went down to 5.3 percent in 2018 and was 5.6 percent in 2019, after which the COVID outbreak caused the share to drop to 5.2 percent in 2020.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ 2023 FSMS report ⁵⁵2023 FSMS Report

⁵⁶ Statistics Sierra Leone, 2022 Report.

In 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, mining activities receded, and some largescale mining companies shut down leading to a -7.1 percent reduction of the sector. In 2021, the sector recovered due to resumption of mining operations. This resulted to 17 percent growth rate of the Industry Sector. In 2022, as a result of a slower growth in diamond production, the Industry sector decelerated to 8.9 percent.

Mining and minerals-based activity is concentrated in select areas of the country, and while it is a significant contributor to overall GDP, there are also environmental and social costs. Large-scale mining activity has increased deforestation and worsened air and water pollution,⁵⁷ as discussed in Section 1.3. Communities' economic and social rights are often negatively affected by mining activities due to historically weak protection. There is high labour intensity and low skill entry requirements in the Artisanal Small-Scale Mining subsector, and it is noted for its high incidence of human rights abuses. While legal and other regulatory framework instruments have been established to manage and mitigate adverse environmental impacts from mining activities⁵⁸ these protection policies have not been effectively enforced and have not adequately protected local communities from the adverse impacts of mining operations.

Residents in mining communities suggest that the land tenure systems are highly monopolized by local authorities and compensation, or surface rents, are grossly inadequate to provide sustainable and alternative livelihoods from land rental. The lack of labour opportunities, poverty and food insecurity have been major triggers of dissatisfaction and conflict in mining communities.⁵⁹ Host communities often see an increase in social vices and exposure to disease with arrival of mining companies. The rate of theft, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, sex work, and drug abuse are all perceived to have increased with a growing influence of people working in or seeking employment with the companies.⁶⁰

The manufacturing sector constitutes a small component of the economy - only 3.3 percent of GDP in 2018.⁶¹ However, manufacturing was the fastest-growing sector, expanding by 12 percent in 2021 after contracting by 6.7 percent in the previous year. The sector benefited from government support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through the MUNAFA Fund and a Bank of Sierra Leone special credit facility of about USD 50 million, as well as from increased agribusiness investments to promote recovery in agriculture.

History has shown that SMEs bear the brunt of negative impacts associated with economic shocks, including those linked to the COVID pandemic. The World Bank's Business Pulse Survey reported that around 88 percent of SMEs experienced a decline in sales during the pandemic, often closing operations and laying off staff—which aggravated their pre-existing constraints of access to finance, land, and infrastructure.

⁵⁷ Fayiah, Moses, Mining and Environmental Degradation: a Gift Brings Grief Scenario for Mining Communities in Sierra Leone, Journal of Mining and Environment (JME), March 2020, p.1.

⁵⁸ The Mines And Minerals Act (2009); Sierra Leone National Land Policy (2015); Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry (VGGT) (2015); Environment Policy (1994) supported by the Environmental Protection Act (2008) and the Sierra Leone Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (SLEITI).

⁵⁹Land Degradation Assessment (LDA) in the Moyamba (Lower Banta and Upper Banta) and Pujehun (Malen and Makpele) Districts, Sierra Leone, Extended LDA Executive Summary, 30 October 2020..

⁶⁰ Fayiah, Moses, supra note, p. 10.

⁶¹ GoSL, (2019) Report of the Implementation of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Programme of Action 2011-2020.

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

The reliance on imports to meet the food requirements is a major risk to food security and progress on the 2030 Agenda.

The share of Sierra Leone exports to Africa remains relatively small, only 2.75 percent of all country exports are to the ECOWAS region and only 3.22 percent to the continent overall, while exports to China and Europe, accounted for about 40 percent of exports in 2021. The country's export basket lacks the diversification to protect the economy

from impacts of price fluctuation in the limited export goods. Figure 13 shows how Sierra Leone's exports compare to other regions.

There are positive trends in the current account deficit (an indicator of how much imports exceed exports), as this measure, including official grants, is projected to narrow from 10.3 percent of GDP in 2022 to 8.0 percent in 2023, and expected to shrink further to 5.1 percent by 2025.⁶²

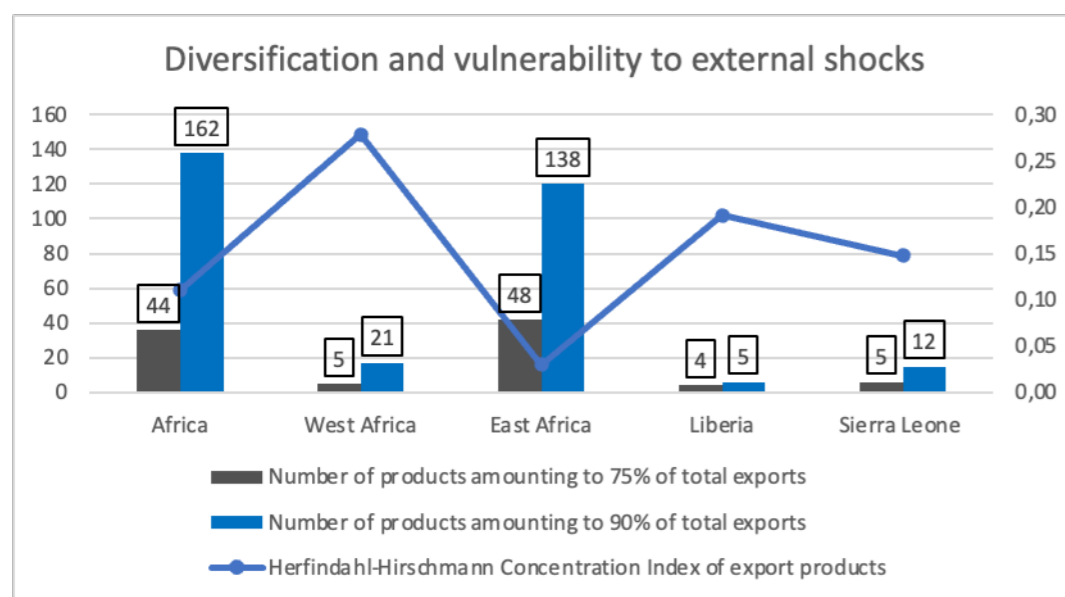


Figure 13: Status of Export Diversification

Source: Based on the Before-After-Control-Intervention International Trade Database at the Product-Level from Centre for Prospective Studies and International Information (CEPII), 2021

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Table 1 shows the medium-term economic outlook through 2028. Growth is projected to decelerate to 3.1 percent in 2023 against a backdrop of high inflation and fiscal consolidation, before converging to its long-term average of 4.0 to 4.5 percent in the medium-term.⁶³ The recovery in 2024 is expected to be supported by an expansion in mining and agriculture, the less contractionary fiscal stance, and macroeconomic stabilization.⁶⁴

Maintaining fiscal discipline will be crucial in restoring macroeconomic stability and is contingent on the government's adherence to its stated reforms, including (i) sharp expenditure consolidation, followed by continued revenue mobilization efforts and (ii) gradual reduction in net credit to government.

	2023 est.	2024 Proj.	2025 Proj.	2026 Proj.	2027 Proj.	2028 Proj.
	(In percentage of GDP unless otherwise indicated)					
GDP at constant Price (percent change)	2.7	4.7	5.2	4.5	4.5	4.6
Consumer price index (end of period)	36.4	22.9	17.4	12.9	9.8	8.0
Gross international reserves (months of next year's imports)	3.4	3.2	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.2
Current account balance (including grants)	-6.1	-4.2	-2.9	-2.8	-3.1	-5.0
External Public Debt	66.0	60.1	56.4	51.2	47.2	46.9
Revenue (Excluding grants)	13.1	14.8	15.8	16.0	16.4	17.0
Domestic Primary Balance	-2.4	-0.2	1.0	1.8	1.8	2.1
Overall Balance	-5.8	-2.8	-2.4	-2.4	-2.4	-4.3

Table 1: Sierra Leone: Medium-Term Macro Economic Framework, 2021-2028
Source: Sierra Leonean authorities and IMF staff estimates and projections.

GREENING THE ECONOMY

The above discussion highlighted the need to diversify the economy away from economic activities that damage the environment towards more service-oriented sectors. The following sections further discuss recommendations to green the economy. These include in the agriculture section where the need to introduce climate techniques is discussed, the blue economy section which emphasizes the need for more sustainable practices, and the infrastructure section that highlights the potential for green energy expansion, to include the expanded public transportation options powered by clean energy. The section on technical and vocational training includes subjects that are linked to greening the economy, such as eco-tourism and renewable energy.



⁶² Government of Sierra Leone, 2022 report.

⁶³ World Bank macro poverty study, Oct 2023

⁶⁴ S/L IMF Sta report-Nov 2023

1.2.2 FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE

The population of Sierra Leone continues to experience food insecurity, which has steadily deepened since 2015.⁶⁵ The situation is characterized by predominantly subsistence farming, lack of modernized agriculture, market distortion due to global economic pressures, slow economic growth and high inflation all exacerbated by climate vulnerabilities.

Close to one in three households, or 2.2 million people (28 percent) in Sierra Leone are severely food insecure today and 71 percent are spending more than 75 percent of their total expenditure on food, making them extremely vulnerable to any change in prices. It leaves them with very limited funds for other essential goods and services.⁶⁶ This comes at a backdrop of an Annual National Food and non-alcoholic beverages inflation for September 2023 of 64.67,⁶⁷ the worst in West Africa.

In addition, the average calorie and protein supply per person is below the African average and declining, especially in the case of protein supply.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the prevalence of insufficient food consumption has increased and is projected to affect 55 percent of the population by 2023.⁶⁸

While the numbers are slightly different, the latest Cadre Harmonisé⁶⁹ projects that people in CH/IPC Phase 3 will go up to 1.5 million⁷⁰ in Sierra Leone in the coming months. These households are in Food Security Crisis, only one step from Emergency Phase 4. Figure 14 shows the degree of food insecurity by district.

⁶⁵ WFP, Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis, 2021

⁶⁶ MAFS, WFP Food Security Monitoring System, August 2023.

⁶⁷ Statistics Sierra Leone, October 2023

⁶⁸ World Bank, Economic Update, October 2023

⁶⁹ Cadre Harmonisé | IPC - Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (ipcinfo.org)

⁷⁰ CH, October 2023

Proportion of food insecure population by district, CFSVA 2020

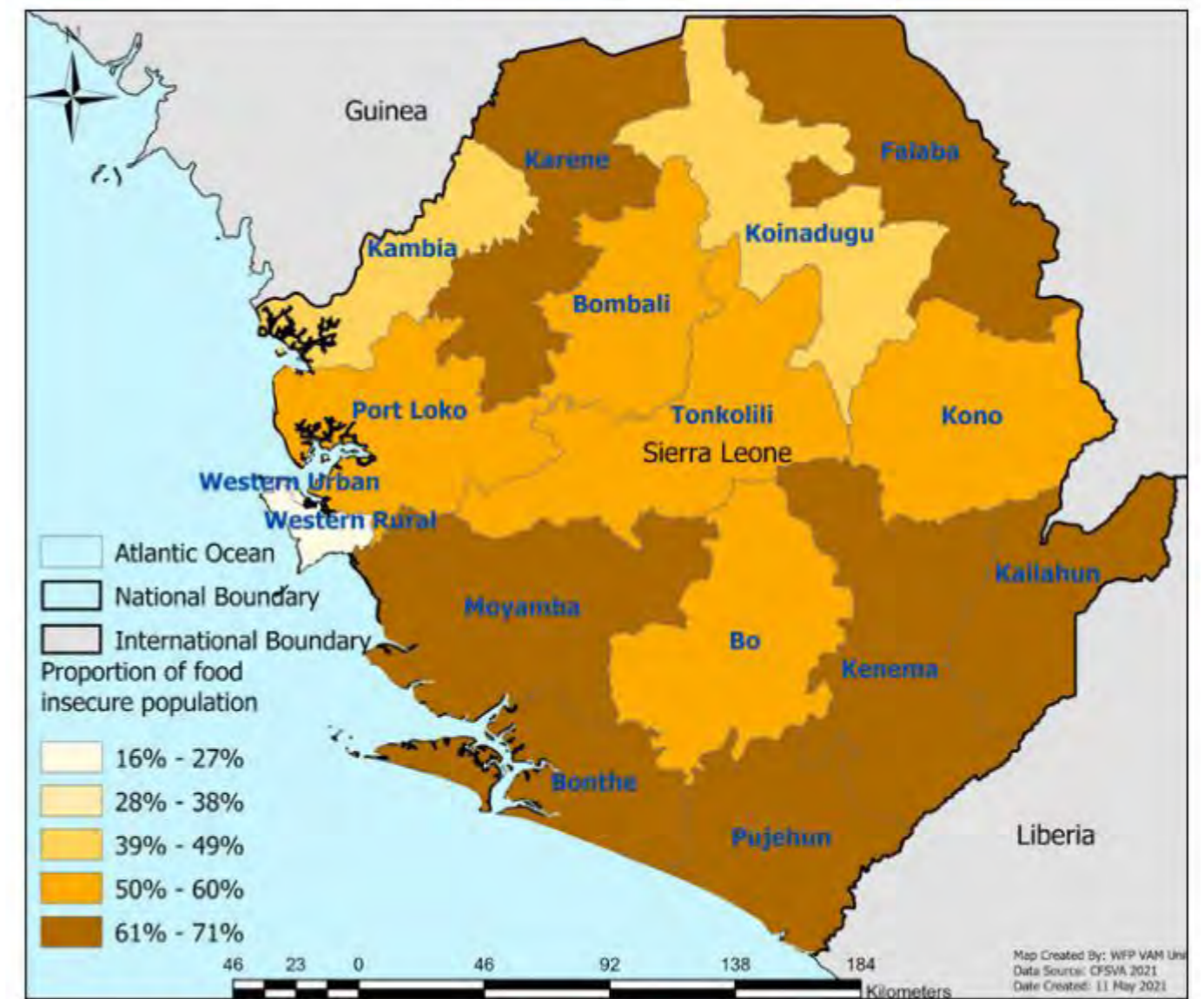


Figure 14: Portion of food insecure population by district.

Source: CFSVA, published 2021 (using data from 2020)

Sierra Leone holds approximately 41,300 square kilometers of agricultural land, comprising roughly 58 percent of total land area. However, current estimates suggest that only 15 percent of its arable land is actively used for farming,

meaning the country is severely underperforming in agricultural output. As a result, food imports are high, and this also weighs down foreign exchange reserves.



A 2021 national dialogue on agriculture identifies key challenges around production (see Box 1).

Key Challenges to Increased Agricultural Production

- *Allocation of government budget (2.6 percent) to the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food Security that is well below the country's 10 percent Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme Commitment.*
- *Weak Agricultural Extension System (farmer education).*
- *Very limited access to agricultural finance.*
- *Very low 'improved' seed and fertilizer uptake, due both to low supply and high prices.*
- *Weak agricultural mechanization systems.*
- *Agricultural farming system that is highly dependent on rainfall.*
- *Poor post-harvest storage facilities and practices, contributing to high post-harvest losses.*

In addition to these challenges, the customary land tenure system discourages commercial agriculture and large-scale land acquisition because of the lack of transparency and low formalization of land transactions. Large areas of arable land including fertile lowlands (1 million ha), with only 15 percent currently under cultivation, can be developed to support double cropping and boost food production, as well as diverse agro-ecosystems offering opportunities for smallholder-based crop expansion and large-scale land-based investments.

A lack of post-harvest storage facilities and processing results in losses of more than 30 percent of total production, and this may be up

to 60 percent in the case of rice (World Bank, 2021). There is untapped potential for a growth of a domestic market to absorb locally grown agricultural products, including processed products for urban consumers, as well for growth of exports, particularly to the sub-region.

One must consider the aspect of water availability when assessing the potential of local agricultural production to meet food security needs. Sierra Leone receives abundant rainfall across 5.4 million hectares (ha) of its arable land, however climate change is resulting in shifting of typical rainfall patterns across the country.

Sierra Leone has abundant water resources to draw on mainly due to rainfall and 10 major river systems. River flows are significant, and the average run-off coefficient is estimated to be between 20 percent and 40 percent. However, for the most part, agriculture in Sierra Leone is still rain fed due to very low agricultural irrigation systems in place. Only 4 percent of farmers are using irrigation facilities, and the overall utilization of surface water is extremely low at less than 0.5 percent.

Total area equipped for irrigation of Sierra Leone is growing at an average annual rate of 2.9 percent.⁷¹ However, the level of irrigation needed to substantially increase agricultural productivity requires a much higher growth rate; specialists in the field have observed that Sierra Leone is vastly underutilizing its irrigation potential. The 2023 National Irrigation Master Plan (NIMP) includes an action plan for climate adaptive irrigation systems for agriculture, but it is yet to be rolled out.

1.2.3 BLUE ECONOMY

Sierra Leone's marine ecosystem plays a vital role, providing key environmental services and economic opportunities. The blue economy in Sierra Leone incorporates traditional maritime industries such as fisheries, tourism, mining, and boat building, as well as aquaculture systems, and carbon stored in mangrove and seagrass ecosystems. The country's oceanic and water resources have an abundant endowment of fish and fishery products, with about 25 percent of the population involved in fishing activities. Fish and fishery products serve as the major source of protein for over 90 percent of the population.

Fishery exports have been growing over the years and has the potential of contributing over USD30 million annually, (excluding value addition), and employing more than one million people. Also, with its large natural harbors, the ports and shipping sub-sector can accommodate large cargo and container ships and provides more than 500 direct jobs. However, the country has traditionally not employed an integrated and sustainable approach to exploiting and managing its marine resources for socio-economic growth. To address this gap, a Blue Economy Strategy was developed aimed at supporting sustainable and equitable economic growth through ocean-related sectors and activities.

1.2.4 PRIVATE SECTOR GROWTH

Growth of the private sector in Sierra Leone faces numerous challenges, including an uncondusive business environment, a rapidly depreciating currency, reduced export revenues, high dependence on imports, limited investment in key sectors, a low skilled workforce due to poor education and health systems, and low infrastructure development.

The policy environment and overall infrastructure is not very supportive. Taxes are high and too many, especially with the introduction of the new 2023 Finance Act. Domestic credit to private sector (as a percent of GDP) was only 0.00635 percent in 2022, according to the World Bank development indicators. The outbreak of Ebola virus in 2014 and COVID 19 in 2020 constrained private sector growth. Frequent and long lockdowns, especially during Ebola, restricted the movement of goods and services, slowing business activity and causing job losses. Private sector businesses have struggled to recover.

Access to finance for agriculture investment and entrepreneurship is still very challenging, according to a recent study on agricultural finance undertaken by the FAO investment center. The key reasons are low financial awareness and literacy among potential borrowers (especially women), knowledge gaps around agricultural finance on the part of lending institutions, and high lending risks for financial institutions. Smallholder farmers and SMEs report difficulties such as prohibitively high interest rates (>23 percent), long time periods for loan approvals, cumbersome documentation requirements, lack of required land titles and tenure, and lending products not being tailored to crop harvest cycles. Due to the country's inheritance laws and customs, women are less likely than men to hold land titles and other collateral required to access agricultural and other credit.

⁷¹ <https://knoema.com/atlas/Sierra-Leone/topics/Land-Use/Area/Total-area-equipped-for-irrigation>

While the Bank of Sierra Leone (Central Bank) is implementing its National Financial Inclusion Strategy (2022-2026), the strategy does not include any specific interventions on agricultural finance. Rather, it indicates client-centric interventions in rural communities will need to account for the specificities of the agriculture sector, an approach that is viewed as too broad to effectively expand this vital economic sector at the desired rate of growth.

Commercial banks, microfinance institutions and community banks have identified several risks to lending to the agriculture sector in Sierra Leone, particularly for primary production. These include the long payback period for agricultural loans, high default rates, lack of collateral and documentation from borrowers, low technical skills on agricultural practices among lenders, and high rates of SME informality in the economy. Agricultural insurance products are not widespread; insurance premiums are prohibitively high, and take-up of these products is low.

1.2.5 EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK

The lack of decent and productive employment is a major socio-economic challenge in Sierra Leone. While the unemployment rate for 2020 was only 4 percent, (based on the ILO standard calculation), this measure neglects underemployment, which reflects the labour market's low capacity to provide more full-time jobs to those who desire them. The underemployment rate in Sierra Leone is about 31 percent, estimated to be higher among men (35.0 percent) than among women (28.1 percent). The rate is higher in Freetown (47.0 percent) compared with rural areas (32.0 percent).

Underemployment is most prevalent among self-employed workers in the informal economy, (90 percent of all workers), many of whom engage in subsistence agriculture or small-scale trade activities.

Complicating this is the fact that financial institutions in Sierra Leone prefer to lend to the government in the form of Treasury Bills with a guaranteed return, rather than to farmers and SMEs. Farmers do not constitute a large enough borrowing group and agricultural loans are viewed as tying up their funds for a longer period with higher risks of default.

Some NGOs and development partners are promoting Village Savings and Loan Associations that use revolving funds as a mechanism to provide rural populations access to some form of financial services. These can be particularly valuable for women in rural areas, who lack access to other banking services, either due to educational barriers or lack of banking institutions in their area. However, the associations are inadequate in terms of loan amounts and structure to address the massive financial needs of the agriculture sector.

These workers face severe decent work deficit that include lack of secure income and job security, inadequate safety at work, lack of social protection, low pay, lack of a retirement savings scheme, and excessive working hours.

With three-quarters of the population below the age of 35, this demographic group is essential for the country to realize sustainable and inclusive development, yet unemployment and underemployment rates among youth are higher than that of the total workforce. As discussed in the education section, illiteracy is a major obstacle for youth to realize decent work opportunities, more so for young women.

High youth unemployment rates, limited access to quality education, and insufficient opportunities

for skill development are common socio-economic challenges faced by young people in Sierra Leone. Youth unemployment has been a major cause of civil unrest in the country and the related economic hardship triggered protests involving displaced youths from various localities. The issue poses a critical risk for the peace consolidation agenda discussed in the Governance and Political Trends section.

Given the country's 2.2 percent population growth rate, the economy will need to create approximately 100,000 new jobs per year to maintain decent employment rates. According to the World Bank, Sierra Leone has a high prevalence of youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET). 18 percent of Sierra Leonean youth are

NEET, and it is higher among urban youth, especially urban females. In Freetown, the NEET rate increased to 27 percent in 2021.⁷²

Some tools are lacking at the country level that would support higher employment. Systems to regularly provide labour market information are absent, as well as a gender-responsive job plan. This makes it difficult to match supply and demand in the labour market. It limits the ability of TVET and higher learning institutions to tailor curriculums to respond to capacity gaps and job requirements. Multinational enterprises and other specialized businesses operating in the country struggle to recruit local employees who possess the right skill sets for specialized jobs.

1.2.6 INFRASTRUCTURE

3 key aspects of infrastructure are discussed in this section: energy, transport and roads, and digital transformation.

ENERGY

Access to electricity is a huge sustainable development obstacle in Sierra Leone, where 28 percent of the overall population have access to electricity, but only 4.9 percent in rural areas,⁷³ well below the average of 48 percent for Sub-Saharan Africa. It limits progress in health and education and hampers economic development. Although mini-grids and stand-alone solar systems have been installed in about 100 rural communities, benefiting businesses, health centers, schools, and other institutions, there are still many communities that lack access to even small-scale energy sources. (See Figure 15)

⁷² World Bank (2021) Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment: The Republic of Sierra Leone. Available at <https://www.data.rightsindevelopment.org/files/documents/89/WB-P176789.pdf>

⁷³ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.ELC.ACCS.RU.ZS?locations=SL>

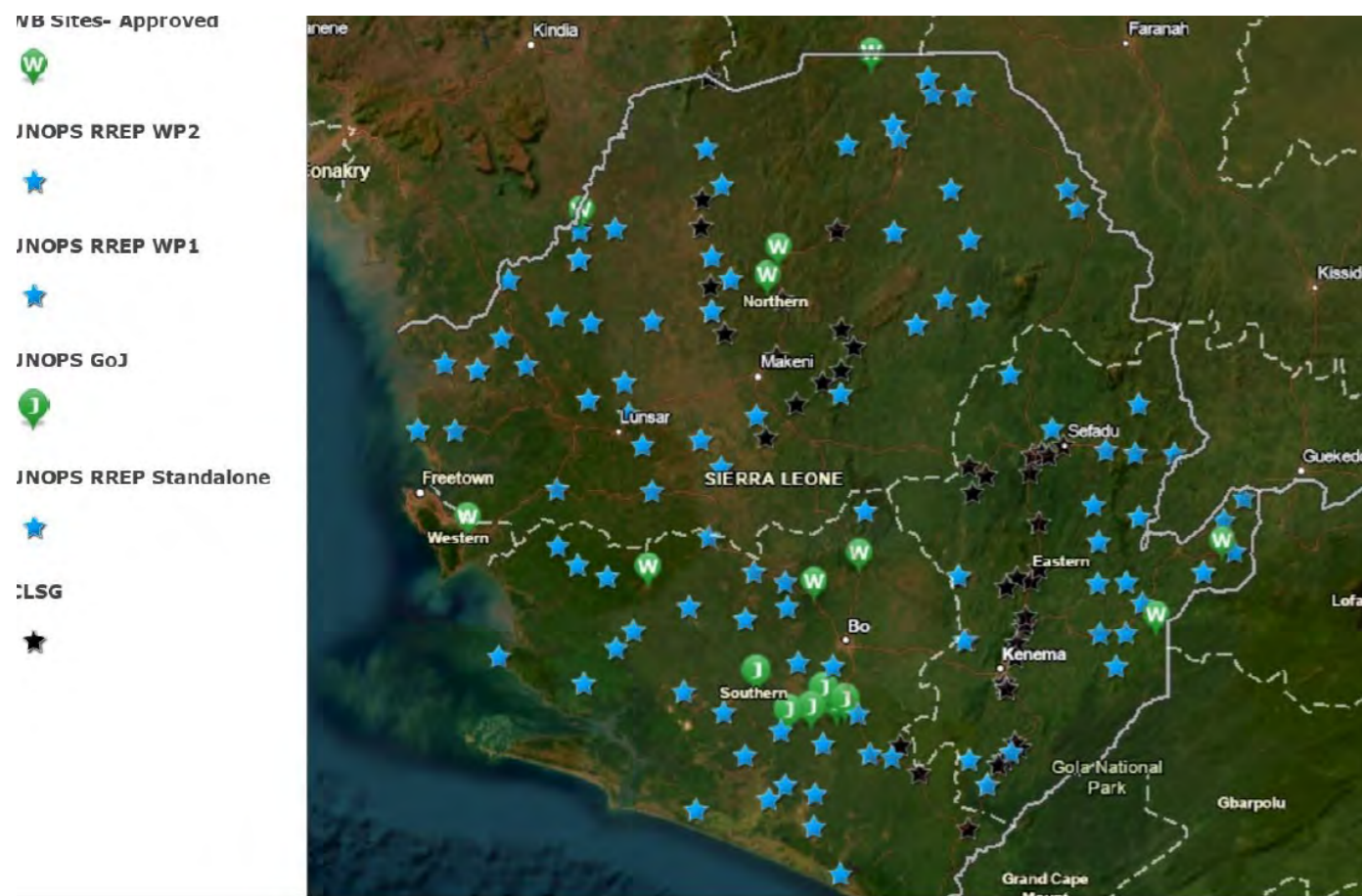


Figure 15: Energy penetration in Sierra Leone

Source: UNOPS, energy penetration in Sierra Leone

The country's current electricity generation capacity is about 100MW, mostly fossil fuel-based energy sources like diesel and petrol. The solar renewable energy-based generation capacity is presently at 6MW, with huge potential to expand the country's distribution network for solar photovoltaic mini-grid systems. The World Bank Group's global solar atlas shows that Sierra Leone is endowed with abundant sunlight for solar power generation with an estimated potential of more than 240 MW, among other promising clean energy options that remain untapped.

The government's national development plan seeks to expand renewable sources of electricity, including solar mini-grids, solar home systems

and solar streetlights. Workable financial models are needed to provide reliable funding streams for future operation, maintenance and scale-up of electric systems to reach geographic coverage goals.

The country's electricity tariffs remain high, even with the existing subsidies provided by the Government. Consumers are currently paying USD 0.11 per kilowatt hour which is higher than those of many of the country's counterparts in the Africa region. Key shifts could include moving away from government-owned generators that rely on fossil fuels that are subject to global price volatilities.

TRANSPORTATION AND ROADS

Road transport represents about 85 percent of the entire transport system in Sierra Leone. 95 percent of the inland transport of passengers and goods is carried out on roads. Primary roads connect the capital with the 3 provincial capitals, as well as with the district centres, and also include limited international routes, only about 40 percent of which are paved. Secondary roads between district centres connect centres of production and distribution networks but are very limited at just 2,091 km of which 46 km is paved. The unpaved secondary roads, as well as about 4,200 km of feeder roads are mostly inaccessible during months of heavy rain, which amounted to 5 months in 2023.

According to the World Bank⁷⁴ organized public transport is inaccessible to a vast number of the population because of their remote location, the poor road network and highly irregular services. As a result, 20 percent of the population depend on individual public paratransit (motorcycles and three-wheel vehicles) for daily travel, which is often more expensive than buses. In Western Area Urban district that includes Freetown, 25 percent of the population lack access to transport services because they live farther than 500 meters bus stops. More than 40 percent of the populations of York (in the west) and Waterloo (in the east) lack easy access. Although motorcycles constitute a popular transport mode, they result in high negative externalities: pollution and high rate of accidents. Driving without a license and carrying 2 or more passengers are also frequent and compromise safety standards.

Transport can be challenging for women and persons with disabilities in urban areas. Safety and security are a major concern for women and influence their choice of mode, time and place of travel. Available evidence suggests that around 18 percent of women have suffered sexual harassment in public transportation⁷⁵ in the past. This number increases to nearly 30 percent for poda-poda (minibus) users, where passengers

often are crowded into limited seating space. In a user survey,⁷⁶ 50 percent of interviewees (male and female) responded that fear of physical violence is one of the main obstacles to them using public transport, and more than 10 percent mentioned theft and robbery.

A study estimated that the number of road-crash deaths has increased by 37 percent in the 20 years between 1998 and 2017.⁷⁷ Close to 50 percent of all recorded fatalities and serious injury crashes occur in Freetown, and many deaths are often unreported, so actual deaths are likely many times higher. Sierra Leone does not have vehicle import requirements but has standards monitored with mandatory periodic inspections. While road safety audits and inspections are regularly performed, there is lax enforcement for violations. Laws on speed limit, seatbelts, helmets, child restraint and drink-driving are enacted, but not strictly enforced.

The Sierra Leone Persons with Disability Act makes provision for accessibility of buildings and transportation, but unclear control mechanisms make the law unenforceable. Very few transport vehicles can accommodate people using wheelchairs or other types of mobility assistive devices. They are also more vulnerable to physical violence when using public transport. Most public transport is managed by private service providers who are difficult to influence and even government transport does not have necessary accommodations. For example, public school buses have no provision for children with disabilities.

⁷⁴ <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/199511560736915766/pdf/Sierra-Leone-Integrated-and-Resilient-Urban-Mobility-Project.pdf>

⁷⁵ Diagnostic of Public Transport in Freetown, World Bank, 2018

⁷⁶ Surveys conducted as part of the Diagnostic of Public Transport in Freetown, World Bank, 2018

⁷⁷ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). GBD Compare. Seattle, WA: IHME, University of Washington, 2015. Available from <http://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare>. (Accessed November 27, 2023).

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

According to GSMA data, in 2022, only 21 percent of the population in Sierra Leone are using mobile internet. Low digital skills, limited access to smartphones, and inadequate digital infrastructure in certain regions are some reasons why its use is so low.

ICT skills in Sierra Leone remain significantly low, particularly among young women. According to the MICS 2017 data, only 4 percent of young men and 1 percent of young women possess basic computer skills, such as copying and transferring files. The challenging geographical landscape, inadequate connectivity infrastructure, and fierce competition for public resources are all contributing factors to the low development of ICT skills, especially in rural areas, leading to a widening digital divide in the country.

There are a growing number of startups emerging to design value-added apps adapted to the local context, including for agritech. They benefit from the support of a small, but growing number of innovation hubs, but there is still enormous untapped potential.

Sierra Leone has been gradually adopting e-commerce; however, digital trade and online business promotion are still in a very early stage. Barriers to MSMEs adopting e-commerce are the lack of awareness about opportunities, limited trust among consumers in online transactions and the quality of products sold online, and lack of needed digital skills. Other more structural barriers include the absence of widely adopted online payment systems, poor transportation infrastructure, unreliable delivery systems, and limited access to connectivity.

Digital financial services are expanding, one of the priorities under the National Strategy for

Financial Inclusion (2022-2026). Most banks have introduced online banking or a mobile application and integrate this with mobile money. In addition, banks are embracing new “branch-less” or “branch-lite” alternatives to broaden their geographic reach and expand financial services to rural communities, vitally important to support trade and economic development. Approximately half of the commercial banks surveyed have either started rolling out or are planning agent networks around the country. Even though mobile money is becoming more popular, it has not reached widespread adoption and most of the population still uses cash transactions.

A few banks have point-of-sale terminals deployed at strategic business and service points, such as supermarkets and hotels. Mobile money operators are also bringing on more merchants to allow for mobile money transactions at hotels, supermarkets, pharmacies, and other retail outlets. New merchant solutions such as QR scan codes are also being introduced into the market, although by just a few service providers. The introduction of the national switch (which will allow seamless interbank settlement) will prove to be a significant catalyst for digital finance in the country.



1.3 ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSION

Sierra Leone is endowed rich natural resources that are crucial in sustaining its people's health and wellbeing, livelihoods, and economy. Nature-dependent agriculture, for example, occupies a significant space in its economy as it employs 77.3 percent of the population while also contributing to over 50 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The country produces a variety of crops, including rice, cassava, cocoa, coffee and palm oil.

These natural resources, however, bear the brunt of a rapidly expanding human population and heavy reliance on traditional biomass energy. The situation is exacerbated by increasing stress on water resources caused by pollution and wetland degradation. Furthermore, the country's fertile lands are subjected to unsustainable mining activities, escalating deforestation, soil erosion, and the impacts of floods, landslides, and prolonged and intensified droughts.

While there are laws and policies in place to protect the environment, the major challenges in dealing with environmental issues are weak implementation, corruption, illegal and indiscriminate mining and logging, weak monitoring of environmental compliance, mandate overlap by ministries and absence of inter-sectorial coordination. On the technical side, the country lacks sound environmental institutions equipped with environmental research equipment and facilities. There is also a need to improve the expertise and capacity of staff in relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) charged with environmental oversight responsibilities. Overall management would also benefit from conducting an annual Strategic Environmental Assessment that used standard guidelines to assess different elements of the environment and the extent to which they are being maintained, degrading, or improving in status.

This section discusses issues around land and forests, water resource management, waste management, climate change impacts, and disaster response planning.

1.3.1 LAND, FORESTS, AND BIODIVERSITY

One of the most important challenges facing Sierra Leone is in reversing/halting land degradation and promoting sustainable land management practices. Land constitutes an important natural capital in Sierra Leone. However, threats of land degradation and biodiversity loss continue to hold back the country's capacity to fully realize the benefit from these vital endowments. It undermines soil's organic matter, biota, and the subsequent agricultural output.

Presently at least for 43 percent of the Sierra Leone's population is exposed to land degradation

and its associated adversities, especially in the rural areas where over 60 percent of the population relies on agriculture for income. This is exacerbated by the country's dominant shifting cultivation practices that are also on the rise while proliferating recurrent threats to forest cover. Satellite imagery shows the country is increasingly being covered by farm bushes as well as secondary tree covers, rather than primary forest, mainly in the country's western regions, but also in the Southern, Northern and Eastern provinces.

An estimated 39 percent of Sierra Leone is forested, with 22 percent of the forested areas located inside 50 forest reserves and conservation areas. One percent of forested areas on chiefdom land but managed by the Forest Division; and 23 percent of forested areas are within wetland and marine ecosystem protected areas. In 2017, Sierra Leone revised its National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan to assess the status of biodiversity, including forest resources, and propose action plans for sustainable management.

Sierra Leone originally had more than 60 percent of its land covered by closed high forests, and 40 percent woodland savannah of the guinea type. Sierra Leone lost over 34 percent of its forests between 1975 and 2018. Presently, it is estimated that nearly 70 percent of the original forest cover has been lost through deforestation activities, including slash-and-burn agriculture that is practiced by approximately 75 percent of the population. Loss of land cover, reduction in soil organic carbon content, and reduced land productivity are three primary indicators of land degradation. Analysis of land use data by CILSS shows the most significant land cover changes

in Sierra Leone. The primary forest losses have occurred in Tonkolili, Kono, and Koinadugu districts, whereas forest degradation is most noticeable in the eastern region. There, most forested areas have been degraded to savannahs and agricultural land.

Deforestation is directly contributing to water shortage, loss of soil fertility, soil erosion and landslides. The major challenges to effective forest management include poor governance, weak law enforcement, lack of coordination among sector ministries and illegal harvesting of forest products. In addition to direct impacts, deforestation increases risk of landslides and flood by removing tree roots that stabilize the ground.

Sierra Leone's forests are estimated to be regularly removing about 2.0 percent of the country's total greenhouse gas emissions per year, a mark that indicates the importance forest conservation and sustainability in realizing climate mitigation goals. Continued encroachment on these resources, especially forests, threatens the country's sink of emissions.



RELIANCE ON BIOMASS ENERGY

Energy consumption in Sierra Leone is dominated by biomass fuel. According to the Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS), firewood was the main cooking fuel for 72 percent of the population in 2018 and 28 percent of the households used charcoal. In rural areas, inefficient wood cooking methods are widespread, the most common of which is an open fire with unnecessary heat production and loss. These methods threaten respiratory health because of inhalation of small particulates emitted with wood burning, and this predominantly impacts women and children owing to their societal roles.

Wood energy is a renewable fuel if harvested sustainably, however, the current consumption of firewood and charcoal for cooking in Sierra Leone is unsustainable. The demand for biomass for cooking energy already exceeds the regrowth rate of the forest cover. The problem will further

be aggravated by the projected population growth to an estimated 10 million by 2030.

Addressing this crisis will require steps to accelerate use of alternative fuels and more efficient cooking devices. This includes conversion of organic waste such as municipal and agricultural waste to energy, increasing the fuel-use efficiency of biomass stoves, and perhaps creating a subsidy scheme to make LPG more affordable, like in other countries in the region to increase usage of LPG fuel.

A continued heavy reliance on traditional biomass energy presents a considerable threat to the country's progress on climate action, as it contributes to land degradation and biodiversity loss which increases the country's vulnerability to climatic impacts.

FREETOWN PENINSULA DEFORESTATION

Rural migration to Freetown during and after the civil conflict has increased pressure on the Western Area Peninsula and implicitly the urban water resources. Even though deforestation of the area was prohibited by law in 2012, fragility within state institutions impedes enforcement. This is demonstrated by recent developments, including the illegal construction of an expanding community directly under the Guma Dam, and the establishment of numerous industrial quarries for dimension stone deep within the park. As of April 2023 report, a total of 580 hectares representing 27 percent of the park has been lost/deteriorated out of the general vegetation cover.

The park is currently at a tipping point which, if not addressed, may imminently result in human losses due to landslides and floods. In addition, deforestation contributes to sedimentation of drinking water, increasing treatment costs and water rates for users, most of whom are extremely low-income households. Plus, as the water catchment area is degraded, water quantity is at risk of significantly reducing during the dry season, which is already jeopardizing access to clean, fresh water, for 1,500,000 residents of Freetown. As fresh water becomes limited, conflict over water resources will become more frequent and a potential risk to the security environment.

BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity in Sierra Leone has been subjected to serious threats, both direct and indirect. The most obvious threats include habitat loss and fragmentation of natural habitats due to deforestation, wetland drainage and infrastructure development, overgrazing, poor mining practices,

poor farming practices, inappropriate use of agrochemicals, pollution, and bush fires. Challenges in overcoming these factors include population pressure, poverty, illiteracy, lack of resources, limited trained human resources, inappropriate policies, and institutional weakness



1.3.2 WATER RESOURCES AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

The country has abundant water resources compared to its counterparts in the west Africa region with its current renewable water resources standing more than 160 billion cubic meters, most of which come from its five perennial rivers that flow from the country's northeast to southwest. These resources are, however, underutilized. GoSL data shows less than 50 percent of the country's available freshwater is being used annually. Surface water resources meet 80 percent of continuing utilization needs, with the rest being met through extraction of underground options. Water uses include irrigation, domestic (drinking, cooking, hygiene), industrial (beer, spirits, soft drink, cooling and waste disposal), and hydroelectric power production.

There is need to build institutional capacity for data collection and reporting, including through the harnessing of satellite-based earth observation techniques and citizen science initiatives. Other areas for action include strengthening national policies and legislations to safeguard the integrity of surface and underground water resources. Enhanced use of Integrated Water Resource Management is needed and would also help combat environmental disasters, many of which are water related. With the country's current annual population growth rate of 2.2 percent, it

MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

The country's marine ecosystem plays a vital role in carbon sequestration and industries such as fisheries aquaculture, tourism, and marine biotechnology rely on the health and productivity of marine ecosystems. They ensure the health of marine ecosystems. Strategies to be employed include: establishing marine protected areas where human activities are regulated or prohibited; implementing measures such as quotas, gear restrictions, and seasonal closures for sustainability of fish stocks and minimal

is likely to be faced with water stress associated with increasing water use demands in the near future, if enhanced integrated water resources management interventions are not put in place. Further constraints are likely to emanate from rising levels of water pollution from point and non-point land-based activities that ends up in freshwater. Climate change effect on wetlands and other water-related ecosystems will also have direct impacts on the quantity and quality of available water resources.

The country's 506 km coastline contains critical marine habitats like mangrove forests, which act as carbon sinks. However, unsustainable fishing practices, pollution, and coastal erosion from activities like sand mining are degrading these marine resources. Overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing have significantly impacted fish stocks. Fishing is a key driver of mangrove deforestation in coastal communities and this calls for more sustainable practices.

Preserving and sustainably managing this blue economy is crucial from both environmental and economic perspectives. Strengthening regulatory frameworks, investing in sustainable aquaculture and ecotourism, and protecting critical ecosystems like mangroves and sea grass beds can generate decent green jobs while buffering climate impacts.

ecosystem impact; coordinating land and ocean-based activities to address complex challenges of pollution, habitat destruction, and development pressures; mitigating climate change impacts and resilience through habitat restoration and species adaptation; involving local communities in decision-making processes and conservation and management activities; increased cross-border collaboration on illegal fishing pollution, and habitat destruction.

1.3.3 POLLUTION AND WASTE MANAGEMENT

Facilities for managing pollution and waste have not expanded at the same rate as the growing population, especially in urban areas where the population has almost doubled in the past five decades and now amounts to more than 40 percent of the total population. Impacts are being mainly felt in Freetown, a city of 1.2 million, where the improperly managed solid waste compound risk of environmental shocks, including by clogging of the inadequate storm water drainage system. This aggravates the risk and magnitude of flooding as well as incidences of vector-borne infections.

Data on the city's waste management interventions show that only 25, while the remaining quantity of about 300 tons per day is buried, burned, or dumped in open areas, waterways, or drains. There is an increased volume and diversity of wastes (solid, liquid, gas), including fecal sludge and methane, a greenhouse gas, that is emitted from dump sites. A large volume of plastic and other solid waste makes its way into streams and the ocean via the large beachfront area in Freetown.

1.3.4 CLIMATE VULNERABILITY AND IMPACTS

Sierra Leone is faced with multiple climatic stresses that pose significant threats on its people, economy, and environmental resources. According to the Notre Dame-Global Adaptation Index (2020), the country is one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the world with the least readiness. Most vulnerabilities are linked to generally low socio-economic development.

This section discusses current and anticipated climate impacts on communities and Annex 2 goes into more depth on seven sectors that will be most impacted by climate change, according to the country's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document: Agriculture and Food Security; Environment and Natural Resources; Fisheries

and the Coastal Zone; Infrastructure; Disaster Preparedness and Management; Water Resources; and, Public Health

Plastic waste can be found washing ashore along many parts of the country's coastline. While initiatives are underway to better organize waste collection and management in Freetown, the current situation is woefully inadequate and greater effort towards circular economy interventions are needed. While similar challenges exist in rural areas, the volume and diversity of wastes are much lower given the overall reduced levels of consumption.

Air pollution attributed to indoor and outdoor sources continue to be a significant environmental threat to public health, proliferating negative health outcomes in both urban and rural areas. Data from UNEP's SDG monitoring shows the country's mortality rate attributed to household and ambient air pollution stand at 324 per 100,000 population (age-standardized), a figure which remains substantial compared to other causes and countries in the Africa region.

For example, rice is a staple food crop grown mainly on smallholder farms that is highly rain-fed reliant. It is sensitive to changes in humidity and precipitation, in addition to being vulnerable to pests that thrive in elevated temperature conditions. This vulnerability promotes persistent rural poverty and impacts farmers who do not hold insurance to protect their crops against severe weather events and requires resources to invest in irrigation and other agricultural technologies to adapt to varying rainfall levels.

The country is vulnerable to the increasing severity of droughts, flood and severe storms and their impacts on sectors such as agriculture and fisheries as well as their potential to disrupt infrastructure and hydroelectric power production. Current estimates show 86 percent of the country's population is exposed to drought conditions and associated impacts on livelihoods.

Ecosystems will be severely impacted by climate change and existing development stressors will make it challenging to curtail impacts. Increased storm surges, flash floods and high winds, will only exacerbate problems such as pollution, landslides, coastal erosion, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and growth of invasive species, all of which will further stress ecosystems. It is therefore imperative that countries like Sierra Leone focus on developing effective mitigation and response mechanisms through identifying and assessing

COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Climate change is impacting coastal communities, which is home to important ecosystems that support a range of livelihoods, including tourism. As such livelihoods will be threatened by sea level rise, as well as loss of coastal ecosystems, due to inundation from major rivers and flash flood during the rainy season, and saline intrusions due to decreased low water flows in the dry season.

Loss of fish and aquatic plant species and reduction in coastal sediments will damage local economies and negatively impact food security for coastal and riverine populations. However, some forms of livelihoods in coastal areas such as sand mining is damaging the environment and will need to be adaptable.

disaster risks and strengthening collaboration and coordination amongst mandated institutions.

The country is streamlining its national and sectoral green growth policies and strategies towards the country's NDC. However, the NDC fails in many areas to offer solutions for generating affordable, long-term financing for developing resilience to climate change.

There is limited private sector participation in financing climate actions, currently a meager 12.0 percent of the country's climate financing flows. Yet there is huge potential for broadening the investor base and ramping up private climate financing in areas such as energy infrastructure. Attracting increased investment would harness the country's natural capital towards green economic growth and decarbonized development pathways.

Coastal erosion due to sea level rise is already a significant challenge in some coastal areas such as Konakridde, Lakka, Hamilton and Plantain Island where the coastline is shifting by about 4 to 6 meters a year.⁷⁸ This continues to worsen the quality and quantity of ground water resources.

Limited availability of knowledge and data collection tools (socio-demographic and marine data) restricts the ability of institutions and decision-makers to make informed planning and policy decisions and to plan actions to remedy and/or adapt to these adverse effects. There are also limited capacities for using nature-based solutions, all of which hinders protection of coastal communities and, alarmingly, and is leading to the dissipation of most islands in Sierra Leone.

FOREST COMMUNITIES

Similarly, forest-dependent communities lack livelihood alternatives, as many rely on charcoal production to earn a living. As the country seeks to increase forest conservation efforts especially as this can provide a potential source of income

URBAN COMMUNITIES

An additional challenge faced by urban centers, especially the capital city Freetown, is heat risk in areas that lack natural and man-made structures for providing shade or other forms of heat relief. Freetown is in the process of mapping heat exposure determining the most vulnerable areas (hot spots) in the city, along with the related vulnerable populations and critical infrastructure. Women working in uncovered market areas,

AGRICULTURAL COMMUNITIES

Presently, Sierra Leone's climate supports production of several primary crops, (rice, sugar cane, banana, coconut, citrus, cocoa, pineapple, yam and cassava), but this is likely to change with shifts in climate. Plus, these crops are highly dependent on soil quality and use of imported fertilizers. Regional climate models project increased temperatures, (ranging from

through generating carbon credits, it will be necessary to provide forest communities with alternative livelihood opportunities. It will also be crucial to reduce the country's reliance on charcoal as the primary cooking fuel.

for example, are particularly vulnerable to heat exposure and related health risks. Steps planned by Freetown include developing passive building cooling methods, (such as heat proof building materials), developing green corridors in vulnerable communities, and integrating building cooling techniques for heat sensitive building architecture into the building code.

+1.7 °C to 2.3°C, depending on location), and rainfall variations from -5 percent to +5 percent of current levels. These shifts will require changes to agricultural practices and production systems, with increased water requirements for crops, which are creating more competition for water resources, and higher incidence of pest and disease outbreaks.

⁷⁸ West African Biodiversity and Climate Change program, 2019 report.

1.3.5 HAZARDS AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Sierra Leone's vulnerability to natural disasters stems from both sudden and slow onset hazards. Weather-related hazards include those discussed earlier, such as coastal erosion (slow onset hazard) and flooding due to storm surges (sudden onset) which are common occurrences. Other hazards include large annual flood and windstorms, resulting in mudslides, bolder rolls and building collapse.

Many communities in Sierra Leone, especially low-income rural areas and informal settlements in urban areas, depend on streams and swamps as a water source. Floods can overwhelm the existing systems, contaminate drinking water and create sewage overflows. These same streams and swamps can dry up during periods of severe drought. Seasonal flooding recurrent flash floods and coastal flooding impact coastal areas, agricultural fields and low-lying areas. Waters also overflow onto roads and into residents' homes. In some parts of the country, roads are impassable for several weeks during the rainy season.

Impact on humans due to natural disasters are likely to be exacerbated in the future by several compounding factors, including population growth, habitat change, resource overexploitation and degradation, water pollution, and changes in freshwater flows. For example, data analysis predicts an annual average of 11,436 displaced persons in Sierra Leone due to floods (IDMC, 2020.) Human and economic losses from climate-related disaster will be lessened by improved information to support disaster risk reduction, planning, and response, including hazard impact-based forecasting, early warnings, climate information, and monitoring capabilities.

Extreme weather events affect women, men, girls and boys in different ways. For instance, due to housing damage during recent flood and mudslides, women and girls were among

those displaced to temporary shelters. In this environment, they are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, for reasons that include loss of safe spaces and loss of protection of family members. Furthermore, women often engage in more informal and unstable livelihood activities, such as petty trade and subsistence farming, which are highly susceptible to disruption when disasters occur.

In addition to climate-related disasters, the country is also impacted by man-made disasters, where vulnerabilities in crowded urban areas are exacerbated by poor urban planning allowing people to reside in slum communities with sub-standard infrastructure. There is often low response capacity, for example, by firefighting services.

Current data shows Sierra Leone's direct economic loss attributed to disasters (natural and man-made) is close to 1 million dollars per year, having risen by 32.3 percent since 2006, and actual figures could be much higher owing to limited availability of accurate and up-to-date data. There are weaknesses in the country's early warning systems, and this contributes to higher mortality rates than in countries with effective systems and comprehensive coverage. It is therefore vital to ramp up all kinds of investments towards curtailing impacts of disasters because the number of medium to large-scale disaster events is projected to increase over time, and the economic cost of it will curtail funds available for other programs to fight poverty.

The recently formed National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) is charged with the responsibility of implementing Government policy on disaster prevention, disaster risk reduction, and climate risk management. Continued effort to support their activities will improve disaster planning and response going forward. A Disaster

Management Policy and National Disaster Management Preparedness Plan were prepared in 2006 and a Multi-City Hazard Review and Risk Assessment was also published in 2018. More recently, in 2021, A Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Policy and National Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery Plan were developed.

The following are priority actions needed for addressing disaster risks to humans and ecosystems:

- *Risk Assessment and Mapping*
- *Monitoring and Evaluation*
- *Policy Integration into national and regional plans, and strategies*
- *Community Engagement*
- *Ecosystem Restoration and Conservation*

- *Research and Innovation*
- *Early Warning Systems*
- *Capacity Building on knowledge, skills, and infrastructure*
- *Transboundary Cooperation*



1.4 GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL TRENDS

This sub-section delves into several governance topics, such as transparency, justice, human rights, and peace and security. It also discusses the current political landscape characterized by a multitude of tensions stemming from the 2023 elections.

A well-known global analytical group, Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (BTI), assesses country political, economic, and governance transformation. According to their analysis, Sierra Leone faces several structural constraints on good governance, including extreme poverty, a labour force with limited education, a lack of economic diversification, severe infrastructural deficiencies, endemic corruption, dysfunctional democratic institutions and proneness to natural and manmade disasters and diseases. They state that overcoming these limitations is complicated by informal power relationships and social networks, as well as traditionally established hierarchical relationships and culturally rooted role expectations. Several constraints are the result of historical-political developments perpetuated by the ruling elites.⁷⁹

In September 2021, a constitutional review process was initiated, with the goal of amending and modernizing the country's 1991 Constitution. This process aimed at addressing various constitutional issues, including governance, human rights, and decentralization, and emphasized public participation and engagement. Citizens were encouraged to provide input through consultations, town hall meetings, and public forums and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations, legal experts, and political parties, contributed to a comprehensive and multi-dimensional review. Debates and discussions ensued around proposed constitutional changes, such as the presidential system, term limits, and the role of traditional authorities. In January 2022, a white paper on the review was launched, accepting major recommendations.

1.4.1 GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Sierra Leone is making strides in the fight against corruption. On the Level of Corruption Perception Index, where 100 is the best score and the average country score is 48, Sierra Leone scored 38 in 2023,⁸⁰ moving from 34 in 2022. Given that the country's score was 22 in 2003, the trend shows significant improvement. Nonetheless, corruption is considered pervasive across all levels of government and is cited as a significant obstacle to foreign investment, while also impacting public service delivery and economic development.

In 2023, the Anti-Corruption Commission engaged in a series of events to minimise corruption and conducted investigations into various corruption cases involving government officials, public servants, and private individuals. While the Anti-

Corruption Commission (ACC) in Sierra Leone has achieved significant gains, it also faces criticism and negative reviews from various quarters. Some critics argue that it is selective in its choice of cases to prosecute and emphasize the need for more transparency in operations and decision-making processes.

The Sierra Leone Police is considered among the most corrupt institutions in the country. Recent surveys suggest that more than 60 percent of

⁷⁹ BTI 2022 Sierra Leone Country Report: BTI 2022 (bti-project.org)

⁸⁰ Sierra Leone's Corruption Perceptions Index | 2023 | Economic Data | World Economics

people fear negative consequences if they speak out about police-related corruption, and more than 50 percent stated that they had to pay a bribe to receive assistance from the police. Accordingly, the overall effectiveness of the police is limited.⁸¹

The country passed 11 out of 20 governance-related indicators on the US Government Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) scorecard in early 2023, making it the country's fourth consecutive 'pass', and positioning it to develop a multi-year MCC programme. For the first time, Sierra Leone passed the 'Land Rights and Access' indicator. In the category of 'Ruling Justly', Sierra Leone passed 5 out of the 6 indicators including 'Control of Corruption' at 83 percent. Other positive scores

TRANSPARENCY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The Sierra Leone constitution guarantees freedom of speech, and freedom of the press; however, the government maintains strong control of media, and at times restricts these rights in practice. Numerous independent newspapers circulate freely and dozens of public and private radio and television outlets operate. Sierra Leone's Right to Information (RTI) law, 2013 is considered as the 5th strongest in the world, according to an analysis by the Centre for Law and Democracy (CLD).⁸² The law scored 124 out of a possible maximum of 150 points on the RTI Rating, an internationally renowned analytical tool developed by CLD and its partner organisation, Access Info Europe, which has been applied to every national RTI law globally.⁸³

There were transparency issues associated with the June 2023 national elections in Sierra Leone. International observers show a consensus of concerns regarding the transparency of the election results tabulation process.⁸⁴ Despite these shortcomings, observers have praised Sierra Leonean citizens for their commitment to democracy and to maintain an environment of peace before, during, and after the elections.⁸⁵ (See later section for a further discussion on the

include Political Rights (92 percent); Civil Liberties (92 percent); Freedom of Information (90 percent); and Rule of Law (63 percent). The country did poorly on Government Effectiveness at 40 percent.

Since completion of the MCC country scorecard in early 2023, concerns were raised by various election observation missions on lack of transparency and management of results during the elections, and this has caused the U.S. Government to put a potential MCC programme on hold until concrete steps for election reforms are articulated by the Government.

election.)

In terms of fiscal transparency, Sierra Leone was acknowledged for significant progress in the US Department of State's 2022 annual report on fiscal transparency in the country, although it did not fully meet minimum requirements.⁸⁶ (Out of 140 countries reviewed, 69 nations⁸⁷ did not meet the minimum requirements.) The report noted Sierra Leone's significant progress in making basic information available to the public (including online) on topics such as natural resource extraction awards, budget documents and debt obligations.

⁸¹ BTI 2022 Sierra Leone Country Report: BTI 2022 (bti-project.org)

⁸² FreedomInfo | Sierra Leone - Freedom Info

⁸³ <https://www.law-democracy.org/live/sierra-leones-right-to-information-law-is-5th-strongest-in-the-world/>

⁸⁴ Sierra Leone election observers urge transparent tallying as unrest simmers | Reuters

⁸⁵ An Analysis of Sierra Leone's June 24, 2023, Elections: Transparency and Integrity in the Balance - Sierra Leone Live

⁸⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-fiscal-transparency-report/sierra-leone>

⁸⁷ <https://sierraloaded.sl/news/leone-fails-transparency-requirements/>

Government has recognized the potential of leveraging technology to improve governance. The use of technologies like drones, digital databases, and on-line platforms present opportunities to enhance transparency, monitoring, and public service provision. For example, drones could aid environmental monitoring of illegal mining and deforestation, while digital identification systems can reduce identity fraud and recover revenue lost to ghost workers. E-governance solutions can increase access to administrative services in remote regions via online portals and mobile apps. The country will need to consider what regulatory frameworks may need to be developed in connection with these digital tools, learning from the experience of other countries who have advanced on these frameworks.

NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE

The need to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to support economic growth resulted into an influx of multinational companies in the extractive and agro-based industries. Undoubtedly, while the upsurge for investment by these multinational companies has contributed to national development goals, their operations continue to have adverse implications for the environment and human rights. There is need to strengthen an inclusive, accountable, and effective governance system that values increased community participation and enables environmental justice, human rights, and sustainability for a transformative change.

Governance issues in the mining and minerals sector include illegal artisanal mining that has contributed to deforestation, land degradation, and pollution of water sources, impacting both public health and food security. Sierra Leone scored 46 out of a possible 100 points in a 2017 Resource Governance Index country rating,⁸⁸ with inadequate oversight, monitoring, and revenue management identified as key shortcomings. Transparent administration of mining licenses, robust environmental impact assessments, and participatory decision-making involving affected communities are critical for responsible resource stewardship.

Communities are often disadvantaged when interacting with mining companies, many of which are local branches of international conglomerates. This stems from low literacy levels among the local population, subordination of community

residents to local chiefs, and lack of public awareness and information on mining policies, all of which constrain the ability of residents to make informed decisions or engage in discussions at the community level. This can generate suspicion, unrealistic expectations, and rumours in the community, many times leading to tensions and conflicts. For instance, community compensations, resettlements and development schemes in mining-affected communities are organized in a top-down manner and rely heavily on the mining companies' goodwill and diligence. There is an increasing demand by stakeholders to focus on issues such as safety, economic resilience, improved public information, community development priorities and effective grievance redress mechanisms.⁸⁹

Key to this is transparency and equitable investment of the mandated percentage of government mining revenues allocated to communities with mining operations, as per the Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022, intended to improve the socio-economic benefit and increase transparency in sector management. Inclusion of all community members around administration and investment of these revenues will help avoid

⁸⁸ <https://resourcegovernanceindex.org/country-profiles/SLEmining?years>

⁸⁹ Strategic Plan 2020-2025, National Minerals Agency (NMA), Ministry of Mines and Mineral Resources, December 2020.

conflict and instability. The establishment of a Directorate for Social Corporate Responsibility was approved in 2019, with the mandate of promoting community participation in the use of land for mineral extraction.

A recent indicator point towards improvements in mining sector governance. The global Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) October 2022 validation report gave the country a "high overall score." Participation in EITI contributes to increased transparency and helps reduce opportunities for corruption, as government must disclose the revenues it receives from mining companies. EITI reports and initiatives have raised public awareness and empowered citizens to engage in discussions about resource governance. The government continues to make public all mining and lease agreements. Critics argue that while EITI enhances financial transparency, it may not necessarily lead to a reduction in

1.4.2 CIVIL SOCIETY

One of the main reasons for the outbreak of the civil war in 1992 was a static political system, with the two main political parties providing little room for participation by disenfranchised youth. During post-war reconstruction, a plethora of CSOs emerged. Most work in a particular policy area, (e.g. women, youth, sustainability, law reform or reconciliation), but their capacities remain limited, and most depend on international partners for financing and know-how.

An NGO policy viewed as restrictive was drafted by Government in 2018 and concerns were expressed by several NGOs and development partners about requiring CSOs to join the Sierra Leone Association of Non-governmental Organizations (SLANGO), which some activists believe has been co-opted by the government to exert influence over civil society.⁹¹ In addition, the NGO Policy included restrictive provisions such as imposing a 30 percent cap on NGOs' administrative expenses and a 20 percent cap on non-Sierra Leonean sta

corruption, especially if broader governance and anti-corruption mechanisms are weak. The Audit Service Sierra Leone, meanwhile, has highlighted concerns over transparency and procurement in the sector in recent reports.⁹⁰

Priorities for improved governance of natural resources include: comprehensive regulatory frameworks; increased capacity building on sustainable practices for regulators, communities, and workers; ecosystem-based management approaches; multi-stakeholder engagement in decision-making; enhance monitoring of natural resources; economic mechanisms to encourage sustainable practices and penalize harmful practices; and, adaptive management approaches for allow for flexibility and continuous improvement in governance approaches.

Following feedback to Government, a revised policy was developed in 2023 that addressed some of the concerns.

⁹⁰ <https://resourcegovernanceindex.org/country-profiles/SLEmining?years>

⁹¹ <https://www.movedemocracy.org/case-studies/sierra-leone>

1.4.3 RULE OF LAW / ACCESS TO JUSTICE

In a bid to improve access and efficiency of justice services, reform effort in the Judiciary have enabled circuit courts to operate in 10 judicial districts. Magistrates are now deployed in every district whilst high court judges are now deployed in Kailahun, Port Loko, Moyamba, Kono and Koinadugu districts. The specialized Sexual Offence Model Court (SOMC) piloted in Freetown has demonstrated the Judiciary's commitment to adjudicating sexual offence cases and enhancing protection of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) through conviction and punishment of perpetrators.

Despite these developments, significant institutional and legal challenges still confront the criminal justice system. The Judiciary is underfunded, and its limited resources and facilities continue to be overwhelmed by the growing demand for access to expeditious judicial services. Protracted trial proceedings, punctuated by indefinite adjournments, continue to adversely limit access to justice in marginalized communities and for vulnerable population. Several factors delay case progression, including lack of witnesses, and this can result in prolonged incarceration of accused persons who cannot meet their bail terms.

The justice system delivers services to an estimated 80 percent of the population through the local courts which administer customary law, and this system lacks predictability and uniformity. These courts are dominated by men and decisions may be subjective in a way that mostly discriminates against women. Because of their critical role in the appointment of local court chairpersons, local chieftaindom authorities and politicians hold a level of control that may interfere with administration of justice. Local courts are also characterized by issuance of excessive fines. Improving functioning of the 320 Local Courts is therefore central to improving access to justice and dispensing gender-responsive and human rights-based

justice services.

The system of checks and balances among government branches is weak, as there is inadequate commitment to separating the position of the Attorney General from the Minister of Justice and the Judiciary is not seen as taking steps to keep the executive branch in check. Following the 2023 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the opposition party questioned the independence of the judicial branch and therefore refused to seek redress through the courts following their allegation of lack of electoral transparency.

Many accused persons are unjustifiably remanded. The Criminal Procedure Act (CPA) of 1965 allows for excessive delays in preliminary investigation proceedings and grants the police wide powers of arrest and detention, which has enabled illegal arrests and detention. Also, there is a lack of uniformity in sentencing and limited alternatives to custodial sentences are provided for in the criminal law. The Sierra Leone Correctional Service (SLCS) Act 2014 has critical gaps in governance, gender representation, accountability and rights-based issues. Presently, efforts are being made to review and facilitate the enactment of both the CPA and the Correctional Service Acts.

Juvenile courts in Sierra Leone are filled with minors who have committed minor offences. Out of all the children detained at Freetown Remand and Approved School, respectively 53 percent and 47 percent have committed the simple offence of stealing. In the Kenema District, 51 percent of juvenile court cases are for petty crimes. Those detained can be held for up to a month, and furthermore, there is no legal obligation to notify parents of their child's situation. Defense counsels assigned with intent to impede detention only appear for 35 percent of cases; in turn, most juveniles plead guilty, regardless of the accusation

or the truth behind it, falsely believing it will alleviate their sentence.⁹²

The effective management of correctional centres is challenged by the perennial problem of overcrowding, which poses extra challenges for provision of food, water, sanitation, health and staffing. For example, The Pademba Male facility

HUMAN RIGHTS

Sierra Leone has ratified key international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRDP) - but not the Optional Protocol, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The country has also ratified regional treaties, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights a.k.a. the Banjul Charter (ACHPR) but not the protocol on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa ('the Maputo Protocol'), which focuses on important issues related to women rights, including FGM, violence against women and girls, child marriage and women's economic, social, and political empowerment.

Implementation of the 2011 Persons with Disabilities Act is impeded by a lack of strategy or policy attached to it and overall governance in this area can be improved by better adherence to international standards. A revised PwDA is expected to be introduced to Parliament in 2023 or 2024. The greatest obstacle to CRPD-compliant programming is overall resource scarcity.

⁹² <https://defenceforchildren.org/deprivation-of-liberty-worldwide-sierra-leone/>

housed more than 6 times the planned number of inmates as of October 2023. An assessment by the Correctional Service found that on 48 percent of 21 correctional centres countrywide had satisfactory water services.

As part of its obligations under international treaties, Sierra Leone has been working to strengthen its national reporting mechanisms. In 2021, the country adopted a revamped National Reporting Mechanism to Treaty Bodies (NRM) to foster effective coordination of preparation and submission of reports to human rights treaty bodies. Sierra Leone underwent the third circle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2021 and committed to fully implement all the 216 accepted recommendations out of 274 that it received. GoSL is also working to complete its reporting obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a report slated for submission in 2024.

During the same UPR process, Sierra Leone made voluntary pledges to review the Sexual Offense Act of 2019 and bring it in line with international standards on child rights, finalize the constitutional review process and abolish the death penalty. The Government remained true to its commitment to expunge the death penalty and courts in the country have stopped pronouncing death sentences. It may be pertinent to observe that Sierra Leone "noted" 58 recommendations including recommendations pertaining to the elimination of FGM and improving human rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI). "Noted" implies that the country neither accepts nor declines the

recommendation. Therefore, there is no concrete national commitment to eliminating FGM.

On 10 August 2022, alleged human rights violations⁹³ were committed by the police and other members of security forces when intervening to tackle demonstrations organized against growing cost of living that occurred in Freetown and in at least four other towns. The President set up a Special Investigation Committee (SIC), but the independence, neutrality and non-partisanship of members of the SIC were doubted by many civil society organizations. As there were a number of civilian fatalities recorded during the protests, the SIC finding that claims of extra-judicial killings during and following the event could not be substantiated, were heavily doubted by many stakeholders. Furthermore, the overall conclusion of the SIC report that 'the survival of the state takes precedence over rights during emergencies' is a worrying narrative and a foundation and justification for future high handedness and

disregard to fundamental human rights, even in the context of emergencies.

According to the SLCS and the Prison Watch Sierra Leone (PWSL), 24 juveniles were detained in Freetown following the August demonstrations. Officials initially struggled to confirm the ages of inmates due to the lack of documentation, which resulted in some juveniles being treated as adults and detained in adult correctional facilities. By late August, all 24 juveniles had been transferred to care homes by an NGO in Freetown with facilities for vulnerable youths.⁹⁴

Despite effort by the Government to address human rights violations, much remains to be done. Human rights violations continued to be reported across the country including FGM, domestic violence, and harsh and life-threatening detention conditions. Other violations include forced labour, child trafficking and child labour, especially in the artisanal diamond and gold mining sectors.

GENDER RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

Sierra Leonean Women often face socio-economic challenges, including wage gaps, limited access to credit, and a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work. Challenges include lack of economic independence, high illiteracy and entrenched customs and traditions, political violence and reprisals that disrupt social cohesion, and harassment or violence experienced when vying for public positions.

In 2023, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act, enacted in 2022, was assented to by the President and became a Law to support the advancement of women's rights to participate in public life and in economics. The

GEWE Act 2022 provides that at least 30 percent of public and private jobs (for companies with at least employees) be reserved for women, requires at 30 percent of all elective and nominative positions for women, grants 14 weeks of maternity leave, prohibits sexual harassment, and guarantees women's equal access to finance employment opportunities and pay. It is a monumental advancement for gender equality in Sierra Leone, a country ranked 181 out of 191 countries in UNDP's Gender Inequality Index. The government has started establishing gender units in key government office. Measures are also being deployed to define a clear pathway and framework

that ensures effective implementation of the act. However, the government still lacks resources to fully fund the accountability framework, complement the creation and capacity building of the gender units in each MDA, and start certain provisions, such as the enforcement of the 30 percent quota in the private and CSO sectors.

Implementation of the 2011 Persons with Disabilities Act is impeded by a lack of strategy or policy attached to it and overall governance in this area can be improved by better adherence to international standards. A revised PwDA is expected to be introduced to Parliament in 2023 or 2024. The greatest obstacle to CRPD-compliant programming is overall resource scarcity.

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LAND RIGHTS

A positive development is enactment of the Customary Land Rights Act and the Land Commission Act in 2022. These empower local landowners to negotiate the value of their land, and companies operating in Sierra Leone will have to obtain the consent of local communities before starting mining, industrial or farming activities. Local landowners will also be able to veto any projects and the Sierra Leone government will have to help pay for any legal fees that the local communities incur in negotiations. Further, the

foster effective coordination of preparation and submission of reports to human rights treaty bodies. Sierra Leone underwent the third circle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in 2021 and committed to fully implement all the 216 accepted recommendations out of 274 that it received. GoSL is also working to complete its reporting obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a report slated for submission in 2024.

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Customary Land Rights Act gives women an equal right to own and use family land. A National Land Commission Act was introduced, which established a commission that will take a gender-sensitive approach to land administration. Advocacy, technical support and stakeholders' monitoring of the actual implementation will ensure the effectiveness of women's access to land and land tenure.

⁹³ https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/415610_SIERRA-LEONE-2022-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf and <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/03/sierra-leone-seven-months-after-augusts-protests-which-turned-violent-in-some-locations-no-justice-yet-for-those-injured-or-the-families-of-those-killed/>

⁹⁴ https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/415610_SIERRA-LEONE-2022-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf

1.4.4 POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Sierra Leone conducted Presidential and Parliamentary elections in June 2023 amidst a climate of incitement and hateful speech, however voting was mostly peaceful as attested to by various observation missions.⁹⁵ The incumbent presidential candidate was re-elected with 56 percent of the total votes cast, while the candidate of the leading opposition party All People's Congress (APC) obtained 41 percent of the votes. There were instances of sporadic violence and delays in arrival of electoral materials at some polling stations. In addition, the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) confirmed incidents of assault on ECSL staff and destruction of electoral materials.

An iVerify fact-checking platform was setup for the election, managed by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, the Independent Radio Network, and BBC Media Action. iVerify successfully processed more than 200 fact-checking requests.

Two election-related deaths were alleged, as well as other incidences of violence. One ECSL staff member was beaten by the public and died from their injuries, and a woman was shot allegedly by the Police at APC headquarters, in what has been described by the Police as an attempt to dispel an unlawful assembly. Several local media houses reported that the police fired live bullets near APC (opposition party) headquarters the day after the election, an event described by APC supporters as unprovoked and a disproportionate use of force.

Official election results have been questioned following accounts of observed irregularities, including late delivery of materials to polling stations, lack of transparency in processes,⁹⁶ and discrepancies in the tallying of votes. The opposition APC party initially rejected the outcome and declared that it would not participate in parliament and local council proceedings and called for the publication of results of each polling

station. This resulted in a political deadlock.

Following a three-day mediated dialogue in October 2023, the GoSL and the APC party signed an Agreement for National Unity to break the political impasse. The Agreement aims to set up a cross-party Committee on Electoral Systems and Management Bodies to review the constitutional and electoral frameworks and promote inclusivity in the governance process. This paved the way for the APC to end their boycott and for their elected candidates to assume roles in parliament and local government. The Committee was inaugurated in November 2023.⁹⁷

The UN is fostering sustained coordination and collaboration among development partners to provide requisite technical and operational assistance to the Committee. Also, the UN through the SRSU UNOWAS seeks to strengthen coordination among ECOWAS, AU and Commonwealth to ensure compliance and implementation of the Agreement, and to mediate among Election Review Committee members where need arises.

⁹⁵ Observation missions include the National Elections Watch (NEW), the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the European Union Observation Mission, and the Carter Center.

⁹⁶ Preliminary statement, EU Observation Mission – General Elections 24 June 2023.

⁹⁷ An agreement for National Unity, Mediated Dialogue held on 16-18 October 2023 in Bintumani Hotel, Freetown.

POLITICAL INCLUSION

A Project aimed at “Fostering Peaceful, Credible and Inclusive Elections” in Sierra Leone 2022-2023 was formed with several government, development partners and CSOs. It assisted ECSL in strengthening its structures and for targeted inclusion of women, and youth groups, and PwDs in the electoral process. The combined effort of all partners contributed to an 83 percent voter turnout on election day. Notably, the Project supported unhindered access for political parties to campaign in many districts, irrespective of regional strongholds of the parties.

ECSL implemented electoral events and conducted a voter registration process, during which most of the persons registered were female. Voter identification cards were distributed, and 3,847 candidates (36 percent women) were successfully registered to take part in the 2023 elections. The 2023 electoral cycle saw a record registration of 22,385 voters with disabilities. ECSL adapted 128

polling stations to enable wheelchair access and distributed 120,000 tactile ballot guides to visually impaired voters.

In terms of political representation, gender inequality remains a significant issue. Deep structural issues like systemic gender gaps and social norms remain a barrier to women's political participation and female political aspirants face inter- and intra-party violence. Nonetheless, and without precedence, 30 percent of those elected to parliament in 2023 were women, up from 15 percent in the 2018 election as shown in Figure 16.⁹⁸ At the local level, overall 34 percent women were elected to local councils, (up from 19 percent), although some districts that did not meet the 30 percent threshold. These improvements are attributed to enactment of the Public Elections Act and the GEWE Act, which mandated minimum representation for women in different political bodies.

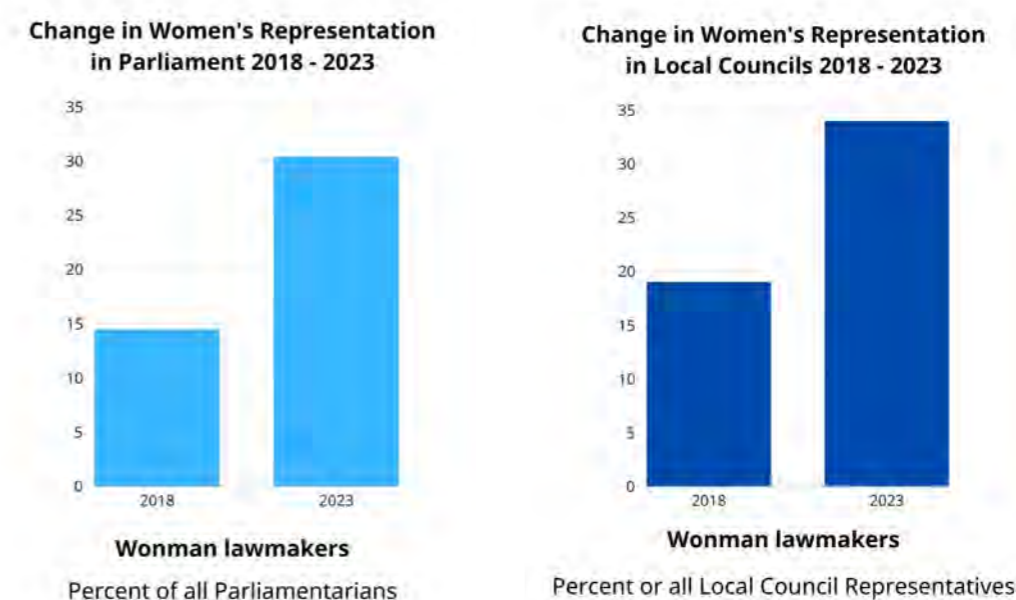


Figure 16: Gender Representation in Sierra Leone Parliament and in Local Councils 2018 - 2023

Source: <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2023-07/record-number-women-mps-elected-in-sierra-leone>

⁹⁵ Observation missions include the National Elections Watch (NEW), the Economic Community for West Africa (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth, the European Union Observation Mission, and the Carter Center.

⁹⁶ Preliminary statement, EU Observation Mission – General Elections 24 June 2023.

⁹⁷ An agreement for National Unity, Mediated Dialogue held on 16-18 October 2023 in Bintumani Hotel, Freetown.

⁹⁸ <https://www.ipu.org/news/news-in-brief/2023-07/record-number-women-mps-elected-in-sierra-leone>

Political Marginalization of Youth is also an issue. It is very challenging for youth to run for office and participate in political processes due to the high costs involved e.g. registration fees, financing their campaigns, as many youths are unemployed or have low incomes. This is especially true for young women. Plus, young women often have underdeveloped leadership skills and lack literacy skills to support their participation in community decision platforms. In the realms of traditional governance at chiefdom level, youth are not included in decision-making and subsequently denied access to vital resources such as land, preventing them from pursuing productive

1.4.5 LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Sierra Leone has made great progress over the past decade in decentralization, advancing to one of the more stable democracies in the region. However, for policies formulated at the federal level to be implemented at the regional and local levels requires the cooperation of regional and local authorities, whose interests are not necessarily in accord with those of the central government. Up to 2004, when the Local Government Act came into force and local councils were established, traditional chiefdom authorities (established under colonial British rule) were the only form of local government.

Hence, traditional power structures continue to have significant influence and exist in parallel to democratically elected Local Councils. While key actors accept Local Councils as legitimate, policy formulation and decision-making frequently do not follow democratic norms and values but are instead characterized by the influence of informal social networks, vested interests and the pursuit of individual gains, according to the BTI group Transformation Index report for Sierra Leone.¹⁰⁰

The Local Government Act of 2004 and its statutory instruments provided the legislative framework governing decentralization in Sierra Leone. Policies on decentralization and chiefdom governance were to be prepared subsequently.

activities such as agricultural and mining. At the national level, youth have limited voice and are often excluded from state resource management decisions, including how resource benefits are distributed.⁹⁹

Further, youth are easily instrumentalized for political actions, (including violence), against candidates, due to their vulnerable economic circumstances. They can be easily manipulated by political parties, with political elite seeking to mobilize disenfranchised people through intricate patronage networks that fuel internal turmoil and threaten peace in the country.

An important area on which the act did not bring closure is the relationship between the local councils and the chiefdom authorities. In 2022 the Local Government Act of 2004 was reviewed, and the new Local Government Act of 2022 has been enacted with new changes made within the District Council, Local Council, and Chiefdom Administrations. This was to address shortcomings in the old Act (2004) and to bring on board emerging issues.

Progress on local governance is threatened by the lingering ailment of inequitable distribution of critical social services, by elements within the central government that are reluctant to comply with the Local Government Act, and by the limited capacity and autonomy of the local councils.

To preserve the great strides that the nation has made to date, champions of decentralization must ensure that local councils continue to receive the fiscal resources and technical support they need to govern effectively. The local councils are highly dependent on grants from the national government. Although the volume of these grants has increased over time, the lack of financial

⁹⁹ <https://ipss-addis.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Sierra-Leone-Conflict-Insight.pdf> pg. 4 & 6

¹⁰⁰ BTI 2022 (bti-project.org) pg14-15

autonomy leaves the local councils very vulnerable to the whims of the national government. The lack of control over frontline staff weakens the ability

1.4.6 PEACE AND SECURITY

Currently, the Global Peace Index ranks Sierra Leone as the 3rd most peaceful country in Sub-Saharan Africa and the 47th globally.¹⁰¹ Despite these ratings on the level of peacefulness, the country remains highly polarized along ethno-political and regional lines. There are long-term, underlying social and economic issues that must be addressed for sustained peace and stability, such as youth unemployment and equitable resource distribution to address income inequality. These present a critical risk for the peace consolidation agenda.

In terms of peace and security architecture since the devastating civil conflict that ended in the early 2000s, Sierra Leone has made significant advancements. The country has established various mechanisms to ensure peace, security, and stability, including decentralized security structures: Provincial Security Committee (PROSEC), District Security Committee (DISEC), and Chiefdom Security Committee (CHISEC). The committees, which bring together stakeholders such as security forces, local authorities, civil society, and community leaders, are vital to peacebuilding and security, especially in rural areas. Challenges to ongoing implementation of these mechanisms exist, including resource constraints, capacity limitations, and the need for sustained community engagement.

Complementing these committees are Early Warning Structures that detect and respond to potential security threats before they escalate into conflicts. These include the National Security and Central Intelligence entity which plays a critical role in providing timely information to decision-makers.¹⁰² Another layer, the Local Conflict Monitors are community-based individuals or organizations tasked with identifying and reporting potential

of the local councils to influence the quality of services.

sources of conflict at the grassroots level, vital to preventive efforts.¹⁰³ In addition Conflict Mapping and Analysis are conducted by organizations such as the Center for Dialogue on Human Settlements and Dignity to identify potential conflict areas and triggers, facilitating early response and conflict prevention.¹⁰⁴

An event that occurred in late 2023 is significant for its impact on Peace and Security. In the early morning hours of 26 November 2023, significant security breaches at key military installations and prisons occurred, something the government has termed a 'failed coup attempt.' There were organized attacks on the country's main military barracks and two maximum security prisons, all located in the capital city of Freetown. Eighteen police and military personnel were killed and an unknown number of assailants. Various armaments were stolen, and an estimated 2,000 prisoners were set free by the assailants, although some have since been apprehended. Some persons alleged to have been involved in the attack have been identified as members of the military and the police. Development partners have urged that investigations into these events must be transparent and impartial. There have also been discussions about the possibility for an Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) stabilization force in Sierra Leone.

¹⁰¹

¹⁰² <https://www.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/projects/support-to-the-reform-of-the-central-intelligence-and-security>

¹⁰³ https://rc-services-assets.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Women_building_peace_Accord_Insight_1.pdf

¹⁰⁴ <https://hdcentre.org/?s=sierra-leone-peacebuilding-needs-assessment>



CHAPTER 2

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

LNOB is a commitment on UN member states and embedded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This chapter discusses how it applies in the context of Sierra Leone and highlights the importance of ensuring human rights and addressing inequalities among different groups in the country at risk of being left behind in social and economic development. It draws on a companion report to this CCA that used mixed methods, including qualitative data collection, to improve research outcomes by triangulating data from different sources. The analysis made use of data collection (although limited in many cases), desk/literature review, Focus Group Discussions (see Annex 3), and Key Informant Interviews. With an overall scarcity of data on many social and economic issues in the country, technical experts within the UNCT used their sectoral knowledge to identify those groups that should be the focus of the LNOB analysis.

The following unsegmented groups were identified as being left behind in Sierra Leone:

1. Children living in poverty;
2. Informal Workers;
3. Homeless Persons;
4. Persons with Disability;
5. Persons living with HIV/AIDS;
6. Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV);
7. Adolescent Girls impacted by Child Marriage and Harmful Practices;
8. Migrants and Victims of Human Trafficking; Returnee Migrants and Deportees;
9. Those living in Hard-to-Reach (HTR) Communities;

10. Inmates of Correctional Institutions;
11. Youths in Conflict with the Law/Youth Gang Members;
12. Persons with Substance Abuse Issues;
13. Ebola Virus Disease Survivors with latent Health Issues;
14. Children who have left Primary and Secondary School;
15. Persons Trafficked including Children; and
16. Vulnerable Persons negatively affected by Climate Change

This LNOB analysis examined the profile of each unsegmented group left behind, the difficulties they face, and the root causes of them being left behind. Many of these groups are predominantly impacted by poverty, especially multidimensional poverty and deprivation issues. The groups also often face discrimination for reasons such as gender, age, disability, and status as homeless or an adolescent mother.

As a result of poverty, these groups are often deprived of basic services and living in precarious living conditions, thus excluded from development. In many cases, poverty is perpetuated from generation to generation, with deprivation and violation of rights.

Global research identified the most common reasons why people are left behind, zeroing in on five factors that represent the central driving forces of exclusion processes. These include: 1) discrimination, based on assumed or ascribed identity or status; 2) geography, that is, groups isolated or excluded due to location with aggravating factors such as environmental degradation, lack of transport, or technology; 3) vulnerability to shocks such as natural disasters, conflict, and economic shocks; 4) socio-economic status, especially multidimensional poverty and inequalities; and, 5) governance i.e. laws, policies, institutions preventing participation in decision making.

Table 2 shows which of the five factors are dominant for why different LNOB groups are left behind in Sierra Leone.



Groups	Primary Causal Factors				
	Discrimination	Socioeconomic Status	Vulnerability to Shocks	Geography	Governance
Children Living in Poverty	X	X	X	X	X
Informal Workers	X	X	X	-	X
Homeless persons	X	X	X	-	-
Persons with Disability	X	X	-	-	-
Persons Living with HIV/AIDS	X	X	-	-	-
Survivors of Sexual & Gender-Based Violence	X	X	-	-	-
Adolescent Girls impacted by Child Marriage and Harmful Practices	X	X	-	-	-
Returnee Migrants & Deportees	X	X	-	-	X
Those living in Hard-to-Reach Communities	X	X	X	X	X
Inmates of Correctional Institutions	X	X	-	-	X
Youths in Conflict with the law / Youth gang members	X	X	-	-	X
Persons with Substance Abuse Issues	X	X	-	-	X
Ebola Virus Disease Survivors with Latent Health Issues	X	X	X	-	-
Drop-outs from Primary and Secondary School	X	X	X	-	-
Persons Trafficked, including Children	X	X	X	-	-

Table 2: Reasons why different groups are being left behind in Sierra Leone

Reflecting on the findings in Table 2, the country can work to address the deprivations these groups face. This requires a shift to targeted approaches, a people-centred approach, an improved governance environment, and ensuring that LNOB groups participate in discussions around solutions. LNOB should be a consideration in all phases of a project cycle for both UN and government programs, including design, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation. It would be advanced by developed of indicators geared towards these groups and collection of more disaggregated data for LNOB groups, including by age, sex, and location.

The following specific actions are proposed to help address the root causes of why identified LNOB groups are being left behind in Sierra Leone:

A. Strengthen Socioeconomic Empowerment of the Key Population Groups through targeted

approaches to eliminate discrimination and promote empowerment of groups.

- B. Address gender and social norms that perpetuate the vulnerability of some of those groups left behind
- C. Develop Awareness Raising Campaigns and increase Knowledge about Human Rights, Gender Equality and Economic Rights, including strengthening the consideration and voice of girls and women in society.
- D. Create a more conducive environment for job creation and doing business, ultimately for promotion of decent work for all, irrespective of their status in society, which would help solve many related social problems.
- E. Enact, and bring into force, laws, policies, practices, and institutions based on human rights, with greater attention to enforcing

these laws and avenues for justice for those who are deprived of their rights.

- F. Improve governance to address weak law enforcement, institutional incapacity, ill-resourced institutions, and lack of policy coherence on key issues.
- G. Create supportive environments that foster community cohesion and political inclusiveness, to overcome discriminative practices and promote accountable institutions.
- H. Give greater voice to LNOB groups to express their views, including strengthening civil society organizations representing these vulnerable groups, to allow for greater participation community and sectoral decision-making.
- I. Improve data collection for LNOB groups to improve understanding of the needs of those left behind and to develop context specific LNOB approaches and instruments. Strengthened national data collection systems can be a tool for monitoring and measuring multidimensional poverty and inequality.
- J. Promote agreements among government institutions to facilitate marginalized individual's access to programs that enhance their rights (for example, civil registration), and to basic services (for example, health and education).
- K. Encourage bottom-up dialogue and inclusive discussions when developing programmes, including social protection approaches, and employ LNOB principles in the design.
- L. Promote wide-ranging sensitivity to the needs of LNOB groups in trainings of those providing social services and social protection at different levels of government, to raise awareness of the issues of people who are left behind.
- M. Stimulate a national dialogue on developing a Unique Social Register (USR) starting with people who are left behind and marginalized, to create an efficient data collection system using technology.
- N. Strengthen the National Social Protection Strategy and approaches to better meet the

needs of vulnerable groups.

- O. Disseminate information and ramp-up communication campaigns in communities related to understanding and claiming of rights, including information on legal forms of protest and legal access if rights are violated.

To ensure that no one is left behind, government and other development partners should apply a human rights-based approach to protect against actions that interfere with fundamental freedoms and human dignity of individuals and population. This entails:

- a. Meaningful and inclusive participation and access to decision-making: The inclusion and meaningful participation of all stakeholders with particular attention to the greater involvement of those individuals and communities left behind in development. Simply put, those left behind in development trajectory should be empowered, involved and actively participate in prioritization and development decisions that affect them.
- b. Non-discrimination and equality: development priorities should not be discriminatory but affirmatively address existing developmental challenges. In summary, the LNOB programs should respect, protect, and fulfil the rights to equality and non-discrimination for those individuals and community's left behind.
- c. Accountability and rule of law for all: government and partners should be accountable to the implementation of development priorities.
- d. Transparency and access to information supported by disaggregated data. LNOB information should be available to all, and that individuals and communities left behind should have access to development and social services.

By applying these principles, states and their institutions as duty-bearers are accountable for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. The above approach addresses individuals as rights-holders and empowers them to know, to claim and to enjoy their human rights. The UN's work should support government in these efforts.



CHAPTER 3

NATIONAL VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The national vision for sustainable development had been anchored in the Medium-term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2019-2023), aligned with Agenda 2030, the Africa Union Agenda 2063, and the New Deal's Peacebuilding and State-building Goals. Human capital development was at the centre, notably the policy of providing free quality school education, and the objectives to foster peace and social cohesion and to fight corruption.

MTNDP faced some daunting challenges because of COVID 19 pandemic and its impact on the local situation, as discussed in Section 1.2.1. The MTNDP mid-term review found that a range of desired results were achieved, but that more efforts are needed for economic resilience, such as promoting private sector development and economic diversification. Having strong development cooperation was a key lesson learnt from MTNDP implementation, given the role played by development partners in COVID 19 response efforts.

With the election of a new government in June 2023, a new MTNDP is being developed for the period of 2024 to 2030, centered on achieving Food Security, consolidating economic gains, and accelerating economic transformation. Below are the "Big 5 Game Changers" identified as most strategic for socioeconomic transformation. Annex 4 shows how the analysis in this CCA relates to the Big 5.

1. Feed Salone: Essentially aimed at boosting agricultural productivity to ensure food security, and inclusive economic growth

2. Human Capital Development: Focusing on nurturing inclusive skills and healthy population for the 21st century demands through scaled-up investment in human capital development.

3. Youth Employment Scheme as a Catalyst for Democracy, Economic Productivity and National Security: Aimed at creating 500,000 jobs for youths in the next five years.

4. Enhancing Public Service Architecture for Empowering Democracy and National Development:

Aimed at ensuring effective service delivery, efficiency, and professionalism in the public service architecture.

5. Technology and Infrastructure: Focused on increasing investment in infrastructure, technology and digitalisation.

Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Food Security are at the top of the new government's agenda, as demonstrated through the appointment of a chairman for a new Presidential Initiative targeting these three priority areas.

The government intends to place emphasis on advancing the Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), (see chapter 6), with special emphasis on increasing financing available for women to boost their contribution to domestic revenue generation.¹⁰⁵ It will also focus on

villages/local communities and transformation of the informal sector through financial inclusion strategies. Moreover, there are plans to advance the development of bankable projects through the establishment of a Project Preparation Fund.

Digital solutions are a priority in advancing governance and public service delivery to reduce transaction costs, maximise effectiveness & efficiency in the delivery chain, and enhance accountability and efficiency in delivering services. Digital systems will also support the fight against corruption and Illicit Financial Flows.

To guarantee ownership and ensure that No One is left Behind in the implementation of the new Plan the government has adopted the following strategies: ensuring effective running of the District Development Coordination Committees, ensuring effective implementation of the revised Decentralization Policy and Local Government Act, and ensuring the establishment of Chiefdom Development Coordination Committee.

National budgets and medium-term expenditure frameworks have always been framed around the priorities of the MTNDP. Therefore, it is expected that all Sector Project Proposals for consideration in the national budget shall be guided through the National Public Investment Programme hosted in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development.

¹⁰⁵ Mid-term Review of the Implementation of Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019 – 2023)-, published 19 April 2022



CHAPTER 4

COUNTRY PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 AGENDA

Sierra Leone continues to implement towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The Country presented her third Voluntary National Review report in 2021 and is scheduled to present again in 2024. The country had, since 2015, focused on two accelerator Goals: SDG 4 and SDG 16, deemed most crucial to socioeconomic transformation in the medium to long-term. Going forward, SDGs 1, 2, and 10, (zero poverty, no hunger, and reduced inequalities) have been identified for acceleration through 2030.¹⁰⁶ The discussion below highlights progress on each of the 17 goals, using information from the country's MTNDP mid-term review, and well as other informed sources.

SDG 1: While there had been progress on poverty between 2003 and 2018,¹⁰⁷ the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the income poverty rate to increase from 57 percent in 2018 to 59 percent in 2020.¹⁰⁸ While rural poverty was reported

far higher at 74 percent than urban poverty at 35 percent in 2018, the onset of COVID-19 saw the urban region proportionately more affected than rural areas. The incidence of Multi-dimensional Poverty rate in rural areas is more than twice that of urban areas.

SDG 2: The continuous rise in food inflation is threatening food security in Sierra Leone, which is highly dependent on food imports. Underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of machinery for application of modern agricultural techniques and widespread utilization of traditional smallholder agricultural practices, mean that access to a diverse and

¹⁰⁶ SAG acceleration roadmap for Sierra Leone- September 2023

¹⁰⁷ Sierra Leone integrated household survey (2018). ¹⁰⁸ World Bank update on Sierra Leone, 2021, pp. 38–9.

nutritionally rich diet is out of reach for most Sierra Leoneans.¹⁰⁹

According to the 2023 FSMS report, 24 percent of Sierra Leonean households fall within the poor food consumption score category, which is a 12 percent increase since August 2022. Disaggregated Food Consumption Scores by district show challenging situation in Koinadugu, Falaba, and Tonkolili districts, where more than 50 percent or more of households fall within the poor food consumption bracket.¹¹⁰ Even so, prevalence of Child Malnutrition (stunting) decreased from 30 percent in 2019 to 26.2 percent in 2021, according to the DHS.

SDG 3: The Government is incrementally contributing more domestic resources to a free healthcare initiative targeting pregnant and lactating women and children under-five and coordinating the implementation of strategies to prevent and treat infectious diseases such as Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. Recent interventions have seen a significant reduction in maternal mortality rate to 443 per 100,000 live births from 717 in 2019.¹¹¹ There has been a reduction in under-five mortality during the last 10 years from 154.5 (estimation in 2011) to 104.7 (UN joint estimation for 2021). Nutrition remains a major health challenge across many age groups and there are very limited mental health services.

SDG 4: Through its Free Quality Basic and Senior Secondary Education objective, the Government significantly increased education expenditure.¹¹² Supporting this were the school feeding programmes, tuition fee grants, and teaching and learning materials covering pre-primary, primary, junior and senior secondary levels. Also, inclusive and special education policies were established for children with disabilities to access education. Consequently, school enrolment significantly increased since the programme launch in September 2018.¹¹³ However, learning outcomes, as measured by student scores on standardized regional exams, remain well below expected levels

and full qualified teachers are not sufficient to meet desired classroom standards.

SDG 5: Scaling-up effort on elimination of harmful practices such as early and forced marriages is critical for Sierra Leone, with 30 percent of marriages before 18 years old, and 83 percent of girls and women having undergone some form of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting.¹¹⁴ The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act was passed by Parliament in 2022. Among other things, this calls for participation in political leadership and decision-making levels for women by 30 percent minimum.

SDG 6: Access to basic drinking water services, currently about 63 percent, has increased in recent years but is below the pace needed to achieve full access by 2030. For sanitation, according to the MTNDP mid-term evaluation report, the total population using improved sanitation facilities increased from 10.6 percent in 2013 to 55 percent in 2019. Progress towards ensuring integrated water resources management (IWRM) remains slow as per SDG 6 targets and markers of growth. The country has managed only 36 percent progress to actualize IWRM at all levels, including through transboundary water resources. The financing component of IWRM in Sierra Leone weighs down on the other components, as it stands at a meager 27 percent.

SDG 7: A development partnership with the UK has helped rural communities with no prior access to electricity to be provided with renewable clean energy. In 2018, 54 Community Health Centres across 12 districts were powered with solar energy

¹⁰⁹ 2023 FSMS

¹¹⁰ 2023 FSMS

¹¹¹ Sierra Leone SDGs Acceleration Roadmap, 2023

¹¹² Sierra Leone MTNDP Mid-Term Report -April 2022

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Demographic Health Survey (DHS) Sierra Leone, 2019, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017

systems and 50 mini grids were installed in 50 rural communities. Overall, access to electricity increased from 16 percent in 2018 to 26 percent in 2021. Household access nearly doubled from 14 percent in 2018 to 24 percent in 2021.

SDG 8: The Government has established a comprehensive Decent Work Country Programme and developed the Labour Market Information System and the National HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy. The Government also has a policy framework for the development of small and medium enterprises. The government pursued other strategies as well, with the employment of more than 10,000 youths in agricultural farms, regulated fishing activities, garbage collection and disposal operations, carwash centres, and other places for wage employment.¹¹⁵ At the same time, thousands more were trained in various skills.

SDG 9: A Science, Technology and Innovation Directorate was established in the office of the President, working in collaboration with related outfit in public ministries, departments and agencies. There have also been scaled-up digital operations in the private sector, including mobile technology penetrations and agent banking. However, only 21 percent of the population in Sierra Leone are using mobile internet. Low digital skills, limited access to smartphones, and inadequate digital infrastructure in certain regions are some reasons why its use is so low.

SDG 10: The country's inequality is worsening over time. The overall Gini coefficient moved from 0.33 in 2011 to 0.37 in 2018, towards the maximum inequality value of 1.0. The 2018 breakdown figures also note geographic differences, ranging from 0.35 in Freetown to 0.27 in rural areas. To help address this, Government has strengthened its revenue collection to finance the provision of social services, particularly in rural areas. A Social Safety Net programme has been established aimed at reaching extremely poor households.

SDG 11: Government is creating sustainable

cities and communities, with the largest city of Freetown taking a leading role in many initiatives, including reducing the risk of landslides and flooding through drainage improvements, slope stabilisation, and re-forestation. Freetown also has issued a climate change adaptation plan.

SDG 12: Sierra Leone is becoming the sixth African country to develop a tool for nutrition education, promoting diet diversification in a safe and sustainable manner with respect to biodiversity and protection of environment. It also discourages harmful cultural dietary practices.

SDG 13: Sierra Leone participates in international agreements on Climate Change and has prepared a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) document, as well as related climate adaptation plans. It is streamlining its national and sectoral green growth policies and strategies towards the NDC, however, there is a lack of solutions for generating affordable, long-term financing for developing resilience to climate change, as the country is highly vulnerable to climate impacts.

SDGs 14 and 15: while the country is a signatory to international conventions related to land and water quality, an adequate legislative framework is lacking, and enforcement of existing laws are inadequate. Significant steps are needed for greater protection of water resources, including the coastal environment, and land assets as detailed in Section 1.3 and elsewhere throughout this report.

SDG 16: Sierra Leone has made effort in promoting inclusive and accountable justice institutions, including through free legal aid services.¹¹⁶ Rural areas now have more magistrates and judges deployed to increase access to justice for the

poor. Four new judicial districts were established, accompanied by the deployment of counsels and additional paralegals were deployed in several communities.¹¹⁷ A Peace Commission was created with almost equal representation of women. However, the justice system delivers services to an estimated 80 percent of the population through the local courts which administer customary law, and this system lacks predictability and uniformity. There are also challenges with wrongfully detained persons and conditions in correctional centers.

SDG 17: The government scaled-up cooperation with Development Partners, including NGOs, during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with development funding levels reduced from several

key donors due to global factors, the country will need to seek additional bi-lateral and multi-lateral development partners to meet key objectives in realizing the SDGs. There is also potential for expanded programs with existing partners, especially international financial institutions, that are targeted towards key priorities and populations as identified in this report. New partnerships, such as those with international climate funds, should be aggressively pursued.

¹¹⁶ MTNDP Mid-Term Evaluation Report, April 2022

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Sierra Leone Acceleration Roadmap 2023.





CHAPTER 5

CROSS BOUNDARY AND REGIONAL SUB-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

There are several historical, socio-cultural, security, environmental, and economic ties among Sierra Leone and the two bordering countries, Liberia and Guinea. Ethnic groups, ethnic loyalties and traditional settlement areas traverse national borders, and cooperation with bordering countries on security is essential, given the sub-region's history of civil conflict.

Ebola and COVID-19 have shown that transboundary disease transmission in humans is a serious threat to public health. There is a

high risk for cross border disease spread, with limited capacities for early detection, reporting and management of public health threats at many formal and informal border crossing points. This risk is compounded by the possibility for transboundary animal diseases.¹¹⁸ Countries have limited capacities for cross border coordination for sharing information for public health surveillance, and joint response to outbreaks. Port health offices lack human resources, infrastructure, communications equipment, mobility vehicles, and accommodation.

The sub-region is endowed with valuable natural resources that include forests, water resources, and flora and fauna. The Upper Guinea Forest, recognized as one of the three most important forests globally, extends across national borders and is home to some of the highest levels of biodiversity in the world. International commitments on the environment are often not fulfilled due to financial and capacity limitations, as well as weak governance structures and enforcement of environmental protection laws. These issues point to the need for sub-regional cooperation on environmental issues, including habitat conservation and wildlife poaching and trafficking.

There are two major cross-border ecosystems between Sierra Leone and Liberia, these are the Gola Forest, which spans both countries, and the Kangari Hills Forest Reserve. Mechanisms and treaties to address their management issues may include bilateral agreements between the two countries.

Additionally, there are international treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, which both countries are party to. Initiatives such as joint conservation efforts, coordinated patrols, and resource-sharing agreements can be implemented to manage these ecosystems effectively.

Sierra Leone and Guinea have tropical rainforests, mangroves, and savannas ecosystems. These ecosystems are vital for biodiversity, climate regulation, and local livelihoods.

In terms of existing mechanisms and treaties to address their management, several agreements and organizations play a role:

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD): Both Sierra Leone and Guinea are signatories. This promotes the conservation of biological diversity, sustainable use of its components, and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from genetic resources.

Regional Forest Initiatives: Various regional initiatives aim to promote sustainable forest management and conservation in West Africa, such as the Congo Basin Forest Partnership (CBFP) and the Guinea Forests of West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot.

African Union's Agenda 2063 and the African Union's African Environmental Policy Framework: These frameworks provide overarching guidance for environmental management and sustainability across the continent, which indirectly impacts ecosystem management in Sierra Leone and Guinea.

While these mechanisms and treaties provide a framework for cooperation and action, effective management of ecosystems between Sierra Leone and Guinea requires concerted efforts at the national and regional levels, along with active participation from local communities and stakeholders.

Informal cross-border trade is the main source of livelihood for borderland communities, but as the borders are porous, this creates challenges for border management, especially considering the widespread lack of resources for border control operations. The communities are channels for trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, drug abuse and illegal exploitation of natural resources (such as logging and fisheries and mineral smuggling) and conflict between farmers and pastoralists over grazing land access.

These communities have high numbers of former combatants, and many are heavily involved in perpetuating serious and organized crime; trafficking in arms, drugs, people and contraband goods; money laundering and foreign currency

¹¹⁸ Transboundary animal diseases are defined by FAO as those diseases that are of significant economic, trade and/or food security importance for a considerable number of countries, which can easily spread to other countries and reach epidemic proportions.

exchange all of which provide them with an income. There is widespread practice of security sector personnel obtaining money by extortion, harassment or sexual harassment from people crossing the borders, with weak oversight of border officials by their respective governments. Border posts also lack sufficient personnel, border management facilities, vehicles, motorcycles, and communications equipment and stationery material.

The level of Trafficking in Persons (TiP) across national borders is concerning, including forced labor trafficking of Sierra Leoneans nationals, largely towards the West Africa, Middle East, and Gulf regions, as discussed in Section 1.1.5. Most cross-border traders are women, often exposed to harassment, extortion and crime from itinerant people, unemployed youth and officials at the border crossing points.

There are also transboundary issues related to climate change migration. Sierra Leone is among the world's most fragile countries in terms of capacity to withstand climate change-related shocks, including slow-onset and sudden disasters. Forced displacement is therefore a risk due to erosion of coastlines (including inhabited islands), shifts in agricultural output due to changing seasonal rain patterns, and potential flooding and landslides. Heavy rainfall in neighbouring countries may cause flooding in Sierra Leone due to the overflowing of rivers, including the Great Scarcies and Little Scarcies rivers from Guinea and Mano from Liberia (World Bank 2017). Due to transhumance of livestock (mobile livestock farming), cross-border conflict between herders and farmers have increased and this can also drive displacement.

There is great untapped potential for increased trade between Sierra Leone and other countries in the sub-region, but a significant constraint

is poor road quality and lack of other transport options. In addition, there are irregularities in regulations among countries, the current tariff structure is not conducive to increased trade, and non-tariff barriers include time-consuming border crossings, unnecessary police and security roadblocks, unofficial 'tolls', excessive documentation requirements, limited credit and financial services for trade, and the complexity of different country currencies. Some of the regional initiatives underway with the potential to benefit the border regions include the Trans-ECOWAS Road corridor, West Africa Power Pool (WAPP) and the EU-funded Gateway Initiative.

An intergovernmental organization has been operating in the sub-region since 1973, the Mano River Union (MRU). Member states are Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire. MRU programs have largely focused on peace and security. MRU hosts a Joint Security Committee and 40+ Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units, which focus on effective intelligence gathering and information-sharing, including early warning of potentially volatile situations to prevent escalation. MRU also has initiatives around trade and public health, among other topics, and played an important role in cross-border cooperation during the Ebola Virus Disease and COVID-19 public health emergencies. It continues working on cooperation for disease surveillance and sharing of information among countries. MRU also supports the UN Women, Peace, and Security Agenda and has participated in national, regional, and global events aimed at supporting women peacebuilding initiatives.

The range of cross-border challenges also underscores the need for enhanced regional cooperation through MRU and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Strengthening cross-border structures and policy frameworks for maximizing the economic,

political and social potential of countries is crucial for strengthening peace and sustainable development in the region.

A 2019 UN Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) study found that 38 percent of conflicts in West Africa have regional dimensions driven by cross-border crime and movement of armed groups. Sierra Leone should leverage UNOWAS support to strengthen border security, intelligence sharing, and joint operations with neighbors.

UNOWAS's grassroots presence can also be tapped to address the root drivers of insecurity, like youth unemployment and lack of economic opportunities that make populations vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers and armed groups. Furthermore, the UNCT in Sierra Leone should explore UNOWAS's conflict prevention, mediation, and good office capabilities to mitigate potential violence and instability stemming from cross-border dynamics.



6.1 DOMESTIC FINANCE

In 2022, the funds generated from domestic revenue sources and grants received by Government was estimated at New Leones (NLe) 11.2 billion (USD 498 million) and is projected to increase to NLe 13.2 billion (USD 586 million) in 2023 (20 percent of GDP). GoSL has mobilized donor funds, mainly in the form of grants, to support various projects in agriculture, education, health, and social protection, largely geared toward provision of basic services and job creation. Grants in 2023 are projected to amount to NLe 4 billion (USD 178 million), split about evenly between programme/budget support and project grants. Figure 18 shows the breakdown between domestic and external donor funds as sources of Government revenue, and Figure 19 shows a further breakdown the domestic sources of funding.

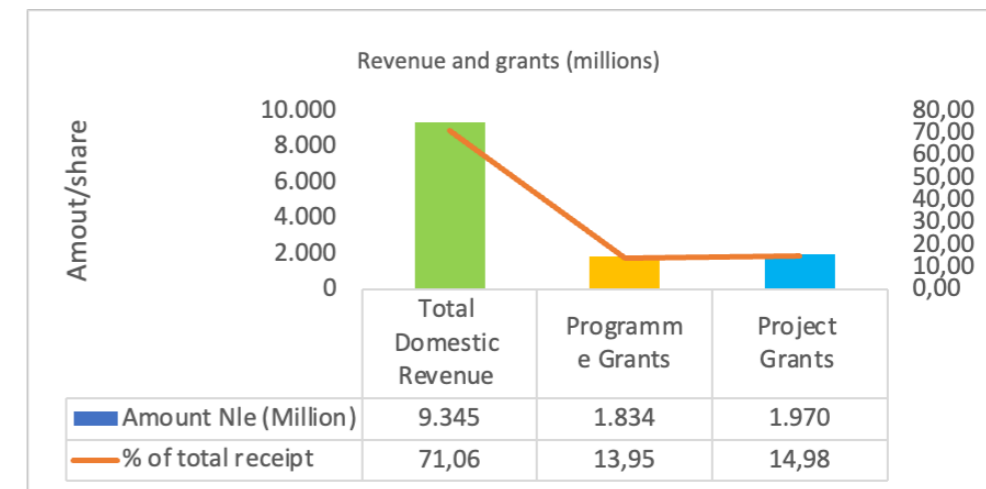


Figure 18: Breakdown between domestic and external donor funds.

Source: Government of Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance.

Exchange rate: 22,500 Le to 1 USD, as per exchange rate at the time the figure were generated,



CHAPTER 6

FINANCING LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES

It is recognized that both public and private finance (international and domestic) have important roles to play in advancing the SDGs, as shown in Figure 17. Therefore, national development strategies should be supported by country specific INFF, and policies should channel domestic resources towards SDG priorities, as well as mobilize and align international development cooperation and investment.

Sierra Leone produced an INFF in 2020 that included a range of recommendations for government to facilitate financial flows in all four areas shown in Figure 17. The 18 recommendations are listed in Annex 5. Some have advanced, while others have been delayed by the disruptions of COVID-19 and supply chain/inflation shocks. The remainder of this section discusses the current financing landscape, considering both domestic and international financial flows.

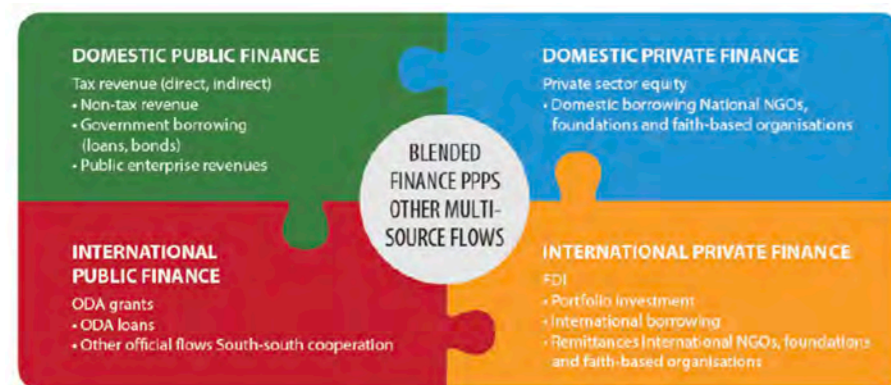


Figure 17: Sources of SDG Finance

Source: SDG Financing and

Funding the Cooperation Framework, Cooperation Framework Companion Piece, UN Development Coordination Office May 2020

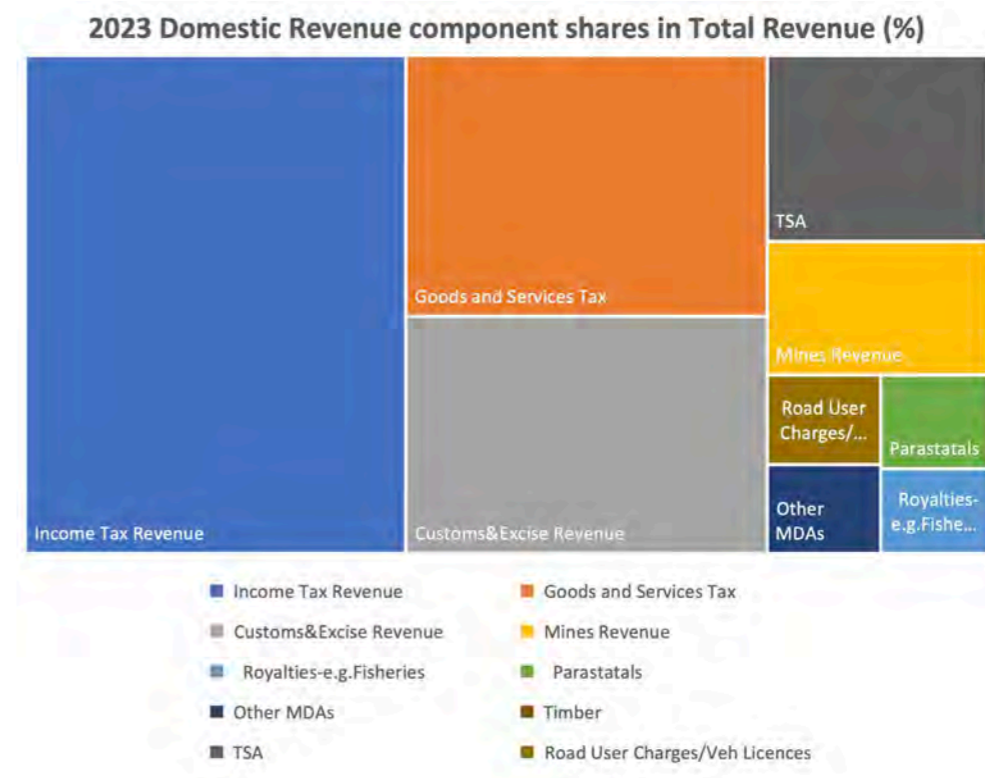


Figure 18: Breakdown between domestic and external donor funds.

Source: Government of Sierra Leone Ministry of Finance.

Exchange rate: 22,500 Le to 1 USD, as per exchange rate at the time the figure were generated,

To support Government efforts to bolster tax revenues, the UN, through the Joint SDG Fund Project on 'Domestic Resource Mobilization,' supported GoSL to implement activities around tax compliance and revenue generation. This project supported the National Revenue Authority (NRA) and the Fiscal Decentralization Unit of the Ministry of Finance to strengthen public financial management and enhance tax compliance and revenue mobilization,¹¹⁹ including through: public-private dialogue with businesses in the informal sector on the importance of the current tax reforms, compliance, and advantages of business

formalization across the country; operational support to the pilot Block Management System, a neighbourhood tax administration approach; and hands-on training in revenue and expenditure forecasting, collection strategies, and reporting for hundreds of fiduciary staff of local councils around the country.

Since its establishment, the Waterloo Block tax office has made gains in tax collection and new business registrations continue to grow, bringing more informal businesses into the tax system.

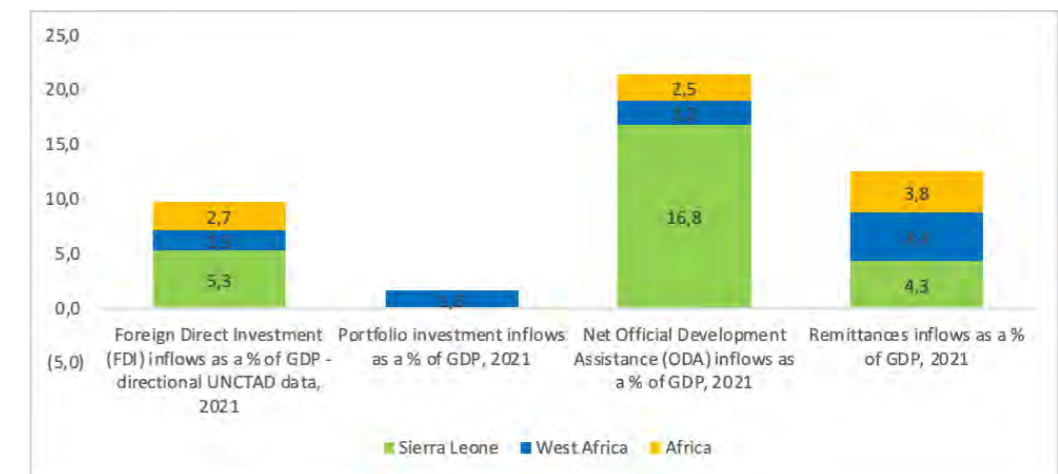


Figure 20: Total financial inflows from international sources as a percentage of GDP

Source: Authors from OECD ODA, UNCTADStat, WB-KNOMAD, AfDB AUC, IMF Balance of Payments

6.2 EXTERNAL FINANCE

Although a country rich in mineral resources such as gold, diamond, bauxite and iron ore, Sierra Leone has attracted little Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) since gaining independence due to political instability and multiple socio-economic problems. FDI inflows were estimated at 218.2 million USD (5.3 percent of GDP) in 2021. Remittances sent through formal channels totaled 179.638 million USD in 2021, representing 4.4 percent of the GDP. The Government is working towards some Diaspora funds being channeled into long-term SDG investments by developing plans for Diaspora-Targeted Bonds and a Development Fund targeting Diaspora investors.

As shown below in Figure 20, the most significant flows of external funds to Sierra Leone come in the form of Official Development Assistance (ODA), which falls in to the 'international public finance category.' As with other severely indebted nations, ODA in Sierra Leone has gone largely to support basic services, but more may be done with ODA to promote investment in productive assets, as Sierra Leone has a relatively undeveloped business and investment climate.

One constraint is that several essential frameworks that guarantee long-term and steady commercial investment prospects remain absent from the nation. The business environment would be enhanced by implementing ongoing tax reform programs, (focusing on minimal complexity and maximal efficiency) strengthen institutions responsible for combating corruption and improving corporate governance, creating a one-stop investment shop, strengthening property rights, and providing access to information for potential investors, whether in the form of ODA or private investment.

Towards this end, the GoSL is developing an Investor Map to provide information on viable investment opportunities that can also promote the country's sustainable and inclusive growth and development. The Investor Map is an important step in reducing the transaction costs, (that is, time spent researching viable investment opportunities), for both domestic and overseas

investors. Related to this are GoSL Initiatives to create a 'One-Stop Shop' for potential investors and the establishment of Specialized Economic Zones to promote efficient investments.

Accessing external funds through climate finance mechanisms represents a huge opportunity for the country. This includes potential revenues from participating in carbon credit markets, funding possible from the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD+) Programme, and grants from various sources for forest conservation or reforestation. One million carbon credits have already been issued by Sierra Leone and can be a good starting point for much broader participation in these markets. This was mainly through the Gola Rainforest Project that enabled local stakeholders to manage the local landscape sustainably to benefit both local communities and wildlife.

¹¹⁹ UNDP Supports Sierra Leone in Domestic Revenue Generation, <https://www.jointsdgfund.org/article/undp-supports-sierra-leone-domestic-revenue-generation>

CHAPTER 7

GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES TOWARDS SDG REALIZATION

This CCA analyzes where Sierra Leone stands in terms of realizing the social, economic, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. This last chapter reflects on gaps and opportunities towards realization of Agenda 2030 organized around several key themes, preceded by some overarching observations:

POVERTY

The country's natural capital is needed to sustain the population and can also provide ongoing streams of revenue for economic development and poverty reduction if sustainably managed. Protection measures are especially important in light of population growth.

INEQUALITY

There is significant inequality between urban and rural environments on measures of poverty and food security, largely due to difficulty in accessing these communities to enable improved health, education, and trade services. Expansion of infrastructure in these areas, including roads, energy, and IT connectivity would address the root causes of many deprivations.

FOOD SECURITY

Food security has worsened over time and the reliance on imports to meet food requirements is a major risk. A transformed agriculture sector could have a significant influence on poverty-reduction and counter inflationary effect and support improved nutrition outcomes.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION

There is a need to accelerate actions and financing for climate adaptation in: Agriculture and Food Security; Environment and Natural Resources; Fisheries and the Coastal Zone; Infrastructure; Disaster Preparedness and Management; Water Resources; and Public Health.

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment is a major driver of rural to urban migration and a main reason that youth turn to drug use and embark on irregular migration. Current systems for providing youth with life and job skills are failing to reach most youth in the country.

FISCAL STABILITY

Maintaining fiscal discipline will be crucial in restoring macroeconomic stability and reducing the debt burden. To complement this, it is vital to fully implement recommendations outlined in the country's Integrated National Financing Framework, including climate finance

GOVERNANCE

Corruption is considered to exist across all levels of government and is cited as a significant obstacle to foreign investment; it also impacts public service delivery and economic development. This requires continued effort to address corruption and increase transparency.

MAINSTREAMING RIGHTS

Some rights holders are not aware of how to claim rights and are not supported in this by the culture and justice sector. Raising awareness among rights holders and capacity building among duty bearers is recommended.

CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

Children face challenges linked to financial limitations pervasive in society, but also due to failure to enforce existing protection measures and shift harmful social norms. Adolescent girls face early marriage, FGM, and inadequate access to SRHR.

DATA GAPS

There is a need to strengthen national capacities to address SDG data gaps, including the use of geographically segmented data, and sex and age-disaggregated data to address gender-related gaps and issues of exclusion in the country. Data gaps impede effective analysis and planning and even where data exists, such as for poverty, it is often outdated.

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RISKS

Among the risks analyzed, those most prominent in terms of Likelihood and Potential Impact relate to: Increased inter-party tension over constitutional and legal reforms; drug abuse, youth marginalization and unemployment, particularly of most vulnerable groups; increased rural-urban divide and irregular migration, particularly of young people; and, over-exploitation of natural resources (timber, over-fishing, land, mineral, sand, etc.) that impacts on sustainability of resources, particularly drinking water.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

To better address the needs of LNOB groups, a people-centred approach, improved governance environment, and ensuring that LNOB groups participate in discussions around solutions are recommended. Root causes relate to poverty, deprivation, and discrimination.

MULTI-LEVEL EMPOWERMENT

UN development activities should target multiple levels in society for transformative change:

1. Individuals - empower individuals and businesses with information and tools for more control over advancing their rights and economic potential.
2. Communities - build potential for community development by fostering inclusivity and building knowledge and capacity on relevant issues.
3. Government enabling environment - support a government with requisite skills and knowledge, trusted by citizens, to effectively deliver key public goods and services.
4. SDG finance - increase financial flows from domestic and international sources by developing multiple financing mechanisms to complement public finance.

The following topical discussion provides analysis on interlinkages among the environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development in Sierra Leone.

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Unsustainable farming, storage and distribution processes, along with environmental factors such as climate change and natural disasters continue to escalate food security challenges. Modernizing the agriculture sector would increase food supply, reduce nutritional deficiencies, provide youth jobs, and reduce reliance on imported food staples. Sector modernization can be driven by youth and is likely to retain more youth in rural areas to work as farmers if avenues are extended for them to acquire the necessary skills and apply for finance to engage in modern agriculture production.

By better equipping farmers, including vulnerable smallholder farmers, with more viable seeds, timely provision of fertilizers, improved agro-processing operations, modern irrigation tools, machines, and other inputs, credit and insurance facilities, and digital tools to better account for weather and market variations, their productivity and income can be enhanced. Equally important will be training farmers on the correct use of these tools through agricultural extension services of the Ministry as well as other initiatives geared towards peer learning.

Prioritization of agrifood system transformation, by leveraging science and innovation and putting in place institutional, policy, and legal environments that ensure consumer and private sector engagement, will also revamp the agricultural sector. The government should work to eliminate any barriers related to import of needed goods and technology, such as those related to import duties or timeliness of processing and distributing incoming goods throughout the country.

An increased supply of food to the population would address food insecurity and nutrition needs and reduce reliance on imported food staples, minimizing the economic hardship brought on by global price fluctuations. Generating a surplus supply of domestically produced food would have

the added benefit of generating foreign currency reserves through exports and serve to bolster the value of the domestic currency.

Agricultural jobs would reduce rural-to-urban youth migration, which creates a situation where some elderly persons in rural areas are left without the financial and social support of younger family members. Rural-to-urban migration also contributes to population growth in urban informal settlement areas and related socio-economic and environmental challenges.

SUSTAINABLE NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Natural resources, if sustainably managed, can boost agricultural production (via more productive land), generate revenues to support social programs and critical infrastructural development (via income earned by selling carbon credits), provide a reliable supply of protein to meet nutritional needs of the population (via improved fish stocks in coastal environments), and support the expansion of eco-tourism (via preserved natural ecosystems in coastal and forested areas).

Designing and marketing bankable projects that make use of the natural resource endowment (via green bonds, carbon credit markets, blue bonds, debt-for-nature swaps, multi-partner grants for forest conservation, etc.) will drive economic recovery, all contributing to employment objectives for youth and opportunities for women and girls to share equally in the benefits. These actions would be key to the country graduating from Least Developed Country status by enabling food systems transformation and clean energy transition, among others.

The preservation of valuable ecosystems also lessens the risk of natural disasters, the occurrence of which draws financial and other resources away from core development goals of the country.

Building resilience to natural disasters and other environmental hazards will accelerate SDG achievement.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

Many steps towards climate adaptation are best taken at the local level, such as effective waste management to keep water drainage systems clear of debris that can result in flooding during heavy rains, or use of sandbags to prevent overflow of waterways. In general, effective management of solid and liquid waste streams is vital for maintaining the quality of environmental resources, such as water and soil. It is important to provide communities with the information and resources necessary for them to effectively manage these activities, including learning from other communities that have successfully realized key objectives. Systems for solid waste management can address, for example, the large amount of plastic waste that enters the ocean and other waterways or ends up in informal waste dumps. Rain-water harvesting can support sustainable agricultural irrigation. Rational and equitable approaches to water and sanitation access can minimize the risk for community conflict and promote overall health. All these activities provide a good opportunity for youth engagement.

Forest communities should be supported for alternative livelihood development and be provided with tools for effective forest stewardship, as well as given a role in formal forest management activities, working hand in hand with the national government.

Effective early warning systems at the local level are crucial to efforts to minimize disaster impacts. Providing community leaders with the knowledge and skills to enact such systems can be an important component of disaster preparedness and response. Helping to build networks among adjacent communities can support more timely

and effective response when disaster occurs.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Human capital development depends on quality health and education services, accessible to all. While some progress has been made in this regard in recent years, this report highlights many areas requiring continued and concentrated effort in the coming years.

Investing in health infrastructure, equipment, and health workers (both in numbers and skills) will improve the quality of services and is essential to minimize the human costs and productivity losses from preventable disease and other negative health outcomes. Continued efforts are required to reduce the high rates of maternal and child mortality. Malnutrition is a significant contributor to infant morbidity and mortality and poses a major obstacle to the country's workforce and economic development. Increasing the number of persons covered under health insurance schemes is pivotal to ensuring more positive health outcomes, given that more than half the households in the country meet the criteria of income poverty and struggle to pay medical bills for even minor health events. Digital tools suited to the local context to help diagnose, treat, and monitor patients should be fully explored and health care workers trained on their use.

The health sector needs to encompass mental health services, which are largely lacking in the country. Among many other needs in this sector are counseling services for those with drug addiction issues, especially abuse of the drug 'Kush' for which hospital admissions are increasing at an alarming rate.

To combat communicable diseases most effectively, it is imperative for the country's authorities together with development partners to continually harness integrated public health

interventions building on the progress of 'One Health' approach for combating zoonotic diseases by mobilizing technical and financial resources for response to shocks. Continued collaboration among the ministries of health, agriculture, and environment on coordinated surveillance and information sharing is vital.

In the education sector, the need to invest more in teacher training and employ more teachers is well supported by information presented on education outcomes and teacher-to-student ratios. This is another area where use of digital tools for teacher training and education in general should be fully utilized. Seeking alternatives to traditional classroom teaching by scale-up of remote learning programs can expand the number of learners, including adults, reached with education programs. There is the possibility to replace books, which are easily outdated, in very short supply with digital alternatives over time.

YOUTH SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

Current systems for providing youth with life and job skills, including literacy and numeracy, are failing to reach most youth in the country. The most efficient way to accelerate this knowledge building is by using culturally relevant digital learning tools, enabled by digital networks and energy networks. This underscores the value of investing in rural energy and digital infrastructure.

Many limiting factors for youth employment link to the 'social' dimension of sustainable development. Youth education, not only at the level of primary and secondary school, but also in the form of TVET and higher educational opportunities, is an important requirement for providing youth with employable job skills. Plus, ramping up entrepreneurial training and financial programs

would expand the number of youth entrepreneurs who, in turn, can create job opportunities for their youth peers.

Youth can have their educational path and ability to participate fully in the economy disrupted because of early sexual debut, unsafe sex, unsafe abortions, STIs and HIV infection, and high rates of sexual and physical violence, all of which predominantly impact young women more than young men. These situations can be drastically minimized by dramatically scaling up youth access to gender-specific sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information and services.

Unemployment and lack of economic opportunity is a main reason that youth turn to drug use, seeing it as a temporary solution to escape from their economic problems. There is an alarming increase in substance abuse, most prevalent in the 20 to 24 age group, the escalation of which will only increase the related social problems and public resources required to address them.

With accelerated skills development, through an expanded network of public and private TVET institutions, youth would be more employable in the formal economy, in ways that serve the social, environmental, and economic objectives of the country. They can be engines driving economic growth through entrepreneurship and SME formation and comprise the workforce for expansion of existing businesses with successful models in field such as agriculture mechanization and post-harvest processing. Private sector engagement for the expansion of TVET and other types of training programs can be an important element to accelerate the creation and rapid scale-up of these programs.

Entrepreneurs can be drivers of local economic growth, especially in rural areas. However, the enabling environment needs to exist, extending

to business mentoring centers, small-scale financial facilities, and programs to promote financial literacy skills. Approaches discussed in this analysis, such as innovation hubs and tools for e-commerce should be easily accessible by those in rural areas, and not just limited to major population hubs. Successful models for use of remote banking/digital finance expanded financial literacy, and business skills development should be expanded to more communities.

INFRASTRUCTURE IN HARD-TO-REACH AREAS

The analysis highlighted that those living in rural areas have much higher poverty rates and face limitations in health, education, and business development opportunities. Infrastructure development like, roads, renewable energy, WASH and digital architecture needs to be accelerated, mostly in agriculture, as an important boost to economic development. This would also reduce a range of social problems e.g. rural-urban migration, unrest among unemployed youth, damage caused by disasters and the taking of undue risks to migrate abroad in search for better economic opportunities.

Locally sourced renewable energy and sustainably managed delivery systems will provide the country with a higher degree of energy independence towards a sustainable development path. While renewable energy in the form of solar power has advanced in many district population centres, there are still many communities that lack access to reliable and affordable energy, and this is slowing down economic growth. The ambitious goals for agricultural development, including modernized farming techniques and post-harvest processing cannot be achieved without reliable energy sources. The country's rice-farming communities and business centres, for instance, continue to

grapple with substantial post-harvest losses which could easily be curbed through mechanized tools and technologies that rely on electricity. Also, cold storage units would allow for increased trade in perishable items.

Designing progressive user fee systems that promote affordability by all residents will be an important element of renewable energy network planning.

Related to this, the much-needed expansion of affordable transportation options will continue to be severely constrained if dependent on imported fuels. A fleet of electric-powered vehicles, buses, and even basic three-wheeled vehicles, powered by solar-generated power, would allow for an expanded network of public transit, reduce the country's dependency on imported fossil fuel, and lower the country's level of greenhouse gas emissions.

Rural infrastructure is an area where there is great potential to capitalize on opportunities for ramped up South-South Cooperation with a range of countries that possess relevant expertise and technologies. To maximize this potential, the country can prepare a pipeline of desired projects for which the country is seeking partners, outlining both needed resources and potential for positive SDG impact. It is also an area where Public-Private partnerships have great potential as the means to realize needed investments.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

The analysis has shown the importance of bolstering foreign private sector investment in Sierra Leone, and expanded country participation in intra-regional and international trade will support economic growth and SDG implementation. The country should exploit opportunities presented

by the Africa Continental Free Trade Area to boost economic growth and revenue generation through significant expansion in export-import trade with other African countries in products and services around which Sierra Leone enjoys a comparative advantage.

Initiatives that raise awareness of these opportunities and how locally owned businesses may engage are vital steps towards trade expansion. Related to this are programs that guide businesses in meeting minimum standards for export products, particularly agricultural products, and understanding the legalities of trade agreements.

Incubators and tech hubs can be crucial in outreach and capacity-building for MSMEs to fully capitalize on digitalization benefits including enhanced ability for e-commerce and trade. They can enhance connections with other tech hubs and facilitate MSMEs' access to support services. They can also promote or lead digital information platforms, connect businesses with potential global partners, and provide valuable market insights to MSMEs.

User-friendly digital tools can provide businesses with market, transport, currency, and product standards information that they need to make informed decisions. The availability of this information in digital form is more easily accessible by groups such as women and youth in rural areas, persons with disabilities, and smallholder farmers, whose ability to participate in centrally based workshops or absorb complex informational documents could otherwise be a barrier to trade activities.

GOVERNANCE AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Governance challenges can be major impediments to all three dimensions of sustainable development. Protecting natural resources,

fostering economic growth, enhancing human capital capabilities, and addressing weaknesses in governance systems calls for expedited structural transformation. Corruption and lack of clear and transparent policies to cover all aspects of private investment limit development of a competitive market economy and impede the growth of FDI.

Similarly, the ability to attract other types of external funds, including from international donors (through ODA), and from the diaspora (through diaspora bonds and investment funds), often hinges on whether the recipient investment funds/vehicles are deemed to have clear objectives, practices to ensure transparent operations, and oversight bodies with multi-stakeholder participation.

Government systems are central to public service delivery for sectors such as health, education, social protection, and infrastructure. The more that the public understands about how these systems work, and the extent to which they are funded by national and local budgets, the more enabled civil society will be to provide feedback to ensure that the systems are responding to public priorities. By increasing the availability of planning, expenditure, and performance data of different government bodies at the national, district, and local level, the potential for feedback and oversight will be enhanced.

Greater use of digital tools for providing information and collecting feedback from end users will result in a more efficient equitable and responsive government services. For example, WASH, where digital avenues for citizen feedback on service provision and reporting of waste or misuse, can help with continual improvement of services. Similar feedback mechanisms can be designed for the health and education sectors, where civil society can easily report on the extent to which planned programs and expenditure are reaching the intended groups, such as rural teachers or children with disabilities. This type

of reporting could also feed into SDG monitoring platforms.

Effective government oversight is central to sectors such as banking, fisheries and mining and minerals. Yet, some sectors suffer from wide-spread perceptions of corruption, exacerbated by lack of transparency in operations and enforcement. Hotlines to report corruption, in place to some extent, can be expanded to be more accessible and made known to more of the population. The Anti-corruption commission should be reinforced to build on existing legislation and ensure every culprit is prosecuted for offences irrespective of their status in society.

Transparency in national and local fiscal operations, to include tax collection and revenue expenditures, is vital to maintain the public confidence in the tax system and willingness to pay taxes. A widening national and local tax base, managed with modern, efficient tax collection and auditing systems, can catalyze key SDG investments. Overall strengthened financial management and targeted steps to address illicit financial flows are also necessary to eliminate leakages in the system that drain resources from serving the public good.

MAINSTREAM RIGHTS

It has been recognized that major efforts are needed for GEWE, PWDA, SRHR, labor and other rights provisions to impact the daily lives of individuals. Many rights holders, especially in rural areas, are not aware of these rights or how to claim them and the enabling environments are not in place. Cultural change, especially to promote equality and non-discrimination elements, would be advanced by public awareness campaigns including targeted outreach to community leaders, CSO groups, social influencers and the rights holders themselves.

A range of culturally appropriate and user-friendly methods should be considered based on their ability to reach target audiences, and

their efficiency in terms of cost and complexity of distribution. This may include radio programs, short, animated videos geared towards youth and those with low literacy skills, town hall meetings, and cultural performances. A network analysis study could help in understanding how information is passed among persons in different social groups, including young women, artisanal miners, and persons with disabilities.

It is important that rights are realized at both national and local levels, and this is furthered by development of the capacities of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and/or of rights-holders to claim their rights. Yet presently, action on issues such as gender and disability inclusion are not standardized across all MDAs and Local Councils. To better support, systematically, the realization of rights, focal points need to be appointed and these, provided with the necessary capacity. Mainstreaming them into the budget systems is a key part of this.

Gender discrimination and violence against women and girls is not only a significant social and human rights issue, but also a main challenge to economic development in Sierra Leone. Women and girls are commonly subjected to social marginalization, discrimination in economic matters, harmful social practices such as FGM/C and child marriage, and forms of exploitation such as school-related sexual abuse. When subjected to these unsafe and abusive environments, women and girls are prevented from realizing their full potential as students, parents, and workers in the economy.

For example, pregnancy at a young age resulting from sexual exploitation reduces the likelihood of a girl staying in school and limits achievement of national education goals that drive progress towards the sustainable development goals. Survivors of violence have an altered sense of well-being that may prevent them from claiming their rights and fully participating in social and economic activities.

The empowerment of women requires gender sensitive data. The lack of gender statistics overshadows Sierra Leone's effort with lost data in the country's report, as it equally undermines effort to adequately accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Goals. According to the UN Women Gender Data Hub related to SDG, about 58 percent of the Sierra Leone's gender data are missed, and at least 31 percent lack performance.¹²⁰

Many gaps identified in this analysis relate to children under the age of 18, many stemming from economic and financial resource limitations pervasive in society, and some due to failure to enforce existing protection measures and harmful social norms. Child protection issues are vital to the country's welfare and require additional human resources, community awareness, and legal and policy changes to provide greater protection.

Wide-ranging and noteworthy are the challenges faced by adolescent girls, such as FGM, early marriage, (often resulting in early pregnancy), Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG), inadequate access to SRHR, and limited literacy and numeracy skills for many. There is no concrete national commitment to protecting rights and eliminating the practice of FGM for girls under age 18.

Failing to support the rights of adolescent girls puts more than half of the future adult population at a disadvantage to realizing their full potential within the community and workplace. Without bold steps to assure their rights, the social and economic development of the country will be severely constrained.

INCLUSIVITY IN COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

From the standpoint of individual political empowerment, there is a strong belief among young people that their needs are not met by

local leadership structures. Although youth are cognizant of the important role Local Councils play in delivering basic services to communities, the enabling environment is not present for them to participate actively in national or local decision-making processes. Similarly, while the GEWE Act provides for increased representation of women in political and economic roles, local power structures and cultural norms may limit women's ability to be fully embraced in these roles by local communities. Changing attitudes about gender roles and creating a climate of zero tolerance for VAWG are key elements of realizing the promise of the GEWE Act.

Models that have proven successful to increase the engagement of youth, women, and vulnerable groups in community affairs should be extended to more communities. Among other things, these initiatives enhance their overall security and sense of empowerment of these groups, while also reducing risks, such as those associated with marginalized youth who feel excluded from political processes. Successful models include the set-up community grievance redress mechanisms using the Fambul Tok¹²¹ approach to engage a cross-section of community members, along with multi-stakeholder decision-making platforms that include local and district-level government officials as well as varied stakeholders to guide community development. Targeted programs can help to build leadership and literacy skills of historically excluded groups, such as young women and persons with disabilities, and facilitate their meaningful engagement in local affairs.

ENFORCEMENT OF SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS

Weak enforcement of existing laws is an issue for women's rights, disability rights, rights of persons living with HIV, addressing water and soil pollution,

protecting wetlands, ensuring compliant mining practices and national park protection. Additional capacity building is needed across the broad spectrum of enforcement and justice activities. For example, enhancement of tools and capacity for enforcement of environmental laws by relevant MDAs, knowledge among local law enforcement on how to respond to SGBV cases and understanding by local government of how improve disability access in public buildings.

Economic expansion and diversification will ultimately be advanced by enforcing environmental laws designed to protect key natural resources, such as water, forests, and coastal zones that support growth sectors such as fisheries and ecotourism.

For increased enforcement to be realized there is a need to build capacity among judges and magistrates on legal provisions related to social and environmental protection and to expand the system of legal aid available to vulnerable persons to pursue justice when their rights are violated.

EXPANDED SDG FINANCE

This report outlines the country's narrow fiscal space and high debt burden. Only by charting a path towards a more consistent and reliable flow of domestic resources, which are minimally impacted by external economic shocks, can the country support ongoing programs in health, education, and other social services. There are key steps the country can take to expand sources of domestic revenue (both public and private) and reduce the country's heavy reliance on overseas development assistance.

The country prepared an Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF) in 2020, and formation of an INFF Steering Committee to guide more regular, structured coordination between Government, development partners, and the private sector, would accelerate realization of the

INFF's 18 recommendations (see Annex 5). These recommendations address the financing gap by, for example, improving the lending environment to businesses, (particularly in the agriculture sector), promoting budgeting systems that better address gender equality and climate objectives, and pursuing opportunities related to international climate finance, diaspora finance and FDI. The country could develop diaspora investment vehicles, such as bonds, to channel diaspora funds beyond remittances to coordinated investments to address major gaps in infrastructure, such as roads, energy, and digital connectivity.

The country also has a potential major source of finance from selling more forest-related carbon credits on the global market. The selling of credits would not be a one-time source of income, but a steady stream of income overtime as forest assets continually capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere to generate marketable carbon credits. Revenues from such transactions can not only benefit local forest communities, but the country overall, if an approach is effectively designed and managed. As many countries and businesses have made pledges of 'net-zero' carbon footprints for the 2030-2050 window, this is an opportune time for Sierra Leone to collaborate effectively with trusted partners and governments to scale-up carbon credit trading to benefit the country.

Setting up the proper governance structure and employing technology such as drones for verification to certify credits is a complex task but likely warranted by the potential revenue generated. These steps will be most cost-effective if ambitious plans are set for scale-up, learning from successful domestic pilot projects. Established development partners of Sierra Leone can advise on topics such as market analysis, standards, and policy requirements, as well potentially support start-up costs.

¹²⁰ <https://data.unwomen.org/country/sierra-leone>

¹²¹ Fambul Tok is an approach for community owned peacebuilding and development that has been successful in Sierra Leone.

Carbon trading is only possible with conservation and sustainable management of forest assets. This indicates the need to urgently take steps in this direction, including for forest in the Western Area Peninsular National Park, which this report has documented as key to water security for the capital city of Freetown and surrounding areas. Similarly, forest assets will continue to be depleted at an alarming rate until the country puts major effort into converting to more efficient and cleaner cooking methods that rely less on charcoal. Loss of major forest assets will be irreversible in the foreseeable future.

GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS

The UN Sustainable Development Group has recently provided guidance to countries on 6 key transitions that can serve as investment pathways to deliver on the SDGs. These are:

1. Food systems;
2. Energy access and affordability;
3. Digital connectivity;
4. Education;
5. Jobs and social protection; and
6. Climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.

In addition, 4 engine room actions have been identified that will advance the above priorities:

1. policy and regulatory frameworks
2. pipelines of bankable and market-ready national projects with participation of both public and private sectors
3. convening all relevant actors the 'deal room'
4. committing to capacity building at-scale to support public institutions and civil society.

The above have been considered in drafting this CCA and will be guiding factors during development of the new UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

Equally important in design of the new Cooperation Framework will be considering ways to mitigate the risk factors outlined in Annex 6. This table shows the likelihood and expected impact of different types of risks on SDG progress, including risks related to political stability, social cohesion, rule of law, and food security.





ANNEX 1

SECTOR POLICIES, STRATEGIES, AND INITIATIVES

This Annex outlines a range of Government policies, strategies, and initiatives designed to address the issues discussed in Chapter 1.

HEALTH

Since 2016, the government has issued several health care policies, strategies, guidelines, protocols and action plans. These include the National Health and Sanitation Policy 2021 (NHSP) and the accompanying National Health Sector Strategy 2021-2025 (NHSS). A National Healthcare Financing Strategy was developed in 2021.

Other key documents include a Community Health Policy 2021-25, Child Survival Action Plan (2023-2025) and EPMM-ENAP acceleration plan (2023-2025). The Ministry of Health (MOH) has declared Maternal and Child deaths a public health

emergency, and prioritized nutrition investments through the Nutrition match fund and in the new MTNDP under development as well. The MoH also drafted National Immunization Policy 2023 (NIP) to holistically guide implementation of life-course approach delivery of quality immunization services to address Vaccine Preventable Diseases in the country.

The NHSS aims to create more robust health systems and increase the quality of healthcare services, while the NHSP seeks to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) for essential

services as part of the Government's UHC Road Map to comprehensive Universal Health Coverage by 2030.

To address this, and in coordination with the country's UHC goal, a major health financing step is development of the Sierra Leone Health Insurance Scheme (SLeSHI). The scheme is expected to provide financial protection against catastrophic health costs and high out-of-pocket expenses.

To address the growing incidence of NCD and injuries, several initiatives were pursued. The health sector strategic plan (NHSSP) acknowledges the ongoing epidemiologic transition (process by which the pattern of mortality and disease in a population is transformed) from a high communicable disease burden to the steady rise in non-communicable disease and injuries. The government launched the Non-Communicable Diseases Policy in 2020 and progress has been made in establishing services such as cancer services and chemotherapy treatment.

To better address public health threats, Sierra Leone developed a comprehensive 5-year multi-hazard strategy and a National Public Health

Emergency Preparedness and Response plan (NAPHS 2018-2022). There is also government commitment to address concerns around the global health security agenda (GHSA). According to the International Health Regulations (SPAR) report to WHO, the overall health security capacity of the country improved from 38 percent in 2018 to 51 percent in 2021. The country's Public Health Act 2022 gave muscle to the December 2023 launch of the National Public Health Agency (NPHA), which is charged with the responsibilities of developing and implementing national public health policies and strategies, strengthening surveillance and data collection systems, preventing and controlling infectious diseases, promoting health education and behavior change, and preparing for and responding to public health emergencies.

The Ministry of Employment Labour and Social Security and its Social Partners, National HIV/AIDS Secretariat, UNAIDS and People Living with HIV/AIDS have collaborated on a Sierra Leone HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy as a key component of the national response to HIV and AIDS.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Interventions by government to address substance abuse include the establishment of a National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and Parliament's domestication of the WHO FCTC into national law. Ongoing sensitization is being carried out by government ministers in multiple regions on the ills of using illicit drug substances. This is in collaboration with the security sector, which is working to limit drug distribution, however even the Sierra Leone Police has recognized that despite their robust efforts there is little success in clamping down on drug peddlers and that selling of illegal drugs is on the increase. Data show worsening of the problem.

Notably, the Tobacco and Nicotine Control Law was enacted in 2022, with comprehensive steps to curb demand as well as supply. Also, the Ministry of Health established the Alcohol Control Technical Working Group (ACTWG) that has successfully worked together to develop a policy aimed at controlling alcohol use.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Sierra Leone continues to advance towards an enabling policy environment for addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights, including for young people. The country has committed to strengthening family planning as part of its FP2030 commitments, including a focus on transforming social and gender norms, addressing the family planning needs of young people and attaining sustainable financing for family planning commodities.

EDUCATION

Data from the World Bank shows that Sierra Leone has the highest expenditure on education in the region as a share of government expenditure, with support from donors including the EU, the World Bank and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa. Under the Education Sector Plan 2022-2026 (ESP), 35 percent of the education budget will go to primary schools, with about 30 percent each going to secondary schools and higher education. Pre-primary schooling is only allocated 2 percent of the budget.

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) aims for educational inclusion of historically marginalized groups, such as pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children from rural and underserved areas, and children from low-income families. Towards this, the country overturned the ban on visibly pregnant schoolgirls attending school in 2020 and also launched the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools in 2021, intending to reach neglected groups.

One of the key priorities of the 2022-2026 Education Sector Plan is to increase the percentage of youths in non-formal programmes certified as functionally literate and numerate and in 2023, the MBSSE initiated the process of developing a Non-formal Education Policy.

There is no stand-alone policy for comprehensive sexuality education however, it is integrated into a number of policies and strategies which highlights

the Government's commitment to its rollout, for example it is an integral part of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage under Pillar Three-Enabling Schools Environment. Furthermore, the provision of comprehensive sexuality education is a key strategy for ensuring retention and completion in both the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools and the Out of School Children's Strategy.

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, National Policy on Radical Inclusion Policy 2021, aligns with a number of international and regional human-rights agreements and obligations to which Sierra Leone is a signatory, including: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Salamanca Statement, 1994; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1999; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) 2003.

¹²² World Bank Data shows that the Government of Sierra Leone has spent 34.2 percent of the total of government expenditure, what represents 8.8 percent of the GDP in 2020. and World Bank Data. <<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GB.ZS?locations=SL>> accessed 21 December 2022. However, much of the budget is donor funded.

COMPREHENSIVE SEXUALITY EDUCATION

There is no stand-alone policy for comprehensive sexuality education however, it is integrated into a number of policies and strategies which highlights the Government's commitment to its rollout, for example it is an integral part of the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage under Pillar Three-Enabling Schools Environment. Furthermore, the provision of comprehensive sexuality education is a key strategy for ensuring retention and completion in both the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools and the Out of School Children's Strategy.

The Education Sector Plan 2022-2026 includes the training of teachers on comprehensive sexuality education as a key indicator. Good progress has been made on ensuring that Sexuality Education, known as Child and Adolescent Health and Life Skills in the Basic Education Cycle and Adolescent Health and Life skills in the senior cycle, is

included in the 2020 Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the 2022 Senior Secondary Curriculum framework. In the Basic Education Curriculum Comprehensive Sexuality Education is integrated into the syllabi of seven subjects: Social Studies, Integrated Sciences, Physical Health Education, Religious Morality Education, Home Economics, English Studies and Expressive Arts and Entertainment. Teaching and learning materials have been developed and an in-service training package is currently being rolled out in pilot districts. At the senior level comprehensive sexuality has been included in the curriculum as a standalone subject. It is, however, not compulsory so learners may elect to not study the subject. This is of particular concern as currently comprehensive sexuality education is not examinable at NPSE, BECE or WASCE level.

MIGRATION

The government of Sierra Leone has demonstrated its commitment and leadership for migration solutions in different ways, namely through the adoption of the National Policy on Migration in January 2022. Furthermore, in April 2022, the government passed the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migration Smuggling Act 2022, providing support for the national anti-trafficking task force. Challenges remain to translate policy prescriptions into operational and actionable realities due to the widespread lack of resources and technical capacities for effective public administration. Notwithstanding that Sierra Leone does not have a fully dedicated migration agency in charge of supervising, coordinating and monitoring migration related matters across the country.

The government of Sierra Leone submitted a report in the context of the global UN Network on

Migration, which aims to assess progress made against the 23 objectives of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM). Since December 2023 the Republic of Sierra Leone joined the Champion Countries Initiative which is a voluntary collective of Member States committed to promoting effective GCM implementation, follow-up and review with support from the UN Network on Migration to exchange and share insights, lessons learned and promising practices and accelerate actions for the achievement of the objectives of the GCM.

LABOR MIGRATION

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security, in collaboration with other state agencies and social partners, formulated the National Labour Migration Policy to articulate and guide the management of labour migration into and out of Sierra Leone. The overriding objective of the policy is to mainstream labour migration in the development agenda by creating an enabling environment into which labour immigrants and emigrants can make significant contribution to the development of the country. Specifically, the policy aims to strengthen good governance of labour migration, promote the protection of migrants' rights and harness the contribution of Sierra Leone's emigrants and immigrants for national development. In 2023 the Ministry of Employment Labour and Social

Security enacted the Overseas Employment and Migrant Workers Act, 2023.

In 2018 Sierra Leone moved towards recognizing, promoting and implementing decent work for women and men in the country by ratifying the following ILO Conventions and Protocols:

- the Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97);
- the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143);
- the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189);
- the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention 1930.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Sierra Leone has declared sexual violence a national emergency and formed a Presidential task force on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).¹²³ In addition, the country launched a National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sierra Leone, revised the Sexual Offence Act;¹²⁴ and establishing a GBV 116 toll-free hotline to provide counseling and referral services to

survivors of GBV. In June, the minister of gender and children's affairs stated that the government would amend the Child Rights Act to outlaw early forced marriage and FGM against minors. Government is also constituting a high-level taskforce on sexual exploitation of children and working to put together a plan of action to address issues affecting children living and working on the street.

CHILD WELFARE

The Government has prioritized child protection and child rights in national development planning and has systematically invested resources with major support from UN, development stakeholders and in partnership with civil society organizations. The Human Resource Strategy for Social Workforce was endorsed envisaging recruitment and deployment of 286 additional social workers of whom 138 were recruited, trained, and deployed by the Ministry of Social Welfare with support from UNICEF in 2023.

¹²³ <https://firstlad.gov.sl/task-force-on-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-report-to-president-bio/>

¹²⁴ The revised Sexual Offence Act 2019 provides new sentencing guidelines relating to the increase of the maximum penalty for rape and sexual penetration of a child from fifteen years to life imprisonment and the introduction of the offence of aggravated sexual assault, among others.

CHILD LABOUR

In 2022, Sierra Leone made moderate advancement in effort to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government passed the Anti-Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling Act, which increased prison terms for sex traffickers and established a trust fund for survivors of human trafficking to pay for shelter, medical services, and legal aid. The government also launched a hotline to report trafficking crimes and established a National Labour Migration Policy to promote the rights of migrants and increase public awareness of human trafficking.

AGRICULTURE

Although past governments did not allocate sufficient funds for the agriculture sector in line with the Maputo commitment, the new administration formed in 2023 has designated agriculture as a development priority. The newly launched Feed Salone initiative¹²⁵, with an anticipated national budget commitment of between 2.6 percent to 10 percent, shows great potential to expand the agricultural sector and reduce the country's reliance on import of key agricultural commodities, in addition to promoting agricultural mechanization and irrigation.

The government of Sierra Leone remains committed to supporting farmers by offering free farm inputs and mechanization services through the e-voucher scheme, each amounting to about US\$950.00 per farmer from January to June 2023. This initiative aims to increase agricultural productivity, improve food security, and generate employment opportunities. Additional support to the country's farming communities includes those associated with a World Bank financial grant of US\$50 million towards strengthening of the resilience of food systems in the country.

BLUE ECONOMY

Sierra Leone recognizes the centrality of its coastal and marine ecosystems in its national development. This is demonstrated by a number of steps that it undertakes at global, regional and national levels. The country has, for example, been at the forefront of supporting international commitments for actions that will eventually stimulate its blue economy. Among them is the country's continued support to various policy processes and priorities for protection of the marine and coastal environments, including through the multilateral environmental agreements. For instance, at the September 2023 78th United Nations General Assembly

September 2023 at the 78th United Nations General Assembly in New York, Sierra Leone became part of the first four countries in the ECOWAS region to sign the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty.

Sierra Leone is also a party to the Abidjan Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa Region. The country's acceding to these Treaties demonstrates its political commitment to sustainability of marine ecosystems.

¹²⁵ Feed Salone: Transforming the Agriculture Sector for Food Security - Tribune Times Newspaper (tribunetimesl.com)

TRADE

The government in 2023 validated four trade policies to support economic diversification. These are (i) The National Cooperative Development Policy, (ii) the Agribusiness Policy, (iii) the Special Economic Zone Policy, and (iv) the National Industrial Policy. Through these policies, a revamped and restructured Ministry of Trade and Industry regulates trade barriers and maintains a supportive atmosphere to foster trade for citizens and the private sector, including developing capacity to create high-quality products and services competitively and sustainably.

ROAD SAFETY

In Sierra Leone, the Road Transport Authority under the Ministry of Transport and Aviation is responsible for promoting road safety in Sierra Leone. In 2021, a five-year Strategic Road Safety Plan 2020-2025 was developed. The Sierra Leone Roads Authority (SLRA) manages the national roads.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Sierra Leone has produced a National Data Strategy to provide a roadmap for the data economy and to improve data use in government and the private sector.¹²⁶ The Strategy aims to set a regulatory regime that is not overly burdensome for smaller businesses, but rather supports responsible innovation. The roadmap focuses on key areas, including digital infrastructure and access; digital skills and human capital development; digital government, e-commerce, and digital financial

services, as well as emerging technologies, innovation, and digital entrepreneurship.

The government has acknowledged the potential of e-commerce in driving economic growth, enhancing trade, and fostering entrepreneurship and is aiming to improve digital infrastructure, enable a conducive business environment for e-commerce, and expand internet connectivity across the country, especially in rural areas.

MINING, MINERALS AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), in collaboration with national and international partners, has formulated several policies, enacted laws, and established systems to ensure effective environmental governance. On 9th August 2022, the Parliament of Sierra Leone enacted the Mines and Minerals Development Act, 2022. The Act

provides, through the agency of the National Minerals Agency (NMA), for effective measures to reduce the harmful effect of exploration and mining activities on life, property, and the environment; the transparent and accountable management of the mineral sector in accordance with international best practice and for improved

welfare of communities affected by exploration and mining activities.

On 6th September 2022, the Environment Protection Agency Act 2022 was passed. The Act established the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) with the mandate to ensure effective and efficient protection and management of the environment in co-operation with government agencies, local councils and other bodies and

institutions.

In March 2023, the country played crucial roles in the formation of the newly established African Forum of Environment Protection Agencies (AFEPA). The Forum is one of the central avenues for strengthening the implementation of regular African Ministerial Conference for the Environment (AMCEN) at the regional, sub-regional, and national levels.

LAND MANAGEMENT

Through the country's Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and Environment, it has, for example revised its level of ambition for combating land degradation and desertification as per their National Land Degradation Neutrality Targets set to be achieved by 2030, as State Party to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). Among others the targets range from reforestation, rehabilitation of degraded areas, wetlands conservation, and sustainable land

management practices. This includes a target to restore 175 square kilometers of its forest lands that have lost forest cover, in addition to 12,237 square kilometers of degraded lands. The country is also working on strengthening policy-based modalities for to support its land reclamation and land rehabilitation interventions in lands that have been degraded by mining activities including those for iron ore, diamonds, bauxite, rutile and gold.

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Sierra Leone has made significant progress in establishing a legal framework to promote access to information as a means of enhancing transparency and good governance. The country passed the Right to Access Information Act in 2013 and The Right to Access Information Commission established the National Open Data Council (ODC) of Sierra Leone to ensure that greater awareness and compliance is achieved by all Public Authorities, in proactively strengthening availability and access to quality data and information. This can only happen if all the key mechanisms are strengthened.

PEACE AND SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

On 20th April 2023, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) officially launched the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict as well as promotion and maintenance of peace. The Commission plays a crucial role in addressing historical grievances and promoting dialogue among various stakeholders,¹²⁷ and played a key role in the recent elections.

¹²⁶ SierraLeone_NationalDataStrategy_2023_v1.pdf (moic.gov.sl)

¹²⁷ <https://hdcentre.org/?s=sierra-leone-peacebuilding-needs-assessment>



ANNEX 2

SECTORS THAT WILL BE MOST IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY

Regional climate models predict increased temperatures and highly variable rainfall levels, both of which require adaptation in agriculture practices and production. Rice production and farmer livelihoods are especially vulnerable to changes in precipitation levels, given that rice is a staple food crop and grown mainly on smallholder farms under rain-fed conditions. This vulnerability is against a background of persistent rural poverty and impacts farmers who do not hold insurance to protect against severe weather events or possess resources to invest in irrigation and other agricultural technologies to adapt to varying

rainfall levels. Climate impacts are also expected to increase incidence of pest and animal disease outbreaks that will need to be managed. Extreme weather events are expected to increase. Warm spells will increase crop water requirements and constrain crop and livestock production in water-limited areas of the country. Increased high rainfall events will potentially lead to flooding. Rain-fed agriculture, which dominates in the country, faces risk of crop and livestock losses that could significantly worsen already low levels of food security.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Valuable ecosystems in Sierra Leone will be severely impacted by climate change. Increased storm surges, flash floods and high winds, accompanied by pollution, landslides, coastal erosion, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and invasive species, will further stress fragile ecosystems. The proportion of land classified as tropical dry forest, tropical very dry forest, and sub-tropical moist forest will shift, particularly in the south and east of the country. A shift in vegetation from tropical rain forest to tropical

dry forest will alter the composition of flora and fauna. Existing challenges of forest management, including poor governance, weak law enforcement, lack of coordination among sector ministries, and illegal harvesting will need to be addressed to adapt to climate change impacts. Additionally, steps to reduce deforestation are required, as this increases the potential for both landslides and flood when tree roots that stabilize the ground are removed.

FISHERIES AND THE COASTAL ZONE

Climate change is having profound impact on coastal environments and fisheries including ecosystems that support fishing and tourism livelihoods. Sea level rise, loss of coastal ecosystems, inundation of major rivers, flash flood during the rainy season, and saline intrusions due to decreased water flows in the dry season all impact local livelihoods, in addition to having measurable environmental consequences. Decreased river flows, rising salinity of estuaries, loss of fish and aquatic plant species, and reduction in coastal

sediments due to climate change are all likely to damage local economies and food security for coastal and riverside populations.

The coast, which will be impacted by sea level rise, beach erosion and coastal flooding is densely populated and key to the economy because of ports and tourist facilities. Yet several coastal communities lack flood escape routes due to low road elevation.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Rapid urbanization has not been accompanied by sufficient resources to manage the growth and cities lack investment funds to cope with the accelerated demand for infrastructure and services. Climate change poses additional risks, as lack of infrastructure can increase vulnerability to events such as floods, mudslides, and extreme heat periods, especially for populations in informal settlements. Water and sanitation infrastructure are sensitive to storm surge, sea level rise and flooding. Wastewater collection and treatment

facilities are often situated at the lowest point possible, as their operation often depends on gravity flow and can easily be inundated by water level rise. Roads are by far the primary mode of transport in Sierra Leone, supplemented by river transport in some areas. Both river systems and roads are often impassable during the rainy season, when roads flood this makes it difficult for farmers to transport their agricultural goods to market.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MANAGEMENT

Sierra Leone's vulnerability to severe droughts, flood and storms caused by climate change is significant. Already, urban, and rural seasonal flooding recurrent flash flooding and coastal flooding are commonly observed, leading to flooding of agricultural fields and low-lying areas and water overflowing onto roads and into homes. Floods overwhelm existing systems, contaminating drinking water and creating sewage overflows. Multiple areas have been impacted by flooding in

just the last year, extending to almost all regions of the country. There are also transboundary issues, as heavy rainfall in neighboring countries may cause flooding due to overflow of transboundary rivers that extend from Guinea or Liberia into Sierra Leone. Conversely, streams and swamps dry up during severe droughts and populations, significantly reducing water availability especially to the rural poor, who depend on them in a variety of ways.

WATER RESOURCES

Water quality and availability are highly vulnerable to climate impacts, yet reliable access to clean water is essential for multiple uses, and shortages can exacerbate social vulnerability and poverty for parts of the population. Major water uses in Sierra Leone include domestic (drinking, cooking, hygiene), agriculture (irrigation), industrial (beer, spirits, soft drink, cooling, and waste disposal), and hydroelectric power production. Urban

water resources are especially under strain, as rural migration to the capital of Freetown during and since the civil conflict has placed increased pressure on these resources. Shifting rainfall patterns have led to reduced flow of rivers and streams and decreased access to water, as well as a lower supply of energy that relies on water flow to meet cooling, lighting, and heating needs.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Incidents of temperature-related morbidity and mortality are projected to increase, as climate change projections for Sierra Leone reveal a significant positive trend in warm periods and a 5 to 10 percent increase in warm nights. Increased temperatures are associated with increased episodes of diarrheal diseases, seafood poisoning, and higher levels of dangerous pollutants. Waterborne diseases are expected to increase with more frequent and intense flooding and heavy rains increase the likelihood of communicable disease outbreaks. More intense dry seasons in the north and west of the country, accompanied by increased temperatures, have already been

linked to reduced water quality and disease outbreaks. With one of the highest malnutrition and child mortality rates in the world, climate-related health risks will place additional burden on the population and the underdeveloped and understaffed health system.





ANNEX 3

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND FOCUS GROUPS

Focus group discussions were conducted by a national consultant contracted by the UN, targeting those LNOB groups where it was felt that information was. The focus groups were for:

- Street Children – 13 children from the group “Future for Children”
- Persons with Substance Abuse Issues – 12 persons
- Homeless Persons – 20 persons from the Dwarzak Area of Freetown

These discussions helped to gather insights on the difficulties they face, their perceptions of being left behind in development and social services, the specific categories of individuals facing severe deprivations, age brackets most affected, reasons for being left behind, geographical concentration, missed opportunities, and governance challenges. The aim was to inform the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) document and address the unique needs of these marginalized groups.

KEY FINDINGS

DIFFICULTIES FACED

Participants highlighted various challenges, including lack of access to education, healthcare, shelter, and employment opportunities, as well as facing stigma and discrimination in society.

DEPRIVATION AND BEING LEFT BEHIND

Most participants felt deprived of essential services and opportunities, leading to a sense of being left behind in societal development.

CATEGORIES FACING SEVERE DEPRIVATIONS

Individuals with disabilities, women, and children, and those struggling with substance abuse were identified as facing intersecting deprivations and discrimination, making them the most marginalized within the group.

AGE BRACKET OF THOSE MOST LEFT BEHIND

Participants identified young adults and adolescents as the age bracket most left behind, often due to a lack of support systems and opportunities for growth and development.

SYSTEMS ISSUES

Participants cited systemic inequalities like corruption, lack of effective policies addressing their needs, inadequate social welfare programs, and limited representation in decision-making processes as key reasons for being left behind in societal progress.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONCENTRATION

The group(s) were mostly concentrated in urban areas, particularly in informal settlements and areas with high rates of poverty and crime.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop targeted programs and services to address the specific needs of street children, homeless individuals, and drug addicts.
2. Strengthen governance structures to ensure better representation and inclusion of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.
3. Increase access to education, healthcare, and social support services for vulnerable populations.
4. Raise awareness and combat stigma and discrimination against marginalized groups in society.

The finding underscores the urgent need for targeted interventions, inclusive policies, and improved governance to address the unique needs of these marginalized groups and ensure that no one is left behind in the country's development efforts.



ANNEX 4

CCA SECTIONS THAT RELATE TO GOSL'S BIG FIVE

Topic / CCA Section Number	Feed Salone	Human Capital Development	Youth Employment Scheme	Revamping the Public Service Architecture	Technology and Infrastructure
Social Dimension					
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) - 1.1.3		X			X
Health and Nutrition		X			
Education - 1.1.4		X			
Migration - 1.1.5			X		X
Violence Against Women and Girls - 1.1.6		X			X
Child Protection- 1.1.7		X			
Economic Dimension					
Micro-Economic Trends- 1.2.1		X	X		
Economic Diversification- 1.2.2					X
Food Security and Agriculture- 1.2.3	X				
Blue Economy- 1.2.4		X			X
Private Sector Growth- 1.2.5	X				
Employment and Decent Work- 1.2.6	X	X	X		
Infrastructure- 1.2.7					X
Environment Dimension					
Land, Forest, and Biodiversity- 1.3.1	X	X			
Water Resources- 1.3.2		X			X
Pollution and Waste Management- 1.3.3		X			
Governance					
Rule of Law and /Access to Justice- 1.4.3		X			
Political Environment- 1.4.4		X			
Local Governance - 1.4.5		X		X	
Interlinkages Among the Three Dimensions of Sustainable Development					
Environmental Resources- 2.1	X	X			
Mining and Mineral Sector-					
Agriculture Modernization- 2.3	X				X
Youth Job and Life Skills- 2.4	X	X	X		
Women Empowerment- 2.5		X		X	
Government Structure- 2.6		X			
Chapter 3: NATIONAL VISION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	X	X			
Chapter 4: COUNTRY PROGRESS TOWARDS THE 2030 AGENDA					
Chapter 5: LEAVE NO BEHIND		X			
Chapter 6: CROSS-BOUNDARY and REGIONAL / SUB-REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE					
CHAPTER 7: FINANCING LANDSCAPE AND OPPORTUNITIES	X		X		
DOMESTIC FINANCE- 7.1					X
EXTERNAL FINANCE- 7.2	X				



ANNEX 5

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SIERRA LEONE INTEGRATED NATIONAL FINANCING FRAMEWORK

PUBLIC SECTOR REVENUE

1. Introduce a GST lottery using customer receipts as entries to encourage compliance
2. Boost large taxpayer auditing capacity of National Revenue Authority
3. Revise levies and departmental charges to ensure costs are covered
4. Build outcome information into the budget process to align more with MTNDP
5. Create systems to track public spending on gender and climate
6. Publish tax expenditure reports, including revenue foregone through tax exemptions
7. Establish a diaspora bond to fund strategic development investments
8. Promote the investment of a portion of pension assets in infrastructure

PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

9. Promote longer-term lending to businesses with financial sector reforms
10. Encourage public sector banks to lend more to private sector and limit purchases of public sector debt
11. Promote diaspora investment through one-stop shop, diaspora bank accounts, and relaxed capital controls to promote business investment
12. Conduct public-private dialogues on how to mobilize inclusive, sustainable private investment and design positive business-related reforms
13. Reduce tax on remittances and promote digital services to lower transaction costs
14. Reduce illicit financial flows through anti-corruption, auditing, and customs detection

PRIVATE SECTOR INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL SERVICES

15. Engage South-South Cooperation partners and establish a secretariat for such
16. Access US Millennium Challenge Corporation Compact funding
17. Introduce development impact bonds to support investments in key MTNDP sectors
18. Access support from untapped global thematic funds, especially for climate finance

ANNEX 6

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL SDG RISK ANALYSIS (2024-2030)

SDG	Risk Area	Description	Scope	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact
SDG 16, 17	Political Stability	Increased political polarization as a result of June 2023 elections. Following the mediated dialogue, government and opposition signed an "Agreement for National Unity", which comprises 10 provisions for implementation	Delay in the implementation of key provisions of the Agreement for National Unity	Social unrest and mistrust on government and opposition leaders	Medium	High
			Disagreement between government and opposition over the ToRs of the Committee on electoral systems and management bodies review	Crisis of credibility of both government and opposition and leadership vacuum	Medium	High
			Increased inter-party tension over constitutional and legal reforms	Widespread violence, disruption to the governance system, dysfunctional Parliament	High	High
			Sporadic violence as a result of 26 November 2023 coup attempt	Rural and Urban areas subject to disruption of services, loss of lives, increased grievances against country's political elites	Medium	High
	Democratic Space	Poor performance of democratic and human rights institutions and shrinking of civil space.	Limited institutional capacity (funding, logistic, human resources) and poor response to citizens' demands	Growing citizens' perception of discrimination and marginalization due to government inefficiency	High	Medium
			Independent state institutions (Judiciary, Security Sector, Human Rights Commission, etc.) display poor performance and lack of respect of international standards.	Progressive violation of citizens' rights and freedoms and increased citizens' mistrust in government institutions	Medium	High
			Continue limitations to the participation of women in decision-making systems at all levels of the government and private sector	Lack of instruments and capacity to implement the gender equality and women empowerment bills	Medium	Medium
	Justice and Rule of Law	Lack of effective and comprehensive implementation and application of the principles of justice, human rights, rule of law and accountability.	Justice institutions display poor performance and lack of respect of international standards	Lack of access to justice, particularly for most vulnerable groups	Medium	High
			Security forces fail to respect human rights and international standards in managing citizens' protests	Increased violent confrontations between people and security forces	Medium	High
			Heavy workload on magistrates and judges causing delay in passing judgments	Vulnerable groups' access to justice hampered, particularly most vulnerable groups.	Medium	Medium

SDG	Risk Area	Description	Scope	Risk factors	Likelihood	Impact
SDG 1,5,10,17	Social cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination	Social cohesion undermined as a result of perceived regional and ethnic discrimination in the provision of services and public employment, including in the security sector. Increased social and gender inequalities and marginalization of youth.	Citizens' perception of discriminatory practices by state institutions based on ethnic and regional biases	Increased grievances, social division and unrest.	Medium	Medium
			Drug abuse, youth marginalization and unemployment, particularly of most vulnerable groups.	Increased school drop-out, mental health and marginalization of youth, gender-based violence, exploitation and abuse of women and children.	High	High
			Increased rural-urban divide and irregular migration, particularly of young people	Unmanaged urbanization and expansion of marginal urban areas, affecting the main cities' carrying capacity and provision of services, chiefly water and sanitation	High	High
SDG 4,6,7,9,117	Infrastructure and access to social services	Lack of availability and limitation on access to basic social services and physical infrastructure.	Government's spending on social programmes and adequate provision of basic services remains low, due to fiscal constraints, low domestic revenues and declining donors' support	Further marginalization and exclusion of the most vulnerable sectors of the population (slum dwellers, women, children, people with disability, border communities, etc.)	Medium	Medium
			Human Capital Development programme remains the most important pillar of government's development strategy, and suffers from declining donors' funds	Free quality education continues to be provided to the primary and secondary students with increased constraints	Medium	Medium
			Socio-economic external and internal disruptions deepen financial and economic crisis	Fiscal crisis, increased food insecurity and poverty rate, debt distress, increased taxation, and declining in economic activities and provision of social services	Medium	Medium
SDG 3, 17	Public Health	Risk to the population, the economy and stability of the country resulting from resurgence of contagious diseases	Deterioration of the health system and provision of health services	Increased threat to the health of the population	Medium	High
			Government commitments to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates, stunting and teenage pregnancy affected by fiscal crisis and declining donors' funds	Delivery of health care services, particularly to the most vulnerable groups, endangered.	Medium	High
SDG 2, 17	Food security, agriculture and land	Increased food insecurity, decreased production of agriculture land, insecurity of land tenure, rural-urban migration and lack of services in rural areas	Food insecurity continues to worsen, combined with food and fuel price increases and loss of livelihoods, particularly for the most vulnerable groups	Increased social unrest and mistrust in the government, increased youth and other vulnerable groups' marginalization.	Medium	High
			Competing priorities between diversification of agriculture to increase population's food security and extensive agriculture projects (e.g. palm oil, pineapple, etc.)	Increased evictions and rural-urban migration, expansion of informal sector and unsustainable forms of livelihoods (illegal logging, sand mining, irregular mining, etc.)	Medium	Medium
			Lack of clarity on the implementation of the new Land Bill.	Difficult access to land and increased evictions, particularly of the most vulnerable groups	Low	Medium
SDG 12, 13,14,1, 17	Environment and climate	Effects of climate change and over-exploitation of natural resources hamper people's livelihoods and sustainability of country's resources.	Increased risk of natural hazards (flooding and drought) with impact on people's lives and livelihoods	Increased internal and external migration, competition over resources, social unrest	Medium	Medium
			Over-exploitation of natural resources (timber, over-fishing, land, mineral, sand, etc.) that impacts on sustainability of country's resources, particularly drinking water.	Depletion of resources and increased poverty level, decreased government's revenues, impacting the most vulnerable people (gender, age, economic status, geographical location, etc.)	High	High



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