



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2025

#IWD2025
#ForAllWomenAndGirls

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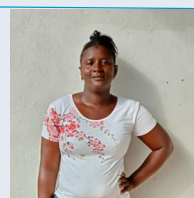
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The Resident Coordinator's FOREWORD

Seraphine Wakana, UN Resident Coordinator, Sierra Leone

This newsletter reflects our collective efforts through the human interest stories you are about to read on issues relating to women and girls and in ensuring that we accelerate progress on the SDGs particularly SDG 5-Gender Equality.

So, as we commemorate International Women's Day this year, let us remind ourselves of the impact that gender equality and women's empowerment have on the development and prosperity of our society. The theme, **"For All Women and Girls: Rights. Equality. Empowerment,"** resonates deeply with our collective mission to ensure that every woman and girl in Sierra Leone can live a life of dignity, free from discrimination and violence.

With our new Cooperation Framework that is fully aligned with the national development priorities as well as the sub-region, continent and global visions, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) family remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing the rights of women and girls.

Our efforts span across various sectors, from health and education to economic empowerment and political participation. We have witnessed remarkable progress, yet we are acutely aware of the challenges that remain.

The UN agencies have been instrumental in driving initiatives that promote gender equality. Through collaborative efforts, we have supported policies and programs that aim to eliminate gender-based violence, improve maternal health, and increase access to quality education for girls. These initiatives are not just about addressing immediate needs but also about creating sustainable change that will benefit future generations.

Empowerment is at the heart of our work. By providing women and girls with the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to thrive, we are fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Whether it is through vocational training, entrepreneurship programs, or leadership development, we are helping to build a foundation where women and girls can achieve their full potential.

Therefore, as we celebrate the achievements of women and girls in Sierra Leone, we must also renew our obligation to addressing the systemic barriers that hinder their progress. It is only through collective action and unwavering dedication that we can create a world where every woman and girl can enjoy their rights and realize their dreams.

On this International Women's Day, let us reaffirm our pledge to work together for the rights, equality, and empowerment of all women and girls. Together, we can build a brighter, more just future for everyone.

Seraphine Wakana

UN Resident Coordinator



The UN Secretary-General's Message on IWD

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General

When the doors of equal opportunity are open for women and girls, everyone wins.

Equal societies are more prosperous and peaceful – and the foundation of sustainable development.

On this International Women's Day, we recognize thirty years of progress and achievement since the landmark United Nations conference in Beijing.

This transformed the rights of women – and reaffirmed those rights as human rights.

Since then, women and girls have shattered barriers, defied stereotypes, and demanded their rightful place.

But we must be clear-eyed about the challenge.

From pushback to rollback, women's human rights are under attack.

Age-old horrors – violence, discrimination and economic inequality – still plague societies.

And newer threats such as biased algorithms are programming inequalities into online spaces, opening-up new arenas of harassment and abuse.

Instead of mainstreaming equal rights, we're seeing the mainstreaming of misogyny.

We must fight these outrages.

And keep working to level the playing field for women and girls.

We need action to unlock finance so countries can invest in equality – and to prioritize those investments.

Action to open-up equal opportunities for decent work, close the gender pay gap, and tackle challenges around care work.

Action to strengthen and implement laws to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

Action to secure women's full participation in decision-making, including in peacebuilding.

And action to remove the obstacles to women and girls in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

The United Nations Pact for the Future, and the Global Digital Compact offer blueprints to guide these actions.

When women and girls can rise, we all thrive.

Together, let's stand firm in making rights, equality and empowerment a reality for all women and girls, for everyone, everywhere.

Antonio Guterres
UN Secretary-General

(IOM) Zainab's Harvest of Hope: A story of resilience and empowerment.



In the quiet village of Bonthe – in a southern, rural region of Sierra Leone – Zainab Kamara's life was transformed by the seeds of knowledge and opportunity.

A mother of three and once struggling to make ends meet, Zainab is now a beacon of hope and inspiration thanks to her participation in a sustainable agriculture training program under the "Enhanced Resiliency and Living Conditions for Vulnerable Communities Addressing Economic, Health, and Food Security Challenges due to Impacts of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone".

With support from the Government of Japan through the United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security implemented by The International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2022.

Before the training, Zainab relied on traditional farming methods that yielded little due to poor soil quality and unpredictable weather. Her family often faced food shortages and she had no means to generate income. But when the Human Security project introduced her to sustainable farming techniques such as crop rotation, organic fertilizers, and water conservation, Zainab began to see hope. She absorbed every lesson, determined to turn her small plot of land into a source of greater abundance.

Today, her farm is thriving. She grows a variety of crops including cassava, maize, and a variety of vegetables using the sustainable methods she learned. Her yields have doubled; her family now has enough to eat and surplus goods to sell at the local market. The income she earns has allowed her to send her children to school and invest in better farming tools. Zainab has become a mentor to other women in her community, sharing with them the techniques and skills that she gained.



I used to feel helpless, but now I feel empowered, I want every woman to know that with a little knowledge and hard work, we can change our lives.



Her story is a testament to the power of education and the resilience of women. Through the Human Security Project, Zainab has not only secured a livelihood for her family but also sown the seeds of change in her community. Her journey reminds us that when women are given the tools to succeed, they can cultivate a brighter future for everyone.

(UN Women) The journey of Kadiatu Feborah Jalloh, Agricultural Leader and Nurse



Kadiatu Feborah Jalloh, a 30-year-old mother of one from Magbenteh village on the outskirts of Makeni, is the founder and leader of a women-led agricultural organization, **Ngoila Women in Agriculture Cooperative Society** dedicated to improving food security and economic independence in her community.

Though raised in a family with limited financial means, she was determined to shape her own future. Her journey thriving as a nurse and agricultural entrepreneur is a testament to visionary ambition, resilience, and the power of economic empowerment. Growing up, Kadiatu faced significant challenges. “I depended entirely on my mother, whose small trading business struggled to provide for my three siblings and me,” she recalls.

Despite challenges, she pursued education, became a nurse, and worked hard to support herself and family. Soon, she saw agriculture's potential to empower women beyond healthcare. Her path took a transformative turn in 2020 when she encountered UN Women Sierra Leone. **“I remember the day I first saw a UN Women vehicle in Makeni,”** she says. **“I rushed over and introduced myself, sharing the story of my organization—our mission, our struggles, and our dreams—with the Head of Office, Setcheme Mongbo.”**

Kadiatu's bravery led to new opportunities for her initiative, benefitting thousands of mainly vulnerable women in remote communities in Karene and Bombali District. With UN Women's support, they gained skills in preventing and reporting violence against women, economic empowerment, and community peace and security. These capacities not only improved their agricultural skills but also strengthened Kadiatu's leadership, public speaking, and advocacy. She now confidently advocates for women's rights and economic inclusion, a skill she previously struggled with in public gatherings. She admits. **“Now, I confidently advocate for women's rights and economic inclusion.”**

Kadiatu's dedication has transformed both her life and her communities of intervention. Through her initiative, she trains other women in climate-smart farming techniques, helping them achieve financial independence. She envisions a future where rural women are not just seen as farmers but as entrepreneurs and decision-makers, driving change.

Reflecting on her journey, she smiles with pride. **“I used to believe I couldn't make a difference. Now, I know that with the right support and determination, we can shape our own futures.”**



(WHO) Reaching underserved communities: Cervical cancer awareness in Sierra Leone.

In an ongoing effort to eliminate cervical cancer, the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the World Health Organization (WHO) Sierra Leone organized a screening initiative during Cervical Cancer Awareness Month - January. This effort targeted underserved communities, encouraging women aged 25-49 to access essential screening services.



Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in Sierra Leone. With 1.7 million women at risk, proactive intervention is crucial. Each year, 512 women are diagnosed, and 189 lose their lives to the disease. The screening drives, held on January 23, 2024, at Tombo Community Health Centre (CHC) and Princess Christian Maternity Hospital (PCMH), focused on densely populated areas with limited healthcare access.

A total of 62 women were screened, with nine testing positive for the virus and receiving immediate treatment. This aligns with the National Policy and Strategy for the Elimination of Cervical Cancer 2023-2028 and supports Sierra Leone's goal of achieving WHO's '90-70-90' targets by 2030. In 2024 alone, 18,944 women have been screened across nine districts, including WAU, WAR, Bo, Bombali, Kono, Moyamba, Port Loko, Tonkolili, and Kenema.



Hawanatu Kalokoh, a 25-year-old mother of two, shared her experience. "I had never done this before, and I was so glad to receive this service," she said. When she tested positive for the virus, she received immediate treatment, a moment she recognized as life-saving. "I thank God because I could have lived with the virus without knowing, which could have led to cancer."

She emphasized the importance of early detection and urged other women to get screened. "It's free and accessible for those who cannot afford it." This initiative provides hope and life-saving care, ensuring women receive the support they need to prevent cervical cancer.



(WFP) Empowering Women through transformation: The story of Takorodi Agricultural Business Center.

In Rokupr, Kambia District, Sierra Leone, the Takorodi Women agriculture organisation has transformed the **Agricultural Business Center (ABC)** and the lives of women farmers. Founded in 2010 by Isata Sesay and a group of determined farmers, the ABC has grown into a thriving enterprise with over 300 members, mostly women, who sell agricultural products locally and internationally.

Isata highlighted the challenges faced by women farmers due to outdated rice processing methods, which were labor-intensive and resulted in post-harvest losses and low-quality rice for which they did not get a good price for. This changed the installation of a high-tech rice milling house, a collaboration between the Government of Sierra Leone, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Government of Japan.

"This milling machine has removed the burdensome tasks of winnowing and destoning, traditionally shouldered by women," said Isata Sesay. "Now, we produce high-quality rice that is truly valued."

Through WFP's Home Grown School feeding we gained market access and training last year and we sold 242.6MT of rice and beans for which we 4,852,000 Leones (USD 206,732). This year they have a contract to sell 200MT of rice and 100MT of beans. It makes a big difference to us to have reliable customer and partner in WFP that we can rely on.

The milling house will boost farmers' incomes, empowering women to take on leadership roles and invest in their families' education and health.

The ABC's success reflects its commitment to self-reliance and sustainability. "When given the choice between a loan and a donation, we always choose the opportunity the gift comes with," Isata explained.



This milling machine has removed the burdensome tasks of winnowing and destoning, traditionally shouldered by women. Now, we produce high-quality rice that is truly valued.



This initiative is a step toward Sierra Leone's goal of food security and agricultural transformation. As Hon. Henry Musa Kpaka, Minister of Agriculture, stated, "We are taking a crucial step towards achieving Feed Salone—our vision for a food-secure Sierra Leone."

Nine more milling houses in Takorodi ABC and other ABCs across eight districts signal a bright future for women. Isata Sesay emphasizes: "We're not just farmers; we're changemakers, building a better future for Sierra Leone with every grain of rice, we are building a better future for Sierra Leone."

The Takorodi Women are a true inspiration!



(IFAD) How financial inclusion and gender training transformed Jestina Waitay's life.



For over five years, 25-year-old housewife Jestina Waitay, endured a marriage where she felt sidelined and disrespected. Her husband, Sahr Waitay, a key shareholder of the Sowa Financial Services Association (FSA), made all financial decisions without consulting her. Their marriage was on the brink of collapse—until the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) training changed everything.

Organized by the Rural Finance and Community Programme, (RFCIP), the GALS training in Kenema aimed at promoting gender equality, strengthening relationships between rural financial institutions (RFIs) and clients, and improving intrahousehold decision-making. Sahr attended the training, and for the first time, he understood the importance of involving his wife in financial and household decisions.

Before leaving for the training, tension filled their home. However, upon his return, Jestina welcomed him with open arms—a moment of reconciliation that had been absent for years. That night, they had a deep conversation about their future, leading Sahr to agree, for the first time, to give Jestina full control over a loan of SLE 6,000 from Sowa FSA to start her own business. With the funds, Jestina launched a mobile money business and stocked goods in preparation for the upcoming fasting period. The transformation in their relationship has been remarkable—Sahr now provides money for household needs on time, no longer stays out late, and supports Jestina's ambitions.

Empowered by her husband's newfound respect and trust, Jestina also formed a women's savings group with over 30 members. The group provides small loans to its members, creating additional financial opportunities for women in her community.

“My husband no longer hides things from me—we are now a happy team working together.”



(UNICEF)

From broken bonds to unbreakable ties: A single mother's journey to rebuild her family in Sierra Leone.



Isata Ogbogie sits on a wooden stool on her veranda in the quiet village of Baoma Koya, Sierra Leone, reflecting on a turbulent chapter in her life, a chapter that nearly destroyed her family. Her relationship with her eldest daughter, Fanta, was once filled with tension, anger, and regret. It all began when Isata's husband walked out, leaving her to care for their five children alone. The weight of single motherhood bore down heavily on her. "When he left, I felt abandoned," she says, her voice tinged with lingering pain.

Her frustration wasn't just about losing her husband; it was about the financial and emotional strain of raising five children by herself. "I sell cooked food at the market to support my family," she explains. "It's not enough, but I try my best to ensure my children have what they need to attend school."

Overwhelmed by her circumstances, Isata lashed out in ways she now deeply regrets. "I was frustrated, angry, and overwhelmed. I took it out on my children, especially Fanta," she admits. "I used to call her names like 'fool,' 'thief,' and 'bastard.' When I beat her, she would leave the house and stay away for days. She was terrified of me." Her temper alienated her children further. "My relatives took them because of my behavior," she recalls. "I was losing everything." Fanta, who was just 12 years old when her father left, bore the brunt of her mother's anger. That same year, she dropped out of school and distanced herself from Isata.

The turning point came when Isata joined the Positive Parenting Program, which is led by Defence for Children International (DCI) with support from UNICEF. The program teaches parenting skills to create nurturing and supportive family environments.

"At first, I didn't think it would help," she admits. "But the sessions opened my eyes. I realized that my children didn't need me to be angry—they needed me to be patient and loving."

Through weeks of training, Isata began to reflect on her actions. Determined to make a change, she approached Fanta, apologized for her behavior, and promised to be a better mother. "It wasn't easy," she says. "But I kept talking to her, drawing her closer. Slowly, she began to trust me again."

The transformation was profound. Fanta returned home, and with Isata's encouragement, she re-enrolled in school. Now 15, she is in class six, preparing for her National Primary School Exams. Fanta dreams of becoming a nurse, a dream Isata is determined to support.



"I don't make much money, but I will do whatever it takes to keep her in school," Isata says with quiet determination. "My children's future is worth every sacrifice." Rebuilding her relationship with Fanta also paved the way for her other children to return home. "We have peace now," she says with a smile. "I've learned that all children need is love and care. Adolescence is such a difficult stage, but I know now that patience and understanding are the only way to reach them."

(ILO)

Promoting decent jobs through gender equality and inclusion.

The Opportunity Salone Programme, implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) with funding from the European Union, has significantly benefitted youths, women, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) across Bo, Kenema, Bombali, and Port Loko Districts. Through capacity development training and access to finance, the program aims to enhance the skills and independence of SMEs, meeting market demands and operating in structured environments.

Equal opportunities are provided to women, youths, and PWDs, contributing to the rise in youth-led businesses and innovations in the project districts. The Bo Vegetables enterprise, a dynamic group of experienced women in agriculture, exemplifies the programme's success.

Through technical training and financial support, they have reduced post-harvest losses and increased the supply of fresh vegetables in Bo and its surroundings. Essential equipment, such as a cold room and dryer, has been provided to preserve perishable vegetables, boosting sales and meeting market demands.



Madam Jenneh Foday, General Manager of Bo Vegetables Enterprise, expressed profound gratitude to the ILO for making their dream a reality, noting that the support has increased profit margins and created more jobs for farmers. She praised the timely intervention and capacity building, which has enabled the enterprise to manage daily operations, attract development agencies, and monitor growth effectively.



This initiative is made possible by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to promote the creation of decent jobs for Sierra Leonean youths, women, and person living with disabilities. With funds provided by the European Union in Sierra Leone.



(UNFPA)

From isolation to hope: Fatmata's journey to healing.



For ten years, Fatmata D. Kamara, 32, endured the pain and stigma of obstetric fistula, a condition caused by prolonged, obstructed labor. Her life changed for the worse after she dropped out of school due to financial challenges. Soon after, she became pregnant and couldn't afford to go for antenatal care visits. She had a difficult childbirth that resulted in the loss of her baby and urinary incontinence, known as obstetric fistula – a debilitating injury to the birth canal resulting from prolonged obstructed labour.

"I was incontinent all the time, and people pointed fingers at me," she recalls. Abandoned by her family and community, she lived in isolation, searching for a cure for nearly 10 years. In 2024, a man led her to a traditional healer, but the treatment failed.

Hope came when a nurse informed her about Aberdeen Women's Centre, where she was successfully treated through surgery. Fatmata spent four months recovering at the centre before being transferred to Haikal, a rehabilitation and reintegration facility. There, she received psychosocial support and skills training to help her rebuild her life. Upon completing a reintegration process, she was given a start-up kit and seed package to help her regain financial independence.

Today, Fatmata has reclaimed her dignity. "Thanks to AWC, UNFPA, Haikal and the Government of Iceland, I have my life back," she says. UNFPA has been partnering with AWC and Haikal Foundation to restore the dignity of Fistula survivors through treatment and social integration services, with financial support of the Government of Iceland.



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AND GIRLS

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