



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 2 • December 2021



UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR BABATUNDE AHONSI ADDRESS TO THE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS IN OBSERVANCE OF UN DAY AT 76

Honourable Ministers of the Government of Sierra Leone,
The Dean and Esteemed Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Development Partners, civil society and the private sector,
Colleagues from UN of Agencies, Funds and Programmes,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Five years ago, at the 70th anniversary of the United Nations, then Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon reminded us that while national flags are a mark of pride and patriotism in every country, there is only one flag that belongs to us all - the blue flag of the United Nations.

The United Nations flag is a hallmark of the UN Charter agreed 76 years ago— peace, development, human rights, and opportunity for all. Throughout the world, the blue flag brings a fresh lease of life for those in need of food and shelter after being driven from their homes.

OVERVIEW

1. UN Resident Coordinator Address to the Development partners in observance of UN Day at 76
2. UN Country Team pays solidarity visit to the Wellington fire disaster site
3. UN Country Team, Ministry of Youth Affairs conclude two-day National Youth Summit
4. Promoting Green economy in Sierra Leone
5. UN Day in Pictures © Girls Behind the Lens
6. UN Resident Coordinator engages the furthest behind in Makeni
7. In the swamps of Sierra Leone, rural women plant seeds of peace
8. A second chance to learn for adolescent mother
9. IOM support to enhance access to reproductive health in remote areas of Sierra Leone
10. Animal Health Key to Human Health. Central Veterinary Laboratory Role to Prevent Animal and Human Diseases
11. Enhancing access to electricity in rural communities
12. Providing skills to rural youth for Inclusive growth; reducing unemployment





UNIDO Country Representative & Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs & International Cooperation
(photo credit/UNRCO)

The blue flag renews confidence in the downtrodden. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the United Nations flag symbolises a life-saving response—to provide vaccines to everyone across the world. Here in Sierra Leone, the United Nations Country Team has worked together with partners, particularly the Government of Sierra Leone to not only respond to the pandemic but to ensure that development work continues to be implemented. Through the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, we have ensured timely and sustainable response to the impact of the pandemic and supported the Government in its development ambitions as outlined by the Medium-Term National Development Plan.

Excellencies, while we are gathered here tonight to celebrate the 76th anniversary of the UN, the enormity of the task at hand calls for us to remind ourselves that with less than nine years left to achieve the SDGs, there is an urgent need to step up action. Realising the SDGs in any country requires a whole-of-society approach built on partnerships. The only way forward is through solidarity.

Therefore, on behalf of the United Nations, I would like to thank the Government of Sierra Leone for providing leadership for the COVID-19 response, while ensuring that we build back better from its impact. To our direct partners, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, thank you for the productive collaboration and continued partnership. I commend the tireless men and women, particularly the front-liners who have staked their lives to ensure that the rest of us are safe, protected, and healthy. I would also like to thank our development partners, that relentlessly supported Government efforts, ensuring that no one is left behind in our development interventions. Thank you for your continued support—financially and technically, in striving towards the realisation of Sierra Leone's vision of becoming a middle-income country by 2035.

Finally, I want to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues, UN Heads of Agencies, Funds and Programmes and all UN staff who continue to uphold the core values of the United Nations in all facets of their work.

As we mark the 76th UN Day, let us continue to work hand-in-hand to live up to the promise and hope of the United Nations; that is -

- To promote peace and social cohesion;
 - To protect our environment and mitigate the effects of climate change;
 - To heal our planet;
 - To uphold the dignity of one and all, and
 - To leave no one behind.
- Thank you very much.



Members of the UN Country Team led by WFP Country Representative & Resident Coordinator a.i. Steve Nsubuga at the Wellington Incident Command Center (photo credit/UNRCO)

UN Country Team pays solidarity visit to the Wellington fire disaster site

Thirteen UN Heads of Agencies, Funds and Programmes operating in Sierra Leone led by WFP's Country Representative and Resident Coordinator a.i. Mr Steve Nsubuga, today visited the epicentre of last Friday's fuel tanker disaster at Wellington, in the outskirts of Freetown. The collision of the fuel tanker, together with a truck carrying granite stones, has led to the loss of about 115 lives, with fears that the number may continue to rise.

The team from FAO, IMF, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UNIDO, UNICEF, UNOPS, WFP, WHO, AfDB, UNFPA and the Resident Coordinator's Office were received at the Incident Command Center by the Director of Response, National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), Mr Sinneh Mansaray before they were taken on a conducted tour of the affected area.

Deputy Director-General of the NDMA Mr John Rogers briefed the UN Country Team about what happened that fateful night and the efforts that are being made to bury the dead and treat the injured. He recognized the effort that UN agencies are making through NDMA to support the Government.

The Mayor of the Freetown City Council Ms Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, who was joined by her Deputy Mr Osman Koroma, said it was good to see the UNCT show solidarity to the victims and survivors of the incident. On behalf of the UNCT, Mr Steve Nsubuga said it was quite unfortunate that many young people, particularly Okada riders were reportedly lost in this incident.

"Perhaps through their association, the Okada Riders should be supported to become champions of road safety- instead of leaving this entirely to the police and other authorities.



National Disaster Management staff briefing the UNCT at the epicentre of the Wellington disaster incident (photo credit/UNRCO)

In this case and knowing the extreme danger, it is those that most commonly use the road that should have taken the initiative to establish perimeters around the scene," he said.

The RC a.i said the UN commiserate with the family, relatives, and friends of the dead. He wished those in hospitals a speedy recovery and assured all that the UNCT is already engaged with the various national agencies in providing the necessary support and coordination in the aftermath of the tragic incident.

UN Country Team, Ministry of Youth Affairs conclude two-day National Youth Summit

The Government of Sierra Leone, through the Ministry of Youth Affairs, with support from the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone on 1 and 2 November, ended a two-day National Youth Summit at the Ernest Bai Koroma University of Science and Technology in Magburaka, Tonkolili district.

The Summit convened on the theme 'Harnessing the Future of Sierra Leone through investment in youth', was in commemoration of the Africa Youth Day on 1 November 2021.



Photo credit/ UNFPA- Leaving no one behind was not just a mantra at the National Youth Summit

The day was set aside on the African Youth Charter adoption in the Executive Council Decision of the Banjul Summit 2006 to promote the increased recognition of youth as critical agents for social change, economic growth and sustainable development in all areas of African Society. With over 700 young participants drawn from the country's 16 districts, the Summit ended with a declaration, dubbed the Magburaka Declaration, calling for young people to be actively involved in shaping and implementing fundamental changes across all aspects of their lives and societies. It also underscored the need for Government and stakeholders, including development partners, to actualize the AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend by prioritising investment in youth to transform the country.

Officially opening the event, Vice President Dr Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh said, "the Summit provided us with an opportunity to take stock of what we have done as a Government with regards to implementing the Africa Union Roadmap on harnessing the demographic dividend. This stock-taking is expected to inspire us further." The Vice President said key policy action interventions of the Government on youth empowerment were demonstrated through the launch of the National Youth Policy in 2020. This document, he said, clearly outlined the key government priority areas, including increased access to livelihood opportunities through education and training, review of legal frameworks to address fundamental challenges facing the youth, including marginalisation and gender-based violence, and increased youth participation in policy decision making.

In his statement, United Nations Resident Coordinator, Babatunde A. Ahonsi, commended the Government for its development priorities, including investment in the sectors and areas that significantly benefit young people. He called for young people to be engaged to have a sense of belonging and 'stakeholdership' and be active agents and beneficiaries of Sierra Leone's quest for rapid economic growth and social transformation. The UN, he said, affirms its commitment to the AU roadmap on harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth.

"The youth dividend, if properly harnessed, can present catalytic opportunities. For that to happen, Government and partners have to collaborate to first address the challenges youth face, such as high unemployment; inadequate competitive technical skills for the labour market; limited access to productive assets; lack of technologies and financial resources; and stigmatisation and discrimination of youth with disabilities and youth-at-risk, who may be associated with cliques and gangs", the UN Resident Coordinator emphasised. Minister of Youth Affairs, Mohamed Orman Bangura, in his statement, said the gathering was to help celebrate the power of young people in Sierra Leone and foster social cohesion, whilst reaffirming the government's commitment to improving the wellbeing of young people and in providing them with growth opportunities.



Photo Credit/ UNFPA Selfie moment at Magburuaka at the National Youth Summit

“We are working to create the platform for youth to live. They should take advantage of the opportunity accorded them. Young people should take ownership of their destiny,” minister Bangura said. Also speaking were the UNDP Resident Representative Pa Lamin Beyai and the Officer-In-Charge of the United Nations Population Fund, Jocelyn Fenard. They said the Summit was to create an open space for young people to discuss issues affecting them. They both agreed, that when young people are provided with quality education, good employment opportunity, and are in good health and enjoy their rights, the country will be able to harness a demographic dividend.

Reacting to the Summit, Marian Pleasant Kargbo, CEO/ Founder Pleasant Foundation, Sierra Leone said, “it was not just a Summit, it was a time to network, a time to listen to government officials make commitments, UN agencies and partners committing to support young people and youth putting together a document that the UN asked for to guide their activities for the following years. This document is coming at a time when the UN and other agencies are working on their 2021 calendar of events and budget.”

Promoting Green economy in Sierra Leone

Nature-dependent sectors, including agriculture, energy, water, mining and tourism, are crucial to Sierra Leone for realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the country's development targets. Goal 1 of the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023) reflects this by declaring 'A diversified, resilient green economy.'

The UN Country Team is partnering with the government to accomplish this goal by sustainably managing the country's diverse natural resources in tandem with economic growth.



UN Resident Coordinator Babatunde Ahonsi and IOM Head of Office a.i, James Bagonza at one of the organization's Tractor/ road maintenance project sites in Sumbuya, southern Sierra Leone (photo credit /UNRCO)

Sustainable agriculture: driver of economic growth

Outcome Area 1 of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2020-2023) focuses on sustainable agriculture, an important driver of economic growth. Since the end of the civil conflict in 2002, Sierra Leone's agriculture sector has grown by an average of 7% per annum. In 2020, the share of agriculture in GDP exceeded 55%. As the global economy emerges from COVID-19 related trade restrictions, the UN Country Team will continue to support the government and local communities to further develop green trade opportunities, especially those linked to agriculture. Initiatives such as the Agricultural Value-Chain Development Project of the International Fund for Agricultural Development focus on increasing the volume and value of agricultural products (rice, palm oil, cocoa and vegetables) through climate-resilient production, market development, and rural infrastructure and information systems. Agencies such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and World Food Programme also invest in local technologies to reduce post-harvest loss and add value to agricultural products. Support mechanisms put into place during COVID-19 assist women farmers who trade in agricultural products, especially women's farming cooperatives and cross-border traders.

Building more skills in policy and finance is essential for trade

Trade as a means of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, plays an important role in boosting the country's agricultural sector. The UN Industrial Development Organization and the International Trade Centre through its West Africa Competitiveness Programme for Sierra Leone are tackling trade aspects related to quality, product diversification and export promotion to increase access to regional and international markets. This includes training more than 40 agribusiness in the cassava, cocoa and palm oil sectors on access to finance. A financial diagnostic assessment revealed that only 20.5% of them have standard financial statements and practice acceptable financial management procedures. Moreover, the International Trade Centre's SheTrades West Africa project determined Sierra Leone's trade outlook using a standard assessment tool that looks at 83 indicators across six pillars. This work engaged 21 institutions, including government, financial institutions and the private sector.

Among the six areas evaluated for the study, the country is doing relatively well in aspects such as work and society (regional/international initiatives and dialogues on gender equality), access to skills (free education until secondary level and trainings targeting women), and business environment (support services for businesses, including information on import/export requirements). Less successful are trade policy, access to finance, and legal and regulatory frameworks. The International Trade Centre and other UN agencies, including the UN Capital Development Fund, will be focusing on enhancing these areas and increasing financial flows to the agricultural sector in the coming months.

Sierra Leone: Member of the African Continental Free Trade Area

Sierra Leone signed and ratified the African Continental Free Trade Area in 2019 to seize opportunities for South/South trade to boost international competitiveness, increase (and diversify) exports, accelerate growth and attract foreign direct investment. The agreement will reduce tariffs and cover policy areas such as trade facilitation and services. This is an important step for Sierra Leone and the UN country team stands ready to further enhance this opportunity.

UN Day in Pictures ©Girls Behind the Lens



RC Babatunde Ahonsi (in the middle) with members of the UN Country Team cutting the UN@76 anniversary cake



WFP Deputy Country Director, Ms Yvonne Forsen (in the middle) with UN colleagues



Cross-section of UN Staff at the Radisson Blu Beachfront Garden to celebrate UN@76 staff event



Mr Henry Turay (L), former driver receiving a certificate of merit from RC Babatunde Ahonsi



UN Day@76 cocktail reception with the development partners at the Golden Tulip Hotel



(L- R) :UN RC , UN Women visiting staff from Nigeria, and Nigeria's High Commissioner to Sierra Leone



(L-R) UN Resident Coordinator, Minister of Development and Economic Planning & World Bank Country Manager at UN@76 cocktail reception with the development partners



The RC, UNDP, IOM and UNIDO Heads of Agencies at a Drop-in Centre in Makeni ((photo credit /UNRCO)

UN Resident Coordinator engages the furthest behind in Makeni

A cross-section of female sex workers and vulnerable young women in Makeni City, Bombali District met with the UN Resident Coordinator (RC) Mr Babatunde Ahonsi, UNDP Resident Representative Mr. Pa Lamin Beyia, IOM Officer-In-Charge Mr. James Bagonza, and UNIDO Country Representative Ms. Mariatu Swaray on Tuesday, 2 November 2021.

This engagement was held at a drop-in centre of Rofutha Development Association (RODA), a local partner of UNAIDS.

During the meeting, the vulnerable women expressed their hope to become self-reliant and abandon the sex trade if provided with alternative means of livelihood. Lady P, an advocate and organization lead of sex workers in northern Sierra Leone, expressed her gratitude to the UN delegation's interest to meet and listen to sex workers, as her group is often excluded from such engagements. Lady P recounted that her group has been left out from the recent distribution of bed nets, have not been invited to social activities, and most times, subjected to paying extra for healthcare services – which she believes, would be otherwise free. She also informed the RC and UN team of incidents of assault her group has incurred from authorities, particularly when they are arrested for loitering. RODA has trained over 200 women and girls involved in the sex trade within Makeni township between 2018 and 2019 on entrepreneurship and financial management, HIV prevention and positive living, and STI management.

Ms Hawanatu Kalokoh, another sex worker, said that while they were beneficiaries of RODA's vocational training programmes and start-up kits, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the number of women and girls in the sex trade, including some that were already positive deviants before the pandemic. In view of this, it will be impactful if more beneficiaries can be identified and supported. To ensure that RODA's interventions are successful, the female sex workers highlighted their support including working as peer educators to get other young women off the streets of Makeni town and its environs. RODA Programme Coordinator, Mr Aruna Rashid Koroma expressed appreciation for the interaction with his beneficiaries whom he described as vulnerable youth on the sidelines of the National Youth Summit in Magburaka. He indicated that RODA is working with sex workers because they are considered a core group for the transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

"They also faced HIV-related gender discrimination, harmful gender norms, restrictive legal environment, low access to public health services due to related stigma, and violence," he said. The RC said he hopes that the conversation and response to the issues of sex workers would continue. "Their biggest desire is for viable alternative livelihoods, and there is no question that this would address many of the other issues they are facing." Mr Ahonsi also highlighted UN support to the most vulnerable communities, underscoring Outcome 4 of the UN Sustainable Cooperation Framework on Protection and Empowerment of the Most Vulnerable.

UNAIDS provides support to address inequality gaps within the national HIV and AIDS response include technical input in resource mobilization from Global Fund and other donors; accompaniment of PLHIV and Key Population (KP) led organizations for proposal development; capacity building; and evidence generation on human rights, and stigma and discrimination which support advocacy and planning. These contribute to the design and implementation of meaningful interventions, leveraging of capacity within the UN Joint Team to ensure the effectiveness of the national HIV & AIDS response, and position PLHIV and KP organizations to directly implement and advocate for vulnerable people including sex workers.



RODA Programme Coordinator Aruna Rashid Koroma (far R) with the RC and Heads of UNIDO, IOM & UNDP (photo credit /UNRCO)

With support from the Global Fund, RODA is implementing comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers and their clients in the North-East and Northwest of Sierra Leone. The project focuses on community empowerment; condom and lubricant programming; legal literacy ("Know Your Rights"); HIV and HIV related legal services; stigma and discrimination reduction, reducing gender-related discrimination and violence against women and girls in all their diversity; human rights and medical ethics for health care providers; sensitization of lawmakers and law-enforcement agents; and community mobilization and advocacy.

UNAIDS Country Director, Dr Isaac Ahemesah said, "we have over 59 children living with the female sex workers in 2 brothels. Thirty percent of them are below 18 years and that SGBV and drug use is extremely high among them." He also noted that HIV prevalence is 6.8 percent among the female sex workers compared to national average of 1.7 percent.



In the Swamps of Sierra Leone, Rural Women Plant Seeds of Peace

Large mineral deposits in Sierra Leone have often caused tensions between farming communities and miners, especially in the rural south. But a group of women have become ambassadors for peace. The mid-mornings of Matagelema village in south Sierra Leone often find the local women ankle-deep inside large rice fields. If they are not planting, they are weeding their crop. They also build or repair bunds and canals that the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Sierra Leone are assisting them to set up to facilitate irrigation, which will boost their yields.



A member of the women's rice group in Matagelema village in Moyamba district. Photo: WFP/Richard Mbouet

"We were forced to abandon our initial farms because of conflict with miners. They were mining in the very place we cultivated, thereby reducing our farming space. About 150 of us decided to form Manumuma Women's Farmers' Association in 2020 and establish ourselves here in Matagelema," says Mamie Achion, coordinator of the women farmers. Most of the group members are widows or single mums, and almost all of them raise their own as well as their relatives' children, Mamie says, and so the women are determined to succeed to be able to feed their families. Matagelema is situated about a kilometer away from a rural trading centre called Moriba, built out of the mining industry. Staff buses belonging to a big mining company ply the area all day; at night, floodlights expose the silhouette of a processing plant. Sierra Leone has the largest deposits of rutile in the world, a mineral used in the manufacturing of ceramics, paint, plastics and even food products that require a bright white colour.

In the past, tension could escalate because of the competition for land. The communities were also troubled by the large pits often left behind and the land degradation associated with mining. The tensions mostly happened Moyamba and Pujehun districts, which host large mining and oil palm concessions. Sierra Leone is also naturally endowed with inland valley swamps, a high potential ecosystem that if effectively used, can provide high agricultural yields, and bring about food self-sufficiency. But due to limited technical knowledge and the labour intensity required to develop irrigations systems, most swamps have been abandoned. Instead, farmers typically rely on shifting, upland agriculture, characterized by low yields and environmental damage. By working with groups such as Mamie's, WFP supports a Government initiative to build peaceful relationships between private companies and communities. Implemented jointly by WFP and the United Nations Development Programme under the UN Peacebuilding Fund, the initiative includes the provision of cash transfers to women and youth groups as an incentive to cultivate rice, legumes and vegetables in the inland valley swamps.

"When there is no food, people get agitated and conflicts emerge," explains Swalihu Jusu, who oversees the peacebuilding project on behalf of the Government's behalf? Working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, WFP has created agricultural employment for over 3,500 women and youths by training them on how to plant rice and vegetables using improved methods. WFP also provided fertilizer and seeds, supplied machines to process the harvest, and guaranteed farmers' access to the market. With additional funding from Japan, WFP has even gone beyond Moyamba and Pujehun to support more groups in six districts altogether in 113 communities. Women and youth groups have built irrigation schemes on 890 hectares of land.

"There is no more commotion now," Mamie adds, "We come together and agree on how to distribute our tasks and how many days and hours in a week to work under WFP's (peacebuilding) programme. Working with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, WFP has created agricultural employment for over 3,500 women and youths by training them on how to plant rice and vegetables using improved methods. WFP also provided fertilizer and seeds, supplied machines to process the harvest, and guaranteed farmers' access to the market.



A group of women returning from a day of transplanting rice. Photo: WFP/Richard Mbouet

“In their first meeting convened by the town chief in January 2020, the women agreed to form a farmers group and to contribute 5,000 Leones or roughly US\$0.50 each to have the group registered with the National Farmers’ Federation. thereafter, they agreed to contribute an additional 10,000 Leones each to buy seeds and fertilizers. They cultivated 10 hectares of swamps that the group itself secured in Matagelema; but the harvest failed because the group lacked access to improved, quick-yielding seeds. “This time, we are expecting a big harvest because we learned how to plant effectively, we are using high-yielding seeds and the bunds and canals now make it possible to retain fertilizer and water for us to plant crops several times in a year,” Mamie says. But some group members do not wait for their first harvest to enjoy the benefits of the project. Each time she receives her share of the money from WFP, 31-year-old Mamie Feika, and mother of five buys delicacies for the children and can afford schoolbooks and uniforms for the older ones.

For the residents of Matagelema, like Feika, WFP’s assistance is not only offering new farming opportunities; it empowers women and youth with the skills, resources and means to restore the degraded land and grow more nutritious food using climate-smart methods that nurture the environment and build long term resilience while contributing to resolving land conflicts/strengthening peace within the communities.

This intervention is financially supported by United Nations Peacebuilding Fund and Japan.

A second chance to learn for adolescent mother

One-year-old John lets out a cry as his mother Saffie Kaiyoko (18) leaves him with the grandmother at their home in Dambala village, Bo district. There is emotional pain in Saffie's heart as she hears John cry, however, the thought of her mission of leaving the house and going back into class at Selenga Junior Secondary School, calms Saffie down. "I dropped out of school in 2018 after I fell pregnant. I came back to school in 2020 and I now want to complete my education," says Saffie who is determined to be both a perfect mother and a star student.



Saffie, with baby John ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2021/Mutseyekwa

At age 16 years, a brief encounter with a man working at a nearby mine, left Saffie pregnant and alone to face the shock, guilt, and anguish of being an adolescent mother. This man had promised to help my family out of our financial problems. When he found out that I was pregnant, he just disappeared," says Saffie, as she reflects on the thought she even had to terminate the pregnancy because she predicated nothing but a gloomy life ahead because of the pregnancy.

"I was physically okay during my pregnancy and I was performing well in class, but I was embarrassed by everything that people were saying about me. I just wanted to hide from the world," says Saffie as she looks back on the constant jeering, laughter, and exclusion from her regular circle of friends which drove her to drop out of school. According to the 2020 Annual School Census, pregnant girls are among the 26 percent of Junior Secondary School girls who disengaged from the school system in 2020. The 2020 Annual School Census also recorded 141 girls from primary through to senior secondary school who were pregnant in school and notes that the learning outcomes of this population of students is compromised and the chances of them returning to school after delivery might be slim. It is for this reason that UNICEF, together with the Development Initiative Partners (DIP), has focused on the reintegration of girls into schools as part of the Access to Education for Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone Project.

The project was initiated to promote access to quality education opportunities for 20,000 out-of-school children (OOSC), who include girls, children affected by Ebola and children living with disabilities. Since 2018, the programme has assisted 85,024 children with school uniforms, learning materials and extra school charges, remedial classes, and mentorship programme to enroll and stay in school. The project has also collaborated with students and their families, schools, and community members to shun the stigma and discrimination attached to school dropouts. For lactating adolescent girls such as Saffie, teachers may give them added attention to ensure that they strike the balance between parenthood and being a student and to dissuade them from repeat pregnancies before finishing school.



Saffie is happy to be back in class with her peers ©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2021/Mutseyekwa

"When a girl falls pregnant at an early age, there is disappointment and sometimes outrage from the parents. As the school administrator and together with the life skills teachers, I have been doing home visits to help parents understand the value of supporting their daughters to complete school," says Mr Abass, the school administrator at Selenga Junior Secondary School.

Saffie is grateful that she has the love and support of her mother, who encouraged her to return to school and who looks after John during the day while she is in class. She is confident that the hard work she is now putting in school will one day pay off.

UNICEF has a large Education Programme in support of the Government of Sierra Leone and works closely with MBSSE and MHTE to ensure all children in Sierra Leone has access to school, reaching school children of all ages, including preschoolers across the country. Among the initiatives, there is the Out of School Children (OSSC). In 2021, UNICEF working with NGO partners and community structures provided support (uniforms, shoes, school materials and mentoring) to approximately 10,000 children who were out of school to bring them back to school.

To ensure high level and sustainable engagement, UNICEF also worked with key education partners to update the 2016 UNICEF supported an Out of School Children Study with Irish Aid funding. Key findings indicate that poverty, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, and harmful practices are among the major obstacles that impact access to education.

Based on the updated study, the government with support from UNICEF and key education partners are developing a national OOSC strategy, which will contribute to the implementation of national policies such as the Radical Inclusion Policy and the Education Sector Plan 2022- 2026. UNICEF is also implementing a pilot project with funding from USAID to address factors related to school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), based on global SRGBV minimum standards. Based on evidence generated by Action Research, UNICEF aims to implement successful actions to promote safety in schools, especially for girls.



IOM support to enhance access to reproductive health in remote areas of Sierra Leone

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has partnered with the Initiative for Global Perinatal Care (IGPC) to deliver training on Ultrasound to ensure access to perinatal care and management of newborns in remote communities and border areas in the country. Because of inadequate capacities to conduct ultrasound services, health care workers especially in peripheral health Units (PHUs)



Group photo of participants. Photo Credit: IOM/Alfred Fornah

in hard-to-reach areas in Sierra Leone refer cases of obstetric emergency to hospitals in major towns/districts headquarter towns. Sometimes the delay of reaching these facilities by pregnant women can be deadly. Portable ultrasound devices are also being made available to PHUs and Health Centres represented at the training. "Innovation in the form of telemedicine in rural areas has a great potential and this project can really contribute to strengthening peripheral health system preventing and responding to obstetric emergencies", said Maria Sole Dall'Oro, Project Coordinator at IOM Sierra Leone. "We are working with IOM to deliver this training in rural areas and remote border communities because the people in these areas are hard to reach with medical modalities. So, we are doing this to reach the most disadvantaged group" said Dr Kodaira Yuichi, Lead Trainer from IGPC. The Health Care Workers learnt fundamental skills on how to locate the placenta, interpreting an ultrasound image and other approaches on how to conduct ultrasound scanning and assessment, among others.

"What we stressed in the training is the identification of pregnant women in an early stage which is really important because you can find the complications of pregnancies in a very early time before they developed serious consequences". Dr Kodaira explained. Lahai Bob Katta, Community Health Officer from Poturu Community Health Centre participated in the training. For him, the training is very important and would enable him to address cases of obstetric emergency at the Health Centre in his Village. "Before, we used to refer pregnant women to Pujehun Maternity Government Hospital for Ultrasound examination, but now that we have gone through the training, we can conduct ultrasound services". Last week, twenty-one Health Care workers including Community Health Officers and Midwives were part of the training in the border district of Pujehun, bringing the number to 42 medical practitioners who have benefited from IOM/ IGPC ultrasonography training.

"Through this training, I have been empowered to accordingly respond to obstetric emergency cases that are being referred to our centre. I can now comfortably conduct clinical findings and confirm the diagnosis using the ultrasound devices", said Mariama Bangura, Midwife-in-charge, Pujehun Government Maternity Hospital.

Also, last month in Bo District 21 midwives received training and more than 100 pregnant women were provided with ultrasound services. In the coming weeks and months, medics in districts along border areas like Kailahun and Kambia will as well be reached for the training.

The programme is being delivered under the project "Strengthening Health System Capacity Preparedness and resilience in COVID19 Affected Points of Entry with Sierra Leone Diaspora" funded by the Government of Japan.



Dr. Kodaira Yuichi doing a presentation during the ultrasound training conducted by IOM and IGPC for healthcare workers in Pujehun. Photo credit: IOM/Alfred Fornah



Photo Credit/ FAO . Inside the Sierra Leone's Central Veterinary Laboratory in Teko, Makeni

Animal Health Key to Human Health. Central Veterinary Laboratory Role to Prevent Animal and Human Diseases

When diseases jump from animals (zoonotic disease) to human beings, it can be devastating, as was the Ebola Virus Disease epidemic that hit Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Liberia and, more recently, the COVID 19 pandemic. Therefore, the role of veterinary laboratory service for human and animal health cannot be overemphasized. For two decades, Sierra Leone's Central Veterinary Laboratory in Teko, Makeni, was renowned for its services.

As part of the Livestock and Veterinary Services Division in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), it was established in 1949 as the first in West Africa. It provided animal health services to farmers in Sierra Leone and beyond. The Laboratory became renowned in bacteriology, parasitology, haematology, histopathology, and serology, production of vaccine against Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia (CBPP), and research, which made it one of the major referral centres for animal health in West Africa. However, the laboratory services came to a halt in 1997, and its facilities were also destroyed because of the war. But even before the war, it was facing teething problems, including lack of funding, maintenance of equipment, reagents and consumables and staff attrition had left the Central Veterinary Laboratory in a disused state.

With the support from the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) program funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Sierra Leone renovated, equipped, and operationalized the Laboratory. Since the operationalization of the veterinary Laboratory, the testing capacity has been continuously enhanced to detect priority zoonotic diseases and Transboundary Animal Diseases (TADs). The CVL can perform basic and advanced diagnostic techniques (e.g. Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA), Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) and Fluorescent Antibody Test (FAT), among other tests. The FAO Emergency Centre for Transboundary Animal Diseases (ECTAD) works with member countries to plan and deliver veterinary assistance as well as respond to the threat of transboundary animal health crises. Through ECTAD, FAO builds animal health capacity to prevent, detect and respond to zoonotic and non-zoonotic disease outbreaks at the source.

According to Dr Germain Bobo, ECTAD Team Lead in Sierra Leone, previously, samples had to be shipped out of the country to regional and international reference laboratories for confirmation. Now the country has the serological and molecular diagnostic capacity to test for some of priority zoonotic diseases and Transboundary Animal Diseases such as Rabies, Avian Influenza (AI), African swine fever (ASF), Newcastle Disease (NCD), Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), Brucellosis, Peste des Petits ruminants (PPR).

Mr Mohamed Alpha Bah, Sierra Leone's Chief Veterinary Officer/Director of Livestock and Veterinary Services, said, "The veterinary Laboratory is very important. Before, when animal diseases broke out, we could not confirm what disease was affecting an animal. We used to conclude and say this person caught rabies, for example, and died. There was no way to confirm until it was too late." He added that farmers were also suffering enormous economic loss due to the lack of testing capacity in the country. "Peste des Petits ruminants (PPR) affected goats and sheep and caused immense economic loss to farmers. It is like an Ebola epidemic for animals. When once one of the herds catch it, almost all of them will die." The impact of the presence of the Laboratory is already being felt. Mr Bah said that "The fact that the Laboratory is able to help the farmers get their animals tested, this is a great help for them.



Photo Credit/ FAO. Veterinary officials at work

These animals (goats and sheep) are like a bank to these people. The more their animals die, it affects their economic wellbeing and even the food security of the country.” Dr Germain Bobo, Team Lead for ECTAD, noted that the quality of testing at the Laboratory had increased considerably. This is evidenced when the Lab at Makeni participated in a Proficiency Testing (PT) with International Reference Laboratory for Rabies and PPR and scored 100%. As a result of a recent diagnosis of the PPR (Peste des Petits Ruminants) virus among animals in the country, the Government of Sierra Leone has provided vaccines to vaccinate small ruminants. “This response was possible only because it was diagnosed and confirmed at the Central Veterinary Laboratory in Teko, Makeni.’ Said Dr Bobo. It is hoped that the Sierra Leone Central Veterinary Laboratory will help the Government of Sierra Leone detect diseases and respond appropriately to prevent and control spread from animal to human and protect the livelihoods of livestock of farmers.

“By ensuring the welfare of animals (e.g. vaccination canines against Rabies), you protect human lives too.” Dr Germain Bobo concluded.



A school learner studies at night in Conakry Dee, Port Loko District. ©UNOPS/Olivia Acland

Enhancing access to electricity in rural communities

Poor access to electricity is a challenge in Sierra Leone, especially for rural communities that are further left behind. The country has one of the lowest rates of access to electricity in the world, with only 23% of the total population and 6% of its rural population having access to electricity in 2018, according to the World Bank data on electricity. This is below the average of 47.6% for the population of Sub-Saharan Africa.

This is recognised as a binding constraint to long-term economic growth in Sierra Leone. Currently, the country is experiencing a net deficit of power and is in desperate need of new power sources. Sierra Leone's energy needs are under-resourced, and the scarcity of a reliable energy supply is one of the key impediments to the country economic and social development. Its installed power capacity per capita is among the lowest in the world with approximately 105 MW available for a population of over 7 million in 2018. In the urban/peri-urban areas, about 53% of the population is connected to the national grid. Lack of power is also constraining the diversification of the economy into higher value-added sectors, particularly light manufacturing, and the use of generators is contributing to Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, pollution, and high energy costs.

Over the past 4 years, the Ministry of Energy (MoE) has partnered with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) on the implementation of the Rural Renewable Energy Project (RREP), funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) to the tune of USD 48 million. The RREP systems are typically solar PV mini grids of varying capacities, ranging from 16kWp to 200kWp, contributing a total of 4.4MW of installed capacity. So far, an estimated 16,798 households, 1,495 businesses, 187 schools, 54 Community Health Centres (CHCs) and 212 other public institutions are electrified across 81 rural communities of Sierra Leone. Currently, 289,882 direct beneficiaries (around 159,298 of them are female and 130,584 are male and 3,930 people with disabilities) are enjoying clean energy.

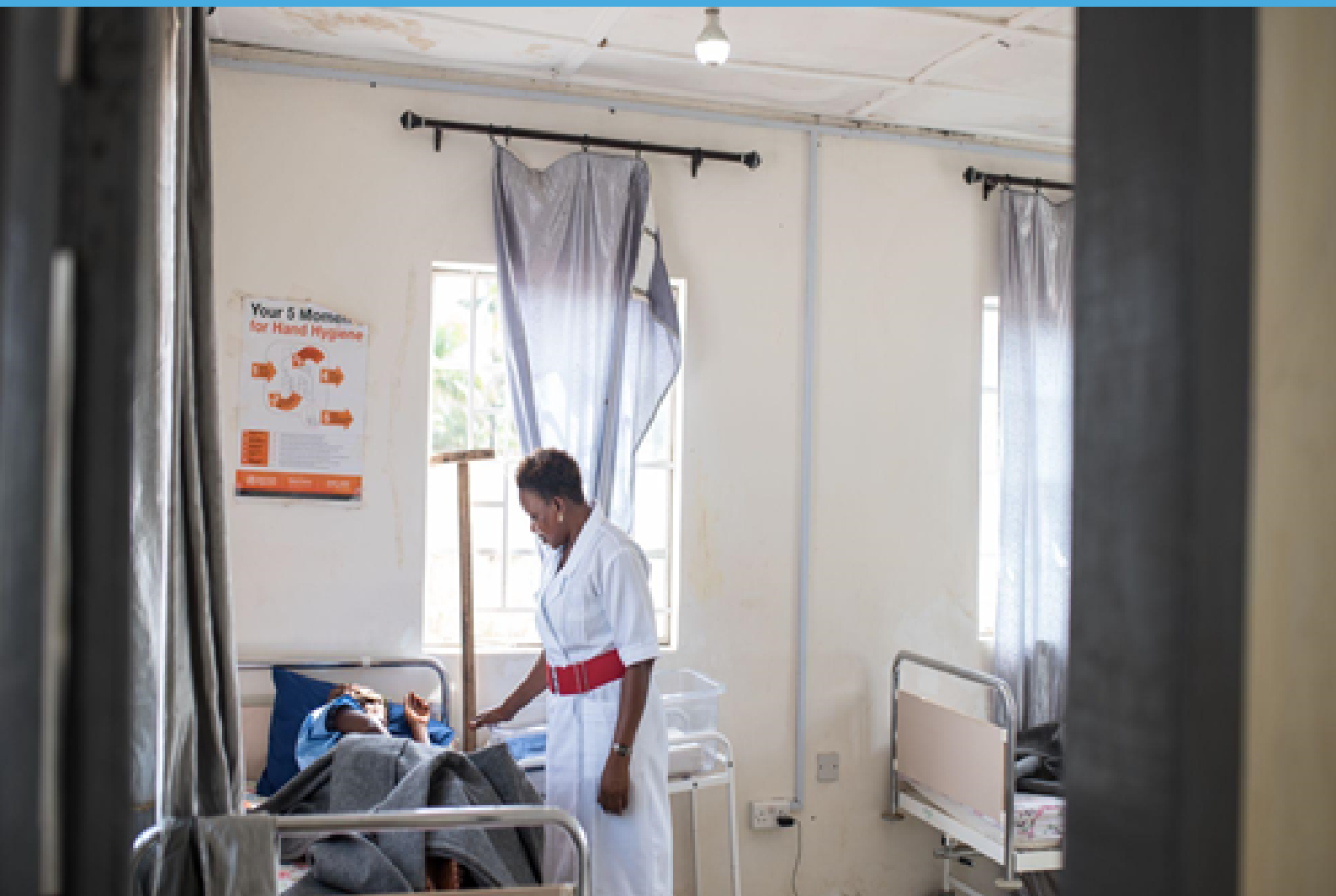
Salamatu Kamara is a nurse at Petifu Port Loko District, and she explains that the mini-grid electricity is helping the CHCs to provide better services compared to other areas where there is no light. She stated that the light has saved the lives of so many people, adding that it is secure and available for 24hrs in the CHC.

"When a child is born, the light helps us to see and observe very well which was difficult earlier using a torchlight. And if a child is in a critical condition, we are able to stabilize the child using electrical vacuum aspiration."

The positive impact of reliable electricity supply in improving health and education systems, and achieving related sustainable development, is well recognized among development experts. WHO has stated that electricity access is a "critical enabler" for universal health access. A special analysis in the 2021 Human Capital Index report finds that improving access to and quality of tertiary education and reducing adult risk factors for health is key for a resilient recovery in the region.

The project has improved both socio-economic outcomes and educational outcomes. Learners have good grades in school because they are able to study at night using electricity. There is increased security of people in rural areas as they feel safe to walk and spend time outside with a bright shining light. Additionally, the household income of people has increased through businesses that support the productive use of electricity.





A nurse attending to a patient at the CHC in Conakry Dee, Port Loko District. ©UNOPS/Olivia Acland

Mohamed Sawaneh, a Manager at the National Petroleum branch in Foredugu, Port Loko District attest to the positive impact of electricity with regards to spending less money on fuel consumption for his business.

“The money used on buying diesel has reduced, I used to spend SLL 800,000 to get petrol generator running every day for 8 hours in the day. But with the electricity from the mini-grid, I spend less amount of money on fuel consumption and reduce carbon emission coming from the use of generator.”

Furthermore, the implementation of the Productive Use Strategy since October 2019 is set to have a positive impact on 49,963 beneficiaries by September 2021, with 312 new direct jobs created and £1,050,000 additional investments in the communities by the private sector in various productive use projects, offering Value for Money (VfM) by leveraging private sector funds. From a modest amount of funds allocated for productive use in the RREP project, the projected economic development outcomes and impacts at the few implementation sites point to huge transformational potential if similar investments were to be made in more sites.

By the end of 2021, with an estimated 24,000 households, businesses and schools connected through the RREP, the rural access rate in Sierra Leone would increase from 5% to 7.3%. The expected social impact is to reach 346,000 direct beneficiaries as well as reduce the carbon dioxide emissions by 455 Tonnes CO₂ by the end of May 2022. The project has been directly responsible for creating the enabling environment for the development of a viable mini-grid sector which has encouraged further mini-grid development in Sierra Leone through the development of regulated standards, transparent processes and fit for purpose tools that encourage the private sector to invest and realize returns.



Providing skills to rural youth for Inclusive growth; reducing unemployment

At age 20, Joseph Foday found himself a high school dropout amidst financial constraints to further his education to university level. With other dropouts in his birth-district of Kenema, he joined a clique- perpetuating act of gangsterism in the township, and his life continued to spiral downwards. "Life was all about clique and gangsterism," Foday affirmed. 34-year-old Daniel Gbani from Tonkolili District lost both parent in 2012 shortly after he had sat to the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), got 7 credits and was ready for enrolment into the University of Sierra Leone (USL).



Photo showing trainees enrolled in UNDP's funded skills training program (welding department) at the Ernest Bai Koroma University in Northern Sierra Leone. Photo Credit @UNDP/Mohamed Kanu

The demise of his parents filled Gbani's mind with frustration together with very limited opportunity for rural youth, casting a slue to his passion. Unlike Joseph Foday, Gbani moved into volunteerism with the hope of seeking employment after a certain period. He volunteered with many institutions in his hometown, but his lack of employable skills left him unemployed. Gbani opted out of volunteerism and started hanging out with 'ghetto' boys. Joseph and Gbani live in different regions of the country but have faced similar challenges as a youth. Today, both Joseph and Gbani are part of 60 youth which includes 34 males and 26 females enrolled in UNDP's funded skills training program (welding department) at the Ernest Bai Koroma University in Northern Sierra Leone.

"I am almost two months old into this training program and now I have realized that I can solve my own problems without involved in gangsterism or any act of violence," says Joseph, "and I hope to use my welding skills to mentor other young people in my district to help turn their lives around."

Joseph's attitude and self-esteem have also greatly improved. With a set of start-up kits that will be provided to the trainees at the end of the course, Joseph is already planning to transform youth gangsterism with his workshop which he intends to establish in his hometown and expand to other districts. Gbani didn't leave his passion behind either, UNDP's latest opportunity to this set of rural youth has motivated Gbani to be a fast learner in the welding program. Gbani is also working hard for what he describes as a 'life-changing experience' and wants to be an ambassador to other youth in Tonkolili District and beyond. "This training has made me understand the value of life with an employable skill, and given me a sense of purpose," says Gbani, with a mixed feeling of pain and a sense of hope.

Aminata Bangura, unlike Joseph and Gbani who came from other districts, lives a stone throw away from the EBK University where she is enrolled on the soap-making program. As a youth and single parent, she does not feel fulfilled with her current way of survival through petty trading. She finds inspiration everywhere, but her mind operates on a burning desire to make something, which the UNDP training program has offered. Her primary desire to be part of the soapmaking program is to be able to give a better life to her two young boys while making other people happy through her new skills.

Unemployed graduate youth are not left behind either

Blessed with a youthful population, with 7 in 10 citizens being below the age of 35, the impact is not only on young people who do not have qualifications, but increasingly, unemployment is common amongst those with diplomas and graduate-level qualifications. 31-year-old Esther Mobombor graduated in 2019 with a certificate in Social Work and she comes from Kono District to be part of the gara-tie-dyeing program. For Esther, she opted into the UNDP supported skill training program because her college certificate could not get her a job and now, she wants to learn and do something with her hands, gara-tie-dyeing being her best fit, which she also believes will give her more voice to raise her 3 children despite her youthfulness. With her new marketing skills, Esther dreams to establish her own gara-tie-dyeing enterprises to make money and to train other female youth in her district.



Photo showing female trainer- Fatmata Bangura in UNDP's funded skills training program (welding department) at the Ernest Bai Koroma University in Northern Sierra Leone. Photo Credit @UNDP/Mohamed Kanu

Increasingly, employers and policymakers are placing greater emphasis on the development of life and employability skills as a way to prepare young people for success in today's rapidly changing and globalized world. Building on those competencies helps young people to be motivated, reliable, and confident decision-makers, who are able to overcome adversity and realize their full potentials.

With funds from UNDP Funding Window, the 'Strengthening Youth meaningful participation in Decision making structures in Sierra Leone' project was launched in 2020, an initiative that seeks to address the challenges, including capacity gaps, of government and civil society actors, in formulating, implementing and partnering for youth and gender-friendly policies that ensure meaningful youth engagement and contribution in decision-making processes at all levels as well as ensuring the meaningful engagement of youth in skills training and income-generating activities.

By the end of 2021, with an estimated 24,000 households, businesses and schools connected through the RREP, the rural access rate in Sierra Leone would increase from 5% to 7.3%. The expected social impact is to reach 346,000 direct beneficiaries as well as reduce the carbon dioxide emissions by 455 Tonnes CO₂ by the end of May 2022. The project has been directly responsible for creating the enabling environment for the development of a viable mini-grid sector which has encouraged further mini-grid development in Sierra Leone through the development of regulated standards, transparent processes and fit for purpose tools that encourage the private sector to invest and realize returns.





SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

