



UNITED NATIONS
SIERRA LEONE



NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 1 • JUNE 2021

COVID-19



UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR BABATUNDE AHONSI ADDRESSES 3RD WAVE OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

Dear Colleagues,

Sierra Leone is experiencing 3rd wave of Covid-19 transmission. We have seen an increase in the positivity rate from 1.5% in May to the current 8.9%. We have also observed that the bed occupancy in COVID-19 community treatment and care centers nationally has increased from 4.0% in the month of May to the current 35.0 % June.

In view of the above, I wish to encourage all of us to consistently observe the recommended public health and social measures to keep Covid-19 at bay. These measures include COVID-19 vaccines which remain the most powerful public health tool at our disposal at the moment. The UN Secretariat last month provides the following information about the AstraZeneca vaccine (that is being offered at the UN Clinic to UN personnel and their family members) and related issues:

OVERVIEW

1. Trained midwife promotes safe motherhood to save mothers and babies
2. UN Resident Coordinator Babatunde Ahonsi addresses the 3rd wave of COVID-19 transmission
3. COVID-19 Flowchart for UN personnel and eligible dependents
4. Hundreds of unemployed youths receiving skills training
5. Responding to the heavy toil of malnutrition on babies and mothers in Kambia
6. Vaccination boosts Sierra Leone's Ebola prevention
7. Moyamba and Pujehun Districts score joint UNDP, WFP-supported project 80% for Peacebuilding Project's Success amidst COVID-19
8. UNDP Sierra Leone Country Office Welcomes New Resident Representative
9. Japan signs a project to help train auto mechanics in Sierra Leone
10. The UN longest-serving staff member in Sierra Leone bids farewell

- The AstraZeneca vaccine is very effective in preventing severe disease and death due to COVID-19 in adults of all ages.
- A very rare but serious side effect (blood clotting with low platelets) may occur after a first dose:
- Initial experience shows it occurs in about 4-6 people in a million.
- It appears less likely in older adults than younger adults – but remains very rare.
- The benefits of vaccination are far greater than the risk of rare side effects. In addition to the benefits in preventing severe disease and death due to COVID-19, the vaccine offers.
 - Protection against overall COVID-19 and complications from 'long COVID' and death.
 - Protection potentially for close contacts and the community, by preventing transmission.
 - Reduction of risk of severe disease from some variant strains of the virus
- While several COVID-19 vaccines appear to have high levels of efficacy, no vaccine is 100% protective. As a result, there will always be some people who do not develop protection as expected after the COVID-19 vaccination.
- In addition to a vaccine's specific characteristics, several factors such as a person's age, their underlying health conditions, or previous exposure to COVID-19 may have an impact on a vaccine's effectiveness.
- Evaluations of vaccines' effectiveness in the routine use sets will be critical for continuing to optimize the use of these vaccines and to further the development of ever more effective vaccines. This is a normal part of the lifecycle of vaccine development and assures that we continue to improve the vaccines and their use.
- For two-dose vaccines, the protection provided by vaccines is only partial after the first dose, and time is needed before protection reaches its maximum level after the second dose. People may still get infected, especially if they do not continue to take precautions after their first dose.
- Even after taking all of the recommended doses and waiting for a few weeks for immunity to build up, there is a chance that someone could fall ill. Vaccines do not provide full (100%) protection. However, even if people fall ill, those who have been vaccinated are likely to have mild illness or be asymptomatic.
- Vaccines are life-saving but on their own, they are not enough. We need to continue to 'do it all, especially when most people in society are not vaccinated and COVID-19 is widespread.
- At the moment we are advising everyone – vaccinated or not – to adhere to the same public health measures like physical distancing, wearing a mask, hand and respiratory hygiene, and opening windows and doors where possible.

In other words, for the foreseeable future, we must continue to wear masks, keep a safe physical distance, and handwash with soap or sanitizer. Being vaccinated does not mean that we can throw caution to the wind and put ourselves and others at risk. But given that being fully vaccinated offers significant protection against severe illness and hospitalization if one were to become infected with the coronavirus, I wish to again encourage all UN personnel (and their family members) that are yet to be vaccinated to receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

The UNCT will continue to listen to your concerns and provide as much information and advice as possible.

Please stay safe and healthy.

Check out our latest publications below.



PROGRESS TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNSDCF IN 2020

On 31 October 2019, the United Nations System in Sierra Leone represented by the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the Minister of Planning and Economic Development signed the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2023. The UNSDCF 2020-2023 defines how the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Sierra Leone contributes to the national development priorities and strategies of the Government of Sierra Leone as established in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023 and the progress towards the achievement of the global 2030 Agenda for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UNSDCF is harmonized with the MTNDP clusters, outputs, targets and indicators and incorporates the goals and principles that underpin the SDGs. The UNSDCF also upholds the principles of gender equality, human rights, and conflict sensitivity, ensuring that “no one is left behind”, which guide all UN system programmes and projects. The UNSDCF intends to advance the United Nations Secretary-General’s agenda on repositioning the United Nations development system and responds to the Secretary-General’s call for optimizing resources and improving the effectiveness of UN support to countries.

Progress has been made towards the implementation of the UNSDCF in 2020, on all four outcome areas in its first year of implementation.

		Sustainable Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security, and Climate Resilience	Transformational Governance	Access to Basic Services	Protection and Empowerment of the Most Vulnerable
	763,924	●	●	●	●
	18.7m	●	●	●	●
	29.2m	●	●	●	●
	4.5m	●	●	●	●
	2.4m	●	●	●	●
	1.8m	●	●	●	●
	1.7m	●	●	●	●

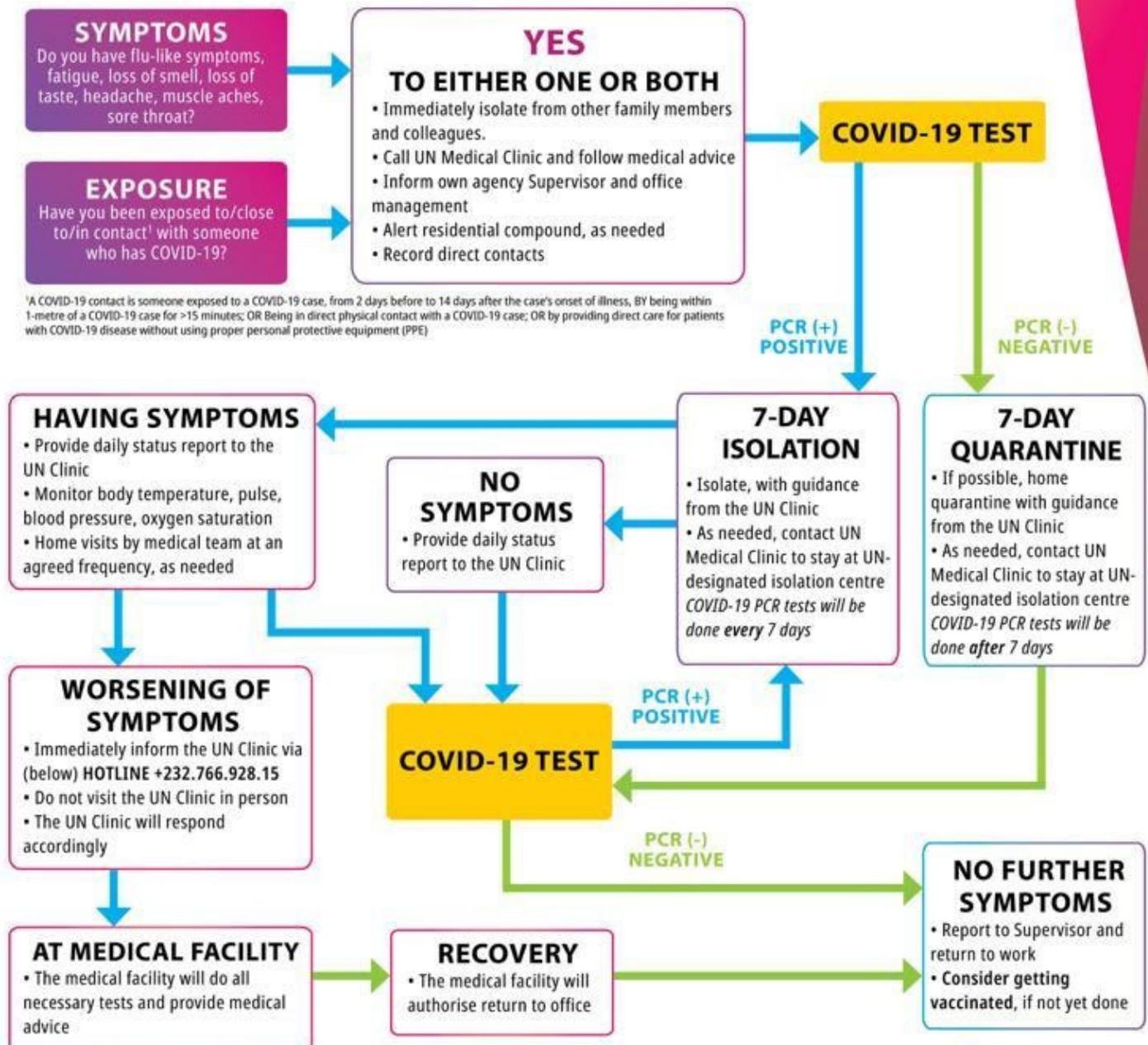
COVID19

Flowchart for UN Personnel and Eligible Dependents

CONCERNED YOU MAY HAVE COVID-19?

Use flowchart below to assess your risk and report as needed

This applies even if you are already vaccinated



UN Clinic Hotline:

+232.766.928.15





Photo showing Bondo Thoronka with her quadruplets. She was safely delivered by Regina Conteh, a UNFPA trained midwife in Alikalia ©UNFPA Sierra Leone/John Sesay

TRAINED MIDWIFE PROMOTES SAFE MOTHERHOOD TO SAVE MOTHERS AND BABIES

“Serving a hard to reach community like Alikalia comes with a lot of challenges. The good thing, however, is my contribution in promoting safe motherhood and in reducing maternal mortality which I am proud of as a midwife,” said Regina Conteh, a midwife attached to the Alikalia Community Health Post, Koinadugu district, north of Sierra Leone. With 717 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the 2019 Demographic and Health Survey, Sierra Leone is

still among countries with the world’s highest maternal mortality ratio. Midwives remain the basis of UNFPA’s work in achieving the three transformative goals of zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls. With funding from UK aid, UNFPA, through the Saving Lives Programme, supports the Government of Sierra Leone in training midwives in the three schools of midwifery (Freetown, Makeni and Bo), to improve the availability of skilled birth attendants as well as to help reduce the gap in the country’s midwifery workforce.

Regina Conteh is a midwife trained at the School of Midwifery in Makeni. By 2012, as a State Enrolled Community Health Nurse, she served at the Community Health Post at Matotoka where she witnessed women losing their lives giving birth to their babies, something that pushed her to enrol in 2017 to become a midwife. “This [midwifery] came with a lot of challenges,” she explained, adding that “it, however, was a way one could contribute in promoting safe motherhood and in saving lives of mothers and babies.” Reflecting on the numerous trainings she got, she said, “The trainings at the school of midwifery are largely contributing to my work in successfully saving lives.”

With no maternal mortality reported since 2019 when she was posted to the Alikalia Community Health Post, Regina believes this is due to the significance attached to the quick referral of major cases. “When a case is detected to be serious at the antenatal care stage, we immediately do a referral to the Kabala Government Hospital. This is sometimes difficult especially given the terrible road network.” Delivering babies comes with required skills and expertise and this is more so with twins or quadruplets. In September 2020, Regina successfully delivered quadruplets, the first midwife to have done so.

A pregnant mother, Bondo Thoronka, arrived at the Community Health Post for health care services but was referred to the Kabala Government Hospital. “She failed to travel to Kabala as advised. Days later, she came to the facility, fully dilated. There was no ambulance. In a bid to save her and the babies, I used the skills I was taught at the School of Midwifery to deliver her,” a proud Regina narrated, and added that, “delivering that pregnancy was a lifetime experience.” With bleeding in pregnancy accounting for about 40 per cent of maternal deaths in Sierra Leone, Regina was worried about possible postnatal complications like bleeding which has the potential to lead to death. “This was my major concern. I couldn’t sleep as I was constantly monitoring her and the quadruplets. It turned out to be one big success. Today the mother and her four babies are all alive,” said Regina.

Community advocacy is critical to ending preventable maternal deaths. When Regina was first posted to the community, she felt like returning. “When I first arrived, there were cultural challenges too, added to the fact that it was my first time coming here. Changing the mentality of people was a problem; more so, getting women to visit the health facility to deliver babies.” There was a high number of home deliveries by traditional birth attendants (TBAs) who lacked the required skills and medical equipment to ensure safe delivery, contributing to women dying during childbirth.



Photo showing a nurse attending to Alikalia Community Health Centre in Koinadugu District ©UNFPA Sierra Leone/John Sesay

When Regina realized this was a major problem, she embarked on outreach visits to different communities, talking to TBAs about how they could help in getting more women to the health facility. “I developed a scheme wherein when a TBA brings to the health facility a pregnant woman, some amount of money is given to her as transport fare. It was a difficult drive but it helped to create impact. Now, we get a huge turnout of pregnant women visiting the facility daily with a minimum of 20 deliveries a month.”

Looking back, Regina, who by midday of Friday, 23 April, had received over a dozen women for maternal health care services, said that working in a Community Health Post she never knew was a challenge especially being the only midwife with a Community Health Assistant. “We lack the infrastructure and tools. There is a need for more support. However, I am happy to be serving the community and helping in promoting safe motherhood by conducting antenatal clinics, clean and safe deliveries, detecting complications and doing referrals and eventually contributing to reducing maternal mortality rates, thanks to the UNFPA and donor support.”



Photo showing UN Resident Coordinator-Babatunde Ahonsi in Sumbuya, Bo District giving thumbs up to a female Grader trainee enrolled in IOM funded Technical Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) for youth

HUNDREDS OF UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS RECEIVING SKILLS TRAINING

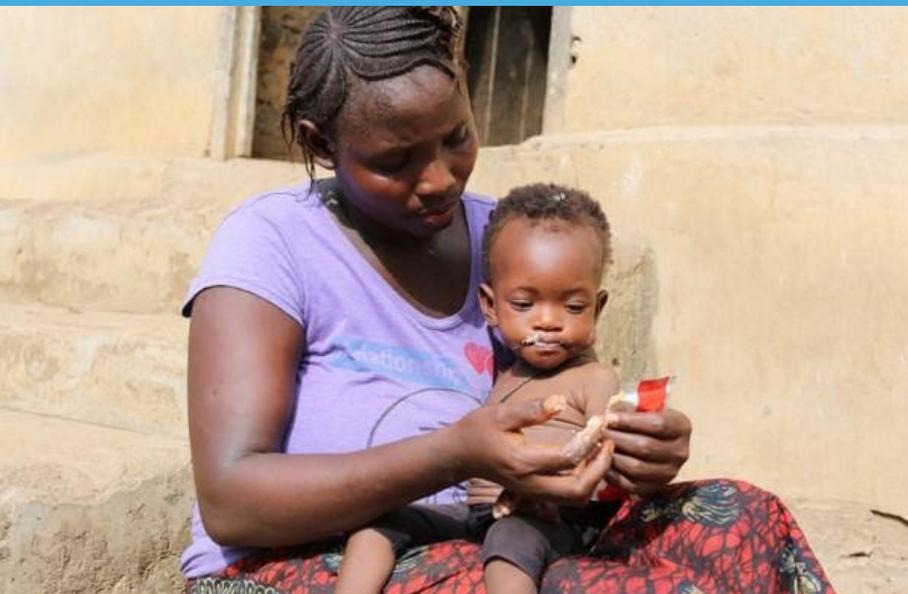
An ambitious USD 4.3 million vocational training programme implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Sierra Leone with funding from the government of Japan has registered more than 1,000 participants, which is halfway towards the goal of preparing 2,000 unemployed young men and women to meet the domestic demand for skilled jobs. The numbers on youth unemployment in Sierra Leone are daunting -almost 60 percent of young people in Sierra Leone

are unemployed, driving their urge to seek work abroad, usually via irregular migration. Yet in an economy still struggling after the ravages of a decade-long civil war followed by Ebola outbreak, there's also strong demand for skilled labour—chiefly in repairing and operating farming, road construction and mining machinery that goes unmet. By expanding a year-long effort to bring greater skills training here, IOM and Sierra Leone's private companies are together creating jobs that will curb irregular migration. This is an opportunity to grow skillsets for Sierra Leonean youth, whilst dissuading them from embarking on dangerous journeys.

In this latest iteration, tractors, graders, and other heavy machinery are driving the project. Currently, 75 young people are engaged in a tractor training programme implemented by IOM and the Ministry of Youth Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education. The initiative grew out of an encounter two years ago at the Tokyo International Conference on Africa's Development (TICAD 7), where IOM representatives met with executives of Sierra Tropical Sierra Leone Ltd. (STL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Dole Asia Holdings and one of the country's leaders in agribusiness. IOM was encouraged by the company's recent investments in pineapple cultivation and fruit processing factory designed to employ locals. IOM had already conducted skills training sessions for 189 youths attached to STL in the Sumbuya, Bo district.

"The knowledge and skills this programme brings will enable young people to have gainful employment that will provide them with income to support themselves and their families," said Dr James Bagonza, the acting Head of Office for IOM Sierra Leone. "It is good for young people to acquire the necessary skills and be employed in the country, rather than risking their lives to embark on desperate backway journeys." At an event in March this year, launching IOM's Grader and Tractor Programme, Mohamed Orman Bangura, Sierra Leone's Minister of Youth Affairs, promised: "Those of you going through this training are assured of getting jobs upon graduation.

It is no doubt that with our youths championing agriculture, the country will become food sufficient." Another 240 youths have received entrepreneurship training and mentorship—that is, learning to launch their own businesses. In addition, almost 300 have received training for jobs in fisheries. Within the same project, IOM has also collaborated with the Freetown City Council to train 220 youths on sustainable waste management, equipping them with 20 motorized tricycles and other waste collection gear. This initiative helps communities better manage waste while creating jobs for young people. These programmes all are part of IOM's larger-scale youth empowerment project targeting 2,000 young job seekers by April 2022.



Kadiatu feeding baby Makala on ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF).
©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2021/Mutseyekwa

RESPONDING TO THE HEAVY TOIL OF MALNUTRITION ON BABIES AND MOTHERS

Kadiatu Kargbo has walked for almost five kilometres, under the blazing summer heat of Kambia district in Sierra Leone, heading towards the family's field to sow some millet seeds.

Baby Makala is strapped securely behind Kadiatu's back as she heads towards the piece of land which she has not attended to for over 10 days.

"I have been in Kambia District hospital because Makala has not been well and was diagnosed as having malnutrition," says Kadiatu, whose face shows the exhaustion she feels from the long walk and from the heavy toil of Makala's struggle with ill health. At eight months, Makala should now be crawling and raising herself to stand, but sadly, she is lagging in her development, can hardly sit on her own and constantly cries despite the mother's compassionate efforts to soothe her. Malnutrition has robbed Makala of the chance to grow, develop or play like any child of that age would do. This condition has also made her susceptible to different illnesses, which bring additional grief to both the mother and the baby. "Because of Makala's ill health, I have not been able to work in the field and this is where I am supposed to get food to feed my family and extra money for the household. I have also had very little time for my other two children," says Kadiatu as she explains how this bout of malnutrition has also had a knock-on effect on the lives of the entire family.

Malnutrition remains a high burden in many parts of Sierra Leone and continues to alter the life chances and potential of many children. According to the Demographic Health Survey of 2019, 30 per cent of children under the age of 5 are stunted (too short for their age), mainly a result of malnutrition. The same survey also highlights that 11 per cent of children under five are severely stunted, five per cent are wasted (too thin for their height), with 1 per cent being severely wasted. The Sierra Leone Emergency Food Security Monitoring System (2020) also highlights how COVID-19 has exacerbated household food insecurity with a potential increase in the burden of malnutrition in the country. Travel restrictions and lack of money have drastically altered household livelihoods and incomes, resulting in increased food insecurity. Across Sierra Leone, 51 per cent of households have had challenges accessing markets, resulting in a 10-percentage point increase in household food insecurity from 53 per cent during the 2019 lean season to 63 per cent during 2020.

In Kambia district hospital, an average of 4 children is admitted weekly to the hospital for treatment of malnutrition. Most of these admissions are of children coming from households where food insecurity and poverty are persistent. With support from the Government of Ireland, UNICEF is working closely with the Directorate of Food and Nutrition in the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, to ensure that babies such as Makala continue to receive the appropriate care and support to help them recover from malnutrition during COVID-19 emergency through capacity building of health workers, community health workers and mother support groups on nutritional care and support in the context of COVID-19.

While admitted to the Inpatient Feeding Program (IPF) hospital, babies receive comprehensive medical care and nutritional support and advice from trained health workers. On admission at the hospital, Makala was severely underweight, weighing just 7.4 kilograms. She was also severely dehydrated, consistently vomited and had a frequent stool.



Kadiatu taking a rest from the work in the field to attend to baby Makala
©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2021/Mutseyekwa



Kadiatu, with baby Makala on the back, coming from a day out in the field
©UNICEF Sierra Leone/2021/Mutseyekwa

Her appetite was also very poor. Two weeks into her treatment, she can now nibble through the entire contents of the ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) packet and is now suckling. “Before heading off to the field, she ate one packet of the peanut butter paste (as per health worker’s advice),” says Kadiatu, as she explains the meal which she hopes will sustain Makala for the greater part of the day while they are out in the field.

Community support structures, such as Mothers’ Support Groups, also serve as important allies for early identification, referral and treatment of severely malnourished children and continue to work with the mothers to provide out-patient treatment support when back in the community. Mothers’ Support groups have also received training on how to support caregivers who lack adequate knowledge on optimum feeding practices for infants.

Kadiatu admits and graciously acknowledges the persistence of, Elizabeth Sherriff, a Mothers’ Support Group member who convinced her that Makala’s illness had nothing to do with witchcraft, but that the baby was malnourished. Kadiatu recalls how she spent many months moving to different villages to try and find traditional solutions to help her baby. “The Mothers’ Support Group has really helped me and my baby. She is the one who took the baby to the hospital, and she continues to give me support on how to prepare nutritious meals for my children,” says Kadiatu. After four hours of working the fields, Kadiatu heads back home, ensuring that she arrives in time to give Makala her next scheduled sachet of the RUTF. Apart from carrying baby Makala on the back, she also carries a pile of firewood, which she will sell some and use the others to prepare the evening meal for the family.

VACCINATION BOOSTS SIERRA LEONE'S EBOLA PREVENTION

While the 2014–2016 deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa devastated lives and wrecked health services, it also offered pivotal lessons in outbreak control by stoking swift and more effective response as well as driving progress in vaccines and therapeutics.

When the virus re-erupted in Guinea in mid-February 2021, neighbouring countries were quick to ramp up readiness to tackle the potential cross-border infection.



Vaccination boosts Sierra Leone's Ebola prevention
©WHO/Saffea Gborie

The outbreak in Guinea, which re-emerged in the same region as the 2014–2016 outbreak, was declared over on 19 June. In support of countries neighbouring Guinea, the World Health Organization (WHO) swiftly undertook a risk assessment and rated the risk of spread in the region as high. WHO further helped the government's institute actions immediately to prevent spill-over of the disease. In readiness for potential cross-border infection, Guinea's six neighbours stepped up enhanced surveillance and screening at border crossing points and robust community engagement. Rapid response teams were deployed to border areas to strengthen districts' readiness using the pillar approach. Capacities for testing and treatment facilities were scaled up as well as working with communities to take full ownership and rally around public health responses. In Sierra Leone, the health authorities rolled out preventive Ebola vaccination as a priority action of its Ebola Outbreak Preparedness and Contingency Plan. The vaccination targeted 16 000 people at high risk such as frontline health workers and communities in border areas.

"Apart from other critical public health measures for preventing EVD infection, the Ebola vaccine is a powerful public health tool at our disposal that can protect the health care workers and other frontline service providers who are at high risk of exposure," says Dr Charles Njuguna, Health Security and Emergencies lead at WHO in Sierra Leone. In addition to health workers, traditional healers, taxi motorbike riders were among the high-risk population groups being targeted in the vaccination for which the doses were mobilized by WHO. "I am a health worker and every day at work we interact with people from different backgrounds and localities even before fully knowing their disease conditions," says Salome Kanjama, who received the Ebola vaccination. "It helped boost my confidence and safety against the disease even as we offer services to others. There are families in Sierra Leone that spend the day in Guinea and return in the evening and vice versa." The latest outbreak in Guinea was contained within the country, where 23 cases, 11 survivors and 12 deaths were reported. Guinean authorities, with the help of WHO and partner organizations, promptly launched a response, with vaccinations starting just nine days into the outbreak. "The government has been impressively proactive and determined in mobilizing partners to support in building structures and capacities for prevention, preparedness and readiness for any potential outbreak, and that includes deployment of the vaccine on compassionate grounds," says Dr Steven Velabo Shongwe, WHO Representative in Sierra Leone.

Even though the outbreak is now over in Guinea, we continue to support the health authorities in the sub-region through cross-border collaboration and partnerships to sustain enhanced public health surveillance for early detection of any resurgence of Ebola as well as continue with the EVD vaccination exercise in Sierra Leone" Dr Shongwe added. While the 2014–2016 deadly Ebola outbreak in West Africa devastated lives and wrecked health services, it also offered pivotal lessons in outbreak control by stoking swift and more effective response as well as driving progress in vaccines and therapeutics. When the virus re-erupted in Guinea in mid-February 2021, neighbouring countries were quick to ramp up readiness to tackle the potential cross-border infection. The outbreak in Guinea, which re-emerged in the same region as the 2014–2016 outbreak, was declared over on 19 June. In support of countries neighbouring Guinea, the World Health Organization (WHO) swiftly undertook a risk assessment and rated the risk of spread in the region as high.

MOYAMBA AND PUJEHUN DISTRICTS SCORE JOINT UNDP, WFP-SUPPORTED PROJECT 80% FOR PEACEBUILDING PROJECT'S SUCCESS AMIDST COVID-19

Residents (youth, women, chiefs and other district and chiefdom authorities) of Malen and Makpele chiefdoms of Pujehun District and of Lower Banta and Upper Banta Chiefdoms in Moyamba District have rated the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), UNDP and WFP Multi-Stakeholder Platform (MSP) Project “over 80% successful” as a resource-based and local conflict resolution mechanism that promotes peace and social cohesion.



Photo showing Jitta Kanneh, Mammy Queen of Makpele Chiefdom and member of Chiefdom Development Committee, at one of the swamp-rice development livelihoods for peace initiative of the PBF project. Photo Credit: @UNDP/Mohamed Kanu

“This finding was revealed by district stakeholders during a two-day spot-check visit to the project chiefdoms led by UNDP where the mission team engaged with community members, local and traditional leaders of the areas to learn about the outcomes of the project. It’s almost one year now, we have not witnessed road blockades or any act of violence in the Pujehun District emanating from land-related disputes or dissatisfied youth groups or a community member. We are grateful to UNDP and WFP and the Government of Sierra Leone.” -says Jitta Kanneh, Mammy Queen of Makpele Chiefdom. Communities of Moyamba and Pujehun Districts share common socio-economic activities, and both districts are recognized for the abundance of natural-resource wealth hence experience a high level of operations by international large-scale mining and agricultural commercial companies. However, the two districts are among the poorest of the poor in Sierra Leone which ranks at the tail end of development globally. Based on this background and a history of war and underdevelopment, there have been frequent unrests between the communities and the multinational companies investing in the areas, as well as among communities and their local leadership.

Courtesy of the UN Peacebuilding Fund, “In Malen Chiefdom, the multi-stakeholder project is bringing all parties together. Community people are trusting each other again and the Grievance Redress Committees (GRC) is providing opportunities to discuss grievances, and stakeholders’ views are sought on how they would like community matters to be taken forward.” According to Chief S.R Moiguah, the Chiefdom Speaker for Malen Chiefdom. The project was launched at the end of 2019, UNDP and WFP through the Government of Sierra Leone launched the “Mitigating Localized Resources-Based Conflicts and Increasing Community Resilience” project piloted in Pujehun and Moyamba Districts. Prior to this project, findings showed that the two districts were characterized by violent social unrest and land conflicts and overall deteriorating relationships between communities and multinational companies investing in the large-scale agriculture and mining sectors in these communities.

The project thus seeks to promote peace and social cohesion in these areas through a combination of peace dialogues, grievance redress committees and community policing and by supporting sustainable agriculture as well as the creation of income-generating opportunities for the people. “Our recent field engagements with chiefdom stakeholders and grassroots members have shown that whatever tool our implementing partner-Fambul Tok International is using to engage the MSP districts of Pujehun and Moyamba seems to be working. We implore our donors, and we hope they (donor) can also come to these communities and boost what has already been started.” Says Kadi Jumu Peters, Leader of UNDP Governance Cluster. According to Kadiatu Kanneh, a single mother of two benefiting from the project said the 20% is left out because “we still lack facilitation to further process the harvested rice. We are starting to harvest the rice three times a year and it is a lot. We need rice dryers and processors and storage facilities”. She believes these facilities will complete the value chain for their community to better rip from the project.

UNDP SIERRA LEONE COUNTRY OFFICE WELCOMES NEW RESIDENT REPRESENTATIVE



UNDP Sierra Leone's newly appointed Resident Representative, Pa Lamin Beyai presenting his credentials to the former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Nabila Tunis. Photo Credit: @UNDP/Mohamed Kanu

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) office in Sierra Leone recently welcomed their newly appointed Resident Representative - Mr Pa Lamin Beyai. On February 4, 2021, he presented his credentials to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation formerly headed by Honourable Nabila Tunis.

Mr Pa Lamin received a warm welcome from the Minister and her team.

She said that the ministry and Sierra Leone at large would be at UNDP's disposal as they work together for sustainable development in the country. She mentioned that Sierra Leone has over a long time enjoyed amicable working relationships with UNDP and the UN family at large. She recalled several instances demonstrating this relationship the most recent being UNDP's support to her then office – Ministry of Planning and Economic Development to develop and print the current Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019 – 2023 (MT-NDP 2019-2023) towards which UNDP provided both technical and financial support.

On his part, the new UNDP head of office appreciated the support and cooperation from the Government and people of Sierra Leone saying that "It is an honour and privilege to represent UNDP in this beautiful country. In partnership with the Government, International & National Development Partners, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and other development stakeholders in Sierra Leone, UNDP programmes will support the people of this country in their quest to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially to eradicate poverty and build resilience to climate change shocks and disasters, without leaving anyone behind. Consequently, our programmatic offer as per our Country Programme Document (2020-2023) is fully aligned with the Medium-Term National Development Plan." Prior to this appointment, Pa Lamin was UNDP Resident Representative (2019-2020) and Country Director for Liberia (2017-2019). Pa Lamin was also Country Director for Nigeria (2013-2016); and Economic Advisor & Team Leader, Inclusive Growth Cluster with the UNDP Office in Ghana (2009-2013). Pa Lamin served as Financial Sustainability Officer with the World Health Organization (WHO) Inter-Country Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa in Zimbabwe (2006-2009); and Health Economist with the WHO Office in The Gambia (1999-2006).

Before joining the United Nations, Pa Lamin held various positions of increasing responsibility at The Gambia Public Transport Corporation (GPTC) from 1994-1999, including as Senior Manager Administration & Human Resources (1997-1999), Manager, Corporate Management Services (1995-1997), and Corporate Management Services Officer (1994-1995). Pa Lamin holds a PhD in Economics with a focus on Health Economics from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, as well as a Master of Science in Finance (Economic Policy) from the School of Oriental & African Studies (SOAS), both from the University of London, UK; a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from the University of Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK; a Postgraduate Diploma in Health Economics from the University of Curtin, Perth, Western Australia; and a Bachelor of Science (Honours) in Economics from Fourah Bay College from the University of Sierra Leone. Pa Lamin took up his new assignment on 11 January 2021. His remarks at the presentation of the credentials ceremony can be [accessed here](#).

JAPAN SIGNS PROJECT TO HELP TRAIN AUTO MECHANICS IN SIERRA LEONE

The ever-increasing number of vehicles in Sierra Leone points to a great potential for growth in the automotive repair and maintenance service sector and thus for job creation.

However, the sector struggles to find workers who can meet the relevant auto mechanic skills requirements.



The signing ceremony between the Ambassador of Japan to Sierra Leone, Himeno Tsutomu, and the UNIDO Country Representative to Sierra Leone, Mariatu Abionor Swaray. Photo Credit: @UNIDO

On the other hand, in a country where youth constitute a third of the population, according to the UNDP, youth unemployment and underemployment stands at a staggering 70%. Out of a workforce of more than 2.7 million people, approximately 800,000 youths are actively searching for employment today. Early this year, UNIDO and Japan signed an Exchange Note for a USD 3.88 Million Promoting Youth Employment through Automotive Maintenance Skills Training project to support Sierra Leone bridge the skills gap in the country's automotive repair and maintenance sector and to train youths in demand-driven automotive technical and entrepreneurship skills thereby promoting decent livelihood opportunities especially for female and disadvantaged youths. With an increased population requiring new skills/training or new ways of supporting their livelihoods, the intervention is expected to play a concrete role in strengthening the foundations for "pro-job" growth.

The signing ceremony between the Ambassador of Japan to Sierra Leone, Himeno Tsutomu, and the UNIDO Country Representative to Sierra Leone, Mariatu Abionor Swaray was hosted by the Honourable Chief Minister at State House and attended by key stakeholders, including the Honourable Minister of Technical and Higher Education, the Honourable Minister of Transport and Aviation, The Development Secretary in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and other senior technical staff of the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, Transport and Aviation and Planning and Economic Development.

The direct beneficiaries of the project will include but are not be limited to:

- 5 VTC trainers whose capacity would be sufficiently built to deliver automotive technician and entrepreneurship training to students of the VTC at the total rate of 400 students /year until at least 2 years after the end of the project;
- 250 unemployed and underemployed youths in Sierra Leone, including females, whose capacity would be sufficiently built as automotive technicians;
- 250 unemployed and underemployed youths in Sierra Leone, including females, whose capacity would be sufficiently built-in entrepreneurial skills;
- Local and international companies, who need a skilled workforce to maintain and expand their economic activities in the region.



Martin Jongo, together with colleagues at UNICEF. Photo Credit: ©unicef/sierra leone/2019/Kidd

UN LONGEST-SERVING STAFF MEMBER IN SIERRA LEONE BIDS FAREWELL

This June UNICEF's longest-serving staff member, Mr. Martin Jongo, bade farewell to the organisation he has served for 34 years. "This was my very first job," says the ever-smiling Martin, as he reflects on the wonderful journey he has travelled, serving the children of Sierra Leone.

"I started working here as a driver, and since then I have graduated to become a Driver Supervisor.

Up to the time of my retirement, I have been overseeing the dispatch of all the other drivers here in Freetown, and we work together to ensure our staff get safely to wherever they need to go." Looking back over his time with UNICEF, Martin says he has met and worked with so many different people since he first began the job. "We have had colleagues from Ghana, Korea, South Africa, America, England – so many places!" Martin recalls. "As drivers, we are usually the first that newcomers meet when they arrive in Sierra Leone, so when we pick up new international colleagues for the first time, we often help them to settle in, help them find their hotel and advise them on nice places to go. Sierra Leone has plenty of beautiful places, like tall mountains and white sandy beaches, with lots of restaurants and places to enjoy – so we tell them about those."

"Of course, during the '90s, when the war was here, people were worried about their safety," says Martin, "and so we would really try to brief them about security, to help them gain confidence to be comfortable to stay. But today, I can say, the country has changed so much. The main thing I tell people now is just this: Sierra Leoneans love strangers! You can be comfortable here, feel free to talk to anyone, because we are all in peace." As the father of five children himself, Martin is also quick to point out how many improvements there have been in recent years in the areas of health care and ensuring free, quality education for all. "Really, I see improvement," he says. "Working for UNICEF, I have had the opportunity to travel all over the country, and we can see, in the schools, that change is gradually coming.

There are now more textbooks, more exercise books, and chalk is available. Even when driving in the streets of Freetown, we see signs saying, 'Hands Off Our Girls' – and we know that there is a new pressure for girls to be encouraged to study, to end child marriage and reduce teenage pregnancy in the country." For the UNICEF Sierra Leone Country Office, it is not just the context of the country that has changed over the past three decades, but also the type of work along with it.

As for Martin, after 34 years of supporting UNICEF to promote and protect children's rights and their well-being across the country, he says he looks forward to seeing the great work of UNICEF continuing. "Not only has this job empowered me to take care of my own children and enabled me to provide education for each of them," he says, "but I am also happy with my work here. We, as colleagues, we have so much respect for one another. We speak politely to each other, and I can say we are friends. So, it is a nice place to work – as you can see, I have been here myself for over 32 years!"



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

