

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2021

Delivering on the  
transformative agenda



**For enquiries, please contact:  
United Nations Population Fund  
12-14 New Signal Hill Road  
Off Congo Cross  
Freetown, Sierra Leone**

**Telephone: +232 79 327330  
Email: [sierra-leone.office@unfpa.org](mailto:sierra-leone.office@unfpa.org)**

**Web: [sierraleone.unfpa.org](http://sierraleone.unfpa.org)  
Twitter: @UNFPASierraleon  
Facebook: @unfpasierraleone  
YouTube: UNFPA Sierra Leone**

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## Acknowledgments:

### Editorial Team

Ibrahim Sambuli, Sibeso Mululuma, John Baimba Sesay, Sonia Gilroy, Stephen Mupeta, Samuel Palmer, Jean Mwandira.





## About UNFPA

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations reproductive health and rights agency, is a principal actor and advocate that works to improve the health and well-being of all Sierra Leoneans, especially women and girls.

Guided by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, UNFPA works to deliver its mandate as the UN Reproductive Health Agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of good health and equal opportunity and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development.

In Sierra Leone, we are working to end preventable maternal deaths, end the unmet need for family planning, and end violence and harmful practices against women and girls. We work to ensure that no one is left behind and those furthest behind are reached first.





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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AYSRH</b>	Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health
<b>CPD</b>	Continuous Professional Development
<b>CSE</b>	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
<b>DHS</b>	Demographic and Health Survey
<b>EmONC</b>	Emergency obstetric and newborn care
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence
<b>IEC</b>	Information, Education and Communication
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population Development
<b>MAPE</b>	Male Advocacy Peer Educator
<b>MoGCA</b>	Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
<b>MoHS</b>	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
<b>MoPED</b>	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
<b>MSW</b>	Ministry of Social Welfare
<b>OPD</b>	Organizations of Persons with Disabilities
<b>PCMH</b>	Princess Christian Maternity Hospital
<b>RHC</b>	Reproductive Health Centre
<b>SACHO</b>	Surgical Assistant Community Health Officer
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SLDHS</b>	Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey
<b>SRHR</b>	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
<b>TBA</b>	Traditional birth attendant

## MESSAGE FROM THE REPRESENTATIVE

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and its severe effects in 2021, UNFPA Sierra Leone remained committed to working closely with the Government in advancing the pathways that are critical to achieving the three transformative results of ending preventable maternal deaths, ending unmet need for family planning and ending gender-based violence and other harmful practices. Achieving these results requires stronger collaboration and partnerships, and in 2021, UNFPA was happy to have worked closely with donors and implementing partners in ensuring that no one was left behind.

UNFPA's continued support to end preventable maternal deaths included the training of midwives which is a core component in the efforts towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although the country has made progress with a 38 percent per cent reduction in maternal deaths – from 1,165 per 100,000 in 2013 to 717 per 100,000 live births in 2019 – the SDG target is still out of focus and hence UNFPA will continue to work closely with relevant stakeholders to ensure increased investment in the critical area of midwifery training.

UNFPA acknowledges the country's demonstrated commitment to ensuring the dignity and rights of women and girls by strengthening the health system to provide quality, integrated sexual and reproductive health and family planning services; and underscores the need for stronger commitment to accelerating the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action. For instance, it is estimated that more than 2,000 women and girls are still living with obstetric fistula in Sierra Leone and approximately 2 million women live with fistula globally. Eradicating fistula before 2030 would therefore require accelerated and increased efforts and investments not just by traditional donor partners, but by the Government of Sierra Leone.

In 2021, UNFPA continued to work with the Government of Sierra Leone in scaling up the unmet need for family planning by making sure those furthest behind were reached first. It ensured an increased proportion of needed contraceptives and lifesaving maternal health medicines reached their maximum stock levels, thus, helping avert 190,000 unintended pregnancies through the availability of modern contraceptive use.

Further, by supporting the development of a National Integrated Health Supply Chain Strategy, UNFPA helped create a coordinated and harmonized framework to guide efforts of partners and stakeholders committed to ensuring availability of essential health commodities.

Globally, UNICEF and UNFPA worked jointly in delivering on the commitment to reduce child marriage through the Global Programme to End Child Marriage. Sierra Leone is one of 12 countries implementing this ambitious project to protect the rights of young girls and build their agency. In 2021, UNFPA supported the Government to set up pilot sexual and reproductive health and rights Hubs in Koinadugu district.



Following the launch of UNFPA's 2022-2025 Strategic plan, the country office views the next three years as critical for accelerating progress towards the attainment of the three transformative results in Sierra Leone.

Proud as we are of all the achievements scored in 2021, we are cognizant of the need to renew our efforts to build on these successes and meet the challenges that are ahead of us.

**Ibrahim Sambuli**  
**Representative a.i**



# ENDING PREVENTABLE MATERNAL DEATHS

## Results and achievements

### *Ending preventable maternal deaths*

- Service providers trained in emergency obstetric and newborn care: 95
- Health facilities supported in meeting emergency obstetric and newborn care (EMONC) standards: 9
- Women screened for suspected obstetric fistula: 353
- Fistula survivors who had surgical repair: 184
- Midwives graduated: 119
- Number of midwives trained as preceptors: 35
- Surgical Assistant Community Health Officers (SACHO) who completed the three-year training programme: 12
- Preceptors and faculty staff oriented on preceptorship guidelines: 4
- Maternal deaths averted: 1,500
- Health workers trained to provide quality integrated sexual and reproductive health services: 484
- Health workers trained in cervical cancer screening and treatment: 50
- Number of women screened for cervical cancer services: 1,289

## Task-shifting training programme for surgical services

To increase access to emergency obstetric and general surgical services, especially for rural communities, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) had initiated a surgical task-sharing (also called task-shifting) training programme in 2011. The programme's main goal is to improve the surgical skills of the mid-level health care workforce and retain them mostly at rural hospitals. With funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UNFPA, through its implementing partner, CapaCare, implemented the task shifting programme to train 18 Community Health Officers in providing surgical services, contributing to strengthening the national health capacity to deliver comprehensive, quality maternal health services.

## Bridging the human resource gap in midwifery

In Sierra Leone, midwives contributed to the reduction in maternal mortality by almost 40 per cent in a period of five years, from 1,165 deaths per 100,000 live births in the 2013 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey (SLDHS) to 717 deaths per 100,000 live births in the 2019 SLDHS. In 2021, UNFPA sustained its support to the three midwifery schools (National School of Midwifery, School of Midwifery Bo, and School of Midwifery Makeni) – with funding from UK's FCDO, through the Saving Lives Programme – to deliver quality training of professional midwives to increase availability of skilled birth attendants. With this support, total of 119 midwives were trained in the three schools.

# SUCCESS STORY

## UNFPA-trained midwife promotes safe motherhood, saves mothers and babies

**Alikalia, Koinadugu, Sierra Leone** – “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.

Regina Conteh is a midwife trained at the School of Midwifery in Makeni, with support from UNFPA. 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 while 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” thanks to the support provided by UNFPA which she said, “helped me to do all what I am doing as a midwife in the community.”

With no maternal mortality reported since 2019 when she was posted to the Alikalia Community Health Post, Regina believes that was 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, at the Alikalia Community Health Post.

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.

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.”







## Eliminating obstetric fistula in Sierra Leone

To eliminate obstetric fistula in Sierra Leone, UNFPA supports work aimed at community mobilization and engagement in the identification and referral of women with fistula and providing fistula repair surgery. In addition, psychosocial support and social reintegration services are provided to the fistula survivors after surgery, which includes income generating activities such as tailoring, gardening, weaving and tie-dye techniques.

In 2021, with funding from the Government of Iceland, and additional funding from the Maternal Health Thematic Fund, 353 women were screened for obstetric fistula out of which 184 had fistula repair surgery with a 93 per cent success rate. Since 2011, Aberdeen Women's Centre, with UNFPA funding, has performed 1,731 successful fistula surgeries.

In the ongoing effort to strengthen ties with the Government of Sierra Leone and UNFPA's Sierra Leone Country Office to scale up their support for the elimination of fistula in Sierra Leone, a delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate of International Affairs and Development Cooperation of the Government of Iceland visited Sierra Leone in October 2021. The visit led to the signing of a landmark agreement between UNFPA and the Government of Iceland for a five-year integrated fistula elimination programme that will contribute to the national campaign to end fistula.





## South-South cooperation

Under the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), the Government of the People's Republic of China committed \$2 million to contribute to the reduction of maternal deaths and prevent and treat cervical cancer in Sierra Leone. UNFPA had, in 2020, commenced the project, targeting vulnerable and marginalized women at high risk of maternal mortality and cervical cancer, by improving the quality of EmONC services and establishing a comprehensive model programme of cervical cancer prevention and control. In 2021, capacity-building was carried out for 50 healthcare providers from nine UNFPA-supported facilities in cervical cancer screening and treatment of precancerous lesions using cryotherapy.

### Demand generation for cervical screening

In collaboration with Planned Parenthood Association of Sierra Leone (PPASL), UNFPA built the capacity of 53 community-based organizations in conducting community sensitization programmes to generate demand for cervical screening. Through this, a total of 435,434 women in the catchment population of the targeted health facilities were reached with information on cervical cancer. In addition, UNFPA supported the MoHS in developing and validating pretested Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials on cervical cancer.



# SUCCESS STORY

## UNFPA helps to restore hope and dignity of fistula survivor

**FREETOWN, Sierra Leone** – “I was depressed and ashamed to interact with friends and relatives because of fistula. My husband who was my source of support told me at one point that he almost abandoned me. I was not a happy woman as a result of this [fistula] predicament,” recollected 38-year-old Maseray Bangura, a petty trader from Mambolo, a chiefdom headquarter town in the Kambia district.

Pregnant with her fifth child, Maseray Bangura was taken for her delivery to the Government Hospital in Lungi, a referral hospital in Port Loko district. There, she encountered difficulties and was unable to deliver the baby. “For three agonizing days, I was experiencing severe labour pain,” she said, recalling her ordeal. Clearly, I was unable to deliver my baby. The nurses told me I was not having enough blood. It was a difficult moment for me. To save my life and that of the baby, a caesarean delivery was performed successfully and few days later, I was discharged.”

When Maseray was discharged, she realized she had developed serious complications, having returned home with fistula. “Four days after returning home, I realized I was leaking urine unconsciously. This was too much for me. It was a shameful thing to experience. I chose not to tell anyone and only confided it to my husband and my mother,” she revealed with sadness.

When Maseray learned of the UNFPA-supported Aberdeen Women's Centre, and their work in fistula surgery, she travelled to Freetown with her husband to be admitted at the centre for her surgery.

“I successfully underwent the surgery without paying a cent. I have seen so much improvement and I am beginning to regain my happiness and self-confidence. My dignity has been restored. I have spent a week without experiencing urine leaks. My wish now is to return to my hometown because I am not leaking anymore.”

Maseray remains grateful to Aberdeen Women's Centre, the Government and the donor partners providing support for the elimination of fistula. “I am appealing for more funding support to partners working on ending obstetric fistula. Without funding support to Aberdeen Women's Centre, I wouldn't be talking here today. I am thankful to UNFPA.”

Reflecting on her experience, Maseray said that it is in the interest of all pregnant women to always go to health facilities to access services during pregnancy and childbirth. “With what I have gone through, I strongly encourage pregnant women to regularly visit health facilities for their routine antenatal services. This is very important,” a smiling Maseray Bangura with her newborn child in her arms said.





# ENDING UNMET NEED FOR FAMILY PLANNING

## Results and achievements

- Proportion of family planning commodities procured in line with the national forecast: 86%
- Proportion of district medical stores who have received all the needed contraceptives and lifesaving maternal health medicines to reach their maximum stock levels (based on availability at central medical store): 100%
- Total users of modern methods of contraception: 510,000
- Couple Years of Protection generated: 697,144
- Unintended pregnancies averted due to modern contraceptive use: 190,000
- Unsafe abortions averted due to modern contraceptive use: 70,000
- Service providers trained in the provision of a method mix of family planning methods: 40

## Supporting the development of a National Integrated Health Supply Chain Strategy

In 2021, UNFPA supported the MoHS with funding from the UK's FCDO and the UNFPA Supplies programme to develop a National Integrated Health Supply Chain Strategy. The health strategic plan will provide a coordinated and harmonized framework to guide efforts of partners and stakeholders committed to ensuring availability of essential health commodities. The MoHS also developed the Costed Implementation Plan for the supply chain strategy, with support from UNFPA. This will provide an estimate of the overall investment envelope that is required to accelerate the health supply chain strategy.

## Ensuring commodity security reaches the furthest behind first

In 2021, with funding from UNFPA Supplies and FCDO, UNFPA supported the timely delivery of contraceptive commodities to the districts and health facility stores. This was done by supporting the Government of Sierra Leone with the development of quarterly distribution plans from the central warehouse to the districts and facilities, and verification of packing lists against the distribution plans, thereby improving commodity security and reducing incidences of stock out. In this regard, contraceptives estimated to protect 724,144 couples from unplanned pregnancies for a period of one year were supplied nationwide in 2021. Additionally, UNFPA, continued with the last mile assurance process through spot check exercises which provided documentation on whether the contraceptives had reached the intended beneficiaries.



## Increasing demand and choice of family planning commodities

To increase the number of family planning providers for newly introduced contraceptive methods, UNFPA supported the MoHS in training 40 service providers on the administration of Depo-Provera subcutaneous (Sayana press) as part of the short-term contraceptive method mix. In addition, 31 service providers had their capacity built in the provision of long-acting reversible contraceptive methods (implants and IUDs).



# EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE AND ENDING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND OTHER HARMFUL PRACTICES

## Results and achievements

### *Adolescents and youth*

- Adolescent girls reached with life skills programmes through girls' clubs: 4,034
- Mentors and volunteers trained in advocacy to end child marriage: 87 mentors, 10 volunteers
- Youth Corp members trained in SRH, life skills and the demographic dividend: 194

### *Gender and women's empowerment*

- SRH hubs established: 4
- Survivors of GBV provided with services (medical, psychosocial counseling, legal services): 2,151
- Boys and men who actively participated in group education/dialogue that addresses harmful masculinity and gender norms: 4,870
- Institutions supported in reporting GBV: 2

## Increasing government capacity to effectively coordinate efforts to reduce adolescent pregnancy and child marriage

In 2021, with funding from Irish Aid, UNFPA continued to support the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy in implementing the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage.

In order to provide strategic direction to partners implementing adolescent pregnancy and child marriage programmes, support was provided for improved coordination at national and regional levels. The youth advisory panel was supported in participating in national and international level youth advocacy events such as the National Youth Summit on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend, through Investments in Youth and the AFRIYAN conference.

## Empowering girls through membership in girls' clubs

Under the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage, 67 safe spaces for underserved and marginalized girls were established in 2021. Within these safe spaces, girls' clubs were formed with not more than 25 girls in each club. Twenty in-school and 20 out-of-school girl clubs were established in Koinadugu district, and 20 clubs each in Kambia and Pujehun districts. Through the safe spaces and girls' clubs, girls at risk for child marriage and teenage pregnancies are provided with life skills and information about their rights, about services available to them, about the importance of education, harmful practices that may affect them and how they can be prevented.





## Integrating Comprehensive Sexuality Education into the Basic Education Curriculum

In order to enhance support for young people to explore and nurture positive values regarding their SRH, UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to integrate age-appropriate Comprehensive Sexuality Education into the Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the syllabi of seven subjects – integrated sciences, social studies, home economics, religious morality education, physical health education, expressive arts and entertainment and English studies.

With funding from Irish Aid and the Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework, UNFPA also supported the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to develop teaching and learning materials for CSE based on the revised syllabi. These materials deal with a variety of topics including SRHR, gender equality and critical thinking. Thus far, teaching and learning materials have been developed for students from Primary One to Primary Six and students in Junior Secondary One to Junior Secondary Three.

## Setting up of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Hubs

To increase availability of services for vulnerable girls and boys, UNFPA, in partnership with MoGCA, supported the setting up of four AYSRH hubs. These hubs are located in four hard to reach communities (Wara Bafodia, Kondembaia, Fadugu and Koinadugu 2) in Koinadugu district and are being piloted for easy access to services meant for adolescent girls who are in the safe spaces.

In 2021, UNFPA donated motorbikes to MOGCA to support AYSRH hubs in Koinadugu district, in

fulfillment of the agency's commitment to support the work of the ministry in Koinadugu, a hard to reach district. The bikes were to help in delivering the expected results in the district, especially in providing young people with the information and services needed for their health and well-being.

The motorbikes donated in 2021 supported coordination of GBV response services of the One-Stop-Centre in the Kabala Government Hospital and the setting up of SRH hubs for easy access to sexual and reproductive health information and access to services by adolescent girls and young women in the Koinadugu district.

UNFPA's support to the Gender-Based Violence One Stop Centres is made possible with funding support from Irish Aid and the Government of the People's Republic of China.

## **Male involvement to end GBV and harmful practices**

In an effort to engage boys and men through a gender transformative approach, UNFPA supported the identification, training and engagement of MAPES and Out-Of-School (OOS) boys' club members in the efforts to end GBV and harmful practices. The MAPES were strategically recruited from different sectors and backgrounds and are role models and leaders in the communities. They conducted outreach and community engagement sessions in various settings targeting men to promote positive masculinity and gender norms, as well as doing referrals and reporting cases of child marriage and other harmful practices and GBV cases. Out-of-school boys do outreach in communities where youth gather.

Community engagement sessions targeted key stakeholders such as chiefs, mammy queens, traditional and religious leaders, heads of households and chieftom youth groups. In the sessions, participants were informed on the dangers of GBV, early child marriage, harmful traditional practices and discussed and agreed on ways to put an end to these practices.

UNFPA's approach was to work with a male engagement implementing partner in identifying influential boys and men in the targeted communities, opinion leaders and role models from different groups and sectors. They were then recruited as mentors and volunteers and provided with relevant training and resources to be able to carry out awareness raising sessions and outreach in the communities. As a way of reaching out to a wider audience with key messages on ending child marriage, UNFPA supported MAPES and Stakeholders Action Groups in the four districts (Moyamba, Pujehun, Kambia and Koinadugu) to host a series of radio discussions on child marriage. A total number of 149 calls (86 male callers, 63 female callers) were recorded from the hosted radio programmes across the four project districts.

Husband schools were also established, which are unofficial learning hubs providing information on GBV, SRHR, sexual abuse, drug abuse and the role of husbands, partners, guardians and parents in ending these harmful practices. MAPES facilitated the husband school sessions, attended by a maximum of 25 participants per session. A total of 450 participants from 18 communities attended.

## **Availability of GBV services during COVID-19**

Although the COVID-19 pandemic continued to pose heavy challenges to the work of UNFPA, the restrictions were not as limiting as they had been in the previous year. Equipped with lessons from the pandemic, UNFPA continued to use safe spaces as effective channels for delivering COVID-19 information, along with information on SRHR and GBV services. COVID-19 risk mitigation continued to be fully incorporated in the adolescent safe space programming, and included the provision of handwashing facilities, face masks for all staff, facilitators and adolescent girls in the safe spaces,





COVID-19 community engagement by staff of implementing partners, and small-group trainings about community transmission should it occur in the target communities.

UNFPA worked with the Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) to develop and adapt existing materials for adolescent girls with disabilities.

UNFPA supported the operation of a toll-free hotline for reporting and referral of GBV cases. UNFPA continued to support the Government of Sierra Leone and the Rainbo Initiative to operate 10 existing service delivery points (Gender-Based Violence One Stop Centres and Rainbo Centres) providing care (medical, psychosocial counseling, legal services) to 2,151 survivors of GBV. As a broader systems-building approach to address GBV in the country, UNFPA and UNICEF worked jointly on initiating the establishment of a GBV information management system (IMS) in Sierra Leone

### **Advancing disability inclusion in Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone was among the 26 countries in 2021 to receive funding from the UN Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNPRPD) on its fourth call to advance the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability (CRPD) and to improve and increase the implementation of disability-inclusive SDGs at the country level across sectors.



The UN Resident Coordinator's Office and UN agencies including UNFPA worked closely with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to implement the inception phase of the programme, constituting an induction workshop on CRPD and SDGs, a country situation analysis and the development of a full proposal for additional funding. Over 20 OPDs were engaged, with key stakeholders including rights holders and duty bearers, to ensure effective contributions towards disability-inclusive policies and systems in all three processes of the inception phase of the programme.



# SUCCESS STORY

## Volunteers' contribution to the UNFPA-supported Campaigns to End Child Marriage

**FREETOWN, Sierra Leone** – Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in the world. According to the country's 2019 DHS, 21 per cent of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 were found to have begun child bearing.

UNFPA works with implementing partners like Women in Crisis Movement and Restless Development in Kambia, Pujehun and Koinadugu districts to increase access to quality health information and services, education and life skills for adolescent girls. Part of the support led to the establishment of safe spaces for adolescent girls in the three districts, as well as the training of 80 mentors and 10 volunteers in asset-building and life skills.

Restless Development has been utilizing the services of some of these trained volunteers to support the girls in their safe spaces.

Reflecting on her work with Restless Development, one of the volunteers, Mabinty Ramadan Kamara, a third-year law student at the University of Makeni had this to say: "Serving as a volunteer in the campaign to end child marriage is a dream come true. Volunteerism has helped in shaping me and it has been a great experience."

In Koinadugu, with UNFPA support, Restless Development assists adolescent girls in 27 communities in five chiefdoms (Diang, Kasunko, Sengbe, Wara Wara Bafodia and Wara Wara Yagala) with safe space facilities, mentorship and training in life skills and referrals to SRHR service providers. Since the establishment in 2021 of safe spaces, 2,007 girls have successfully been provided with SRHR information by the volunteers and mentors trained by Restless Development.

In countries like Sierra Leone, child marriage and teenage pregnancy are largely fuelled by a diverse set of drivers that make girls vulnerable, including poverty, social and gender norms, sexual violence and exploitation and compounded by lack of information, knowledge and skills.

"Koinadugu is known for forest logging and those engaged in the trade would usually take advantage of the vulnerable young girls and keep them as wives. I have seen young adolescent pregnant girls, some forced into child marriage by their parents and in most cases, due to poverty," Mabinty explained.

Restless Development reported that, thanks to the work of Mabinty and other volunteers, two girls in the community where Mabinty served as a volunteer – Janu Kamara, in Kafogo community and Marie Sesay, in Sangbanba community – were able to return to school. Additionally, in Koinadugu 2 hub, two students, Hawa Samura in Nyafrando community and Isata Koroma in Yataya community, are now back in school.

"I am proud to have worked with the communities in the district and successfully convinced those young girls to return to school and community leaders like section chiefs to embrace the call for an end to child marriage. This empowering experience has convinced me to decide to continue with advocacy work for the rights of adolescent girls even after completing my law studies", concluded Mabinty.







# OTHER STRATEGIC FOCUS AREAS

## Empowering young people

Taking the right actions to put young people first and invest in their health, education, employment and empowerment is critical in achieving the demographic dividend. There is a strong need to adopt a coordinated, multi-sectoral and collaborative approach to implementing youth programming which speaks to all four pillars of the AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth.

Given the above, a National Youth Summit was held at the EBK University in Magburaka, with UNFPA providing overall leadership and coordination. Historically, the first of November was proclaimed and instituted as Africa Youth Day on the occasion of the African Youth Charter adoption in the Executive Council Decision of the Banjul Summit 2006. Every year, this day promotes the increased recognition of youth as key agents for social change, economic growth and sustainable development in all areas of African Society. The AU theme for African Youth Day in 2021 was "Arts, Culture and Heritage: Levers for Building the Africa We Want."

## Addressing AYSRHR issues

In 2021, the country office established an Adolescent and Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health Taskforce, a mechanism to better deliver on SRH challenges facing young people, especially adolescent girls. The Taskforce supported the engagement of adolescents and youth in advocacy and programming for integrated SRH services. It also supported evidence generation of effective and efficient service delivery models, increased access to, and utilization of, adolescent responsive health service, advocacy and policy dialogue for the rights of young people in Sierra Leone. The work of the Taskforce culminated in a National Youth Summit in 2021.





## Supporting the popularization of the National Population Policy

UNFPA supported the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) in popularizing the 2018 National Population Policy (NPP) that had been launched by MoPED in 2019 with support from UNFPA. The NPP addresses population dynamics through an effective response to the needs and aspirations of the expanding population.

Critical issues captured in the policy include reproductive health and rights, reducing adolescent pregnancy, building women's empowerment, achieving education for all and reducing mortality rates, all aligned with UNFPA's mandate.



## Stakeholders discuss 2021 Voluntary National Review

In 2021, UNFPA held a two-day national consultation engagement with stakeholders to position its three transformative results into Sierra Leone's Voluntary National Review Report, a report carried out by countries to track progress made on the SDGs and other development indicators.

Last year's presentation of the Voluntary National Review Report is the third by the country since it adopted the 2030 Agenda in 2015. One of the goals of the SDGs is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for everyone at all ages. This goal seeks to achieve universal access to SRH, reduce global maternal death rates and bring an end to the HIV/AIDS epidemic by 2030.

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

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone – The Government of Sierra Leone, under the leadership of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, with support from the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone, ended a two-day National Youth Summit held on 1 and 2 November 2021, 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. The day was dedicated on the occasion of the adoption of the African Youth Charter 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 African Union Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend by prioritizing investment in youth to transform the country.

Officially opening the event, Vice President Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh said, "The Summit provides 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. That 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 marginalization and GBV, 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 in development activities to strengthen a sense of belonging and stakeholdership and become 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 African Union 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 stigmatization and discrimination of youth with disabilities and youth-at-risk, who may be associated with cliques and gangs," the UN Resident Coordinator emphasized.

The 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 well-being of young people and in providing them with growth opportunities. "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 UNFPA Officer-In-Charge, Jocelyn Fenard. They said the summit was meant to create an open space for young people to discuss issues affecting them. They both agreed that when young people were provided with quality education, good employment opportunity, and were in good health and enjoyed their rights, the country would 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."

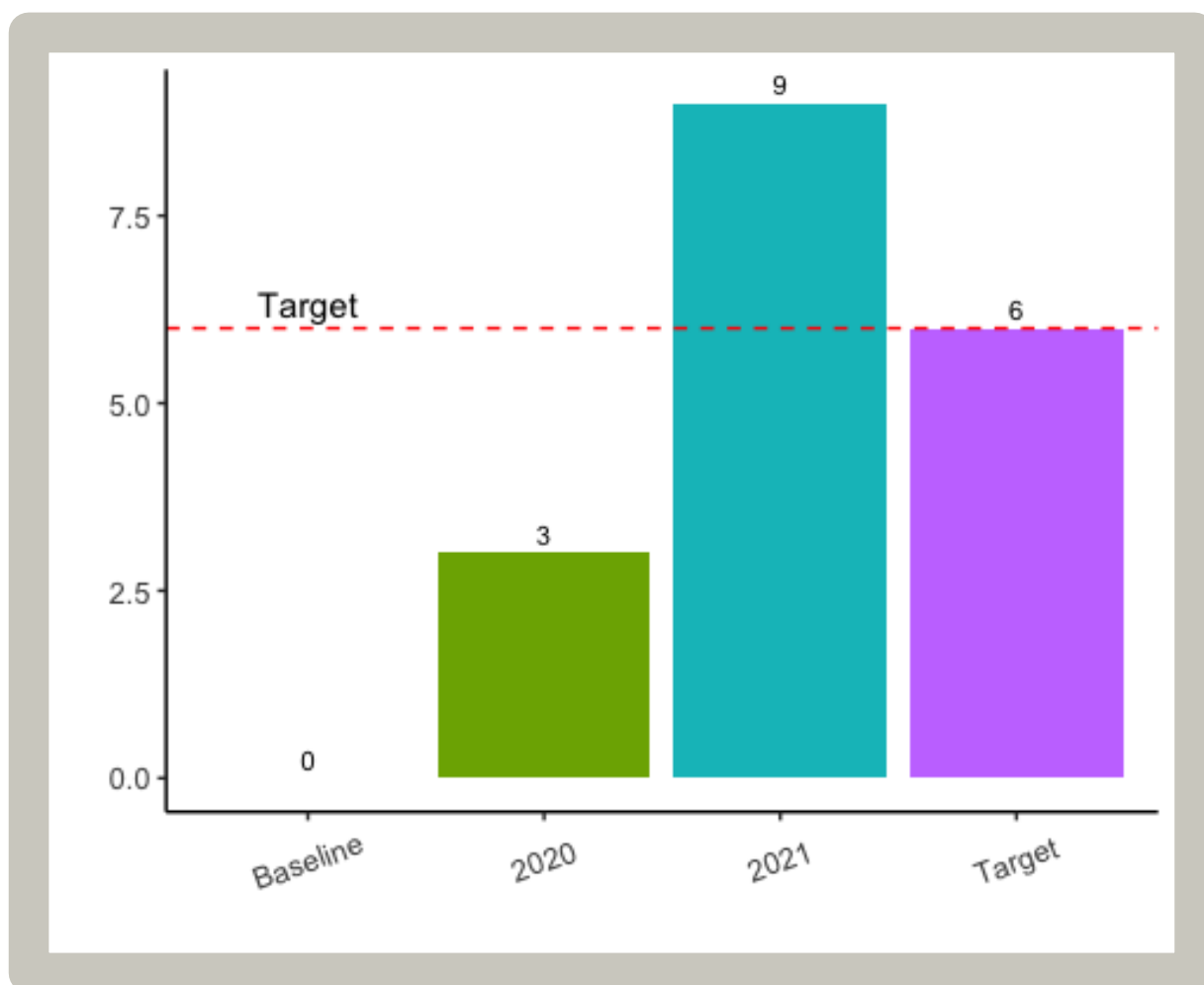


## Progress towards meeting the seventh country programme targets

In delivering on its three transformative goals, UNFPA Sierra Leone is implementing its seventh Country Programme covering the period 2020–2023 and guided by the country's development frameworks. UNFPA continues to provide support to the Government in its efforts to maximize impact on SRH, adolescents and youth, and gender and women's empowerment. Thus far, since the commencement of the country programme in 2020, the following critical targets have been achieved:

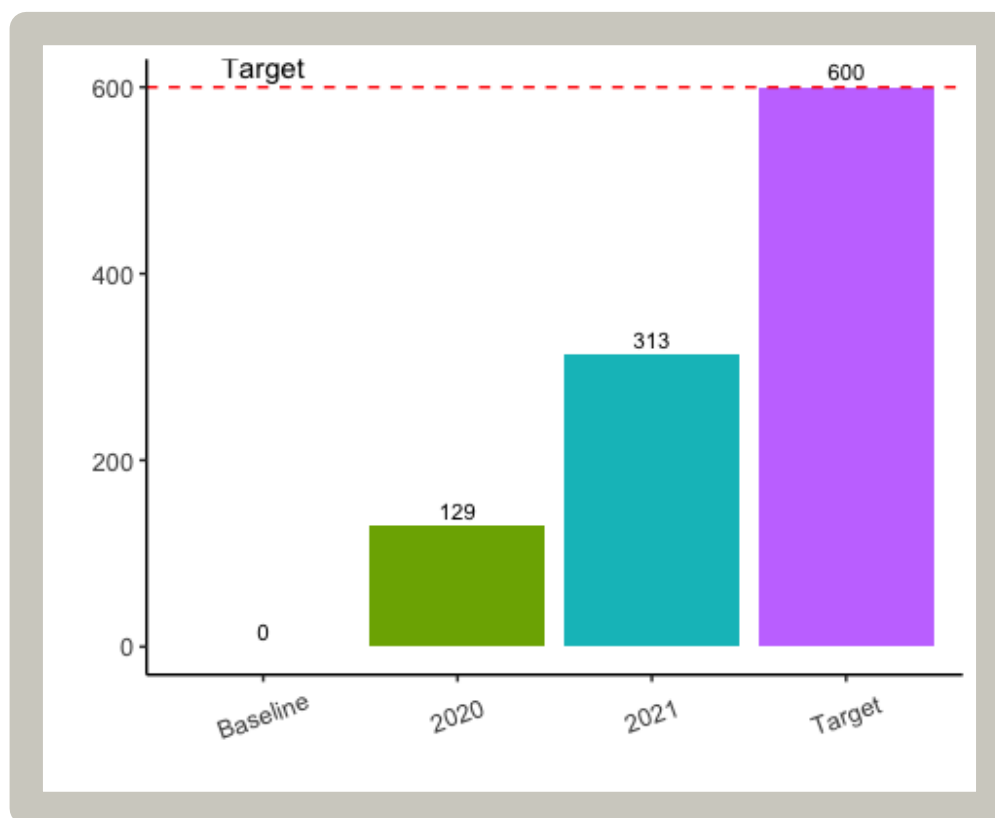
### Outcome 1: Sexual and reproductive health

Health facilities supported in providing EmONC per international recommended minimum standards (cumulative)

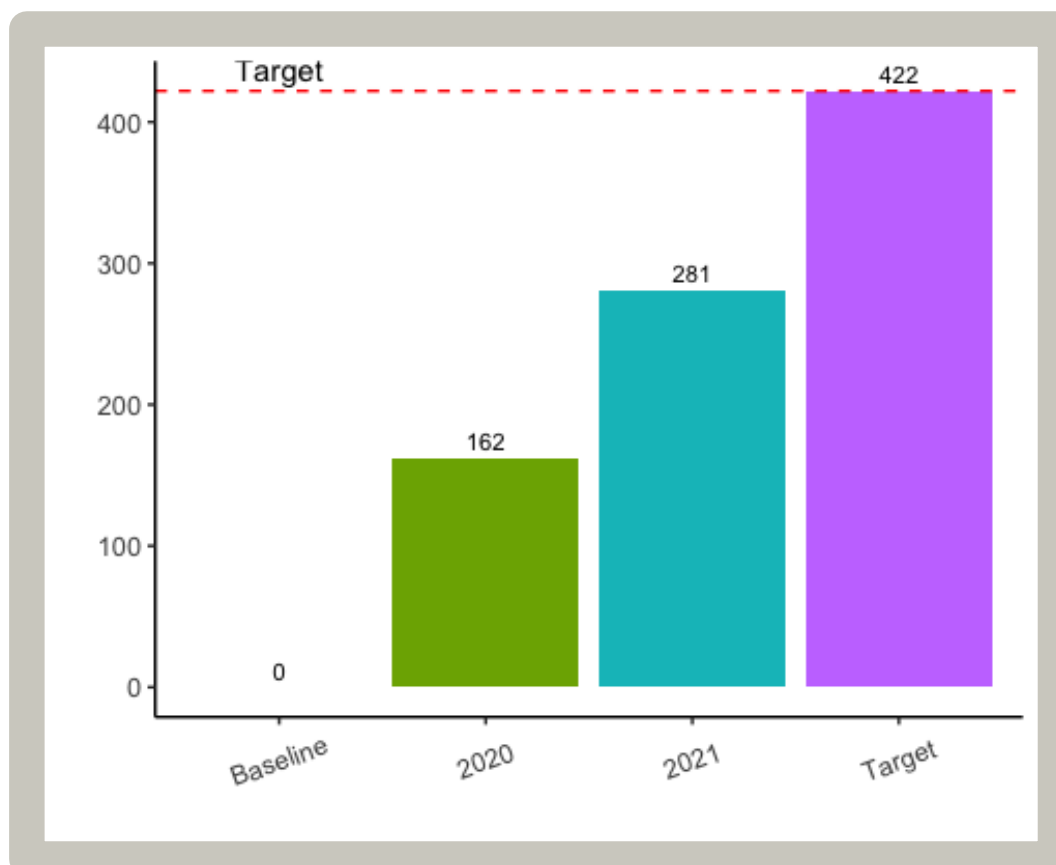




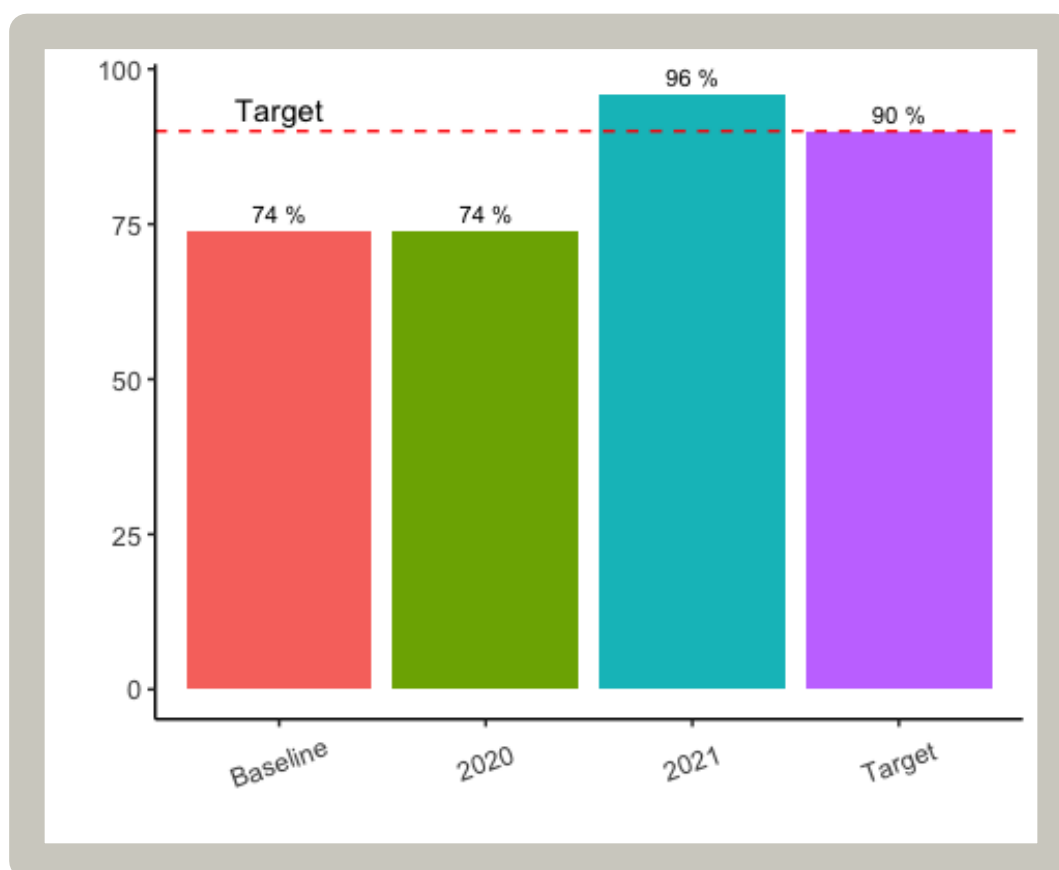
Obstetrical fistula cases repaired with support from UNFPA (surgery, catheterization/probe placement) (cumulative)



Number of midwives who graduated with support from UNFPA (cumulative)

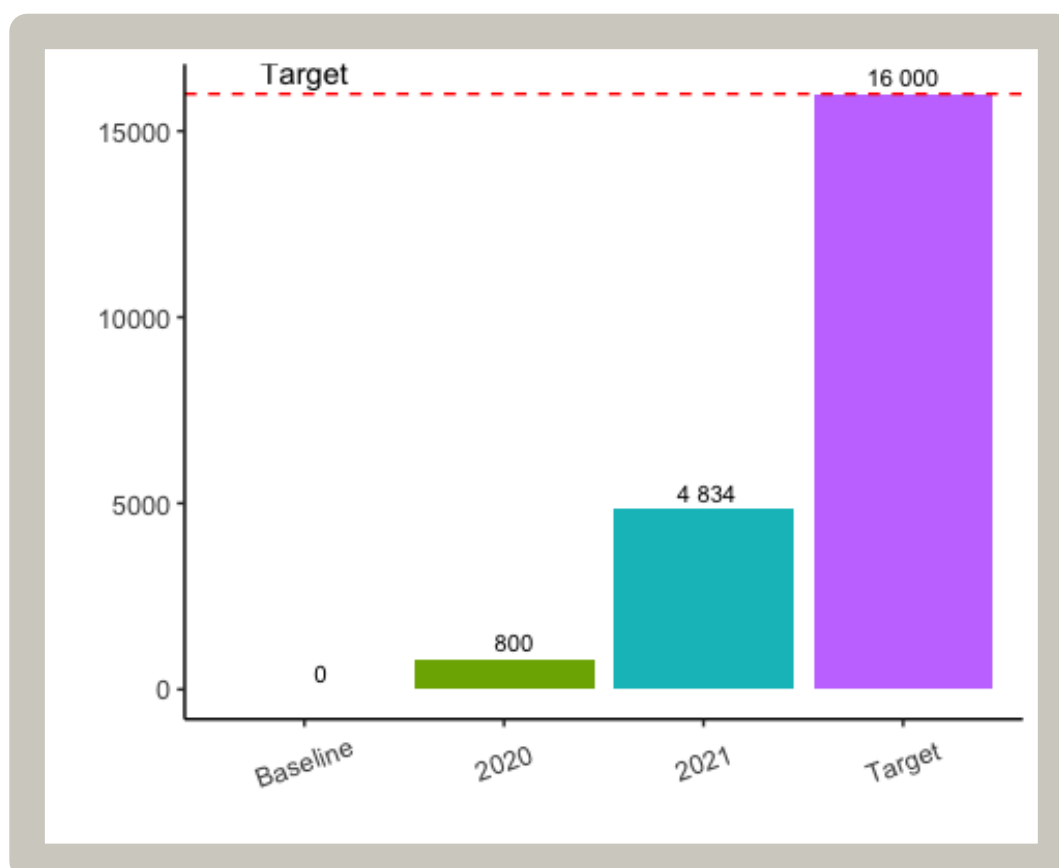


Percentage of service delivery points with no stock-out of at least three modern contraceptive methods during the last three months



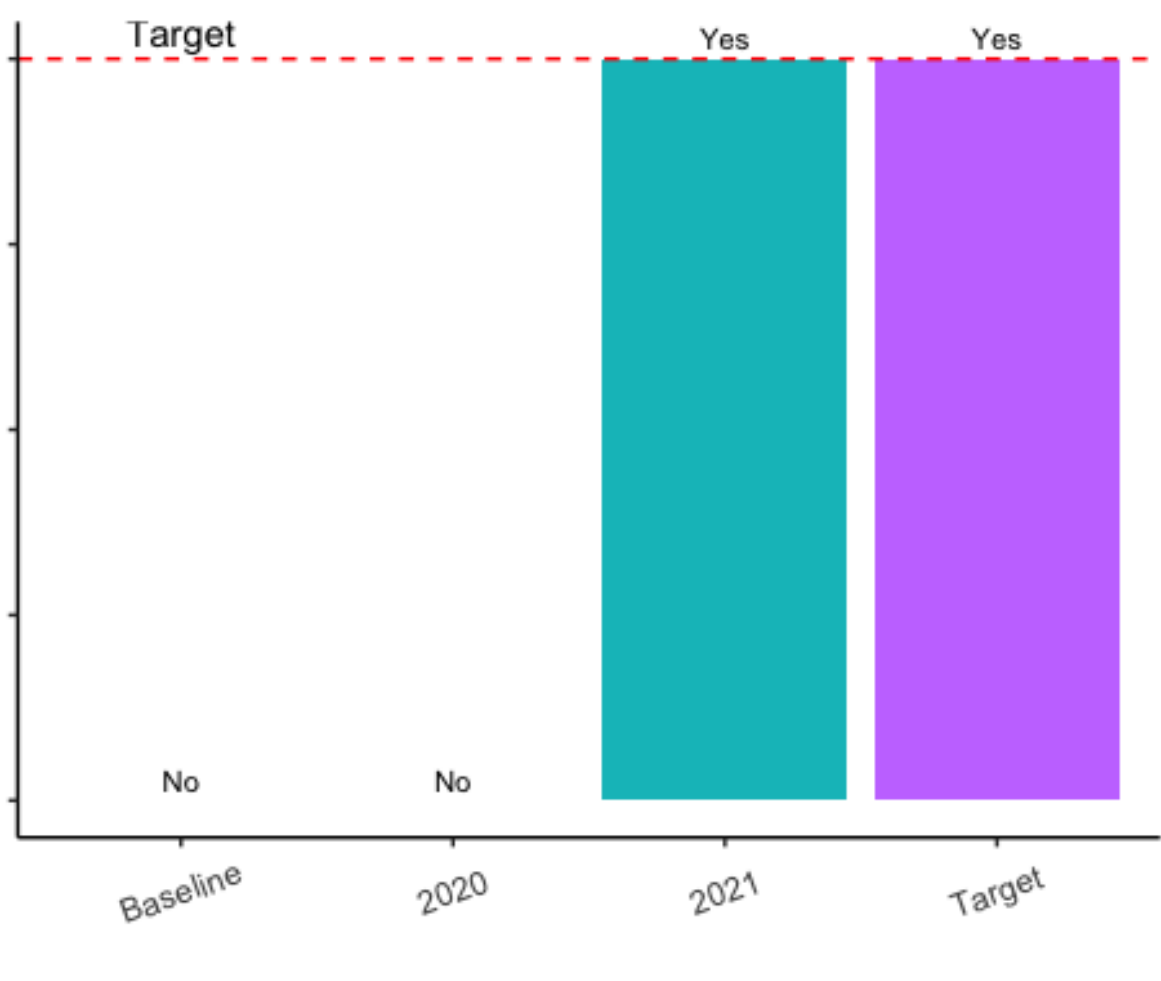
## Outcome 2: Adolescents and youth

Number of marginalized girls reached by life skills programmes that build their health, social and economic assets (cumulative)





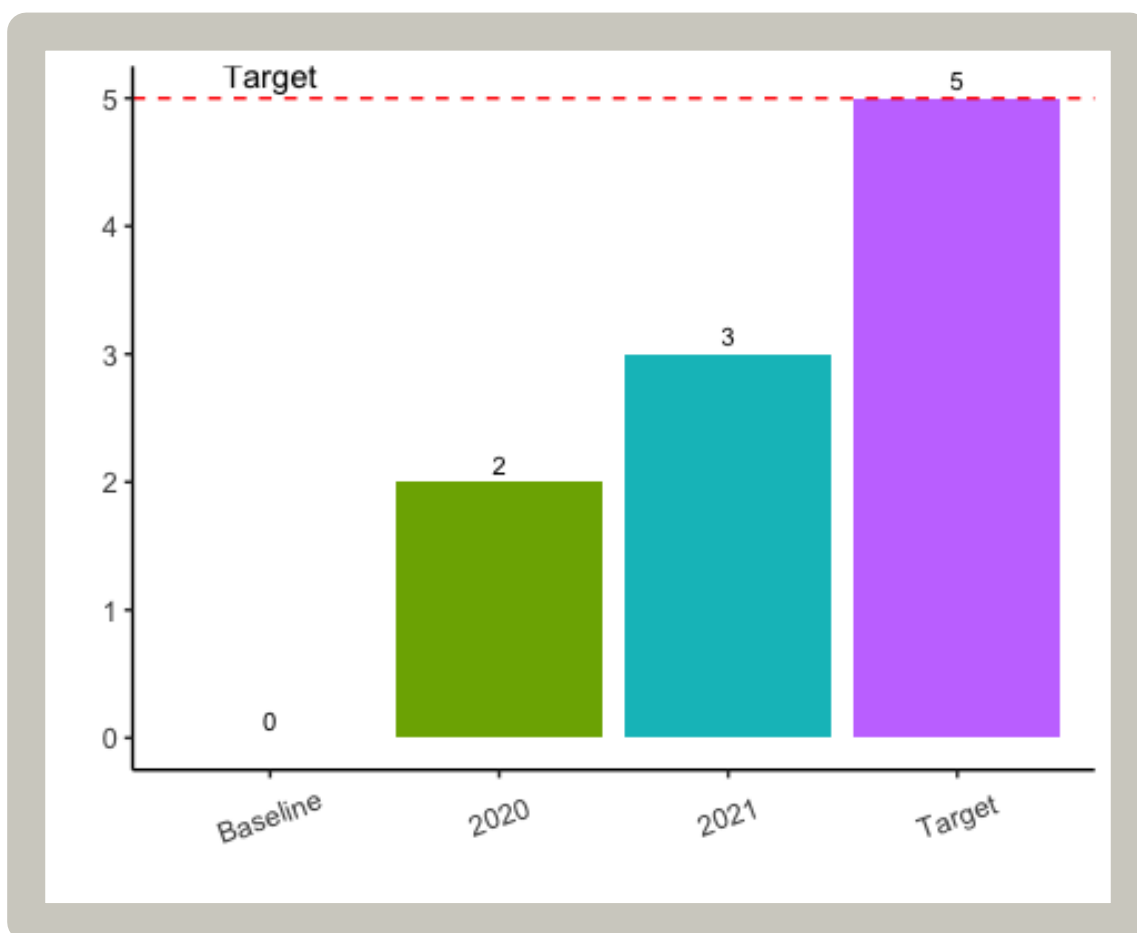
A functional national demographic observatory for tracking progress on the demographic dividend in place



***In Sierra Leone, we are working to end preventable maternal deaths, end the unmet need for family planning, and end violence and harmful practices against women and girls.***

### Outcome 3: Gender and women's empowerment

Number of national strategies and frameworks to advance gender equality and reproductive rights developed with support from UNFPA (cumulative)



Number of communities reporting abandonment of harmful practices (cumulative)

