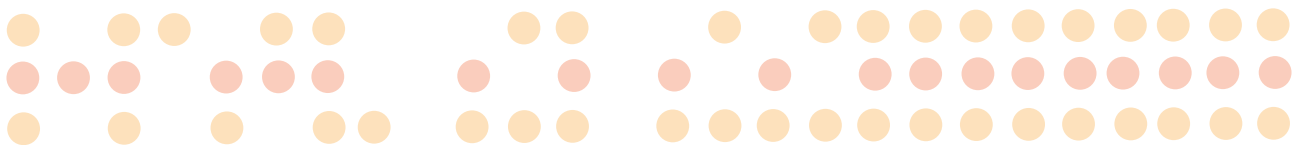


# NEWSLETTER

UNFPA SIERRA LEONE

JULY - DECEMBER 2021



# Message from the Representative a.i

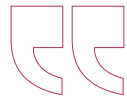


**IBRAHIM SAMBULI**  
**REPRESENTATIVE A.I.,**  
**UNFPA SIERRA LEONE**

Dear readers,

I bring you warm greetings from the UNFPA Sierra Leone Country Office and wishes for a prosperous 2022. I am delighted to present the last edition of the UNFPA Sierra Leone newsletter for 2021.

It is estimated that today 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. This calls for accelerated and increased efforts and investments towards eradicating obstetric fistula in Sierra Leone before 2030. It is doable! Therefore, in this edition, we look at a visit by a delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland to Sierra Leone and their commitment to providing increased support for ending obstetric fistula in the country. Also, we look at



## *A call to action towards the accelerated implementation of the country's transformative goals*

how, with UNFPA's intervention, the dignity of a fistula survivor was successfully restored in Mambolo.

We showcase the establishment of Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health Hubs for easy access to sexual and reproductive health information and services by adolescent girls and young women in the Koinadugu district.

In Sierra Leone, issues relating to youth empowerment are addressed throughout Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019–2023. We are aware that the country will achieve the demographic dividend when we take the right actions to put young people first and invest in their health, education, employment and empowerment. We are therefore happy to have supported the Government of Sierra Leone, through the Ministry of Youth Affairs, with a National Youth Summit, convened on the theme 'Harnessing the future of Sierra Leone through investment in youth.'

The summit was in commemoration of the Africa Youth Day on 1 November, 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.

As we enter 2022, the UNFPA Sierra Leone Country Office is glad to note the Executive Board's approval of UNFPA's new Strategic Plan for 2022–2025. As with all other country offices, we see this new plan as a call to action towards the accelerated implementation of the country's transformative goals and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Sierra Leone. It also provides an opportunity for increased commitment to accelerating the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development ICPD programme of action.



# UNFPA support AYSRHR hubs in Koinadugu



On 26 August 2021, UNFPA handed over five motorbikes to the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs to support the coordination of Gender-Based Violence response services of the One-Stop-Centre in the Kabala Government Hospital and the setting up of Adolescent and Youth Sexual Reproductive Health Hubs for easy access to sexual and reproductive health information and access to services by adolescent girls and young women in the Koinadugu district.

Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy in the world. According to the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2019, 28 per cent of girls between 15 and 19 years have begun childbearing. This is driven by a number of factors including lack of information, knowledge and skills, weak institutions and services, poverty and girls' limited access

to assets and widespread sexual violence and exploitation. UNFPA is supporting the Government of Sierra Leone in promoting integrated Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights issues, including gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Handing over the motorbikes, Betty Alpha, Gender Specialist at UNFPA said, "UNFPA will continue to support the work of the ministry in Koinadugu which is a hard-to-reach district. We [UNFPA] remain hopeful that the bikes will help in delivering the expected results in the Koinadugu district. Young people should be provided with the required information and services needed for their health and well-being which will equip them to reach their potentials. We therefore look forward to seeing how these bikes will significantly help adolescent girls to have access to the AYSRHR

hubs when once established as well as help the officers in the hubs to effectively coordinate critical activities."

Receiving the motorbikes on behalf of the ministry, the Permanent Secretary, Zainab Buya-Kamara said, "The Ministry remains committed to closely work with UNFPA in addressing gender-related issues." The motorbikes, she said, will help in creating greater impact in the establishment of the hubs in a bid to provide access to vital information on sexual and reproductive health services for adolescent girls and young women in the Koinadugu district.

# Investment to accelerate campaign to end obstetric fistula

Iceland ends visit to Sierra Leone, commits more support to fistula elimination



A delegation from the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs visited UNFPA Sierra Leone on 5 October 2021 in view of increasing funding support to Sierra Leone's efforts in eliminating obstetrical fistula.

The aim is to enhance capacity for the prevention and treatment of fistula and improving access to quality maternal health services towards elimination of obstetric fistula. The support has, in the last two years, helped supplement the Government's efforts in the prevention and treatment of obstetric fistula.

During the visit, the delegation from Iceland met with UNFPA officials, interacted with fistula survivors and visited the Aberdeen Women's Centre and Haikal

Foundation to get a first-hand experience of Sierra Leone's efforts to end obstetric fistula.

The visit by the team provided an opportunity to explore expanding the fistula programme through consultations with government officials and other stakeholders. It also helped in recognizing the results from Iceland's programmes interventions and fostered continued collaboration to accelerate Sierra Leone's ongoing efforts in the prevention and treatment of fistula. The visit also resulted in scaled up support by Iceland to the UNFPA Sierra Leone Country Office.



*Foster continued collaboration to accelerate Sierra Leone's ongoing efforts in the prevention and treatment of fistula*



## With UNFPA's intervention, dignity of fistula survivor restored!



With 717 deaths per 100,000 live births, according to the 2019 Demographic and Health Survey, Sierra Leone is still among the countries with the world's highest maternal mortality ratios. Bleeding in pregnancy (obstetric haemorrhage) accounts for about 40 per cent of maternal deaths in the country.

In Sierra Leone, UNFPA is addressing fistula prevention – as well as prevention of maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity, and stillbirth, and improving the quality of maternal care – by supporting the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in improving quality services for pregnant and postnatal women.

In Sierra Leone, UNFPA works with Haikal Foundation, a local non-governmental organization, to mobilize fistula clients and prepare them for fistula surgery, and to build the capacity of post-operative women in life skills to facilitate their reintegration. UNFPA also works with Aberdeen Women's Centre, an international non-governmental organization equipped with technical capacity in screening women with obstetric fistula and conducting fistula surgery.

Through these interventions, UNFPA successfully helped restore the dignity of 38-year-old obstetric fistula survivor Maseray Bangura, a petty trader from Mambolo, a chiefdom headquarter town in the Kambia district. "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.

Obstetric fistula, a childbirth injury wherein a hole develops between the birth canal and the urinary system resulting in constant leakage of urine or faeces is often the direct result of failure by a health system to provide quality health care during childbirth.

Women who develop fistula often have prolonged labour due to a delay in making a decision to go to a health facility when labour starts, or a delay in reaching a health facility due to a poor referral system or bad road network, or a delay by a health facility in providing timely and quality treatment to women during childbirth.

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. Narrating her ordeal, she said, "For three agonizing days, I was experiencing severe labour pain. 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 a week later, 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 confined it to my husband and my mother," she revealed with sadness.

When Maseray learned of the work of Aberdeen Women's Centre, she travelled to Freetown with her husband to be admitted at the centre for her fistula surgery. "I successfully underwent the surgery without paying a cent. I have seen so much improvement and I am beginning to gain 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."

Looking back 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 will 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.

# Makeni School of Midwifery contributes to the reduction in maternal mortality



Midwives remain the basis of UNFPA's work in achieving the three goals of zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls.

In the last 10 years, the agency's support to the midwifery programme has contributed in turning out over 1,000 additional trained midwives in Sierra Leone. The support includes developing major strategies and critical policy documents, including the preceptorship policy and implementation guidelines meant to guide implementation and enhance the quality of clinical practice for midwifery students.

With funding from UK aid, UNFPA is working with the Schools of Midwifery in Bo and Makeni and the National School of Midwifery in Freetown to train midwives, to improve the availability of skilled birth attendants, a crucial factor in ending maternal deaths.

According to Francedess Forna, head of the School of Midwifery in Makeni, "The support by UNFPA is huge. We cannot underestimate that. It has been very consistent and for that we are very grateful because, it shows they [UNFPA] are aware of the role of midwives as lead professionals in promoting maternal and newborn health issues."

The School of Midwifery in Makeni, presently with over 100 students, was established in 2010 by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to help address the increase in maternal and infant mortality and to increase the number of midwives in the country.

Speaking about the school's relationship with UNFPA, Francedess Forna continued: "UNFPA has been a trusted partner since the establishment of this [School of Midwifery] institution. So far, out of the 689 midwives that have graduated from this school, UNFPA has fully supported about 500 midwives who are presently deployed

to various health facilities across the country."

The support by UNFPA, Forna believes, is of tremendous benefit to the country which has witnessed a reduction in maternal mortality by almost 40 per cent in a space of five years, from 1,165 deaths per 100,000 live births in the 2013 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey to 717 deaths per 100,000 live births in the 2019 survey. There is also an increase in percentage of births attended by skilled birth attendants from 60 per cent in the 2013 survey to 87 per cent in 2019.

"Midwives are now able to attend to complications and where necessary, make early referrals, thus reducing the risk of pregnant women dying due to childbirth-related complications," Forna said.

Despite the progress the country has made in recent times, Forna says there is still more to be done. Reducing maternal mortality to less than 70 deaths per 100,000 live births, in line with the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development, requires training more midwives. With the existing figure of about 150 midwives trained yearly, Sierra Leone may not reach the over 3,000 midwives required to meet the acceptable standards for the midwifery workforce.

# UNFPA funds MoHS with IEC material validation workshop



With the generous funding support of the People's Republic of China, UNFPA in Sierra Leone, in October 2021, organized a workshop to validate pretested Information, Education and Communication materials on cervical cancer for the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

Cervical cancer ranks as the second most common cancer among women in Sierra Leone. UNFPA works with

the Government through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to especially reach women at high risk of maternal mortality and cervical cancer.

The People's Republic of China remains a major donor country to UNFPA in Sierra Leone in the campaign to reduce maternal deaths and prevent and treat cervical cancer in Sierra Leone. Within the framework of the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund, the

country committed \$2 million in 2018 to this work.

In April 2021, the partnership between the UNFPA Sierra Leone Country Office and the People's Republic of China to reduce maternal mortality saw the training of 50 health providers on cervical cancer screening and management of cervical pre-cancers.

The validated Information, Education and Communication materials are a product of a workshop conducted early this year by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, with UNFPA funding support, followed by pretesting in Western Area Urban and Rural Districts.

## UNFPA, partners, commemorate International Day of the Girl

On International Day of the Girl Child, in partnership with Women in Crisis, UNFPA, on 11 October 2021, supported the Kids Advocacy Network in their 6th National Girls Empowerment Forum for adolescent girls from across the country on life skills and the use of technology and innovation as accelerators of girls' empowerment.

In a world affected by COVID-19, digital connectivity for all girls is critical for human rights, and inclusive and equitable socio-economic development and growth. The global theme of the International Day of the Girl Child 2021 was Digital Generation, Our Generation. For UNFPA, the adapted theme was

Digital Generation: Technology and innovation as accelerators of girls' bodily autonomy.

Speaking at the forum, UNFPA Gender and Rights Specialist Sonia Gilroy said that the theme highlighted the importance of ensuring that girls have equal access to technologies. In particular, it is important for girls to be able to access the internet whether in Freetown or Kabala. "When girls have the power to make decisions over their bodies and their lives, we can achieve universal sexual and reproductive health and rights, and gender equality. Digital technologies and approaches can improve or undermine girls' bodily autonomy, decision-making and movement building," she said.

In a statement marking the day, UNFPA Executive Director Natalia Kanem said, "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how quickly inequalities can multiply: Under school closures, girls who lack internet access have seen losses in education, health information and care. In many places, girls denied an education face an increased risk of being married off against their will. The realization of many rights is increasingly predicated on digital access, which can help girls find information, connect with peers, build social movements, explore their identities, track their periods and find help for harassment or violence."



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



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 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 marginalization 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 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 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.

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, 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."

United Nations Population Fund  
12-16 New Signal Hill Road  
Off Congo Cross  
Freetown, Sierra Leone

Tel: +232 79 327330  
Email: [sierra-leone.office@unfpa.org](mailto:sierra-leone.office@unfpa.org)  
Website: [sierraleone.unfpa.org](http://sierraleone.unfpa.org)

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