

Sierra Leone Country Overview

1. Country Context

Sierra Leone amongst other African countries have been part of the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership since 2010. During this period there have been several engagements with Civil Society Organization's (WASHNET), line ministries, private sectors, International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs), and UNICEF in ensuring that we diligently work towards achieving key commitments. Since then, there has been several sector reforms: including legislative policy as well as institutional transformation, Multi-sectoral Coordination Working Group (MSCWG) and so on in the midst of other challenges that the country is still grappling with. Key among these challenges includes but not limited to low level of sector investment, weak/limited capacity of sector institutions to effectively address disparity gaps between urban and the rural population in terms of access to resources and services; and disease outbreaks (EVD, and COVID-19).

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is at the center of the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2019 – 2023) and the distinct sector pillar with direct link to the Sustainable Development Goal 6, SDG 6)

2. Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities and services

Sierra Leone government's commitment is to increase resource allocation as one of the measures to accelerate access to safe water and sanitation for all.

Tremendous efforts have been made to increase access to safe water. To date, up to 67% of the households' population have access to an improved source of drinking water (DHS, 2019).

This implies that an estimated 33% of the people are still drinking water from unimproved water sources. Furthermore, 58% of households used piped water or water from a tube well or borehole without an interruption of at least one day (DHS, 2019)

Substantial efforts have been made to increase access to improved sanitation facilities from 13 percent (post Ebola), to 16 percent nationally (MICS6 2017). Open defecation has reduced from 26.3 to 18.8 percent (UNICEF, 2017).

Data on WASH in health facilities and in schools show an estimated 75% and 74% coverage respectively (UNICEF, 2017).

Cost of Inaction

In Sierra Leone, the Sanitation and Water for All Multi-stakeholder Coordination Working Group (MSCWG) platform has been adopted to scale-up WASH interventions in the country. Several Meetings have been conducted with key stakeholders to plan and discuss on ways to strengthen the WASH program.

Access to adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services saves lives and is significant to uphold the health and dignity of the populations in need. The provision of water and sanitation infrastructure and services, coupled with the promotion of good hygiene practices, has reduced the risk of water-related disease transmission, impacting positively in health and nutrition outcomes.

The cost of inaction may lead to: Increase in household income expenditure, absenteeism from school, low school enrollments, poor academic performance, low productivity and high morbidity and mortality.

The contributions from different players has actually improved the WASH system though much more to be done. Sierra Leone will still continue to work with the Multi-stakeholders platform for a more formidable and sustainability program.

3. The Economic case for WASH

The economic case for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is widely recognized. For example:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that for every US\$1 invested in water and sanitation, there is an economic return of US\$8 by keeping people healthy and productivity.
- The World Bank has stated that hygiene promotion is one of the most cost effective health interventions.

There are strong economic arguments for investing in WASH. According to the UN's Human development report, lack of safe water, sanitation and hygiene causes Sub-Saharan African countries annual losses equivalent to 5% of GDP, more than the entire continent receives in development aid. In Sierra Leone government losses 5% of its GDP to WASH related illnesses (WASHNET, 2017). In addition to lowering of economic productivity of women and school retention of the girl child.

Various WASH INGOS have been supporting the Multi-stakeholder Coordination Working Group meetings in Sierra Leone. This has helped in the reduction of duplication of activities and getting towards a more concise joint intervention process.

WASH is Cost-Effective

WHO has estimated that the cost of delivering universal access to WASH can result to significant financial savings to the global economy. In Sierra Leone this is part of our focus. Presently we are working towards creating a WASH account which will help us track the financial strength of the Country and also serve as a monitoring tool to track our Country income and expenditures.

4. WASH and COVID-19

The provision of safe Water, Sanitation and Hygienic conditions is essential to protecting human health during all infectious disease outbreaks, including the COVID-19 outbreak. Ensuring good and consistently applied WASH and waste management practices in communities, homes, schools, marketplaces, and prisons. Frequent and proper hand hygiene is one of the most important measures that can be used to prevent infection with the COVID-19 virus. WASH services should enable more frequent and regular hand hygiene by improving facilities and using proven behavior change techniques.

During the peak of the COVID -19 situation in Sierra Leone WASH related issues were managed due to the experiences learnt from the Ebola menace. The Government and its supporting partners were able to work together in ensuring that the WASH interventions were addressed in the Health facilities and quarantine homes. The provision of Pipe born running water was challenging but water trucking was the alternative used.

5. Key Accomplishments

Despite numerous challenges the country has faced in the past years e.g mudslide, Ebola menace and the COVID-19 pandemic, the country has been able to get some success stories some of which are highlighted below:

Water

- Provision of water in 30 Peripheral Health Units (PHUs) and 11 District Hospitals, sanitation and waste management facilities in 10 District Hospitals and 8 PHUs, and Procurement of WASH/IPC materials to respond to 25,000 people in a bid to support WASH interventions during Covid-19 response and Susan's bay fire incident
- Constructed and rehabilitated water supply facilities across rural and peri-urban communities
- Developed Water Safety Plan Strategy and rolled out implementation of water safety plan in 18 project communities
- Constructed and rehabilitated WASH facilities (Wells included) across 15 Schools/ Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers
- Reactivation of district WASH coordination platforms- Chaired by the Ministry of water Resources and co-chair Ministry of Health and Sanitation

Sanitation and hygiene

- Adoption of the chiefdom-wide approach to ending open defecation; 3 chiefdoms have attained Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and seven chiefdoms are currently on the verge of becoming ODF
- Developed and launched the National Protocol on verification and certification of ODF communities and chiefdoms
- Reviewed WASH implementation guidelines and regulatory frameworks which is being finalized for publication and dissemination (WASHCOM Manual and Standard Operating Procedure, Hygiene Improvement Framework and Guidelines, School Sanitation and Hygiene Improvement Guidelines, Village Savings and Loan Scheme for Sanitation Uptake, and Technical Guidelines for WASH in Schools and Health Facilities to support sector development
- Engagements and participation in Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) high level meetings including collaborations with the newly appointed Sanitation and Hygiene Ambassador for Africa (H.E. Mrs. Fatima Bio)
- Strengthening of the existing WASH Multi-Stakeholder Coordination Working Group (MSCWG) at national level which includes key line Ministries, District councils, private sector actors, CSO's, ESAs, and other local and international WASH partners
- MSCWG supported development of Sanitation and Hygiene Game plan which encompasses 9 key components including Governance, Advocacy and Communication, Finance and Investment, Supply Chain and Markets, Service Delivery and Sustainability, Gender and Inclusion, Innovations and Learning, Evidence generation and performance management, National Systems and Institutional Strengthening
- MSCWG platform was used to update the country's Mutual Accountability Framework (MAM) which was very participatory, created synergy and ownership amongst different stakeholders
- Developed and launched of the Sanitation and Hygiene Strategy
- Signed up with AMCOW's African Sanitation Policy Guidelines towards strengthening national guidelines and capacities for scaling up sanitation
- Revised the 2015 National Technical Standard on WASH in Schools
- Supported establishment of spare parts supply chain outlets, identified area mechanics and provided trainings on Operations & Maintenance (O&M) for sustainability
- Constructed and rehabilitated WASH facilities across 15 Schools/ Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centers
- Reactivation of district WASH coordination platforms
- Sanitation and Hygiene Fund (SHF) approved to help accelerate sanitation market based approaches intended to building an investment case for sanitation in order attract investors
- Developed and disseminated WASH in Emergencies guidelines to stakeholders nationwide
- Commemorated global events and conducted awareness campaigns (World Toilet Day (WTD), Global Hand Washing Day, etc....)

- WASH budget line has been created in the Ministry of Finance but still inadequate resources are being allocated to scale-up WASH interventions in country