



UNITED NATIONS
SIERRA LEONE



COMMON COUNTRY ANALYSIS

2020 UPDATE



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1. Introduction

The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Sierra Leone launched the Common Country Analysis (CCA) exercise in 2018 to identify the “game-changing” priorities to accelerate the development progress of Sierra Leone. The 2018 CCA served as an analytical tool that informed the preparation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2020-2023, which was signed between the UN system in Sierra Leone and the Government of Sierra Leone in October 2019. The UNSDCF 2020-2023 identified four strategic priorities—i) Sustainable agriculture and food security; ii) Transformational governance; iii) Access to basic services, and; iv) Protection and empowerment of the most vulnerable. The Joint UNSDCF workplan for the programme cycle of the UNSDCF was approved and operationalized in May 2020.

As a core integrated analytical tool of the UN development system, the CCA is updated annually to reflect issues that shape the context for sustainable development in the country. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the analyses of the most current data have never been more important to the implementation of the programmatic activities of the UNSDCF. In Sierra Leone, the UNCT launched the update to the CCA in October 2020, to reflect the changes since the initial draft of the CCA in 2020, notwithstanding the implications of the pandemic to Sierra Leone.

The 2020 CCA Update was developed through an inclusive, extroverted and data-driven process that engaged the entire UN Country Team, including non-resident agencies. The structure of the CCA Update has also been aligned to the new Cooperation Framework Companion Package that included comprehensive analyses on political economy, environment and climate change, social exclusion, leave no one behind, and cross-boundary issues. A core output of the CCA update was also to establish a UNCT Data and Analysis Repository, which will provide source materials for more frequent analytic products and generate evidence and analysis that is responsive to emerging needs and changing conditions of the country.

The CCA update in Sierra Leone brought together and utilized the wide range of expertise existing within the UN entities represented in the UNCT, among national experts, and civil society. Under the leadership of the UNCT/Resident Coordinator, the UNSDCF Results Groups were delegated to improve on internal coordination and ensure a coherent UN system-wide approach to data collection and consultations on their thematic area that informed subsequent analyses. Consultations with national stakeholders, including the Government of Sierra Leone and civil society, which culminated to a validation exercise together with the UNCT were also conducted.

2. Executive Summary

Sierra Leone had made significant strides towards peace, security and sustainable development. The country has seen a peaceful transition of power through democratic elections, while the economy has recovered from the twin shocks of 2014 and 2015—the Ebola epidemic and fall of iron ore prices. However, the health and economic crises brought about by COVID-19 pandemic could threaten this progress and intensify political tensions. Structural weaknesses continue to threaten progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite efforts in maintaining macroeconomic stability in post conflict period, Sierra Leone's economic growth has been slow and has remained factor-driven. The dependency on vulnerable productive sectors and natural resource endowment with very little value addition has made it vulnerable to shocks, such as the decline of iron ore prices. Youth structural unemployment rate is amongst the highest in the West African region, posing risks to peace and stability. The added pressure brought about by the pandemic has further compounded the macroeconomic environment, impacting livelihoods and food security.

Sierra Leone has demonstrated resilience by achieving significant progress in building state institutions of governance and maintaining stability as part of its post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction agenda. Progress has been reflected in policy and legal reforms aimed at enhancing institutional capacity for service delivery. However, these have been undermined by significant systemic and structural challenges. Public service delivery institutions are challenged by weak accountability mechanisms, while effective administration of justice is hampered by limited institutional capacity and the limited application of the rule of law. Pervasive corruption and allegations of mismanagement of public funds continue to permeate. Despite the acclamation of the elections being peaceful, they are still characterised by heightened political tension and violence, resulting to perceptions of diminishing social cohesion. Mistrust between political parties and the ruling government has incumbered COVID-19 measures and may continue to challenge consensus on response measures to the pandemic.

Climate change is one of the key factors that stand in the way of Sierra Leone's environmental sustainability. Sierra Leone's coastal areas are projected to be adversely affected by future incidences of inundation, waterlogging, increased flooding, erosion, and salinization due to sea-level rise. Increasing climate-related crises and environmental degradation affected food production, which is in a five-year low. Moreover, COVID-19 measures have significantly increased food prices while decreasing food stocks, impacting food availability and access, particularly for

poor households. Food insecurity is expected to deteriorate further in 2021 due to the yearly lean season with an estimated 1.4 million Sierra Leoneans facing a food crisis. Sierra Leone is already among the 15 worst performing countries in the world in terms of food security. The linkages of the climate-related vulnerabilities, low food production and increasing food costs continue to risk food insecurity in Sierra Leone that may plunge the country in a humanitarian situation.

The interconnected nature of these elements necessitates a multi-dimensional approach to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As such, progress or regress in one area may have significant impact in other areas. The structural challenges and underlying causes of poverty and food insecurity in Sierra Leone need to be addressed sustainably, while ensuring inclusion of the most vulnerable populations.

Although vulnerability in Sierra Leone is almost universal, certain segments of the society face additional challenges that impede their participation to the country's sustainable development and are most at risk of being left behind. Despite strides towards social inclusion, the most vulnerable groups continue to face barriers in accessing social services, including education, health services, legal rights and public participation and representation. COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the challenges of the following most marginalized groups: women and girls; persons with disabilities (PWDs); youth; sexual minorities; people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA), and; older persons.

Significant hurdles remain in accelerating the progress towards the 2030 Agenda in this "Decade of Action". The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the underlying challenges of sustainable development in Sierra Leone, as meagre resources are reallocated to mitigate the health and macroeconomic impact of the epidemic. However, there is a cause for optimism. The Medium-term National Development Plan provides a framework for the Government of Sierra Leone and its partners to implement strategic and inclusive programmes rooted on the SDGs. The Government's COVID-19 Health and Socio-economic Response Plans layout a path that seeks to alleviate the country from the impact of the pandemic.

However, to affect real progress and build back better from the pandemic require acknowledging and understanding Sierra Leone's structural weaknesses while ensuring social cohesion and inclusion. The Government of Sierra Leone at all levels, civil society, development partners and stakeholders need to continue working together to ensure that peace and development are sustainable and leave no one behind.

3. Country Context

Sierra Leone has demonstrated resilience by achieving significant progress in building state institutions of governance and maintaining stability as part of its post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction agenda, since the civil war ended in 2002. Progress has been reflected in a number of policy and legal reforms aimed at enhancing institutional capacity for service delivery in sectors relating to economic growth, justice, security, human rights, peace, and democratic governance.

Macroeconomic Overview

Historical Trends and Structural Context

Sierra Leone is endowed with vast natural resources, yet the country's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) at USD540 in 2019 has changed little from its level after independence in 1961, though there was a steady increase in GDP per capita from 2002 to 2019, its longest period of sustained growth. For three decades from independence to civil war, per capita GDP grew at a very slow rate of about 0.4 per cent on average per annum while contracting by 3.5 per cent on average per annum during the civil war between 1991 and 2001 and increasing by 3.4 per cent on average per annum between 2002 and 2019 (post-civil war period). Economic growth was driven mainly by agriculture, i.e. agriculture, forestry and fishery sectors. Between 2002 and 2019, agriculture grew by 7 per cent on average per annum contributing nearly 50 per cent to the total real GDP growth over this period¹. An exception to the dominance of the agriculture sector as the driver of growth is

the period of iron ore led mining boom between 2011-2014 when the industry sector grew by 62 per cent on average per annum contributing nearly 65 per cent to the total real GDP growth during the 4-year period. This growth trend was reversed in 2015 when the economy contracted by 20.5 per cent due to the collapse in global iron ore prices and the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak. Economic growth has since recovered but remains volatile.

The post-civil war growth has been inclusive. According to the 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey, poverty headcount ratio declined to 56.8 per cent in 2018 from about 66.4 per cent in 2003. Inequality initially declined as the Gini coefficient fell from 0.39 in 2003 to 0.32 in 2011 only to increase to 0.36 in 2018 implying worsening but modest inequality. However, the youth structural unemployment rate of 70 per cent is amongst

¹ See also the World Bank (2018). Priorities for Sustainable Growth and Poverty Reduction, Systemic Country Diagnostics, February 2018.

the highest in the West African sub-region. Sierra Leone has made great strides in maintaining macroeconomic stability in post conflict period. The initial post-conflict years i.e. 2002-2003 were characterized by low and stable inflation. However, the consumer price inflation accelerated to double digits and averaged 13.5 per cent during 2004-2007 driven mainly by food and energy prices. Inflation stabilized during 2008-2015 averaging 6.4 per cent due to lower international food and fuel prices following the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and the twin shocks of 2014-2015. Driven by continued exchange rate depreciation and pass through effects, inflation accelerated again from 2016 averaging 14.9 per cent for the period 2016-2019. The Bank of Sierra Leone (BSL) has shifted from an expansionary monetary policy towards a tight policy in recent years to bring down inflation to 9 per cent over the medium term, albeit in the face of fiscal pressure.

GDP increased to an all-time high of 55 per cent in 2019 (see Figure 10). Promoting economic diversification and competitiveness is one of the core priorities of the Medium-Term National Development Plan, 2019-2023.

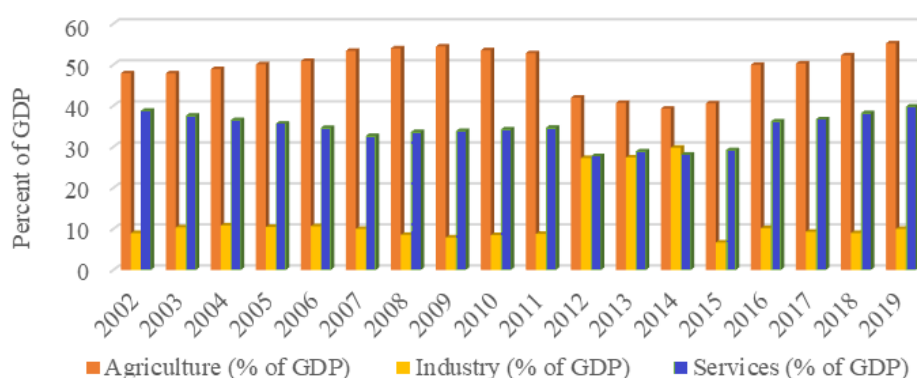
Fiscal balance improved significantly in 2007 reaching a surplus of 20 per cent following a large injection of grants and funds from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' Multilateral

Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). Following the MDRI debt relief in 2007, Sierra Leone witnessed a sharp decline in debt-GDP ratio from 102 per cent of GDP in 2006 to 42 per cent of GDP in 2007. The debt-GDP ratio remained relatively low between 2007 and 2015 until it began to rapidly increase in 2016 due to rising government borrowing to finance infrastructure investment and resuscitate growth after the external shocks. Sierra Leone is classified as being at high risk of debt distress according to the latest Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) carried out by IMF in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to worsen the debt levels in 2020 and beyond.

Domestic revenue mobilization efforts remain low in Sierra Leone. The tax revenue-GDP ratio averaged 10.6 per cent between 2010 and 2015 which was 10 percentage points lower than the Sub-Saharan Africa average. Weak revenue mobilization remains a challenge in the context of declining aid and slow recovery in manufacturing and services. For almost half of the post-civil war period, the current account deficit has been in double digit reaching -21 per cent of GDP in 2017 before declining to -13.5 per cent of GDP in 2019.

Sierra Leone's economy is a factor-driven economy heavily dependent on natural resources endowment with very little value addition, insufficient diversification and

Figure 1: Sierra Leone: Evolution of Economic Structure: Sector Share in GDP 2002-2019 (Percent)



Source: AfDB; Statistics Sierra Leone

structural transformation. Agriculture, forestry and fishing sector remains dominant. Its share in GDP increased from 48 per cent in 2002 to 53 per cent in 2011 before declining to 41 per cent in 2013 and 39 per cent in 2014 the lowest levels in two decades. It has however, risen to 57.4 per cent in 2019². On the other hand, the share of industry in GDP increased rapidly from as little as 9 per cent in 2002 to 27 per cent in 2013 and 29 per cent in 2014, the highest levels in two decades due to an expansion in iron ore mining. The collapse in the world iron ore prices and the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in 2014-2015 undermined the efforts to boost the mining sector output and diversify away from agriculture to industry. The manufacturing value added remains very low accounting for only 3.2 per cent of GDP at the end of civil war in 2002 which further deteriorated to 1.9 per cent of GDP in 2019. The share of industry in GDP collapsed from 2015 onwards to a single digit before marginally improving to 10 per cent of GDP in 2019. The service sector accounted for nearly 40 per cent of GDP in 2019 and remains the second largest sector in terms of its share in GDP. As recoveries remain slow in manufacturing and mining sectors, the share of agriculture sector in GDP increased to an all-time high of 55 per cent in 2019 (see Figure 10). Promoting economic diversification and competitiveness is one of the core priorities of the Medium-Term National Development Plan, 2019-2023.

Recent Economic Development and Macroeconomic Impact of COVID-19

following the Ebola outbreak and a decline in the price of iron ore, the main export product, growth rebounded to 6.4 per cent in 2016 following the recovery in agriculture and services as the country was declared Ebola-free in March 2016. However, the recovery has been uneven with economic growth slowing After contracting by 21 per cent in 2015

² https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Sierra-Leone/share_of_agriculture/

to 3.5 per cent in 2018 only to later improve to 5.1 per cent in 2019 underpinned by continued recovery of agriculture and services.

Recent fiscal consolidation efforts which have focused on boosting revenue mobilization and prioritization of expenditures have helped narrow the overall deficit from 8.8 per cent of GDP in 2017 to 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2019 whilst inflationary pressure moderated to 13.9 per cent in 2019 from 18.2 per cent in 2017 reflecting the tight monetary policy stance of the authorities. Public debt has increased sharply with the risk of debt distress increasing from moderate to high in 2018.

External sector performance was severely weakened by the collapse of iron ore exports since 2016 reflecting the downturn of iron ore prices coupled with weaknesses in mining sector governance. The current account deficits widened to 21.1 per cent of GDP in 2017 and declined gradually to 13.8 per cent of GDP in 2019 driven mainly by the recovery of exports.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dealt a further blow to the economy by disrupting demand and supply and restricting trade and production. Sierra Leone is once again contending with both an economic and health crisis that has jeopardized gains already made since the Ebola crisis with most macroeconomic indicators projected to worsen in 2020, compared to pre-crisis estimates. The economy is projected to contract by 3.1 per cent in 2020 mainly due to contraction in the service sector (tourism, and trade including supply chain disruptions of impeding imports) and dampening manufacturing and construction due to the suspension of international flights and Government's COVID-19 containment measures.

Headline Inflation was initially projected to rise to 17.5 per cent towards the end of 2020, up by 4 per cent from pre-Covid-19 estimates mainly reflecting food supply constraints as a result of supply chain disruptions exacerbated by Covid-19 restrictions such as

lockdowns and border closures. The current account deficit was expected to widen to 15.8 per cent of GDP in 2020 from 13.8 per cent of GDP in 2019 due mainly to the widening of the trade deficit creating huge financing gap and balance of payment (BOP) needs as the Government grapples with the cost of containing the pandemic and keeping the economy vibrant. The current account deficit is expected to be financed by external budgetary and balance of payment support from development partners.

The Government instituted the Quick Action Economic Response Program (QAERP) with the overall objective of maintaining macroeconomic and financial stability aimed at mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, businesses and households. The implementation of both the QAERP and Covid-19 Health Response as well as depressed revenues are expected to increase the overall fiscal deficit projected at 5.8 per cent of GDP in 2020 compared to 2.9 per cent of GDP in 2019. The deficit will be financed from both foreign (0.5 per cent of GDP) and domestic sources (5.3 per cent of GDP). Total public debt is projected at 79.4 per cent of GDP in 2020 (up from 71 per cent of GDP in 2019), largely reflecting the larger fiscal deficit. As at the last Development Sustainability Analysis (DSA) in June 2020, both external and overall risk of debt distress remain “high”. The implementation of the QAERP is expected to cushion the impact of the pandemic on households and business and keep the economy from plummeting further³. Despite the huge uncertainty in all sectors of the economy, it is projected that the economy will rebound strongly in 2021 with growth projected at 2.7 per cent with strong mining sector recovery and increased food production enhancing growth.

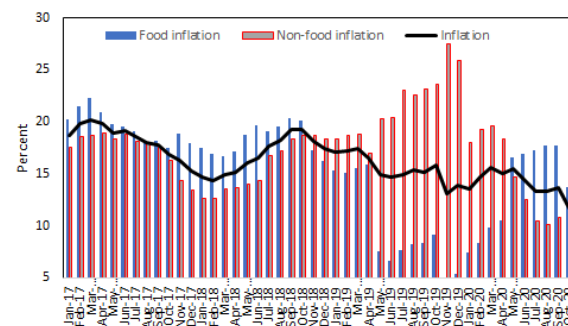
³ With the support of UN Women, Statistics Sierra Leone is closely looking into the gender impact of the COVID-19, including in the economic sector. The results are expected to be released in the first quarter of 2021.

Real Sector

Sierra Leone’s economy is projected to contract by 3.1 per cent in 2020 due to a sharp tightening in the services sector, reflecting suspension of international flights, closure of land borders and *lumas* (weekly open-air markets in rural areas). Growth in agriculture is expected to slow with disruptions in labour supply and delivery of key inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. The COVID-19 Impact Monitoring Survey in Sierra Leone (CIMS) conducted in July 2020 found that nearly two-thirds of rural households reported planting less rice this farming season, indicating increased food insecurity among the population. Production data through September 2020 showed that there has been a strong contraction in the mining industry as production declined for some major mineral exports (diamond, bauxite, albite, rutile). On the demand side, the contraction of the economy is explained by lower investment and net exports, reflecting COVID-19 related uncertainties and global trade disruptions. Public and private consumption will, however, remain strong with increased spending on health, support to vulnerable households and businesses and demand for essential commodities, including food.

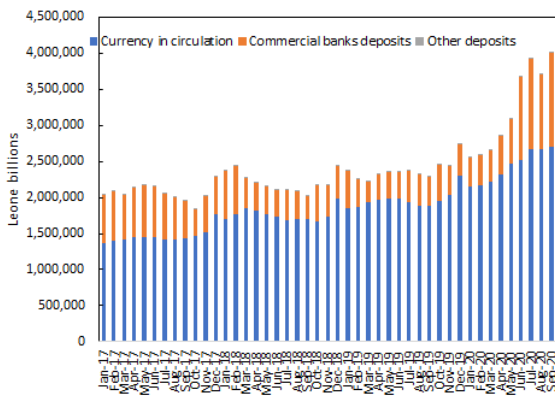
Headline inflation increased from 13.9 per cent in December 2019 to 14.4 per cent in June 2020 reflecting food supply constraints as

Consumer Price Inflation (y-o-y, in percent), 2017-20

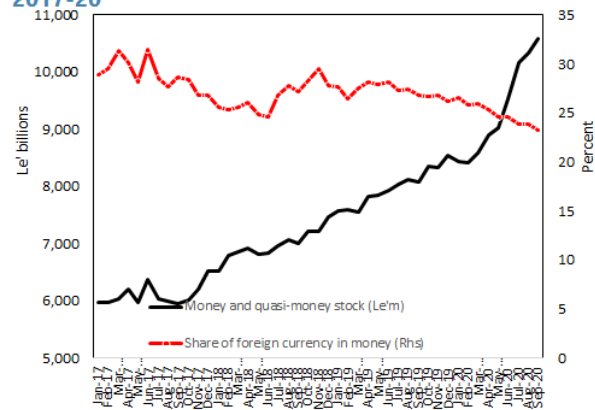


Source: Estimates from Government Data and Partner Funds

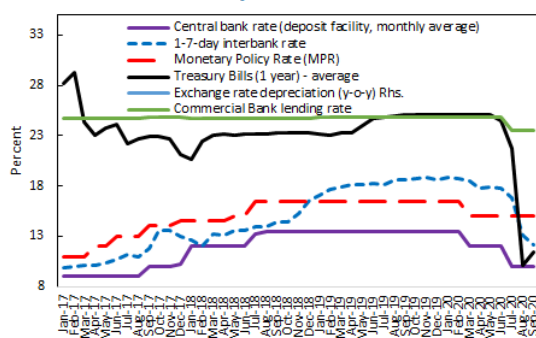
Composition of Reserve Money (Le'billion)



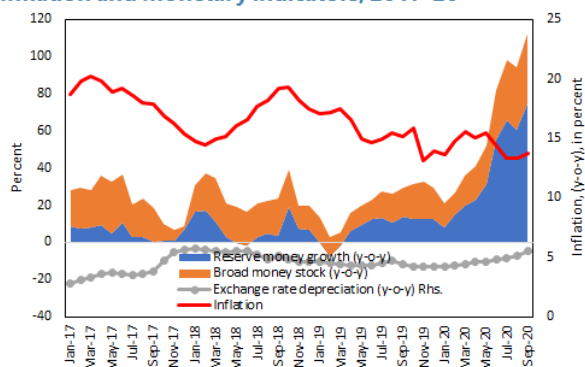
Currency Composition of Bank Deposits, 2017-20



Interest Rates 2017-20 (percent)



Inflation and Monetary indicators, 2017-20



Source: Estimates from Government Data and Partner Funds

lockdowns and border closures spurred panic buying in anticipation of shortages and higher prices. Food inflation which had declined to 5.4 per cent in December 2019 reached 16.9 per cent in June 2020 reflecting food supply constraints as a result of lockdowns and border closures. According to the CIMS, 8 out of 10 households reported having difficulty getting enough food compared to a year ago, due mainly to a decline in income and increased prices. Non-food inflation declined sharply during the same period from 21.1 per cent to 12.3 per cent in June 2020 reflecting lower prices for transportation, hotels and restaurants and goods and services. However, inflation has moderated in October to 11.7 per cent (year-on-year) as food and non-food inflation declines to 13.7 per cent and 10.3 per cent compared to June 2020 figures, reflecting easing of restrictions (inter-district

Monetary Sector

lockdowns) and agricultural food harvest. In an effort to mitigate the impact of Covid-19, the Bank of Sierra Leone reduced the monetary policy rate by 150 basis point in March 2020 from 16.5 per cent to 15 per cent and also rolled out the special credit facility of Le500 billion to support the production, procurement and distribution of essential commodities to ease supply constraints. Consequently, broad money grew by 20.4 per cent (year-on-year) in June 2020 from 14.5 per cent in December 2019 with currency in circulation showing the strongest growth (up by 44 per cent) due to increased credit in the banking system. Reserve money grew by 55.5 per cent (year-on-year) in June 2020 compared to 12.4 per cent in June 2019. The Leone depreciated by 5.1 per cent against the US dollar in the first half of 2020, reflecting lower-than-expected export receipts.

Fiscal Sector

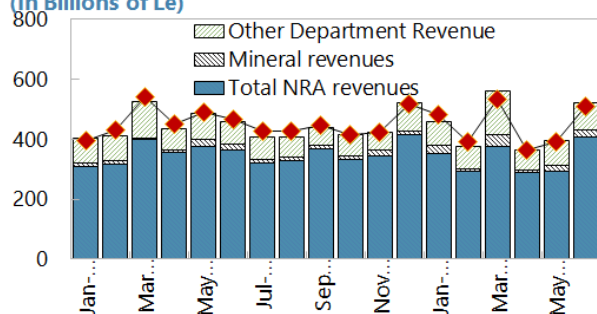
COVID-19 has had a negative impact on domestic revenue mobilization with actual revenue faring worse against targets (original and revised). Actual revenue as at September 2020 declined by 2 per cent to Le3.9 trillion compared to September 2019 (Le4.1 trillion) as a result of depressed economic activity and the granting of tax deferrals and waivers to businesses. Expenditure is projected to increase to 26.1 per cent of GDP in 2020 from 20.6 per cent of GDP in 2019 with increased spending to implement public health measures and mitigate the impact of the crisis on households and businesses. The overall fiscal deficit is projected to increase to 5.8 per cent of GDP compared to original projection of 3.3 per cent of GDP with the deficit to be financed from both foreign and domestic sources. Total public debt is projected to increase resulting to a high overall risk of debt distress. However, net domestic debt has moderated especially with the increased budgetary grant support to finance the deficit. Despite the BSL's Le500 billion credit

intervention, credit to the private sector has declined in nominal terms since May 2021 but has increased by 10.2 per cent (year-on-year) in June 2020.

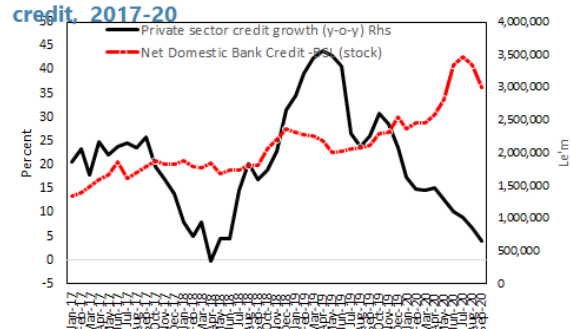
External Sector

The current account deficit (CAD) is expected to widen to 15.8 per cent of GDP in 2020 from 13.8 per cent in 2019, due largely to the widening of the trade deficit as exports fall while imports increase. With a dampened external demand depressing mining activity and export and curtailing foreign direct investment (FDI) and remittance flow as a result of border closures and other COVID-19 restrictions around the world, a widening trade deficit will be exacerbated by the need to import food and medical items. The widening trade deficit and contracted FDI created a widening BOP gap US\$214 million. Gross Reserves in June 2020 was US\$650 million which is high by historical standards and covers over 6 months of imports reflecting the IMF's Rapid Credit Facility (RCF) disbursement of US\$143 million and World Bank disbursement of US\$102 million.

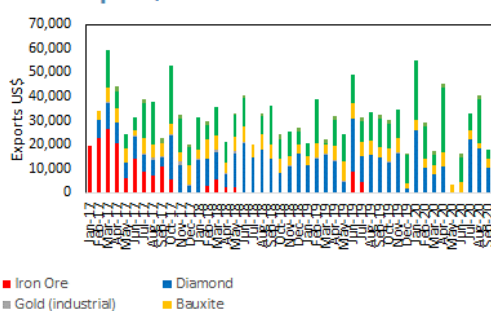
Domestic Revenues, 2020
(In Billions of Le)



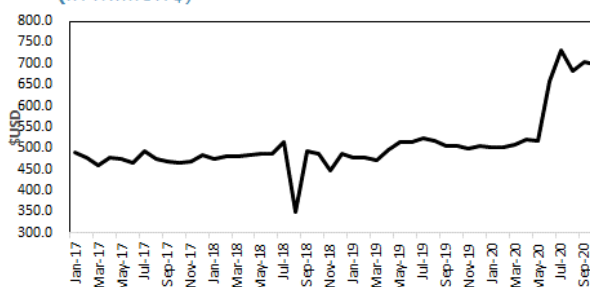
Domestic financing and private sector credit, 2017-20



Mineral Export, 2017-20



Gross International Reserves, 2017-20
(In Million \$)



Source: Estimates from Government Data and Partner Funds

General Outlook of the Economy

Growth is projected to rebound to 2.7 per cent in 2021 and 4.2 per cent in 2022 as markets reopen for Sierra Leone's export, and activities in the service sector, agriculture and mining recover. The huge investments in agriculture increases the prospect for increase food production while the expected resumption of iron ore mining at both the Tonkolili and Lunsar will further enhance a quick bounce back from the pandemic. Inflation is projected to moderate to 10.2 per cent by 2022 as

domestic food production improves given a strong recovery in agriculture and fisheries. Fiscal consolidation efforts through revenue system reforms and implementation of ITAS and the electronic cash register and eventual expansion of the tax base are expected to reduce the budget deficit to 4.2 per cent of GDP by 2022 (RCF, June 2020) reflecting prudent expenditure management and control and vigorous revenue mobilization. The current account deficit is projected to narrow to 13.3 per cent of GDP in 2022 driven by increase export and remittance flow.

		2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Selected Macroeconomic Indicators	GDP at constant prices	3.8	3.5	5.1	-3.1	2.7	4.2
	Inflation	15.3	14.2	13.9	17.5	13.5	11.1
Financing	Public Debt	69.1	69.1	70	77.2	79	77.5
	Domestic Financing	28	27.9	26.4	22.2	21.9	21.4
External Sector	Current account balance	-21.1	-18.7	-13.8	-15.8	-14.7	-13.3
Fiscal Sector	Overall balance/deficit	-8.8	-5.6	-2.9	-8.2	-5.2	-3.6

Source: IMF-RCF, June 2020

Sierra Leone Government's Policy Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

To respond to burgeoning macroeconomic risks and issues, the Government launched the Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP) in addition to its health sector COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan. The QAERP has five broad pillars directed to the objective of maintaining macroeconomic and financial stability and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 shock on businesses and households.

1. Build and maintain an adequate stock of essential commodities at stable prices.
2. Provide support to the hardest-hit businesses to enable them to continue operations, avert employee lay-offs and reduce NPLs.
3. Provide vulnerable groups with safety nets.
4. Support labor-based public works.
5. Help with local production and processing of staple foods.

The Government estimated the cost of the QAERP to be from US\$166.5 million to US\$379.5 million and approved a supplementary budget to the tune of US\$170 million. Accordingly, the total financing gap was closed with the IMF RCF and World Bank Budget Support disbursements in June 2020. In line with the QAERP, the Bank of Sierra Leone has reduced the monetary policy rate by 150 bps to 15 per cent to stimulate credit supply, created a US\$50 million special credit facility to support production, procurement, and distribution of essential goods and extended the reserve requirement maintenance period to ease tight liquidity. BSL also provided foreign exchange resources to avoid disruptions to imports. The Government Health Preparedness and Response plan covers surveillance, case management, medical supplies and laboratory costs as well as communication and coordination. The Government has also increased cash transfers to persons with disabilities and other extreme poor citizens during national lockdowns in April and May 2020.

Politics and Institutions

Elections

Parliamentary, Local Government and Presidential elections were held in 2018, the first elections conducted without a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) mandate. These were commended by various observers including the European Union Observer Mission to be free, fair, inclusive, transparent and credible (2018 EU election report). It also saw the smooth transition of power from one political party to the other. The 2018 elections resulted in a “Rainbow Parliament”; for the first time, the Parliament consisted of Representatives beyond the 2 major parties—All Peoples Congress (APC) and Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) and included MPs from Coalition for Change (C4C), National Grand Coalition (NGC) and those that contested as independent candidates.

However, a Government transition report completed in June 2018, alleged mismanagement of public funds among other allegations by the outgoing administration. The Government subsequently instituted Commissions of Inquiry (COI) under the direction of Nigerian Supreme Court Justice Biobele into the work of the previous administration. The white paper from the COI was published in September 2020 with proposals for the Anti-Corruption Commission to prosecute persons incriminated in the report.

In 2019, the Judiciary of Sierra Leone processed some cases among several electoral offence cases lodged from the 2018 elections, this pertained to the candidacy of MPs and the resulting verdict and court decision was for these MPs to lose their seats in Parliament. Mostly opposition MPs were affected. Ensuing tension between the opposition All Peoples Congress (APC) and Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) led administration, electoral violence in by-election mostly in opposition stronghold, resulted in perceptions of

diminishing social cohesion. This affected Sierra Leone’s ranking in the 2019 global peace index – dropped 18 places to become the 74th most peaceful country in the world.

In May 2019, GoSL initiated a national dialogue process as a response to the need for an effective post-election reconciliation programme and minimise tensions with the opposition parties. Although this was a laudable approach towards addressing an already deteriorating atmosphere of peaceful co-existence, the opposition questioned its sincerity amidst a perceived government inaction to address the by-elections violence and other considerations. This ultimately frustrated an initial opportunity for convening a platform which would have been meaningful to chart and set in motion an effective process of reconciliation. Representation at the Bintumani III conference was largely drawn from CSOs, women’s, youth and children’s groups, opposition parties excluding the APC and development partner representatives.

The progress achieved in post-conflict reconstruction and social cohesion has, however, been undermined by significant systemic and structural challenges which threaten efforts toward building sustainable peace and development in Sierra Leone. Despite the acclamation of the elections being peaceful, heightened political tension⁴ and violence, were indicative of declining atmosphere of tolerance and social cohesion. The political tension⁵ impacted negatively on the maintenance of peace and left the country polarized along ethno-regional political lines.

The Constitutional review process, a recommendation of 2004 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)⁶, was

4 European Union Election Observation Mission, FINAL REPORT: Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Council Elections 2018, pg. 20.

5 The Carter Center, March 7, 2018 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections in Sierra Leone, Final Report, March 23, 2018, pg. 54. <https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/march-7-2018-presidential-and-parliamentary-elections-sierra-leone-final-report>. [Accessed on 9/10/2020].

6 CRC, Report of the Constitutional Review Committee Republic of Sierra Leone, 2016, pg. 2.

concluded in 2017 with a white paper that accepted 32 of the 134 recommendations. One of the recommendations from Sierra Leonean women CSOs is to entrench equality as one of the core guiding principles of the constitution in order to support Gender Equality as constitutional provision. There has been renewed calls on the GoSL by civil society organisations (CSOs) to resume the review process⁷. Moreover, In July 2020, the Sierra Leone Parliament unanimously repealed Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act (POA), which criminalized libel, making way for improved freedom of speech in Sierra Leone when implemented.

By-elections held by NEC have largely been marred by violence; often the heavy presence of senior political party stalwarts from mostly the APC and SLPP parties contributes to tensions within these communities on polling day. In August 2019, by-elections in constituency 110 in Western Area were cancelled due to some polling stations reporting their ballot boxes and voting materials vandalized and destroyed. Three main parties, the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), the All People's Congress (APC), and the National Grand Coalition (NGC), were vying for a parliamentary seat in the election. In December 2020, the by-elections were successfully conducted with an opposition MP elected and announced by the NEC. Prior to this, series of consultations were held with political party stakeholders, the candidates and communities in constituency 110. All partners appeared to endorse and accept the result.

Governance

Decentralisation of government functions that started in 2004 had stalled by 2010 with Ministries, Departments, and Agencies withdrawing functions from councils.

⁷ CARL, CARL and ActionAid Sierra Leone call on the Government of Sierra Leone to resume the constitutional review process, 18 December 2018. Available at <http://www.carl-sl.org/pres/carl-and-actionaid-sierra-leone-call-on-the-government-of-sierra-leone-to-resume-the-constitutional-review-process/>. [Accessed on 11/11/2020].

Additional 17 central government functions were passed on to local councils in early 2019 and the Inter-Ministerial Council resuscitated to coordinate strategic decisions on decentralisation. Between 2018 and 2019, the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development commenced the review of the 2010 Decentralisation Policy and the 2004 Local Government Act. Key changes in the proposed policy and act include higher level of qualification required for occupying the post of Local Council Chairperson and salaries for the said post, depoliticizing of the posts of Chairpersons and Mayors, restructuring of Local Council hierarchies, and creation of boroughs in Freetown municipality. Proposals for creating upward promotion for Chief Administrators in councils, with the view to increase motivation, improve transparency and staff effectiveness were also under consideration during the review. Part of the functions that were decentralised to councils include health and agriculture.

In order to booster South/South trade and concentrate on her comparative advantage, Sierra Leone signed the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) in July 2019 which was ratified by parliament and it came into force in April 2019. The AfCFTA envisions to increase the free movement of goods and services across African borders as intra-African trade remains below its potential, accounting for about 17 per cent of the total African trade volume in 2017. Together with its eligibility with the EU under the Everything But Arms Initiative, the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the ECOWAS trade agreement, Sierra Leone hopes to seize the opportunities under the AfCFTA to boost its international competitiveness, increase (and diversify) their exports, accelerate growth, and attract foreign direct investment. The agreement will reduce tariffs and cover policy areas such as trade facilitation and services, as well as regulatory measures such as sanitary standards and technical barriers to trade.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government set up the National COVID-19 Emergency Response Centre to coordinate and direct the response. This centre was then decentralised to district levels allowing for district level stakeholders in collaboration with the local councils to address the challenges of tackling the pandemic within the specific context of their district. A significant omission, however, was the limited number of women appointed to the leadership of the NACOVERC and (district) DiCOVERCs despite the disproportionate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on women. This follows trends observed in the country where women's representation in decision making and leadership⁸ (elected and appointed) continue to be below par.

Many public service delivery institutions continue to be challenged by weak accountability mechanisms and are characterised by inefficiency and lack of transparency. Consequently, corruption has become a pervasive phenomenon in the public sector of Sierra Leone⁹. In 2018, the total cash losses and irregularities noted within Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) amounted to Le56.2 billion whilst a total loss of Le66.3 billion was observed in public enterprises¹⁰. During the 12 months of 2018, 52 per cent of public service users paid a bribe. The Governance Transition Team (GTT) noted *"an astonishing level of fiscal indiscipline and rampant corruption..."*¹¹ as a characteristic of the previous government. The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranks Sierra Leone 119th out of 180 countries by its perceived levels of public sector corruption from a scale of 1 being the least corrupt country to 180 being the most corrupt country in the world.¹²

8 Women make up less than 15% of Members of Parliament or of cabinet ministers

9 Government of Sierra Leone MTNDP (2019-2023), pg. III.

10 Audit Service Sierra Leone, Auditor-General's Annual Report – 2018, Graphic Re [presentation and Summary, pg. 14 and 16 respectively. <https://www.auditservice.gov.sl/> [Accessed: 3rd September 2020].

11 Report of the Governance Transition Team 2018, Officer of the President, Republic of Sierra Leone, pg. 1.

<https://sierralii.org/content/sierra-leone-government-transition-report-2018>.

12 Corruption Perception Index. <https://www.transparency.org/en/>

The Government considers corruption not only as a governance issue but also a national security threat. The MTNDP (2019-2023)¹³, as a demonstration of political will in the fight against corruption, the Government enacted the Anti-Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2019, which increased the powers of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to make corruption very expensive and to more efficiently confront corruption at all levels; including preventing the signing of contracts that are adverse to national interest¹⁴. The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranking of Sierra Leone as 119th out of 180 countries for its levels of public sector corruption indicates an improvement from 129 ranking between 2018 and 2019.¹⁵

Access to Justice

The effective administration of justice at national and local levels continues to be challenged by limited institutional capacity and the limited application of the rule of law and adherence to fundamental human rights norms and standards as well as dilapidated infrastructure. Women continue to be adversely affected by discriminatory practices across both formal and informal justice settings, which inhibit their ability to access justice, security and live in peace. Access to justice in terms of fair trial and physical access to courts continue to be a major concern for people in remote chiefdoms. There is strong reliance on the local courts system which serves as the main judicial forum in the provinces and services an estimated 80 per cent of the population, yet cases brought before the local courts are characterised by imposition of excessive fines and non-compliance to the Bail Regulations. Sierra

[cpi/2019/results](https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results) [Accessed: 3 September 2020].

13 Specifically, Cluster 4: 'Governance and Accountability for Results', the GoSL set the following broad results areas: 4.2 Fighting corruption and illicit financial flows; 4.3 Strengthening public financial management; and 4.5 Promoting inclusive and accountable justice institutions. Government of Sierra Leone MTNDP (2019-2023), pg. IX.

14 ACC Press release, Ref/ACC/PR/19/022, 31st October 2019.

15 Corruption Perception Index. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2019/results> [Accessed: 3 September 2020].

Leone developed, validated and endorsed an Anti-corruption policy in 2019 and revised Act 2019; this increased prosecution powers of the ACC and paved the way for the establishment of anti-graft courts.

The Government demonstrated commitment to the fight against SGBV by amending the Sexual Offences Act 2012 to provide new sentencing guidelines that increase the maximum penalty for rape and sexual penetration of a child from fifteen years to life imprisonment and the introduction of the offence of aggravated sexual assault, free medical service at all government facilities for survivors of sexual violence. The Government also established the Pilot One Stop Centre in 8 districts to provide psychosocial counselling, medical examination and treatment, obtain victim statement and safe home for survivors. On 24 July 2020, the Government launched the Sexual Offences Model Court (SOMC)¹⁶ to expedite court proceedings over SGBV cases in addressing impunity and expediting access to justice for survivors/victims. The situation is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic with increased incidence of gender and sexual based violence among women and girls. The same trend was observed during the Ebola epidemic that resulted in over 200 schoolgirls falling pregnant even though sex with a minor remains a crime. Women also disproportionately suffered from COVID-19 prevention measures such as reduced trading hours resulting in economic hardship and tensions, increased hours of being locked down with potential perpetrators of violence and limited support for reporting or economic stimulus package.

Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Politics

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Sierra Leone declared a health state of

¹⁶ Sierra Leone's President Julius Maada Bio launches Sexual Offences Model Court. Available: <https://statehouse.gov.sl/sierra-leones-president-julius-maada-bio-launches-sexual-offences-model-court-praises-hands-off-our-girls-campaign/>.

emergency for the period of 12 months. However, with the existing mistrust between political parties and the Executive, the state of emergency was opposed which affected the response to the pandemic. Consequently, the general populace continued business as usual, not adhering to the prevention measures instituted by the Government. Misinformation on the incidence of the disease was rife, including messages reporting that the number of cases is inflated to attract COVID-19 funding. Over time, consensus was attained, where political parties in addition to other stakeholders, undertook to educate their constituents on COVID-19 facts.

The Government in 2020 released a statement that funds received for the fight against Covid-19 would be exempted from Procurement Rules of the National Public Procurement Authority (NPPA) and another statement indicating that the funds will be audited under a special audit to be instituted by Government and not the Audit Service. Civil society advocates on Governance and opposition parties pushed back against this move by the Government. The fight against corruption was sighted as being undermined as accountability could not be assured neither were state institutions and procedures being respected.

National Development Aspirations

The agenda to foster peace and social cohesion on the one hand and the fight against corruption remain key priorities of the GoSL. The Medium-term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2019-2023) sets as one of its key goals, the creation of Peace Commission in a bid to build a society that is peaceful, cohesive, secure, and just¹⁷. As at the 12 November 2020 a Bill for the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion was tabled in Parliament, which has gone through the first and second readings and is currently being debated by the Legislative

¹⁷ Government of Sierra Leone MTNDP (2019-2023), pg. VI.

committee in Parliament. It is hoped by the end of the year the Act will be enacted, to ensure the setup of the Commission in 2021. Women have continued to lobby, advocating and pressing for equal representation of women and men in the proposed Peace Commission.

In November 2019, the Government of Sierra Leone through its Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) validated the findings of a nation-wide fragility assessment. The results of the fragility assessment informed a road map in support of Sierra Leone's efforts to move out of a state of fragility. Prior to this, the country was reported in 2016 to be at the Transition Stage of the New Deal Spectrum. GOSL is the co-lead on SDG 16 and signed up for voluntary national reporting. Sierra Leone presented its second voluntary report in 2019 at the High-Level Political Forum.

In 2019 Sierra Leone qualified for the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Threshold Programme; a US\$44.4 million investment to improve service delivery, transparency and accountability among others. Sierra Leone's qualification for MCC threshold program was attributed to improved indicators on control of corruption for example. In 2020, Sierra Leone has been scored high on indicators for Trade policy (70 per cent), Right to information (80 per cent), Business startup (85 per cent), girls' Primary education completion rate (68 per cent), control of corruption (79 per cent), gender in the economy (61 per cent). This will support the government's efforts to build back after the COVID-19 effects on the economy.

Environment and Climate Change

Climate Change

Climate change is one of the key factors that stand in the way of Sierra Leone's environmental sustainability.¹⁸ While the country's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is low, it remains vulnerable to risks associated with climate change. Its terrestrial, coastal, and aquatic ecosystems are highly exposed to the potential impacts of climate change. Sierra Leone's coastal areas, for instance, are projected to be adversely affected by future incidences of inundation, waterlogging, increased flooding, erosion, and salinization due to sea-level rise.

The Notre Dame (ND) Global Adaptation Initiative Index in 2018 ranked Sierra Leone 21st most climate-vulnerable country and the 50th least ready country. However, the country has moved up the vulnerability ranking by 3 points since 2015. The country's capacity to combat the impacts of climate change is weak. A cumulative score of its exposure, sensitivity, and ability to adapt places it at 0.558 while its readiness is ranked at 0.311¹⁹. As per ND classification, Human Habitat is the most vulnerable sector in Sierra Leone scoring 0.670, followed by food at 0.645, health at 0.633, ecosystem services at 0.579, water at 0.464, and infrastructure at 0.356.

Increasing temperatures leading to seawater rise and submergence of islands and coastal areas are the main climate change trend in Sierra Leone. The extreme weather events of 16-17 September 2016 and 14 August 2017 caused the most devastating flooding and landslides the country has ever experienced. According to the International Disaster Database (EM-DAT), the 2017 landslide led to substantial loss of lives (over 1,000),

¹⁸ Sierra Leone's Third National Communication to the UNFCCC [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/FinalThird per cent20Nat. per cent20Com. per cent20document per cent2011.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/FinalThird%20Nat.%20per%20Com.%20document%20per%202011.pdf)

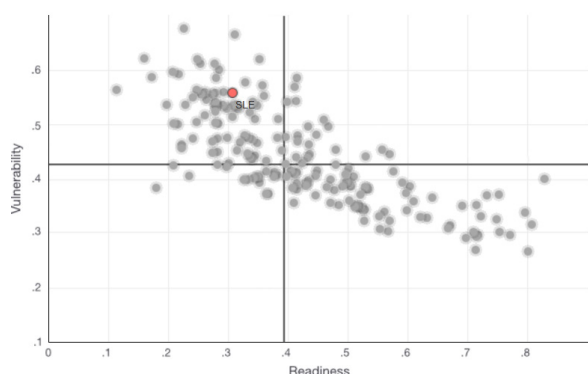
¹⁹ <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>

livelihoods, and infrastructure²⁰. It has been noted that these extreme weather events are becoming stronger and more frequent. In the last 15 years, intense and frequent storms, as well as flash floods, have affected more than 220,000 people along the coast of Freetown (World Bank 2017). Floods account for 85 per cent of disaster-related mortality in the country, followed by landslides, storms and fire accidents. Moreover, most of the primary economic sectors of Sierra Leone's economy are heavily affected by climatic events, either directly or indirectly. Recent projections show that the mean annual temperature may increase by 1.0 to 2.6°C by the 2060s (McSweetney et al. 2010).

A recent study by Richard Wadsworth reported a significant reduction in annual rainfall in the northwest part of the country²¹. This erratic rain pattern affects the timing and duration of the agricultural season and consequently the level of food production in the country. Human activities have disturbed the ecosystem in Sierra Leone. Urban expansion into protected forest reserves coupled with illegal logging has exacerbated deforestation.

The ND-GAIN Matrix

The ND-GAIN Matrix illustrates the comparative resilience of Sierra Leone against other countries. The vertical axis shows the score of vulnerability and the horizontal axis shows the readiness score.



Source: <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/rankings/>

²⁰ <https://www.emdat.be/>

²¹ Changes in Rainfall in Sierra Leone: 1981–2018

Reports from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) indicate that seasonal rainfall at the beginning of the rainy season was timely and adequate, which has supported planting operations, soil moisture content and development of major crops grown in the country (cereals, cassava and potatoes). According to a pre-harvest assessment conducted by MAF in October 2020, cereal and tuber crop harvests cultivated in the uplands will be encouraging for farmers. The assessment report also cites a change in the rainfall pattern in the middle and towards the end of the rainy season.

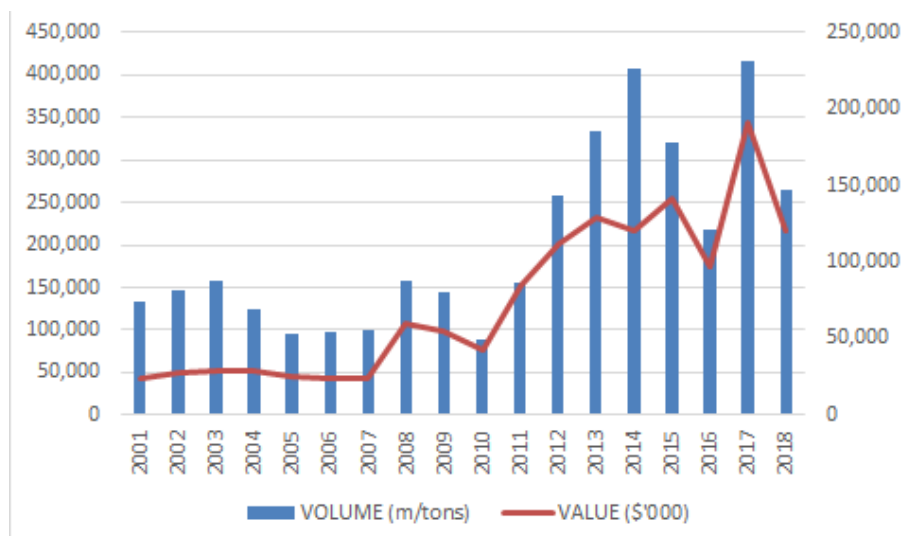
The Forum of the Agro-Hydro-Climatic Seasonal Forecast in Sudano-Sahelian Africa (PRESASS) predicted a below average rainfall from July–September 2020²². The African Centre of Meteorological Applications for Development (ACMAD) also predicted a below average rainfall from September–December 2020. The predicted below average rainfall may contribute to scarcity of pasture for livestock and decrease crop yield, especially vegetables and ground nut. Additionally, climate change will have mixed impacts for major crops. Scenarios from biophysical models have suggested increasingly negative trends for net rice exports, but with some increase toward 2050. A slight increase in the area under cultivation for cassava and other roots/tubers has also been projected²³. Oil palm is highly tolerant and naturally suited to all districts of Sierra Leone, but highly vulnerable to bush fire (especially at infancy and maturing stages), which is likely to be more pervasive in dry conditions. Cocoa is the major cash crop and leading export commodity of Sierra Leone²⁴; it is ecologically suited to forest zones. Cocoa requires rainfall range between 1,250 to 3,000 mm and temperature range between 18–21°C

²² Global Information and Early Warning Systems May 2020.

²³ Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2017. Third national communication of Sierra Leone to the United Nations framework convention on climate Change. 3rd national communication: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/FinalThird%20Nat.%20Com.%20document%20111.pdf>

²⁴ Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Forestry, (no date): National Cocoa Value Chain Policy.

Rice Imports for Sierra Leone, 2001- 2018



Source: Bank of Sierra Leone: http://www.bsl.gov.sl/Statistics_Archive.html

and 28-32°C²⁵. Increasing temperatures and decreasing rainfall in cocoa producing districts are already affecting production²⁶. Sierra Leone is projected to experience a future reduction in climate suitability for cocoa production by up to 20 per cent in the more suitable southern districts and up to 40 per cent in the drier north-eastern upland districts by 2050²⁷.

It should be noted that during the 2020 rainy season, there were minimal flooding events nationally and in the capital Freetown vis-à-vis 2019. This reflects lower than average rainfall levels.

The ripple effects of these conditions would be felt by the dependent sectors of the economy. Government reports, such as the Third National Communication to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), show Sierra Leone is

already experiencing the impacts of climate change, with increased levels being expected in the future. The severity of it is set to be compounded by the deterioration of forests and wetlands that would have been pivotal in cushioning the country's exposure to climate change-related disasters.

Policies implemented by the Government to contain the spread of COVID-19 seem to have inadvertently had a negative effect on the protection of the environment, biodiversity conservation, and, possibly, on conservation gains. Many environmental protection and conservation agencies in their effort to comply with the Government of Sierra Leone COVID-19 restriction measures scaled down their operations to protect and conserve the environment. The aquatic environment has also been exploited by poor coastal communities in a bid to stock up on protein sources during the lockdown period as well. Aquatic species were harvested uncontrollably, regardless of the type and size of fish to be captured, resulting in numerous by-catch issues. Coastal communities situated along the Sherbro River Estuary of the Bargura Creek and Moyamba District in southern Sierra Leone were mostly affected. Fishing has always been the main source of

25 Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2017. Third national communication of Sierra Leone to the United Nations framework convention on climate Change. 3rd national communication: <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/FinalThird%20Nat.%20Com.%20document%20111.pdf>

26 Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Forestry, (no date): National Cocoa Value Chain Policy.

27 Götz Schroth, Peter Läderach, Armando Isaac Martinez-Valle, Christian Bunn and Laurence Jassogne (2016). Vulnerability to climate change of cocoa in West Africa: Patterns, opportunities and limits to adaptation. *Science of the Total Environment* 556. 231–241. Elsevier

livelihood for these communities, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many more people are fishing in these waters, putting aquatic species at higher risk of exploitation²⁸.

Forest Management

Unsustainable use of the Sierra Leonean natural resources coupled with limited access to alternative livelihood options has contributed to a drastic decline in the country's natural forest cover. Government and partners' reports show that the country's forest cover stood at 80 per cent in 1970s but has now declined to less than 15 per cent. The losses have been attributed to competing demands on land for agriculture, which is the main livelihood activity, as well as rising human population and urbanisation. Such situations threaten the country's standing as one of those that are globally recognised as a biodiversity hotspot being part of the Upper Guinea Rainforest. The losses also risk jeopardising Sierra Leone's socio-economic development due to the critical role of forests in the country's prosperity through its ecosystem goods and services. Key among them include the provisioning of employment, sustenance of food security, and linkages with water resources. Its nature-dependent agriculture is one of the country's vital economic activities that contribute to about 65 per cent of the country's Gross National Products (GNP)²⁹.

National assessments show at least 90 per cent of the Sierra Leoneans have inhibited purchasing power tied with huge dependence on wood and wood products as fuel for cooking and lighting. This, therefore, means that the populations continue to subject a substantial footprint on the environment. Central reliance on traditional biomass fuels also imperils the health and overall quality of

life. This is due to its associated deterioration of indoor air quality which adversely impacts on women and girls, especially in the rural areas, because of the dominant gendered roles in the country. A UNEP report³⁰ in 2019, covering 22 sub-Saharan African countries, featured Sierra Leone as the country with the greatest number of hours spent by households on collecting fuelwood for cooking, heating, and lighting in households across Africa. Such states not only affect the country's trajectory on SDGs 7 and 15, energy and protection of terrestrial ecosystems, respectively but also SDG 5 on gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

In recognition of the forest management benefits amid the existing challenges, the Sierra Leonean Government, through its Ministry of Environment, has commenced a countrywide National Tree Planting initiative. Details from the Government indicate the initiative is aimed at planting 5 million trees in approximately 14,706 hectares of degraded lands and coastal areas in the entire country. Launched by its President Julius Maada Bio in June 2020, the four-year initiative is taking a five-phase approach, with the first phase running between June 2020 and May 2021, with a target to plant 1.2 million trees. The other phases will then proceed through to June 2024, targeting additional growing of 3.8 Million trees.

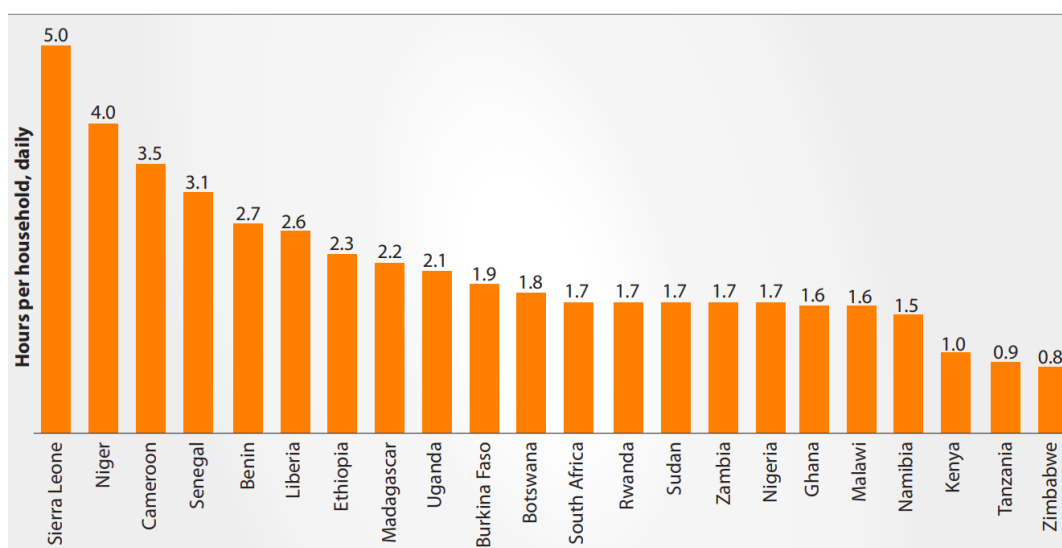
Conservation of the under-threat Western Area Peninsular Forest (WAPFOR), from where the capital Freetown derives its primary water source, also seems to have been undermined by the impact of COVID-19 containment measures. As a result of closures of the beaches close to Freetown, from which many local communities derive their primary livelihood, there seems to have been a significant increase in charcoal burning as a livelihood coping strategy. This is likely to further exacerbate the vulnerability of Freetown and Peninsular communities to

28 Challenges beyond public health: the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on Sierra Leone's biodiversity <https://www.zef.de/2129/blog-sierra-leone.html>

29 Fayiah, M., Dong, S., & Singh, S. (2019). Status and challenges of wood biomass as the principal energy in Sierra Leone. *International Journal of Biomass and Renewables*, 7(2), 1-11. <http://103.8.145.246/index.php/ijbr/article/view/4565>

30 UNEP (2019). Review of Woodfuel Biomass Production and Utilization in Africa: A Desk Study. United Nations Environment Programme. <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/28515>

Hours spent collecting fuelwood for cooking, heating and lighting in households across Africa



Source: UNEP Report, 2019

seasonal flooding and landslides, as WAPFOR performs a critical, natural disaster mitigation role on the steep mountainous slopes of the peninsular.

Energy

Sierra Leone's current installed power generation capacity stands at 90 megawatts per annum. This is far below its estimated countrywide electricity needs of 300-500 megawatts per annum. This makes biomass a key alternative source of energy for household cooking and lighting, with most of it being in the form of wood fuel that includes firewood and charcoal. Estimates show more than 85 per cent of the country's population rely on wood fuel as the primary source of energy³¹.

Firewood usage at the sub-national level varies according to locality and level of urbanisation. The country's northern region accounts for a more significant share of firewood usage at 96 per cent compared to the others in the South, Eastern, and Western areas which stand at 93 per cent, 90 per cent,

and 28.5 per cent, respectively³². Besides, rural areas account for a bigger share of firewood usage at more than 95 per cent as compared to urban areas which make up about 50 per cent usage, with increasing consumption of charcoal being reported for the urban areas including Freetown.

Accordingly, the availability of clean and affordable energy remains a major challenge in Sierra Leone, with the results of it being more pressure on forests and other ecosystems that supply biomass energy³³. This sustainability bottleneck needs to be addressed if the social, economic, and environmental benefits that accrue from sustainable energy are to be realised. The urgency of it is more relevant now than ever given Sierra Leone's need to build back better from the ramification of COVID-19 pandemic. Its micro-small and medium enterprises would greatly benefit from access to affordable, clean, and reliable energy. Targeted interventions would also ensure the energy needs of businesses and households in the country are met, thus

31 UNEP (2019). Review of Woodfuel Biomass Production and Utilization in Africa: A Desk Study. United Nations Environment Programme. <https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/28515>

32 Fayiah, M., Dong, S., & Singh, S. (2019). Status and challenges of wood biomass as the principal energy in Sierra Leone. *International Journal of Biomass and Renewables*, 7(2), 1-11.

33 Mansaray, L. R., Huang, J., & Kamara, A. A. (2016). Mapping deforestation and urban expansion in Freetown, Sierra Leone, from pre-to post-war economic recovery. *Environmental monitoring and assessment*, 188(8), 470.

fast-tracking the attainment of its medium-term development targets. Besides, energy efficiency options and technologies such as solar systems, fuel-efficient energy cookstoves and efficient charcoal production kilns need to be suitable to Sierra Leone. They would need to be introduced and intensified as part of the measures for addressing the current gaps. Incentives, as well as partnerships with the private sector in developing favourable credit facilities to cater for most citizens that are interested in investing in renewable and clean energy, e.g. solar and LPG but hindered by the initial capital needs, are some of the low-hanging fruits.

Wetlands and water resources management

Sierra Leone is endowed with vast amounts of freshwater resources. Its inadequate management and distribution of water, however, continue to deprive the citizens and economy of the benefits associated with such natural assets. Land-based activities and their associated management interventions continue to affect the quality of the country's water resources and water-related risks that include floods and landslides. Hydrological reports show floods are increasingly recurring in Freetown, the country's capital on the coastal areas built on wooded hills. The phenomena are associated with substantial environmental impacts on water catchment areas. Among them is de-vegetation which reduce underground seepage, thus precipitating heightened surface flows which can result in humanitarian crises in the downstream areas.

Sierra Leone's wetlands cover a land area of about 4,838 km², categorised into two main types, namely: the inland wetlands (floodplains, lakes and rivers) with vegetation typical of freshwater swamp forests, riparian zones and 'bolilands'; and the coastal and marine wetlands, mainly associated with mangroves, sand flats and mudflats. The total mangrove estate is 172, 000 hectares and

extends to about 825 km of coastline and 30 to 50 kilometres inland. The coastal resources also include sandy beaches, mudflats, cliffs, wildlife, cultural and historical sites and attractive landscape. Sierra Leone entered the Ramsar convention on 13 April 2000³⁴. It currently has one site, the Sierra Leone River Estuary, designated as Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites), with a surface area of 295,000 hectares dominated by mangrove systems. Its Ramsar site and other wetland ecosystems are, however, under constant threats from vegetation clearance, sea transport activities and unsustainable exploitation of resources such as fisheries and minerals. Reports show the country's measures to protect its wetlands ecosystems have been slowed down by low level of awareness, including by being overshadowed by the "relatively higher premium" given to other ecosystems such as the forests.

In the 2019 Voluntary National Review (VNR), the Sierra Leonean Government indicated access to improved drinking water and sanitation at 71.3 per cent, having increased from its 2013 levels of 51.3 per cent. The same reports, however, show at least "97 per cent of water at household level was found to be contaminated in 2017", a situation which needs more urgent interventions. Such worrying levels of water pollution threatens human health and wellbeing, as well as the health and productivity of ecosystems, including the country's fish resources that constitute a component of food security, nutrition, and income.

Biodiversity Conservation

Sierra Leone's biodiversity, natural ecosystems and habitats play a crucial role in its national development. They are pivotal in the sustenance of its water resources, agricultural productivity, and tourism, among others. Aware of these benefits to the country, the Government, through its National

³⁴ Ramsar Convention Country Profiles – Sierra Leone: [https://rsis.ramsar.org/rsis-search/?f\[0\]=regionCountry_en_ss per cent3ASierra+Leone](https://rsis.ramsar.org/rsis-search/?f[0]=regionCountry_en_ss%20per%20cent3ASierra+Leone)

Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 2017-2026, has set itself ambitious targets for managing its biodiversity. It seeks to enhance the implementation of its conservation plans to catalyse momentum and improve the health and productivity of the ecosystems for the benefit of its people and economy. Key among the areas targeted actions at policy and legislative fronts, upscaling protection measures for threatened and rare species, more awareness, and increased equitability in sharing of the benefits accruing from its biodiversity.

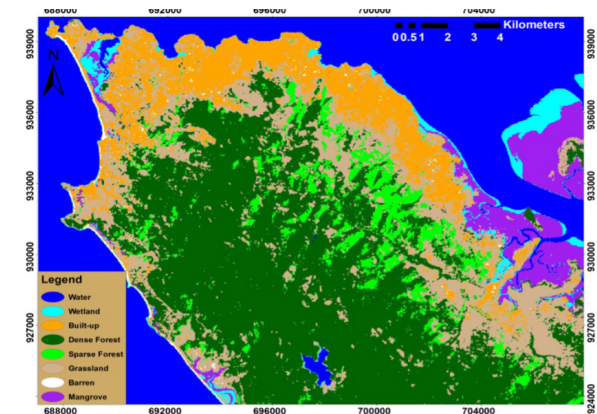
The country's NBSAP goals indicate its dalliance with area-based conservation, which aligns with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), using its protected areas. This is due to the level at which ecosystem conservation is considered in the NBSAP, coupled with targets set for reversing the ongoing losses to biodiversity and ecosystem services that have severe impacts on livelihoods of Sierra Leoneans. Sierra Leone has several protected areas under the country's National Protected Areas Authority (NPAA). Among them are forested and non-forested wildlife-rich areas that include Gola National Park, being one of the largest in the country. Others are the Outamba-Kilimi National Park, the largest portion of savanna ecosystem currently under protection in the north of the country, and at least four (4) Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that were declared in 2010.

Despite the ongoing Government's efforts, challenges remain in the way of conservation and sustenance of Sierra Leone's biodiversity. Key among them are increasing human population and urbanisation, which pose both direct and indirect threats to biodiversity in the country. The threats include habitat loss and fragmentation of natural habitats due primarily to deforestation, wetland drainage and infrastructural development to meet the needs of the growing urban areas and human populations. Others include poorly managed agricultural activities, mining, poverty, and institutional weakness.

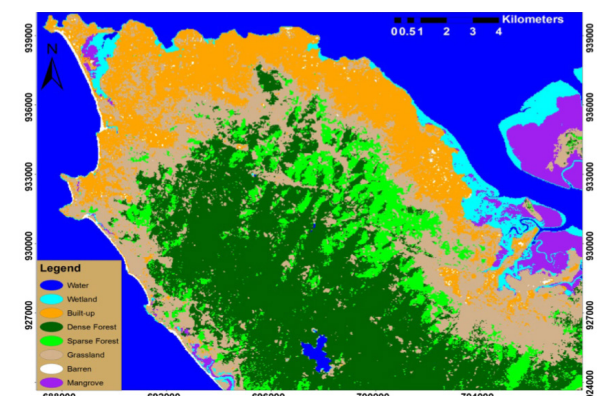
Dominant agricultural practices such as shifting cultivation in many parts of its arable lands that near 74 per cent of the national land area threaten the country's forest-dependent species and enterprises³⁵. Opening of new lands for farming disjoins key migratory

35 FAO (2017). The State of Sierra Leone Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture <http://www.fao.org/3/CA3424EN/ca3424en.pdf>

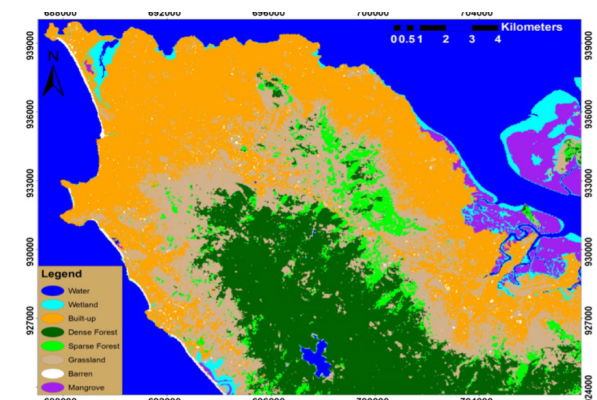
Land-cover maps of Freetown



1986 Land-cover map of Freetown



2001 Land-cover map of Freetown



2015 Land-cover map of Freetown

Source: Mansaray, et.al., 2016

corridors for wildlife thus disrupting their natural populations and distribution. The clearance of vegetation to pave the way for the short-seasoned shifting cultivation also affects Sierra Leone's standing on climate change, given its associated emissions of carbons to the atmosphere. Nevertheless, in line with the Government's commitment to increase productivity and socio-economic opportunities in agriculture, Sierra Leone's agriculture may be practised sustainably. Key among the country's potentially useful options are the adoption of new technologies (such as irrigation), especially among the smallholder rice farmers who make up a considerable proportion of the output.

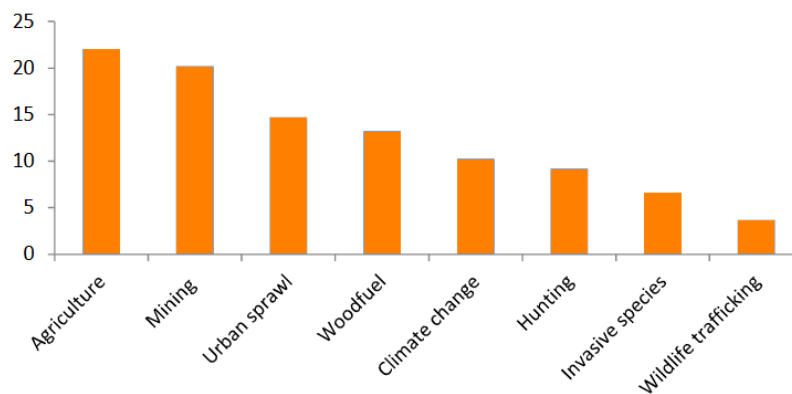
Another growing challenge is the mushrooming of commercial farms that focus on monocultures. These include multinational enterprises that are reported to be encroaching on pristine and environmentally sensitive natural habits to establish the growing of sugarcane and palm oil. Such commercial enterprises, if not adequately guided by holistic policies, would easily deprive local communities of their opportunities to fight hunger and expand livelihood streams through agriculture. Thus, slowing down Sierra Leone's Agenda 2030

for Sustainable Development trajectory, including in the areas that involve fighting hunger (SDG2), improving human wellbeing.

Vast growing human populations and urbanisation are another critical threat to the health and productivity of the Sierra Leonian ecosystems. For instance, current data show increased proliferation of housing on the previously forested hills overlooking the city of Freetown. The areas have been previously known to hold a significant number of wildlife species, whose survival have been imperilled. This is in addition to more expansion of settlements along the Freetown estuarine coast that harbours migratory water birds.

To cement its national and global commitments on the protection of biodiversity, Sierra Leone continues to be an active State Party to the Convention on Biological Diversity since its accession in 1995³⁶. The country has also acceded to its associated Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety in September 2020, and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing in January 2017. It also remains committed to adjusting its national legislations and policies to strengthen the protection of its biodiversity, though it has more room for improvement.

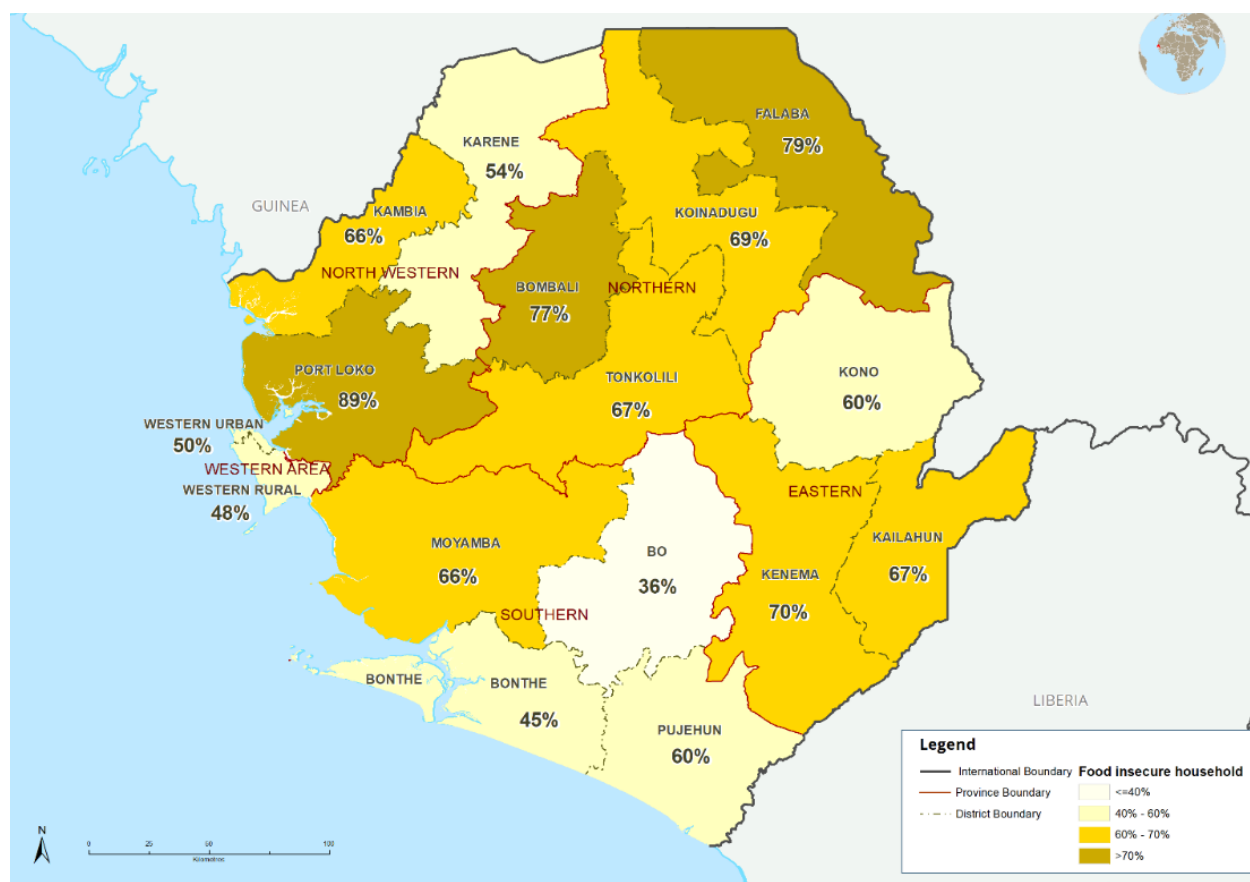
Relative effects of known threats to biodiversity in Sierra Leone



Source: Sierra Leone's Second National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026, November 2017.

36 CBD Country Profiles: <https://www.cbd.int/countries/?country=sl>

Prevalence of Food Insecurity in Sierra Leone, June 2020



Source: Food Security Monitoring System, June 2020

Food Security

Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security

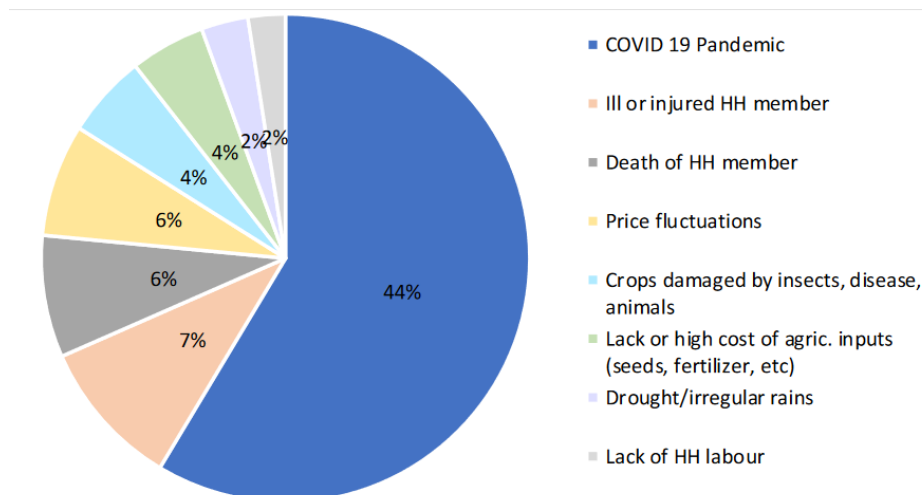
The country was already experiencing a deteriorating food security situation before the COVID-19 outbreak, with the pandemic exacerbating this trend. According to the January 2020 Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS), national food insecurity was 47.7 percent. The June 2020 Emergency Food Security Monitoring System (E-FSMS) showed a 15 percent increase in food insecurity, now standing at 63 percent. A Cadre Harmonise (CH) analysis conducted in October 2020 confirmed that the food security situation remains alarming in all districts due to COVID-19 restrictions, including inter-district lockdowns, curfews and the closure of periodic markets. About 852,383 Sierra Leoneans are in crisis and beyond (phases CH 3, 4 and 5).

Sierra Leone recorded an increase in food prices, lower stocks of goods compared to last year, difficulties in carrying out activities due to measures restricting public events and the closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic. According to forecasts, the negative growth anticipated for Sierra Leone for 2020 is - 2.3 percent, compared with economic growth of 5.1 percent recorded in 2019³⁷.

While rice is the main staple food produced and consumed in Sierra Leone, substituted by cassava, it is a food deficit country where food imports amount to some 32.6 percent of total imports. In 2019, cereal production including rice was 1,035,545 MT, leaving a

³⁷ ECOWAS/IMF Commission 2019.

Main Shocks Reported by Households, June 2020



Source: Food Security Monitoring System, June 2020

yearly average gap of some 580,000MT³⁸. Production estimate of 2020 shows an increase of 2.5 percent in rice and cassava production compared to 2019. The 5 years average shows a decrease of -15.20 percent in rice production and -37.8 percent in cassava production³⁹.

Prices of local rice and imported rice have significantly increased in 2020 when compared to 2019. Price of local rice increased by 23 percent between October 2019 and October 2020, whilst imported rice increase by 28 percent. Price of cassava however, decreased by 22 percent within the same period, the decrease is associated with border closure between Sierra Leone and neighbouring Guinea, forcing a downward pressure on demand.

Low production, inflation of prices and depreciation of local currency and below average rainfall are some of the contributing factors of food insecurity in Sierra Leone, impacting both on food availability and access and have had a negative impact on affordability vis-à-vis food access among poor households. Food consumption patterns of vulnerable households also changed during

³⁸ MoAG

³⁹ Cadre Harmonize Analysis Report, Sierra Leone, October 2020

the national and inter district COVID-19 containment lock downs, as households preferred food with longer shelf life driven by a lack of household food storage facilities, consequently reducing the consumption of more nutritious but perishable fruits and vegetables.

In addition, estimates of the average share of vulnerable jobs⁴⁰ in Sierra Leone was 86 percent of total employment in 2019⁴¹. The fact that a significant number of workers suffer from precarious and uncertain working conditions and lack of social security have made them particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. COVID-19 restrictions put in place have therefore severely affected the informal sector and the households whose livelihoods depend on it⁴².

Food insecurity is expected to deteriorate from June to August 2021 due to the yearly lean season (June – September), when local

⁴⁰ This sector encompasses workers, often marginal, who are often not employees in the usual sense of the term. They are mainly involved in subsistence farming or are often self-employed at home (making clothing, food, crafts, etc.), street vendors or in unregulated markets and are micro service providers (cleaning, transport, etc.) or domestic workers, etc. The majority of actors in this sector survive on daily hand to mouth earnings and are therefore in a highly vulnerable situation

⁴¹ ILO

⁴² ECOWAS, Covid-19 impact on restriction measured in West Africa, December 2020

production of crops reduces in tandem with the heavy seasonal rains and access is constrained as a result of poor road conditions, with an estimated 1,359,362 Sierra Leoneans facing a food crisis. The three districts of Kenema, Kailahun and Bombali are most prone to (Phase 3) crisis⁴³.

Sustainable Consumption and Production

Sierra Leone's economy and society have closely knit ties with the country's environment and natural resources. The country's nature-dependent agriculture, energy, water, mining, and tourism, among others, are crucial in the delivery of the country's current medium-term development targets. Its nascent manufacturing sector, which reported a value-added proportion of GDP at 1.914 per cent in 2019, is also linked to its environmental sustainability, including through its agro-based products.

However, the dilemma of expanding Sierra Leone's economic activities equitably while attempting to stabilise the rate of resource use and reduce environmental impacts poses an unprecedented opportunity and challenge to society. The country has tried to put in place regulatory measures that include those under the custody of its Environmental Protection Agency but remains far behind its potential. Sierra Leone's consumption of natural resources, and the production of goods and services associated with them, continue to wreak havoc on the environment due to weak implementation and oversight of the existing mechanisms. Environmental challenges such as pollution, biodiversity loss, ecological disasters, and climatic shifts abound.

Extraction of minerals is also a big challenge in the sustainability of Sierra Leonian environment. Mining is a major economic activity with an average GDP contribution of

4-10 per cent per annum, in addition to being pivotal to employment and local investment opportunities. Its iron ore industry has been cited as a key facet in the country's mining sector with a key lever on the national GDP. The country has, however, not managed to decouple the growth in its mining industry from environmental degradation. Opening of forests and wildlife-rich areas for mining activities with limited remedial measures continue to jeopardise the country's natural environments. Mine tailings from industrial mining and unregulated artisanal mining activities continue to ruin the productivity of vast areas of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Some of the areas most affected by these situations include Freetown Peninsular.

The country, nonetheless, has immense potentials to introduce and actualise targeted interventions that include strengthening its institutional capacity, with leadership on it at the highest political levels. Its nature-based tourism activities, as well the transformation of the country's environmental value chains, are some of the areas that present it with opportunities to curb environmentally damaging activities. Its active partisanship to various multilateral environmental agreements, including on sound management of waste and chemicals offers it a chance to work closely with its development partners. Such areas can include strengthening of technical and financial capacity of its national institutions in line with SDG 12.

Besides, Sierra Leone's current membership to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)⁴⁴ places it at a firm footing to reposition itself for more gains from its natural endowments, including on the global markets. Such a repositioning would be vital in not only curbing the leakages from the country's natural capital but also pivotal in securing opportunities to finance the implementation of its (post-) COVID-19 recovery options. EITI

⁴⁴ Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a global standard for the good governance of oil, gas and mineral resources. It seeks to address the key governance issues in the extractive sectors - <https://eiti.org/>.

⁴³ Cadre Harmonize Analysis Report, Sierra Leone, October 2020

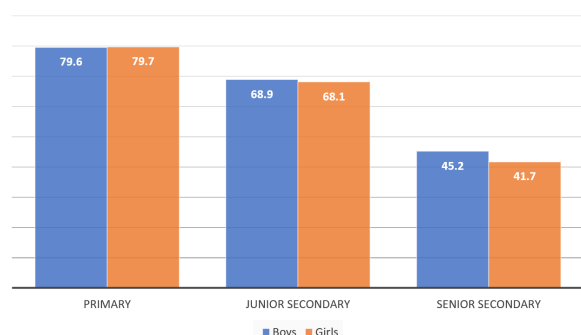
reports⁴⁵ show Sierra Leone's mineral exports in 2016 contributed about 2.7 per cent to the national GDP and accounted for 91.1 per cent of total exports.

Social Exclusion

Women and Girls

Gender inequality and discrimination against women and girls in Sierra Leone is a cause of social exclusion. Sierra Leone has a Gender Inequality Index value of 0.644, ranking it 153 out of 162 countries in the 2018 index⁴⁶. Women and girls in Sierra Leone face a range of barriers to social inclusion, including education, health services, legal rights and public participation and representation, and stereotypical gendered social norms that position women and girls as wives and caretakers while men and boys are breadwinners and decision makers. This means that boys' rights – whether to education, health care or adequate nutrition are prioritized over those of girls from an early age. Many women and girls find it difficult to access vital and basic services. In December 2020, the Government launched the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Policy which serves as a reference point for addressing gender inequalities by all stakeholders at national and community levels.

Completion Rates Between Boys and Girls



Source: 2015 Census Report

45 EITI Sierra Leone: <https://eiti.org/sierra-leone#:~:text=Sierra per cent20Leone per cent20EITI's per cent20objectives per cent20is, revenues per cent20from per cent20the per cent20extractive per cent20sector.>
 46 Human Development Reports 2019 (<http://hdr.undp.org/en/data#>)

There are clear disparities in education between women and men, and between girls and boys. According to the 2015 Census Report enrolment of girls is slightly higher than boys. The 2015 Census data showed that 55.9 per cent males as compared to 44.1 percent females were enrolled in vocational, technical and nursing training institutions. The disparities occur in completion rates as well especially in the upper grades.

In 2018, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) launched the Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE) to help ensure access to education for all children in Sierra Leone. Under this national programme, the government provides school subsidies based on enrolment so that schools fees are no longer levied. Under the FQSE programme, the government also supports the provision of teaching and learning materials, exam fees, a school feeding programme with plans for teacher incentives in rural areas, school construction and rehabilitation and teacher training. Another factor that contributes to poor learning outcomes is a pupil to government teacher ratio of 94:1 in primary schools⁴⁷

As part of the FQSE programme, the government strengthened decentralized education representation through Ward Education Committees. These localized structures were responsible for ensuring monitoring of education programmes and providing information throughout the year.

Additionally, the advent of Free Quality School Education re-ignited the need for more sustained and equitable provision of school related services. Top of this agenda is school health which is a pre-requisite to quality education. The GoSL has always acknowledged that health and education are the two cornerstones of human development. This policy, therefore, seeks to give credence to the need to provide the child with the tools required to be the best that they can be

47 2019 Annual School Census, MBSSE

physically, socially and mentally⁴⁸.

Girls' education is shrouded in challenges related to early marriage, teenage pregnancy and unwillingness of parents to support girls in their educational pursuits. Another challenge is long distance to schools and associated risks of getting to school and living with relatives in another town has been cited as a reason that girls drop out of school. The few who are sent to school in neighbouring chiefdoms or communities are at risk of teenage pregnancy.

The situation of children (especially girls) and their access to education in a COVID-19 environment are equally cause for concern. Data show children eating less, and the proportion following distance education relative to normal classes are low⁴⁹. Closing of schools has created large disruption to teaching and learning for approximately 2.6 million children, including with far greater impact on girls from the most vulnerable and marginalized background such as in rural households⁵⁰. Local media reports and reports from other African countries reveal an increase in the dropout rate among girls as a result of closure of schools as a measure to contain the spread of the virus.

The World Bank 2020 Economic Update highlights girls' education in Sierra Leone and emphasizes that similar to the 2014 Ebola crisis, COVID-19 is likely to affect adolescent girls' education prospects and their human capital potentials. Evidence shows that teenage girls are especially at risk when they are out of school as the risks of being married or having a child too early are magnified. In turn, child marriage and early childbearing make it hard for girls to later return to school, leading to long-lasting negative impacts. The report identifies the need to prioritize investments in girls and to support students and families to cope with the crisis and ensure

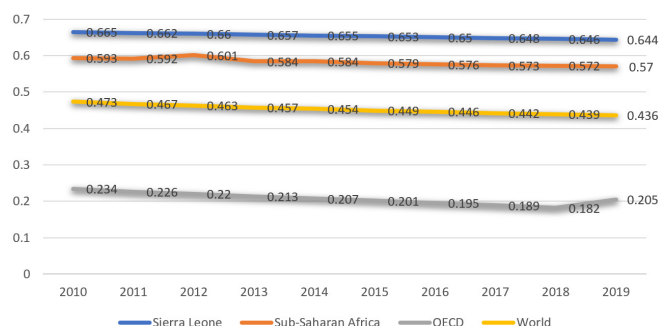
48 School Health Policy, GoSL, pg.i

49 The International Growth Centre (2020). Tracking the economic consequences and response to COVID-19

50 UN socioeconomic impact assessment of COVID 19 (2020)

Gender Inequality Index (GII)

A composite measure reflecting inequality in achievement between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market, 2010-2019.



Source: Human Development Index, 2019

that learning continues while they stay at home.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) rates in Sierra Leone remain high with 85 per cent of adult women in the country having experienced it. Young women and girls can face social exclusion in especially rural communities if they have not gone through the traditional rites. The National COVID-19 Response Secretariat has put a ban on all traditional practices including FGM. This can serve as an entry point for international aid agencies to continue dialogue with authorities for these practices to remain banned.

The political system also acts to deepen social exclusion in Sierra Leone. Despite a vocal women's movement, only 17 women out of 146 parliamentarians are women. This percentage was further reduced when some MPS, including one female lost their seats in post-election court cases. At present there are 16 female MPs forming 11.6 per cent of legislators⁵¹. At the local level after the 2018 elections, 17.7% (97/549) councillors were women, a reduction from 19.1% following the 2012 elections. The number of women council chairpersons/ mayors increased by one to 13.6% (3/22) in 2018 from 10.5 (2/19) in 2012⁵².

51 National Electoral Commission Sierra Leone, 2018

52 ibid.

Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

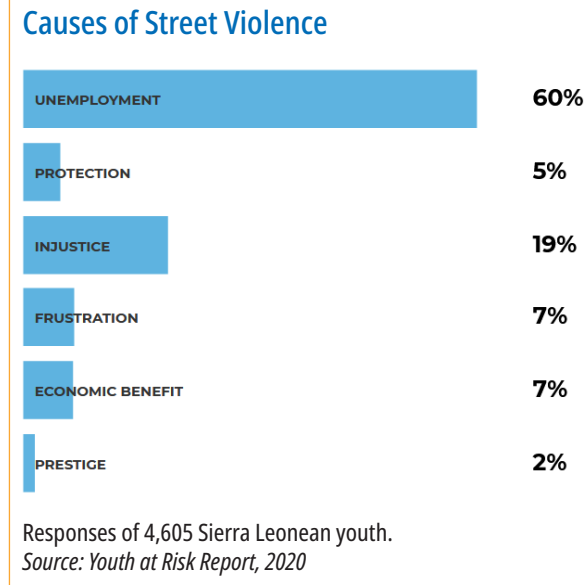
Persons with disabilities in Sierra Leone face a range of attitudinal, environmental and institutional social exclusion. According to the Sierra Leone Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019, multidimensional poverty based on disability stood at 68.1 per cent with functional disabilities being poorer than those without functional disabilities. The Persons with Disabilities Act 2011 marks an important advance to inclusivity of disabled persons into the Sierra Leonean community. During COVID-19, persons with disabilities have face social exclusion as some of them cannot access hand washing stations because of physical inaccessibility, difficulty in social distancing because of additional support needed and barriers to access public health information. The 2015 National Census indicates that boys and girls with disabilities were 7 percent points and 10 percent points less likely to be in school than their nondisabled peers. The proportion of adults who were illiterate was also higher among people with disabilities. Thus, a study in Sierra Leone reported that 46.5 percent of people with disabilities had never been to school and 63.9 percent were illiterate compared to 34.3 percent and 50.7 percent for people without disabilities respectively⁵³.

Youth

Sierra Leone’s young population has a high unemployment rate. According to the UN, in 2019, the unemployment rate is higher among youth than among older people (defined as people aged 36–64) at 5.9 per cent versus 2.2 per cent, respectively. High rates of unemployment and poverty are a barrier to social inclusion among the youth. According to a recent UN study of youth (2019) a high number of youths are involved in drug abuse and misuse, have limited access to vocational and educational programmes, and are an easy bait for politicians to use to perpetuate

53 Pilleron S. Access to services for people with disabilities. Lyon: Handicap International; 2011

political violence⁵⁴.



The COVID-19 containment measures (inter-district lockdowns, curfew, etc) had a negative impact on the sectors (transportation, tourism, agriculture, mining etc.) that employ most of the youth. This has further escalated an already volatile situation as violent incidents have been observed in Tombo in the Western area, Lunsar and Makeni in the Northern Regions of the country. The increased economic burden on young persons derived from the pandemic and its related curtailment measures is directly impacting on social menaces like armed robbery, increased drug abuse, socio-political tensions etc.

Young women in Sierra Leone also face a range of barriers to social inclusion as a result of teenage pregnancy and child marriage. According to the 2019 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) fertility rate is high and estimated at 125 per 1,000 for the 15–19 age group. Rural teenagers tend to start childbearing earlier than urban teenagers (29 per cent versus 14 per cent). The high rate of pregnancy among adolescents is a clear indication of limited knowledge, minimal use of contraceptives and other sexual and reproductive health services. The National Strategy for the Reduction of

54 Report of the joint assessment mission on youth at risk in Sierra Leone

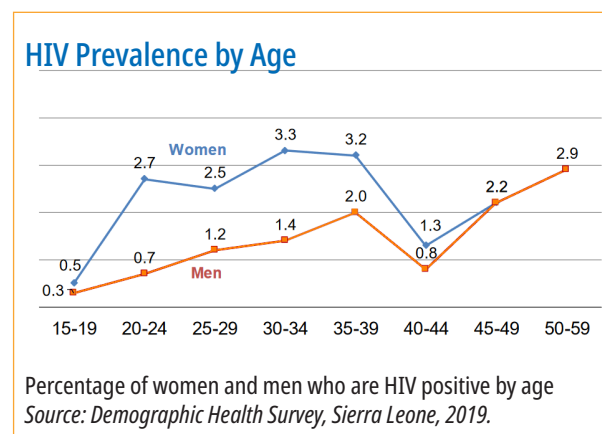
Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage 2018–2022 details the Government’s commitment to address this challenge of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage. However, with the COVID-19 pandemic and its mitigation measures, the incidences of teenage pregnancy are expected to increase. Nevertheless, the Government of Sierra Leone has lifted the discriminatory ban that prohibits pregnant schoolgirls from attending school. The lifting of this ban is critical for inclusive access to education for young girls.

Sexual Minorities

There is a good body of literature on the sexual behaviour of sex workers and men who have sex with men (MSM) in relation to HIV prevention, treatment and care, but less attention has been paid to social and economic deprivation, exclusion and marginalization because of sexual orientation or sexual behaviour. In Sierra Leone, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) populations, may face legal charges under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861. An attempt to replace this Law with one that could give right to LGBT population was thwarted in 2018. Sex workers face a range of barriers to inclusion in society, including: difficulties gaining social acceptance in the society; exclusion from the right to marry and have a family; exclusion from health care institutions; exclusion from formal workplaces and informal working arrangements; and exclusion from the institutions that maintain justice in society. When they try to access services, they experience stigma, discrimination, harassment, and abuse. This means that many LGBT people and sex workers avoid the institutions and services, which leads to the reinforcement of their exclusion, poverty and disadvantage.

People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWA)

Prevalence rates for people living with HIV is estimated at 1.7 per cent among adults age 15-49 with 2.2 and 1.1 percent in women and men, respectively⁵⁵. HIV prevalence in urban areas is twice that in rural areas, at 2.3 percent in urban areas compared with 1.2 percent in rural areas. People Living with HIV in Sierra Leone face discrimination from families and communities. There is limited access to HIV and AIDS services, particularly vulnerable populations such as sex workers. In October 2020, the National Aids Secretariat launched the Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Prevention, Diagnosis, Treatment and Care in Sierra Leone which provide new opportunities, as well as new imperatives for strengthening HIV prevention and care efforts, increasing access to Antiretroviral Treatment (ART) for people in need and treatment monitoring for people on antiretroviral (ARV) drugs. The guideline was launched at a critical time during COVID-19 as PLWA need access to Antiretroviral therapy to strengthen their immune system. It was also critical that all people living with HIV in Sierra Leone should have access to health-care providers to ensure that they have adequate stocks of essential medicines. The disruption of health services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected people living with communicable diseases such as HIV as there has been delays in accessing medical assistance which has in turn increased deaths in most communities⁵⁶.



⁵⁵ Demographic Health Survey 2019.

⁵⁶ United Nations COVID-19 Socio-Economic Response Plan for Sierra Leone- UN 2020

Older Persons

There are no established institutional structures in place to reduce the increasing vulnerability of older persons. There are more (about 52 per cent) women amongst persons above 65 years old. Of the older persons population, older women are more likely to be vulnerable and exposed to social exclusion. Due to the patriarchal power relations underpinning Sierra Leonean institutions, structures and communities, widowed women may face greater social exclusion than those who are married. This may include being dispossessed of property after their husband's death and ill-treatment from in-laws and communities. The Devolution of Estates Act (2007) provides that men and women have the same inheritance rights in the event of the death of a spouse or a parent, but implementation of this law remains a challenge. The majority of the economically active older persons are engaged in subsistence farming (over 70 per cent⁵⁷), which is predominant in rural settings. Due to reduction in farming activities as a result of inadequate inputs and COVID-19 curtailment measures, most of these older persons could not continue farming, a main source of their livelihood and nutrition. This stands to further undermine their resilience to the pandemic and its impact.

Development-Peace Linkages

The COVID-19 pandemic was first announced by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a public health crisis of global proportions on January 30, 2020. It quickly evolved into a complex humanitarian crisis with two distinct but interrelated components, health, and socio economic. The health component encapsulates measures to address the direct consequences on people's exposure to the disease. In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS) in collaboration with WHO and other partners, formulated a

⁵⁷ Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Elderly Population

strategic plan, the COVID Health Preparedness and Response Plan to address the health component of the COVID crises⁵⁸.

The socio-economic component consists of the direct and indirect effects of the humanitarian, social and economic measures taken to control the spread of the virus. The consequences have both primary and secondary effects on the population, especially the most vulnerable including women and children, as well as the economic and socio-political systems of society. Governments all over the world are therefore engaged in providing mitigating measures to attenuate the negative socio-economic impact and eventually prepare a Response and Recovery programme. The Sierra Leone Government has already prepared a Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP). A careful assessment of the COVID 19 impact is a first step towards ensuring the effectiveness of such a Response and Recovery programme.

There has been a steady rate of growth in agricultural contribution to national output since 2016. The contribution of agriculture to GDP has increased from around 50 per cent in 2016 to 56.6 per cent in 2020 as projected. However, control measures such as lockdown and inter-district travel restrictions appear to be impacting negatively on agricultural activities. Restrictions that coincided with the peak of the planting season had limited the movement of farm labour between districts as well as curtailed the supply of inputs. Households are resorting to more extreme livelihood coping strategies to survive, with the proportion of households adopting "emergency" measures increasing from 14 per cent in January 2020 to 20 per cent in June 2020.

Sierra Leone's large youth cohort - about one third of the population - continues to struggle with high levels of unemployment (70 per cent unemployed) - an historic grievance and conflict driver - and relies heavily on subsistence livelihoods that fail to respond effectively to an ever-increasing population growth rate.

⁵⁸ Assessment of the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone

4. National Vision for Sustainable Development

The Government's vision for national transformation and development has been articulated in the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2019-2023) entitled "Education for Development" launched in February 2019. The plan is aligned with the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Africa Union Agenda 2063, and the New Deal Peacebuilding and State-building Goals.

The MTNDP has marked the start of a new vision embedded in the Government's New Direction Agenda, which translates Sierra Leone's aspirations of becoming a middle-income country by 2035 into tangible achievements. Human capital development is at the centre of the Government's vision in the MTNDP and forms the basis of the Government's goal of providing free quality school education for all in the context of promotion of inclusive growth and leaving no one behind. The Government has articulated its development strategy in these four key goals:

Goal 1: A diversified, resilient, green economy

Goal 2: A nation with educated, empowered, and healthy citizens capable of realizing their fullest potential

Goal 3: A society that is peaceful, cohesive, secure, and just

Goal 4: A competitive economy with a well-developed infrastructure

The MTNDP is based on an ambitious macro-fiscal framework that aims at achieving key macroeconomic objectives including: attaining and maintaining single-digit

inflation, reducing the budget deficit and maintaining the public debt at the sustainable threshold of not more than 70 per cent of GDP, increasing domestic revenue collection and maintaining government expenditures within budgetary limits of around 24 per cent of GDP.

The new MTNDP (2019–2023) is organized around eight policy clusters and several sub-clusters (or broad result areas), as follows:

Policy Cluster 1: Human capital development

Policy Cluster 2: Diversifying the economy and promoting growth

Policy Cluster 3: Infrastructure and economic competitiveness

Policy Cluster 4: Governance and accountability for results

Policy Cluster 5: Empowering women, children, adolescents, and persons with disability

Policy Cluster 6: Youth employment, sports, and migration

Policy Cluster 7: Addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience

Policy Cluster 8: Means of implementation

The Government's vision also prioritizes innovation and promotion of new technology as key drivers of development and, as a result, a Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation has been established in the Office of the President. The Directorate is especially mandated to support the Ministry of Higher Education to promote research and technological education and is currently receiving technical support from specialized UN Agencies. The total estimated cost of the new plan is USD \$8.15 billion for a period of five years (2019–2023), with a financing gap of USD \$1.55 billion.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for the 2020-2023 period is aligned with the structure of the MTNDP and builds on its strategic vision and development goals, with a particular focus on the implementation of programmes at both national and district levels.

Progress Towards the SDGs in Sierra Leone

The Government of Sierra Leone has adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has emphasized Goal 4, human capital development, and Goal 16, access to justice, as accelerators of all other goals. Sierra Leone submitted its 2nd Voluntary National Review Report on the progress made on the SDG targets to the 2019 High-Level Political Forum in New York.



The Government launched the free quality school education programme in 2018 and has allocated 22 per cent of the national budget for 2021 Financial Year to the education sector, maintaining the 2020 Budget allocation to the sector, compared to

21 per cent for 2019. Pupils, including those in remote communities, have access to free textbooks for core subjects, as well as other learning materials. The national programme benefits children from pre-primary to senior secondary level in all Government approved schools, including those living with disabilities, contributing towards the achievement of SDG4.

Access to justice, as part of the targets of SDG 16, has been expanded countrywide by strengthening the capacity of the Legal Aid Board, which, since its establishment in 2015, has provided legal representation, advice and education services to more than 350,000 less privileged and vulnerable persons around the country. Females and children accounted for most of the Board beneficiaries.

The country adopted the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the context of National Food Security and has created an initial ATLAS of land tenure at community level in order for farmers to have guarantee of tenure and contribute to the achievement of Goal 2 “End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture”.



Under Goal 1, Sierra Leone, since the end of the conflict, the proportion of national population living in absolute poverty, i.e below the national poverty line, has decreased from 66.4 per cent in 2006 to 56.8 per cent in 2018 according to the most recent household survey. This percentage points reduction was essentially due to a decrease of rural poverty from 78.7 per cent in 2003 to 73.9 per cent in 2011 and urban poverty reduction from 46.9 per cent in 2003 to 34.8 per cent in 2018⁵⁹. The three poorest district currently are Pujehun,

⁵⁹ It is to be noted that there was a shift in the methodology for income poverty calculation; the poverty line was adjusted in 2018 to reflect price changes and other welfare conditions, making the indices in 2018 not directly comparable with those of 2003. The SLIHS 2011 and 2003 were much comparable, please refer to the first version of this report, comparing these two years, which showed much progress in poverty reduction during 2003-2011.

Tonkolili, and Falaba, standing at 84.6 per cent, 84.8 per cent and 81.3 per cent, with extreme poverty of 27.9 per cent, 27.4 per cent and 11.8 per cent. While urban poverty reduced from 46.9 per cent in 2003 to 34.8 per cent in 2018, poverty in Freetown, increased from 13.6 per cent in 2003 to 16.3 per cent in 2018. The poverty increase in Freetown is believed to have been mainly driven by three factors: in-migration, the slow creation of well-paid jobs, and inflation. The last census notes that 79.9 per cent rural women live below the poverty line whilst in urban areas 45.2 per cent of women live below poverty line. The 2015 National figures for women states 68.4 per cent of the rural poor are women.



Under Goal 2, While the evolution of food poverty shows progress with a 30 percentage points decline of the population leaving under the food poverty line, between 2003 and 2011, the food security situation has followed opposite trends between 2010 and 2015. Food security exists when people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. In Sierra Leone, nearly half of households did not have access to sufficient and nutritious food in 2015, a 5 per cent increase since 2010. More specifically 8.6 per cent of households were severely food insecure and 41.2 per cent moderately food insecure. This deterioration has happened despite the positive economic trends prior to the EVD outbreak, which shows the chronic and cyclical nature of food insecurity in the country. Women play a critical role in food production, processing and distribution and are therefore essential to meeting the agricultural productivity and nutrition targets of Goal 2.



Under Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all at all ages), the Government has sustained and is incrementally contributing more domestic resources to a

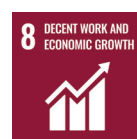
free healthcare initiative targeting pregnant and lactating women and children under-five.



Under Goal 5 (Achieve Gender Equality and empowerment of women and girls), the Government of Sierra Leone has launched the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (2020) demonstrating its commitment to promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in Sierra Leone. Amongst other things this policy calls for active participation of women in political leadership and decision-making levels by 30% minimum by 2022.



Progress has also been made on Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy). As a result of a Rural Renewable Energy partnership between the Department for International Development of the UK and the Government of Sierra Leone, rural communities with no prior access to electricity are being provided with renewable clean energy for economic, social and environmental development. In 2018, 54 Community Health Centres across 12 districts in the country were powered with solar energy systems and 50 mini-grids were installed in 50 rural communities.



Under Goal 8 (Decent work and Economic Growth), the Government has established a comprehensive Decent Work Country Programme and developed the Labour Market Information System and the National HIV/AIDS Workplace Policy. The International Conventions on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour was ratified and domesticated in June 2011. The Government also has in place a Small and Medium Enterprise Policy that provides the framework for the development of small and medium enterprises.

Under Goal 9 (Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation),



the Government has adhered to the Global Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative to promote transparency and accountability in the management of its minerals and oil and gas sectors and use the revenues to expand service provision to all districts in the country. The establishment of a Directorate for Social Corporate Responsibility was approved in 2019, with the mandate of promoting community participation in the use of land for mineral extraction.



In term of progress towards Goal 10 (Reduced Inequality), the Government has strengthened its revenue collection policy to finance the provision of social services, particularly in rural areas to reduce the urban-rural gap. Fiscal reforms are being promoted in order to contribute to reduce the income inequality gap. A Social Safety Net programme has been established, aimed at reaching extremely poor households and also to complement the free quality school education programme by reaching 140 schools covering 51,000 children nationwide. Inclusive and special education policies to enable boys and girls with disabilities to access quality education have also been established.



In line with Goal 11, the Government is creating sustainable cities and communities by focusing on reducing the risk of landslides and flooding, through drainage improvements, slope stabilisation, re-forestation and landslide risk analysis.



The Government is working towards sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12) by developing Food Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) for Healthy Eating in 2016, becoming the sixth African country to develop FBDGs. The FBDGs are a tool for nutrition education, promoting diet diversification in a safe and sustainable manner with respect to biodiversity and protection of environment, and it discourages harmful cultural dietary practices.



On Goal 13 (Climate Change), Sierra Leone has increased enforcement of environmental protection compliance and conducted an education campaign in schools and universities, sensitizing students and teachers on environment protection and climate change. The Government has also instituted monthly cleaning exercises, which is helping to mitigate the impact of flooding in the urban areas.



The Government has established the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department (NaMED) within the Office of the Presidency, formerly in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MOPED) with the mandate to track, monitor and evaluate partnerships (Goal 17), development interventions and capital projects in the MTNDP and to ensure that development results are reflected in the lives of the people.

5. Leave No One Behind

Leave no one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative commitment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UNSDCF was developed with this commitment at its core. Outcome 4 aims to ensure that by 2023, the most vulnerable, particularly women, youth, adolescents and children (especially girls), and persons with disabilities, are empowered and benefit from increased social and economic opportunities drawing from the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (2020).

Women and Girls

Across a range of indicators, females face more challenges than their male counterparts. Gender is key in ensuring healthy lives and wellbeing. Indeed, biological differences between women and men and socially determined differences in their rights, roles, and responsibilities—undermine women and girls' health and wellbeing. Lack of control over resources, gender-based violence, the burden of unpaid care and domestic work, longer working hours and unhealthy work conditions all impede on women's ability to lead healthy lives. Gender norms and biases shape how women's health needs are perceived by themselves and by others.

In 2019, child marriage was still a widespread practice, with almost 30 per cent of women aged 20 to 24 years first married or in union before age 18 years⁶⁰. The age of consent stated in the Registration of Customary Marriage Act of 2007 is not aligned with the

age of consent (18 years) from the Child Rights Act (2007), though the Government is working to harmonise these laws. The rates of adolescent pregnancy are also high with 21 per cent of girls aged 15-19 years having begun child-bearing⁶¹. A larger proportion of teenage pregnancies occur in rural areas – 29 per cent compared to 14 per cent in urban areas.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is also a prevalent practice in Sierra Leone. In 2019, 83 per cent of girls and women aged 15 to 49 years had undergone FGM, 89 per cent in rural areas, and 76 per cent in urban areas⁶². As education or wealth increases, the percentage of women undergoing FGM decreases.

According to the 2019 DHS, 61 per cent of ever-partnered women aged 15-49 years had experienced intimate partner physical and/or sexual violence at least once in their

60 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019

61 *ibid.*

62 *ibid.*

lifetime and 50 per cent aged 15-49 years had experienced physical and/or sexual violence in the last 12 months, 85.1 per cent of which was reported to have been perpetrated by current or former husband or partners. Sexual violence remains an extremely sensitive issue. The DHS report demonstrates that sexual violence is mostly perpetrated by a person known to the victim, with less than 2 per cent of sexual violence perpetrated by a stranger. The main perpetrators of violence are current husbands or partners, or ex-partners.

While there were concerns that restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic may exacerbate issues for women and girls, Government and partners have made great efforts to ensure appropriate services are in place to mitigate challenges. The year 2020 saw the launching of the “National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Sierra Leone” and the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy. Furthermore, a national toll-free hotline was established for survivors of gender-based violence. Six one-stop centres were opened, to provide comprehensive and multi-sectoral care for survivors of gender-based violence. The Government also overturned a long-standing ban against visibly pregnant girls attending mainstream schools.

Children

Despite the lack of comprehensive data on children suffering from ill-treatment, abuse and neglect, domestic violence and sexual abuse, numbers of civil society and human rights organizations report a high level of child abuse in the country. The report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child completed in 2014 highlights the high incidence of sexual violence, including rape and defilement in all settings, including in the family and in schools.

Violent discipline has increased, with the 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2017)

showing that 86.5 per cent of children aged 1 to 14 years (86 per cent female, 87 per cent male) in Sierra Leone having experienced some form of violent discipline in the household, an increase from 64.8 per cent in 2010; this is the 12th highest incidence of violent discipline in the world. Some 25.5 per cent of children (24.6 per cent female, 26.4 per cent male) experienced severe physical punishment, whilst nearly three-quarters of children reported experiencing any physical punishment (73.1 per cent: 72.1 per cent female, 74.1 per cent male).

The Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) – mandated to investigate and refer crimes such as domestic and sexual violence, child abuse and cases relating to child offenders – are key in facilitating access to justice for women and children. Since 2016, the numbers of cases reported to the FSU have risen steadily – showing increased coverage and also increased public trust and awareness. Between January to September 2020, FSUs provided services to 5,138 children in contact with the law: 4,138 victims (3,425 female and 713 male) and 1,000 offenders (171 female and 829 male). The number of cases of sexual offence rank highest with 2,999 children (2,532 survivors and 467 offenders) coming in contact with the law, which accounts for 58 per cent of all cases of violence involving children. Donors and UN agencies have contributed to building the capacity of FSU staff to deal with cases but operational support is lacking.

The Legal Aid Board (LAB) provided legal aid services to 18,229 children (9,870 female and 8,359 male) between January to September 2020. This includes 419 children (65 female and 354 male) represented by LAB’s legal counsels, 8,543 children (5,393 female and 3,150 male) provided with legal advice and assistance through the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) and 9,267 children (4,412 female and 4,855 male) provided with legal education during the reporting period.

There is also an increase of children in conflict

with the law in detention under deplorable conditions (poor beddings, inadequate food, lack of water supply. Some have been there between 1 to 3 or more years without a charge. There are currently 55 children (44 in remands homes and 11 in the approved school), all being boys.

There is a need to further advocate for the judiciary to fast track cases and release children in detention to their families or in alternative placement – for the adoption of child friendly approaches such as diversion and alternative to detention in handling child offenders. The Justice Sector Coordination Office, together with technical and financial support from UNICEF, developed a new Child Justice Diversion Framework Policy draft in 2019.

In 2019, Primero, the Child Protection Information Management System, was strengthened in all 16 districts where 80 Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender's Affairs (MSWGCA) staff and 400 additional personnel from CSOs and other Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) were trained on case management and child protection concepts. It has become a key source of data to inform child protection partners on child protection cases and needs: 826 cases (371 boys and 455 girls) were registered and documented in the system in 2020.

The government launched a Comprehensive Country Assessment of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) and Identity Management Systems in August 2019, together with a Costed Strategic Plan now under implementation by the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA). According to the MICS 2017, 81.1 per cent of children had their birth registered with civil authorities, but out of these number, 28.2 per cent do not have a birth certificate.

Children in Sierra Leone continue to be affected by high levels of poverty. Poverty in childhood can have irreversible consequences. Children are more vulnerable to and experience

poverty differently from adults because they have age-specific needs which cannot in most cases be caught up later in life if children face deprivation in areas such as nutrition and early child development. COVID has further exacerbated poverty and affected livelihoods of informal workers, increasing the urgency of addressing child poverty.

The 2018 Multidimensional Child Poverty Report shows that poverty declined by 11 percentile points from 77 per cent in 2010 however rural child poverty has worsened, from 85 per cent in 2010 to 87 per cent in 2018. Most of the districts showed declines in child poverty rates, with Western Area dropping from 47 per cent to 36 per cent between 2010 and 2018, noting that the Report highlighted a child poverty belt across the country from the North to the South. A mother's education was shown to play a critical role in child poverty status with greater maternal education reducing the likelihood of child poverty. Girls experience less poverty at 64.9 per cent compared to boys at 67.0 per cent.

The Multidimensional Child Poverty report highlights that rural poverty has worsened; district and regional disparities persist, with a child poverty belt from the South to the North; shelter remains the most common deprivation amongst children; and boys are more deprived than girls (64.9 and 67.0 per cent respectively). The report provides data to improve geographic targeting to address these disparities in 2020 and beyond.

In 2020 a new set of beneficiary households have been enrolled in the national Social Safety Net (SSN) programme which targets the poorest households. 35,000 households have been enrolled to date, while analysis is still ongoing to ascertain the numbers of children in beneficiary households. The SSN programme which is the national flagship social protection programme is essential in ensuring households affected by poverty can still support their children with adequate food, clothing and education expenses. Furthermore 29,000 households

have received a one-off cash transfer under a COVID Emergency Cash Transfer programme targeting informal workers in urban areas. This cash transfer enables families to rebuild their livelihoods and meet the needs of their children.

Youth

Sierra Leone has a young population with 78 percent of people under the age of 35 years⁶³. Youth (15-35 years) constitute nearly 40 percent of the overall population of Sierra Leone. With the right investments in education, employment and training, this population could be leveraged as a productive force, driving the nation's development. However, According to the Sierra Leone Labour Force Survey⁶⁴, the unemployment rate is higher among youth than those aged 35 years and above. A lack of skills and experience is cited as one of the main reasons for the high youth unemployment rate.

When disempowered, youth can be at risk of joining cliques and gangs. According to information provided by the Office of National Security (ONS), there are over 2,500 cliques and gangs across Sierra Leone, which are organized in different types of structures with varying levels of capacity, influence, and network⁶⁵. Correctional facilities constitute the dominant source of recruitment and operating cells for cliques and gangs in Sierra Leone. Over 90 percent of the prison population are youth who are convicted of minor offenses. These interact with career criminals due to the poor inmate classification system. The Attorney General's August 2018 report notes that, of the 4,434 inmates, only 1,941 had been convicted (about 43 per cent). The protracted periods of remand have resulted in overcrowded centers with difficulties for the Correctional Service

to maintain controls or rehabilitate inmates adequately. Gangs are filling the gaps and are transforming young boys and girls, who are in correctional facilities for petty crimes, into their foot soldiers. This is compounded by the fact that minors are often placed in adult correctional centres as both juvenile correctional centres are at capacity.

In 2020, efforts were made by the Government of Sierra Leone to develop the Sierra Leone National Youth Policy (2020 – 2025)⁶⁶ to guide the efforts to improve the situation of the nation's youth. To address the unemployment issue, the National Youth Service will train 1000 youth corpsers who will be posted to Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Sierra Leone in 2021. Furthermore, the UN Country Team made a successful bid for a project aimed at *"Empowering youth at risk as resources for sustaining peace and community resilience in Tonkolili and Kenema districts in Sierra Leone"*.

IDPs, Migrants and Urban Slum Dwellers

IOM's Irregular Migration⁶⁷ report revealed that an estimated 8,000 – 10,000 young individuals embark on irregular migration out of Sierra Leone every year, primarily to Europe or the Middle East through risky journeys across the Sahara Desert and the Mediterranean Sea. The most pervasive districts of origin are the "3K area" of Kailahun, Kenema and Kono, with irregular migration predominantly undertaken by youth aged 16 – 29 (89 per cent), mostly males (83 per cent). On their arrival in Sierra Leone, many repatriated migrants suffered from various physical and psychological trauma (sexual predation, rape, aggravated assault, torture, etc.). Returning female migrants from Kuwait and Lebanon reported higher abuse levels in

transit and at the destination than their male

63 Sierra Leone Population and Housing Census 2015

64 World Bank Group, "Findings from the 2014 Labour Force Survey in Sierra Leone," accessed 14 June 2017, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/806541468178774794/pdf/104269-PUB-PUBLIC.pdf>.

65 Originally reported in Peacebuilding Fund proposal

66 Currently in draft form

67 Irregular Migration Report from West Africa to the Maghreb and the European Union (IOM). <https://policyrepository.iom.int/Pages/View.aspx?itemId=64&itemCode=CNY>

counterparts.

Each year, thousands of Sierra Leoneans – including children – are trafficked for forced labour or sexual exploitation in and outside Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone passed an Anti-Human Trafficking Act in 2005, setting up a National Task Force on Human Trafficking with a mandate to coordinate the implementation of the Act. The Act also established an Inter-Ministerial Committee which oversees and provides policy guidance to the task force. The Anti-Human Trafficking Act is mainly focused on the risk of trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and abuse. The National Task Force on Human Trafficking adopted the National Action Plan on Trafficking in Persons (2015-2020) in 2015 and a new action plan for 2020-2023 is being finalized as of August 2020. With the government's effort, Sierra Leone progressed to Tier 2 in 2020 U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report, although much remains to be done, including trafficking victims' services expansion, expansion of the investigation/prosecution of traffickers, and training of law enforcement personnel.

Sierra Leone struggles with development issues and a general lack of economic development; thus, labor immigration prospects are not incredibly attractive in the region. The difficulty in assessing the extent of labor immigration in Sierra Leone also stems from the fact that the country does not have a comprehensive labor market and migration information system; there is a lack of data on the labor market and migration issues. There is also non-disclosure when trying to get information on work permits for foreign nationals, which can act as a proxy to understand labor migration trends in the country.

Rural Communities

Rural communities accounted for 57.52 per cent of the total population in Sierra Leone. The Multidimensional Poverty Index for 2019 highlights that 64.8 per cent of the population

in Sierra Leone were multidimensionally poor with the rural areas accounting for 86.3 per cent. The incidence of income poverty is 72.4 per cent in rural areas. This implies that rural communities are majorly affected and suffer deprivations in key basic service sectors (health, energy, sanitation, education). Rural communities have limited and inequitable provision as well as access to basic services.

There are limited employment and livelihood opportunities for rural communities as compared to urban areas. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the situation of rural communities of Sierra Leone, the restrictions on movements and freedoms in order for the government to deal with the crisis led to loss of jobs and livelihood opportunities due to inability of communities to undertake normal livelihood routines and employment. In rural settings, many communities were either under a lockdown or limited in their ability to access goods and services. Even though the Government has recently lifted most of the restrictions, to date the land borders are still closed which has continued to affect the rural communities in border areas previously engaged in trading of goods, largely agricultural produce.

There is concerning deterioration in food security in Sierra Leone majorly in rural communities. As January 2020, the total food insecure population was 47.7 per cent which reflected an increase from 34 per cent in February 2019 ⁶⁸. Development partners, private sector and the Government of Sierra Leone are jointly supporting rural communities to address the food insecurity situation. Notably, for the period of 2019 – 2021, IFAD, Government of Sierra Leone, as well as private sector have availed USD 72.6M to support 34,000 vulnerable rural households aimed at improving food and nutrition security and raise the incomes of smallholder farmers by modernizing agriculture, increasing production and developing markets.

⁶⁸ Findings of Sierra Leone January 2020 food security monitoring Report (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Statistics Sierra Leone, WFP and FAO)

Persons with Disabilities

While data on persons living with disabilities is weak, according to the 2015 Census 1.3 per cent of the population of Sierra Leone have some form of disability, including physical, mental, visual and hearing impairments⁶⁹, with 67 per cent (of the total) living in rural areas of the country. The Northern region has the highest number of PWDs in the country (35.3 per cent of the total), followed by the Eastern region, (27.5 per cent of the total), and the Southern region (24.4 per cent of the total). The report also suggests that there are more male PWDs (50,319 or 54 per cent of the total) than females (42,810 or 46 per cent of the total) in Sierra Leone.

Access to education remains a challenge for people with disabilities, the 2015 census found that out of a total of 92,076 persons with disabilities above the age of 3 years, 57,794 (63 per cent) never went to school, while 34,282 (37 per cent) did attend school. The Persons with Disability Act 2011 provides for free education at tertiary level and further states that the Government 'shall' ensure the structural adaptation of educational institutions to make them easily accessible to PWDs. However, while free education at tertiary level is currently being provided, in practice, it is not accessible because, with the exception of the University of Makeni, no tertiary institution in the country has made significant structural and environmental adjustments to their institutions. The same applies to primary education where meeting the special needs of school going PWDs remains a major challenge. Environmental and assistive measures, including providing ramps and lifts on public buildings to ensure easy access for PWDs also remains a challenge.

In terms of access to healthcare, according to 'The Persons with Disability Act 2011', "every person with disability shall be provided

with free medical services in public health institutions". However, in practice this is not the case, for example, clinics may be physically inaccessible due to a lack of ramps and in most cases there are no drugs available for PWDs in public health institutions. According to a 2017 study on Disability in and Around Urban Areas of Sierra Leone, 19.5 per cent of respondents with severe or very severe disabilities are unsatisfied with the health care they receive, compared with 6.3 per cent of non-disabled respondents⁷⁰.

The 2015 census further suggests that there are limited employment opportunities for PWDs, with only 1.8 per cent of them employed. Similarly, the study in 2017 on urban disabilities in Sierra Leone (referenced above) suggests that only one third of PWD respondents of working age are in employment. In terms of social and political participation, the study further suggests that 39% of PWD respondents do not participate in social events because they have been discriminated against or assume that other members of the community would not accept them. The same applies to political participation.

While overall progress is slow, in 2020 some improvements have been seen. For example, a draft policy was developed based on the principle of radical inclusion. The overarching goal of the Radical Inclusion Policy is to promote and support the constitutional rights of all children to education. This means actively encouraging those from previously marginalised groups to enter, and remain in, school, and creating an accessible, respectful and supportive learning environment for all children including those with disabilities. Currently, the Persons with Disability Act 2011 is being reviewed to respond to emerging issues surrounding PWDs. The importance of reviewing the existing Act cannot be overemphasized. It is evident that

69 Sierra Leone Population and Housing Census 2015

70 Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/320757193_Disability_in_and_Around_Urban_Areas_of_Sierra_Leone/link/59f9ac7ea6fdcc075ec9cea2/download. Also included in the UN Rapid Appraisal on Disability in Sierra Leone

while the 2011 Act in its current form may have established structures that provide services to persons with disabilities (e.g. the National Commission for Persons with Disability), some of its provisions remain unrealistic and untenable given the existing national capacities. It is, therefore, hoped that the current review process will capture emerging realities on disabilities issues and when completed would provide the basis for effective and efficient implementation of the PWD Act in Sierra Leone.

Further, the UN is supporting Government to increase accessibility in public buildings such as Parliament and Reproductive Health Centres (as with the King Harman Maternal and Child Health Hospital and Makeni Government Hospital). Efforts are being made to increase inclusion of people with disabilities in advocacy groups and to serve as change makers rather than passive recipients.

The National Social Safety Net programme allocates a dedicated quota for people with disabilities, particularly in urban areas, and the programme will provide an additional top-up for enrolled PwDs. The government is also in the process of establishing a disability fund as stated in the PWD Act 2011.

People Living with HIV

Although HIV prevalence among adults (15-49 years) remains low at 1.7 per cent, prevalence among key and vulnerable population groups is significantly higher and concentrated. HIV prevalence among men who have sex with men (MSM) (14 per cent), transgender (15 per cent), people who inject drugs (8.5 per cent), prisoners (8.3 per cent), sex workers (6.7 per cent), who are often left behind in the national AIDS response and development, poses a serious threat to the human capacity development efforts. Similarly, HIV prevalence among females aged 15-49 years (2.2 per cent) is double the prevalence among males (1.1 per cent); and thrice as high among adolescent and young women aged

15-24 years (1.5 per cent) compared to males of the same age group (0.5 per cent)⁷¹. Yet condom use remains low among the general population, sex workers (14.9 per cent) and MSM (32 per cent). It is estimated that 78,000 people are currently living with HIV (9,100 are children below 15 years) of which 37,400 (48 per cent) are on treatment. Coverage for preventions of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services is currently at 58 per cent, which has contributed to the high HIV mother to child transmission rate of 17.8 per cent; compared to the global elimination target of less than 5 per cent⁷².

The UN has supported the Government to review and develop a new national HIV and AIDS strategic plan (2021-2025) that focusses on increasing quality and equal access to HIV prevention and treatment services in high burden districts of the country using innovative strategies that puts key and vulnerable populations at the centre of the national AIDS response. The national antiretroviral treatment guideline has been revised to include differentiated services delivery models and Dolutegravir as first line treatment medication. The HIV testing guidelines is currently being revised to include the promotion and use of HIV self-test kits. Additionally, the UN has supported comprehensive assessment of the mother to child transmission programme; based on which a national eMTCT strategy and operational plan is being developed. Recognizing, the adverse impact of COVID-19 on PLHIV, the UN mobilized over USD\$85,000 to provide nutrition assistance to support HIV affected households, while discussions are ongoing to include these households in the World Bank supported NACSA cash transfer programme. With significant support from the UN system, Sierra Leone has mobilized over USD\$150 million from the Global Fund for the implementation of the HIV, TB and malaria programmes and the strengthening of the health system over the next three years (July 2021- June 2024).

71 Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019

72 UNAIDS AIDS Info : Sierra Leone <https://aidsinfo.unaids.org/>

6. Commitments to International Standards and Norms

The 2019 Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the SDGs implementation highlighted several success stories that brought the vulnerable and marginalised of society into the consultative process around the SDGs. The principle of 'Leaving No One Behind' stood front and centre in Sierra Leone's drive to bring the fruits of development to every child, woman, and man throughout the country. The CSOs deserve special recognition for taking the lead in data collection and holding consultations across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone.

In recent years, Sierra Leone has taken various steps to promote and improve regulatory transparency. The Right to Access Information Act 2013 makes government records and information available to the public. However, since its establishment in 2014, the Right to Access Information Commission has been largely ineffective due to funding constraints. In 2018, the Bio administration appointed a new head of Commission in an effort to improve its services, while the World Bank launched the Proactive Disclosure Scheme for information to be released before it is requested.

7. Cross-boundary, regional and sub-regional perspectives

Sierra Leone scored 1.82 in the Global Peace Index Report 2020, ranking 74 in the world and 46 in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Although in 2019 the country decreased 18 places in the global peace index, it remains among the most peaceful countries in the world and the sixth most peaceful country in the Sub-Saharan region.

In February 2020, the Mano River Union Secretariat facilitated a Joint Action Planning meeting with Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, targeting government officials of the three countries. The aim was to strengthen the capacity of MRU Secretariat to deliver on its integration agenda and capacity building of the MRU Joint Border Security and Confidence Building Units to address trafficking in arms, persons, and other illicit substances and promote cross-border peacebuilding and social cohesion. How to promote sustained progress in the consolidation of democracy, and sustainable development with focus on increasing women participation/presence for elected positions; youth entrepreneurial development and cross border trade of SMEs especially those owned by women in the MRU Member States, is a priority. Equally important is coordination with the MRU to support its Member States to harmonize national policies with regional implication including civil registration and vital statistics and identity management, maritime, as well as climate change resilience policies,

strategies, and resources.

The MRU Secretariat in the three countries have pushed to enhance the capacity of the cross border gender responsive management aimed at significantly reducing cross border transmission of COVID-19 and improving cross border gender-aware surveillance and cooperation between the Mano River Union countries thus making the fight against the virus borderless. This involved strengthening mechanisms for disseminating information and raising awareness among populations on behavior change; based on experiences of response to Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) messaging through the distribution of IEC materials and support for social mobilization and community engagement through strengthened engagement with community decentralized structures (like the Local Council (LCs) and NGOs/CSOs/CBOs and women's groups) to support local communities through the procurement and supply of ten (10) wash hand stations, twenty (20) megaphones, twenty (20) cartons

of liquid soap, fifteen (15) hand sanitizers, ten thousand (10,000) face masks and other kits. Sixty (60) JBSCU volunteers were also supported to disseminate information on COVID-19 in collaboration with twenty (20) local radio station in border communities to promote programmes on COVID-19.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs in conjunction with the MRU Secretariat and with United Nations Country Teams (UNCT) support conducted a Joint Simulation testing exercise on COVID 19 for ground border areas in Jendema and Bo Waterside. The purpose of the mission was to monitor the joint simulation was to assess border systems preparedness in implementing the new standards and protocol designed by the Mano River Union in collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone and UNCT. The Port Health staff, Immigration officers, police, NACOVERC representatives, police, military officials, UNDP, UNICEF, IOM, WHO and the Mano River Union participated in the simulation exercise at both sides of the border, reflecting on what worked well and what improvements and considerations in planning for the operationalization of the standards was needed. As part of the exercise, members were able to discuss the structural gaps in both areas and made some amendments to the SOP to fit the context of the two countries. Needs of the Port health Staff, and other agencies were identified, and recommendations made to enable preparedness for the border re-opening in Sierra Leone⁷³.

To promote sustained progress on cross border trade of SMEs especially those owned by women in the MRU Member States a Cash Transfer feasibility assessment was carried out by the GoSL with the support of the UNCT and MRU Secretariat. The aim was to identify the most vulnerable women in Jendema community whose businesses were affected by Covid-19 pandemic, map out the

73 <https://www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/presscenter/articles/covid-19/undp-supports-joint-border-simulation-exercise-to-promote-safe-t.html>

various women's groups or associations in the community and assess the capacity of the community to absorb cash transfers. In addition, it aimed at identifying potential risks in implementing the proposed cash transfer programme. Plans are underway to train 135 women on Financial and Business Management and Entrepreneurial skills, provide seed funding to 9 Women Cross Border Traders Associations/organizations to help them resume trading, social mobilization activities on COVID 19 prevention and control (awareness raising, mask up campaign etc.) and strengthening local security semi command structures to monitor and enforce bye laws to enhance risk management along the border towns.

The Ministry of Transport and Aviation, Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority (SLCAA) and Sierra Leone Airport Authority (SLAA) worked with the UNCT team (especially IOM and WHO) for the reopening of the Lungi Airport. Like most West African countries, Sierra Leone on 22 March closed its borders—including its airspace—to international passenger traffic to limit the spread of COVID-19. That, however, negatively impacted the country's economy. To open Freetown International Airport (FNA) safely, the above-mentioned group /team conducted a capacity assessment to identify areas that needed urgent support before resuming scheduled operations. Moreover, the growing number of Sierra Leoneans stranded abroad and wishing to come home added pressure to reopen as soon as safety allowed. That spurred the completion of the assessment of 450 FNA workers, including immigration officials, airport authorities, and customs officers. Most were trained on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and the use of updated airport COVID-19 measures to improve entry and exit health screening processes. With these supports, SLAA has an updated Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) for COVID-19 prevention at the Airport, which enabled SLCAA receive the approval to reopen Lungi Airport on 24 July 2020⁷⁴.

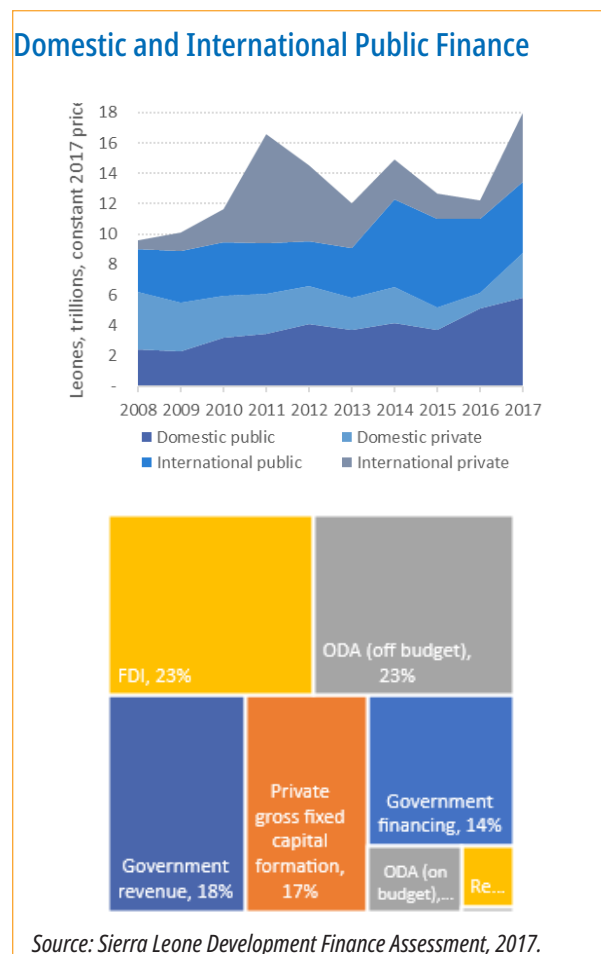
74 <https://www.slcaa.gov.sl/blog/2020/06/28/slcaa-iom-slaa-conduct-first-covid-19-simulation-exercise-at-fna/>

8. Financial Landscape and Opportunities

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires a significant increase in investment and bringing together diverse sources of financing for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Despite the growing momentum for financing the SDGs, funding gaps remain large. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) from 2015 and the 2017 report of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development call for the establishment of Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs).

Understanding the national financing landscape is a vital foundation for identifying the most pertinent opportunities and priorities for financing the SDGs and Government Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP). Achieving the SDGs will require investments and spending across a range of public and private resources that contribute toward its various objectives both directly and indirectly. As such, it is important to build a comprehensive understanding of current trends and trajectories across public and private flows, and the contributions that these diverse types of financing are making toward sustainable development in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone was one of the first countries globally to prepare an INFF, with the support of UNDP. As the first step to roll-out the INFF process in Sierra Leone, a Development Finance Assessment (DFA) process was undertaken. The context in Sierra Leone was one in which public finance – both government finance and development cooperation – dominate the financing landscape as indicated in next figures.



Public revenues were growing rapidly before the COVID-19 pandemic. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, total domestic revenue is projected to decrease to 13.0 percent of GDP in 2020 from 14.6 percent in 2019 owing to the contraction of economic activities as well as weak tax compliance. Moreover, Official Development Assistance (ODA), a significant part of the financing landscape, and private financing remained small with low levels of domestic commercial and foreign investments. Remittances continue to be an important part of the financing landscape, providing a vital source of financing for many communities as well as a key source of foreign exchange for the country.

Based on the financing context and trends in Sierra Leone, as well as the policy and institutional factors analysed, the DFA identified several recommendations to be considered by the Government of Sierra Leone and other actors at the national level. These recommendations outlined key steps that can be taken to strengthen public and private financing of the SDGs and MTNDP. One key DFA recommendation is to start by looking at the potential to establish an INFF before focusing on potential changes related to revenue mobilization, the alignment of the budget with the MTNDP, private finance, development cooperation, diaspora finance and cross-cutting issues. The Sierra Leone Integrated National Financing Framework (SLINFF) has been developed and operationalizing select elements of it has commenced through funds received from the Joint SDGs Fund. The DFA is expected to be officially launched to the public in early 2021. Editing of the INFF is still in progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely undermined growth prospects in Sierra Leone. In 2019, the economy grew by 5.4 per cent, but it is projected to contract by 3.1 per cent in 2020 due to a sharp tightening of the service sector, reflecting suspension of international flights, closure of land borders and “lumas” (weekly open air markets in rural areas), and business closures, especially in

the hospitality sector. Growth in agriculture is expected to slow with disruptions in labour supply (due to the lockdown) and in delivery of key inputs such as seeds and fertilizers⁷⁵. However, growth is expected to rebound to 2.7 percent in 2021 and further to 4.2 per cent in 2022 driven by the recovery in agriculture, mining and services. Downside risks to this outlook include a more severe COVID-19 outbreak, higher-than-expected inflation, financial sector weakness, growing unemployment and poverty.

Though inflation moderated in 2019 at 14.8 per cent, it was still relatively high. Food inflation dropped from a 2018 average of 17.7 per cent to 8.8 per cent in 2019 as robust growth in agriculture provided more food domestically. Contrary to historical trends, in 2019, non-food inflation was the biggest driver of headline inflation, because of higher prices especially for transportation and energy as both fuel prices and utility tariffs went up. To curb high inflation, the Bank of Sierra Leone (BSL) has kept monetary policy tight. After surging 150 basis points in July 2018 to 2019, the monetary policy rate (MPR) was kept unchanged at 16.5 per cent as the Bank balanced the risks of higher inflation and exchange rate depreciation against the results of Government fiscal consolidation efforts. In keeping with the tight monetary stance, key money market rates went up and remained high. Furthermore, the 2019 liquidity in the money market was scarce, as evidenced by persistent undersubscriptions in the primary market for government securities and a higher interbank rate, which continued to top the MPR. Despite keeping the MPR constant, broad money grew due to the increase in net domestic assets as both credit to government and private sector increased⁷⁶.

It seems likely that 2020 economic growth will be less than the pre-COVID-19 estimates of 2.3–4.0 per cent. The outlook is predicated on a contraction of about 12 to 16 per cent of GDP in the service sector as travel restrictions,

⁷⁵ mpo-sle.pdf (worldbank.org)

⁷⁶ Sierra-Leone-Economic-Update-2020-World-Bank

flight cancellations, and quarantine measures reduce tourist arrivals and hotel occupancy to almost zero. Because the local food production system is labour-intensive, the increased isolation due to COVID-19 has cut into food production, slowing growth in agriculture.

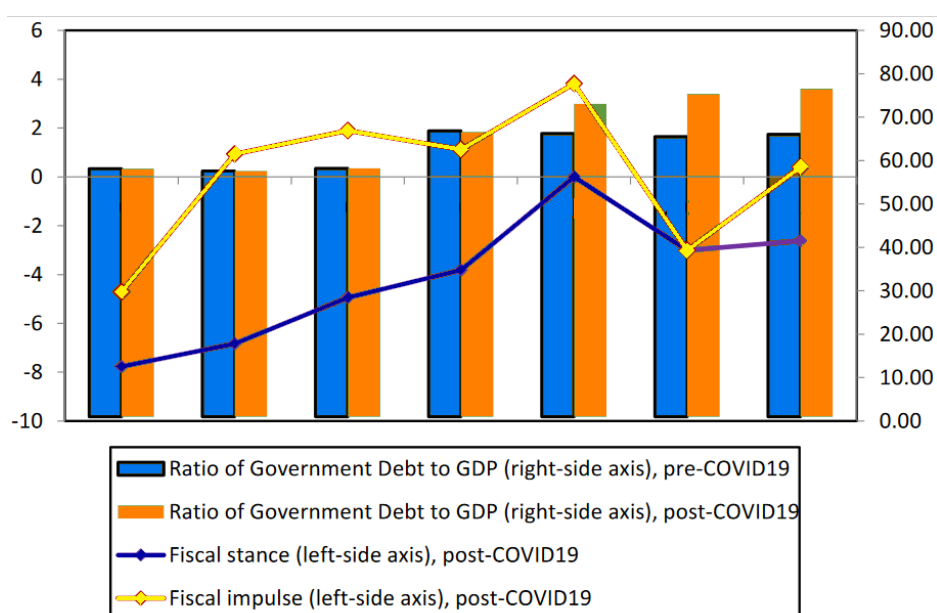
Domestic revenues increased to Le4.43 trillion (13.7 per cent of GDP) in 2018 from Le3.34 trillion (12.3 per cent of GDP) in 2017 as the performance of both tax and non-tax revenues improved. Tax revenues increased from 10.6 percent of GDP in 2017 to 11.1 percent of GDP 2018 on account of the improved performance in corporate income tax, Goods and Services Tax and import duties. The improved performance in tax revenues could be attributed to the implementation of policy reforms including the rationalization of tax and duty waivers, liberalization of the petroleum prices, adoption of the ECOWAS Common External tariff, audit of GST credits, special audits informed by data matching, field audit of large businesses, and stricter enforcement of tax legislations. Non-tax revenues (including mining royalties and

licenses) increased from 1.6 per cent of GDP to 2.6 per cent of GDP mainly due to the operationalization of the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and the upward revision of fees and charges collected by MDAs as per revised Finance Act 2018.

During the first half of 2019, total domestic revenue collections amounted to Le2.78 trillion, exceeding the programme target by Le213 billion. The improved performance is due to the better-than-expected collections of Income taxes, Goods and Services Tax, import duties, mineral royalties and licenses, and other non-tax collected by MDAs, TSA agencies and timber royalty. Excise duty on petroleum products, royalty on fisheries and Road User Charges were less than projected.

Total grants received during the first half of 2019 amounted to Le752 billion comprising budget support grants of Le540.3 billion (the equivalent of US\$39.67 million and US\$20.7 million disbursed by the World Bank and the African Development Bank, respectively). Project grants amounted to Le205 billion.

Fiscal Stance, Fiscal Impulse, and Government Debt



Source: Sierra Leone Economic Update 2020

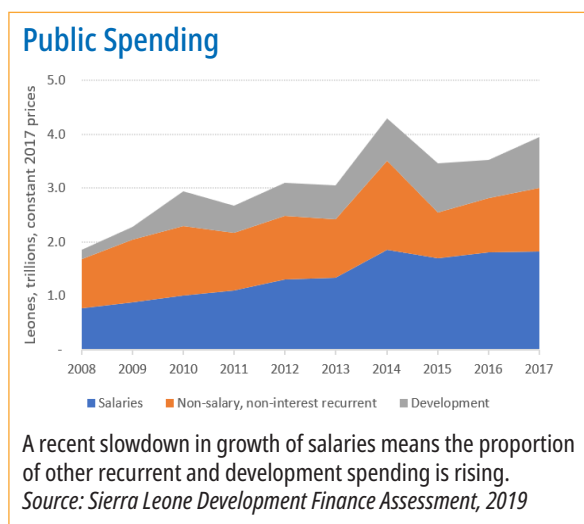
Total Expenditures and Net Lending in the first half of 2019 amounted to Le3.58 trillion compared to the budgeted of Le3.77 trillion indicating an under-spending of Le197 billion mainly due to lower-than-budgeted capital spending as recurrent expenditure of Le2.78 trillion exceeded the budgeted amount by Le67.7 billion. Wages and salaries recorded an overrun of Le23.8 billion due to the payment of gratuities to the political class, which was not budgeted. Goods and services recorded an under-spending of Le57.8 billion due to lower spending on the social and economic sectors, though spending on free quality education for secondary schools exceeded the budgeted amount. Subsidies and transfers exceeded the budgeted amount by Le73.4 billion due to overrun on transfers to local councils of Le21.2 billion and energy subsidies of Le48.9 billion. Total interest payments amounted to Le550.1 billion, within the budgeted amount. Capital expenditure and net lending amounted to Le794.3 billion, which was Le264.7 billion below the budgeted amount due to less than expected disbursement of loans and grants as well as less than budgeted spending on domestic funded capital projects. The overall budget deficit is estimated at Le42.7 billion compared to the ceiling of LeL388.2 billion. Excluding grants, the deficit totals Le794.7 billion compared to the ceiling of Le1.20 trillion for the first half of 2019.

Domestic Revenue Projections 2020-2022

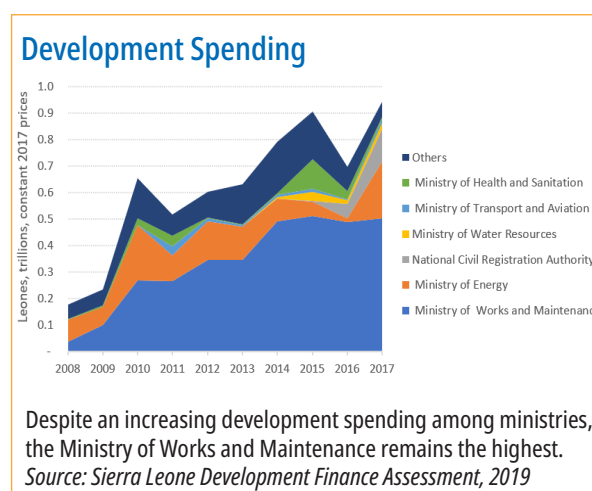
Domestic revenue is projected to increase from Le 5.3 trillion (14.1 per cent of GDP) in 2019 to Le6.5 trillion (14.8 per cent of GDP) in 2020 and to Le 9.4 trillion (16.4 per cent 19 of GDP) in 2022.

Public Spending

The breakdown of public spending overall shows that over three-quarters is recurrent spending (see below). The majority of recurrent spending is on salaries, which accounted for 46 percent of public spending in 2017.



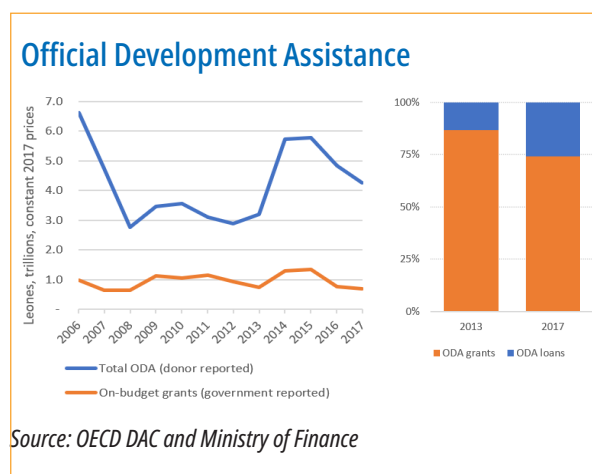
The levels of development spending can be an important indicator of the funds available to government to make investments that will drive future progress in national sustainable development. Development spending is concentrated within a few ministries, with the Ministry of Works and Public Assets accounting for more than half of the total (see below).



Development Assistance

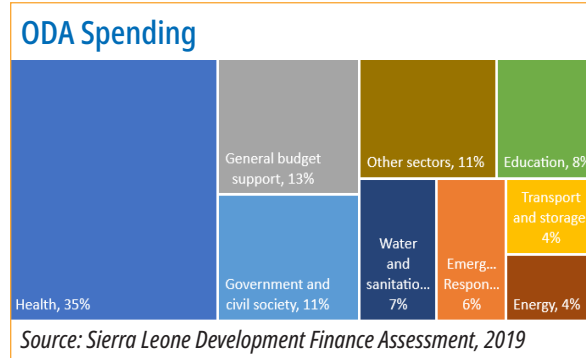
Official Development Assistance (ODA) plays a significant role in Sierra Leone's financing landscape, accounting for over a quarter of total financing. ODA totalled over Le 4.2 trillion in 2017, or US\$ 579 million. This is equivalent to 14.7 percent of GNI, putting Sierra Leone among the top twenty countries in the world by this measure and the fourth highest in West Africa⁷⁷.

Total volumes of ODA have declined from the peak during and after the Ebola period⁷⁸, and in US\$ terms have returned to levels broadly in line with those before the Ebola period. The majority of ODA is provided in the form of grants, although loans have increased within total ODA when compared to the pre-Ebola period, rising from 13 percent in 2013 to more than a quarter in 2017. At the same time on-budget support has decreased.



The sectors that receive the most ODA funding are primarily related to social development and governance. The health sector is the largest sector overall, accounting for 35 percent of ODA in 2017. This is partly a response to the Ebola virus period. However, significant health funding comes from thematic funds such as GAVI and the Global Fund.

77 Liberia (33.5%), Gambia (27.3%) and Niger (15.2%) all had higher levels of ODA to GNI in 2017. These figures are all gross ODA disbursements.
78 Total ODA remains higher when expressed in Leones due to currency depreciation.



Financing Opportunities to Increase Domestic Resources

In the medium-term, Government is implementing the following tax policy and administrative reforms to achieve the targeted revenue-GDP ratio of 16.4 percent by 2022 paving the way for reaching the ambitious target of 20 percent of GDP by 2023. These measures include:

- Development of a policy on duty and tax waivers to rationalize the granting of duty and tax waivers;
- Continue the implementation of the liberalized formula for domestic petroleum pricing;
- Automation of tax processes and procedures through the introduction of electronic cash registers for GST administration; Integrated Tax Administration System and Revenue Reconciliation Gateway;
- Introduction of Electronic Single Window to streamline clearance of goods at the Quay
- Re-registration (formalisation) of businesses; intensifying the on-going data matching project by signing MOUs with key MDAs for data sharing;
- Broadening the coverage of and implement phase II of the TSA;
- Implementation of the Extractive Industry Revenue Act (2008) as regards all new Mining and Petroleum projects and existing Mining Lease Agreements that come for renewal or review;

- Intensify monitoring through stricter enforcement of tax legislation and enhance intelligence and investigations;
- Undertaking specialized tax audits and more field audits making use of IDEAs licenses to uncover unreported taxable transactions;
- Strengthen voluntary compliance by implementing an aggressive taxpayer sensitization and education programme including the development and implementation of a taxpayer communication strategy, holding taxpayer workshops, publishing relevant taxpayer education materials, and implementing a National Taxpayer Day;
- Undertaking a rented property census in the major cities of the country and collaborate with the Freetown City Council (FCC) in their current rented property identification and valuation in the Freetown municipality to establish a reliable and complete Rental income database and more revenues there from;
- Implementation of the Domestic Tax Preparer Scheme to aid reporting and formalization of SMEs leading to increased revenue collection therefrom; and
- Operationalisation of the Excise stamp duty regime to reduce smuggling from imported alcoholic and tobacco products and hence improve collection through the manned customs routes.

Recent Fiscal Developments to Reinforce Financing Opportunities

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government drew up the Quick Action Economic Response Program (QAERP). The five pillars of the QAERP are directed to maintaining macroeconomic and financial stability and mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 shock on businesses and households. Government policy priorities are twofold: (1) short-term measures to reinforce crisis response and (2) medium-term measures to facilitate economic recovery. In the short term, the emphasis is on three pillars:

building health sector resilience, protecting poor and vulnerable groups, and keeping the economy stable. These require sound economic policies that are financially feasible, through adequate health care funding, and through compensatory measures for people and businesses. In the short term, the policy emphasis could be on the following, subject to the limited available fiscal space⁷⁹.

- Fiscal space: Invest more in public health to ramp up health care system capacity to test and treat critically ill patients and to provide free or subsidized preventive and curative medical care. The Government should maintain COVID-19 health policies—mandatory quarantines, inter-district lockdowns, school closures, wearing face masks in public, hand washing, social distancing, and night-time curfews—until the infection rates slow down.
- Support vulnerable populations through such means as cash transfers, especially during quarantines and lockdowns.
- Using policy instruments --such as easing monetary policy, exercising regulatory forbearance, etc. to continue to support businesses and households.

The QAERP provides a solid basis for making progress on these short-term policy priorities.

In the medium term, policy measures should focus on structural reforms to accelerate inclusive economic growth and making macroeconomic policies more stable through fiscal consolidation and prudent monetary policy. To stabilize the economy in a post-COVID-19 era and spur growth, the authorities should quickly move forward on fiscal consolidation policies, prioritize arrears clearance to ease that burden on the budget, improve debt management and transparency, and deepen financial reforms.

⁷⁹ <https://mof.gov.sl-2020-FISCAL-STRATEGY-STATEMENT>

9. Multi-dimensional SDG Risks

SDG	RISK AREA	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	RISK FACTORS
SDG 16, 17	Political Stability	Risk of increased political polarization as the country starts a new electoral cycle.	Electoral management bodies, particularly National Electoral Commission (NEC), display weak level of preparedness to manage the electoral cycle	Perception of partiality of electoral management bodies and lack of credibility on the electoral process. Disputed elections.
			Relevant institutions, such as the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), play a critical role in mitigating divergences between political parties.	Agreement between political parties to continue to sustain peace in the country.
			Political parties disrupt the electoral process	Manipulation of youth to engage in violent activities
SDG 16, 17	Democratic Space	Risks of budget constraints for and political interference in the functioning of democratic and human rights institutions.	Limited institutional capacity to perform effectively and response to citizens' demands	Lack of meaningful participation or representation of citizens
				Limited participation of women in democratic institutions and decision-making system
			National Human Rights Commission weakened	Progressive decrease of respect of citizens' democratic rights and freedoms
SDG 1,5, 10, 17	Social cohesion, gender equality and non-discrimination	Risks to social unity resulting from perceived political and ethnic discrimination. Increased social and gender inequalities and marginalization of youth.	Citizens' perception of discriminatory practices based on ethnic and political biases	Increased grievances, social division and political unrest
			Marginalization of women and girls from social and political participation	Unequal access of women and girls to resources, including land.
			Sexual violence, exploitation and abuse due to breakdown in social and economic activities, social division, and cultural norms	Increased gender violence and exploitation of women and girls, including by continuing customary harmful practices
			Increased rural-urban divide and internal migration particularly of young people	Unmanaged urbanization and increased number of slums in marginal urban areas

SDG	RISK AREA	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	RISK FACTORS
SDG 16, 17	Justice and Rule of Law	Risk to the fair, effective and comprehensive implementation and application of the principles of justice, the rule of law and accountability from issues.	Budget constraints might hamper progress on justice and security sector reforms	Lack of access to justice for most vulnerable groups
			Security forces lack capacity and tools to use international standards in crowd control techniques	Violent confrontations between young people and security forces
			Women and girls and other vulnerable groups' access to justice hampered by social norms and lack of economic power	Lack of access to justice for women, girls and other vulnerable groups
SDG 4,6, 7, 9, 11, 17	Infrastructure and access to social services	Risks to society and the population resulting from a lack of availability and limitation on access to physical infrastructure, and/or basic social services.	Government's spending on social sectors and adequate provision of basic services remains low due to fiscal constraints of low domestic revenues and declining external support	Lack of access to social services for all sectors of the population, particularly the most vulnerable ones (slum dwellers, women, children, people with disability, etc.)
			Human Capital Development programme remains the most important pillar of government's development strategy and receives government and donors' funds	Free quality education continues to be provided to primary and secondary students
			Resumption of Government funded road construction activities contribute to boost economic growth	Temporary job creation promoted
SDG 3, 17	Public Health	Risk to the population, the economy and stability of the country resulting from prolonged COVID-19 pandemic and resurgence of other diseases	Increase in preventable or treatable health issues.	Increase threat to health of the population
			Government maintains commitments to further reducing infant and maternal mortality rates, stunting and teenage pregnancy	Consolidated efforts to improve the delivery of health care services and outcomes

SDG	RISK AREA	DESCRIPTION	SCOPE	RISK FACTORS
SDG 2, 17	Food security, agriculture and land	Risk to people resulting from increased food insecurity.	Food insecurity continue to worsen, combined with price increases and job losses especially in the informal sector	Increased risk of instability
			Competing priorities between diversification of agriculture and use of land for other marketable projects	Increased rural-urban migration
			Constraints on access to land continue, particularly for women, due to lack of land bill	Lack to access to land for women and poor farmers constrains access to food
SDG 12, 13,14, 15, 17	Environment and climate	Risks to the ecology of the country, its ecosystem and its people resulting from climate change and overexploitation of natural resources.	Increased risk of damaging impact to life and livelihoods of natural hazards and climate change	Increased risk of conflicts over access to land and natural resources
			Over-exploitation of natural resources due to exports	Depletion of resources and increased poverty level of the population

10. Gaps and Challenges

Sierra Leone has made relative progress in the various socioeconomic parameters that have been analysed in the 2020 Common Country Analysis update. There are, however, underlying and structural problems that have constrained the country's development progress, most of which have been articulated under various thematic areas in the 2020 CCA update. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic did not only exacerbate slow progress, but in several ways, has reversed most of the socioeconomic gains made over the past two years. The direct and indirect consequences of efforts to control the pandemic and protect livelihoods have created gaps and challenges across various sectors as outlined below.

1. Sierra Leone's macroeconomic situation remains challenging despite the implementation of bold policy measures since 2018. The pandemic has hit the country at a time when the economy is growing slower than expected. The Government mitigation measures to curb the spread of the virus such as suspension of international flights, closure of land borders and *lumas* (weekly open-air markets in rural areas), and inter-district lockdowns affected agricultural productivity and the importation of essential goods which pushed up food prices. The acute drop in the number of rural households reported planting less rice in 2020 farming season, gave rise to increased food insecurity among the population. At the household level, increasing income inequality and food insecurity are imposing greater burdens on women and women-headed households. The current shortage of bank notes in the country has been partly attributed to the extra fiscal pressure on the Government caused by COVID-19.

2. Despite the progress in consolidating political stability and peace in the country, social and political cohesion have been negatively impacted by the pandemic. The various measures adopted by the Government to stop the spread of the COVID-19 have ignited spontaneous social unrest and at times, political tensions in the country. Sporadic inter-party clashes were observed after the 2018 elections. These clashes were exacerbated as result of stricter measures, such as curfews and inter-district lockdowns, which led to clashes between youths, who are mainly affected and security forces in some parts of the country. The increased rate of unemployment, mainly among youths, combined with losses of income in the informal sector as a result of the pandemic have triggered sporadic conflicts and violence around the country. Also, the seemingly existing mistrust between the Government and opposition political parties caused a lot of criticism of the state of emergency, which to a great extent affected the response to the pandemic.

3. Climate change remains one of the key factors that stand in the way of Sierra Leone's environmental sustainability. There is serious mismatch between economic growth and environmental preservation which has triggered enormous climate change issues in Sierra Leone. The COVID-19 pandemic has further increased unsustainable environmental practices such as logging and charcoal burning for livelihood. These practices if not curtailed would lead to serious environmental degradation that will affect agricultural productivity and further worsen the food insecurity situation in the country. The extra budgetary spending burden on the Government created by the pandemic response has left little room for other needs. Sierra Leone's energy generation continues to be far below the country's required energy needs. The ensuing slits make biomass as a key alternative source of energy for household cooking and lighting, with most of it being in the form of wood fuel that includes firewood and charcoal leading to serious environmental consequences.

4. Social exclusion is an attribute of poverty in Sierra Leone. The socially excluded segment of the Sierra Leone population is largely poor. They include women, children (especially the girl child), people with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS etc. The issue of inequality, low degree of participation, lack of freedom of choice, lack of human dignity, self-esteem and prestige continue to affect these vulnerable segments in Sierra Leone. Women and girls, in particular, continue to face a range of barriers to social inclusion. Various reports suggest that there has been a rise in gender-based violence as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The closure of schools has also increased teenage pregnancy and early child marriage. Robust implementation of the legal and institutional instruments that promote inclusion and general participation of vulnerable groups continues to be a challenge in the country.

5. The Government's vision for national transformation and development has been articulated in the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2019-2023) entitled "Education for Development" launched in February 2019. However, the implementation of the MTNDP will be challenged with the huge financing gap due to weak domestic revenue mobilization and relatively small donor community presence in Sierra Leone. Moreover, given that the Government is battling with curtailing the COVID-19 and at the same time keeping the economy vibrant, this implies that there is small fiscal space to support the implementation of programs in the national development plan that could accelerate the achievement of the SDGs.

6. Despite the growing momentum for the SDG financing in Sierra Leone, significant gaps remain. The Development Finance Assessment (DFA) report indicated that the financing landscape in Sierra Leone is dominated by public external finance. Official Development Assistance (ODA), a significant part of the financing landscape and private financing, remained small with low levels of domestic commercial and foreign investments. The need to deepen domestic revenue mobilization remains high amid the current donor fatigue.

Several risk factors, related to political instability, democratic space, national cohesion, justice and the rule of law, public health, food insecurity etc could pose enormous challenges to the country's development aspirations if requisite measures are not implemented.



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