

Sierra Leone Country Overview



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

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is at the center of the medium-term national development plan (2019 – 2023) and the distinct sector pillar with direct link to the Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6).

Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities and services:

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

Tremendous efforts have been made to increase access to safe water. To date, up to 57% of the population have access to safe water sources (UNICEF, 2017). This implies that an estimated 43% of the people are still drinking water from unsafe sources.

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

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

Cost of Inaction

Access to adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services saves lives and is essential to uphold the health and dignity of the populations in need. The provision of water and sanitation infrastructure and services, coupled with the promotion of good hygiene practices, reduce the risk of water-related disease transmission, impacting positively in health and nutrition outcomes. The cost of inaction may lead to: Increase in household income expenditure, absenteeism from school, low school enrollments, poor academic performance, low productivity and high morbidity and mortality.

The economic case for WASH

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

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

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

WASH is Cost-Effective

WHO estimates that the cost of delivering universal access to WASH would result in significant financial savings to the global economy.

WASH and COVID-19

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

Key Accomplishments

- Reviewed of the existing policies and regulatory frameworks and establishment of new ones that will support sector development
- Developed and launched of the Sanitation and Hygiene Strategy
- Developed Water Safety Plan Strategy
- Strengthening of WASH coordination platform at national level
- Reactivation of district WASH coordination platforms
- On the process of developing WASH in Emergencies guidelines
- Budget line has been created in the Ministry of Finance but still to be actualized