



What we do in Sierra Leone

- We're protecting 10,550 children from violence and abuse
- We're providing free primary healthcare for 28,172 children
- We're helping 9,500 children go to primary school
- We're finding innovative ways to tell people what we're doing in Kroo Bay



The civil war that ended in 2002 has left a dreadful legacy. Sierra Leone is officially the worst place in the world for a child to be born. **One in four children die before their fifth birthday.** One in three children under five are moderately or severely underweight. More women die in childbirth than in any other country. And life expectancy is just 42.

Of the country's 5.7 million population, more than half are children and young people under 18. Many children have to work to help their families earn enough to get by. They miss out on education – one in three primary-aged children don't go school. Even though enrolment rates are increasing, many children – often girls – end up dropping out.

Health services were also destroyed during the war. Clinics lack trained staff and medicines. And many people can't afford to see a doctor or pay for medicines – that's one of the reasons why so many children are dying from preventable, treatable diseases.

In 2007 a new government and president were elected. They face big challenges – tackling corruption, improving people's access to basic services, maintaining peace and stability and creating jobs.

Save the Children in Sierra Leone

We returned to Sierra Leone in 1999, after an absence of six years. Since then, we've focused on protecting children from violence and abuse, providing free basic healthcare for women, children and young people, and helping children get a good quality primary education.

We work in six slum areas of Freetown (including Kroo Bay) and in two remote districts of the country – Pujehun, on the border with Liberia, and Kailahun, which borders Liberia and Guinea. We work closely with Save the Children Denmark, one of our partners in the International Save the Children Alliance. We also work with government ministries, local authorities, other NGOs and community-based organisations.

We're helping children protect themselves

The social and economic breakdown caused by the war has left many children open to exploitation. Vulnerable children include those without parental care, orphans, those in foster care and living with extended families, children with disabilities and children from very poor families. Young girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse through early marriage, female genital mutilation and prostitution, which for many is the only way to earn a living.

We're protecting 10,550 vulnerable children from violence and abuse. We've set up 27 child welfare committees and 27 children's clubs in Freetown, Pujehun and Kailahun. The committees link with local police and the Ministry of Social Welfare to raise issues around abuse and exploitation. Last year, they helped report 142 cases of abuse involving 262 children. The children's clubs provide a safe space for children to play and talk, with adults on hand to discuss any problems. Some have come up with their own ideas to help the poorest children, such as setting up gardening projects.

We've trained 54 young people (aged 18–25) as 'mobilisers' or youth leaders. They support the children's clubs, and encourage all children to get involved (especially those who might get left out, such as children with disabilities, orphans or young mothers). They also play an important role in mediating between the children and adults in their community, making sure children's views are heard by local decision-makers.

We're also finding ways to tackle the reasons why children become vulnerable to exploitation. Our pilot livelihoods project has helped 100 children engaged in prostitution or harmful work find other means of support. And we've provided life-skills training to 480 young girls and boys addressing problems such as teenage pregnancy and early marriage. This has given girls more confidence in negotiating relationships with boys and with their families.

The Child Rights Act became law last year, and we helped make sure that children's views were taken into account. We'll support the implementation of the Act, and continue to lobby for female genital mutilation to be included in its provisions.

Next year, we'll aim to reach 10,000 children and 5,000 adults directly, and 50,000 children indirectly through our child protection work. We'll do this by setting up more children's clubs and welfare committees and training youth mobilisers in the three areas where we work. And we'll help 300 households with children engaged in high-risk activities such as sex work to find safer ways to earn money to support themselves.

We're saving women and children's lives

Three out of every ten children born in Sierra Leone die before they are five years old. In two out of every 100 births, the mother dies. People have to pay to see a doctor or get medicines, and many simply can't afford it.

We're helping the poorest people get access to free healthcare. We're supporting 15 clinics in Kailahun, providing free primary healthcare to 28,172 children. There are also more pregnant women attending antenatal clinics (2,033 last year, up from 1,755 in 2006). We've developed a training module for district health teams and local health workers on safe birth planning and newborn care, which is saving women and children's lives.

Together with local and international NGOs, we're talking to the government about the best way to finance healthcare for the poor and abolish user fees. We're also asking the government to develop strategies to reduce the high number of infant and child deaths. These changes would benefit a further 3 million children throughout the country.

Our aim is that by 2011, at least 74,000 children under five, 95,000 young people and 18,000 pregnant women in Kailahun district and slum areas of Freetown will have better access to basic healthcare. We want to reduce the number of women who die in childbirth by 20% and make sure that at least 80% of children under five are treated for malaria.

We're improving young people's sexual health

High numbers of teenage pregnancies contribute to Sierra Leone's shocking rates of maternal and infant mortality. Rates of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are on the increase.

We're working with young people in six areas of Kailahun to increase their knowledge about sex and family planning. Through our children's clubs and working with a local partner, the Community Agricultural Skills Training Institute (CASTI), we've helped more than 2,000 young people take part in the Sissy Aminata project. They can discuss their problems and find solutions together, writing and answering letters seeking the advice of 'Sissy Aminata', a respectable older sister, about relationships and sex.

Adults and young people in the communities involved have responded positively to this work, which is helping to change young people's behaviour. They're now more likely to discuss health issues with their parents, more girls are going to school rather than marrying early, and there has been an increase in the reporting of rape cases.

We're also working with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in 12 upper primary and secondary schools as part of a scheme called Population Family Life Education. As well as providing information to 10,819 students on sex and relationships, the scheme covers basic preventative healthcare – for example, how to protect children against malaria and diarrhoea.

Next year, we plan to help 42,000 children under five, 53,000 adolescents and 5,000 pregnant women get better quality primary healthcare and reproductive and sexual health (RSH) services.

We're helping more children go to school

In 2002 the government introduced free primary education, so enrolment figures are generally quite high and almost as many girls as boys are enrolled. But for many reasons, girls are much more likely to drop out of school.

We're helping 9,500 primary school children in 30 schools in Kailahun and Freetown get a good education, as part of the International Save the Children Alliance's Rewrite the Future campaign to help children affected by conflict. This year, in the areas where we work, enrolment increased by 27% in the second term, and 1,059 children who had dropped out have re-enrolled in primary and preschools.

With support from Save the Children Denmark, we're working with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, training 170 teachers, 10 supervisors and 150 members of school management committees (SMCs). We're also sharing our experience of working in schools in other countries where a war has recently ended.

We're making 28 primary schools and 2 preschools safer and more welcoming for children so that fewer children drop out because of poor quality schooling. We're running workshops for 128 teachers on child-centred teaching and learning methods. And through our support for SMCs we're encouraging teachers and parents to get children actively participating in how schools are run. We're carrying out minor repairs to school buildings and developing activities to involve the whole community in the school. We're looking at ways to reduce the use of corporal punishment and to ensure that girls are less vulnerable to sexual abuse. The SMCs and children's clubs actively find ways to support vulnerable children (particularly girls) to enrol and stay in school.

Although state education is free, families have to pay for school uniforms, books and other equipment. They also have to make up for any income the child might otherwise have been

earning. We're exploring ways in which families can earn money at the same time as keeping their children in school.

Together with UNICEF, we're training MEYS staff and other organisations to ensure that children's education is not interrupted in the event of an emergency. We've also been involved in developing and approving the ministry's ten-year education strategy.

We're making everyday life better in Kroo Bay

Kroo Bay is a dump – literally. The better-off Freetown residents throw their rubbish into the Crocodile River and it gets washed up in Kroo Bay. Most people live in shacks made from corrugated iron that are built on the rubbish. There's no electricity, no running water and only one run-down clinic between 6,000 people. Regular floods wreak havoc, bringing disease and resulting in loss of life.

We've set up an interactive website to show what life is really like for children and their families in Kroo Bay. There are message boards and webisodes and regular updates about how we're helping people tackle the problems they face. You can get to know some of the people in the Kroo Bay community, from rap duo 'Double K' to Bilal and his best friend Muhammed, who love to play football but have to spend a lot of time collecting scrap metal from the river to earn money to buy food.

We have big plans to help people in Kroo Bay and other slums. We asked people what they need for their children to grow up healthier and have better lives. They said they want better healthcare facilities so that basic illnesses can be treated. So far this year, we've built a walkway to stop people having to wade through the filthy river when it floods, benefiting 3,400 children (850 families). We're helping the community reinforce the river banks. We've cleared drains, collected rubbish and provided basic education on health and hygiene. And we've trained 240 Blue Flag volunteers to identify and treat cases of diarrhoea. We're also making progress with renovating the run-down clinic. We'll provide vital equipment like delivery beds so that mothers can give birth safely. And we'll help train healthcare workers and provide free medicines and supplies so that children in Kroo Bay can grow up healthier.



Save the Children UK
1 St John's Lane
London EC1M 4AR
Telephone +44 (0)20 7012 6400
Fax +44 (0)20 7012 6963
savethechildren.org.uk

Registered charity no. 213890