



What we do in Sierra Leone

- We're protecting around 10,000 children from violence and abuse
- We're providing free primary healthcare for 57,733 children
- We're helping 20,162 children get a better education



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, creating jobs, and weak skills base. More immediately, the global economic crisis has resulted in an increase in food prices: a bag of rice has nearly doubled in price, which means that more families are struggling to get enough to eat.

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 rural districts of the country – Pujehun, on the border with Liberia, and Kailahun, which borders Liberia and Guinea. We work closely with government ministries, local authorities, other NGOs and community-based organisations. During the last year, we've expanded our work in health, education and child protection, benefiting a total of 78,316 children. We work in close partnership with Save the Children Denmark, one of our partners in the International Save the Children Alliance.

We're helping children protect themselves

The social and economic breakdown caused by the war has left many children vulnerable to exploitation. These include children 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.

In 2008, we've worked closely with the government on a plan to implement the new Child Rights Act, piloting its roll-out in existing community-based protection structures such as child welfare committees (CWCs) and children's clubs. If the Child Rights Act is fully implemented, around 3 million children will benefit.

We're protecting 3,137 vulnerable children directly from violence and abuse, and our activities have benefited around 10,000 children indirectly. We've set up 27 child welfare committees and 27 children's clubs in Freetown, Pujehun and Kailahun, and have expanded our work in three new communities in remote border areas. The committees link with local police and the Ministry of Social Welfare to raise issues around abuse and exploitation. The 3,100 children who take part in children's clubs know how to protect themselves and others from abuses of their rights. They've reached out to around 10,000 other children through their activities, helping them to learn about their rights.

We've also established a clear referral system for cases of abuse in all areas where we work. We've trained more than 800 key people who work with children (eg, health workers, police, social workers, and community leaders) so that they know who to report suspected cases of abuse to, and what procedures to follow.

We've been doing some exciting work with children to help them express their views on key issues that affect them. Representatives from the 27 children's clubs we support have put

together a series of short films that dramatise the 12 children's rights in the new Child Rights Act. These were all written, directed and performed by children. They were filmed in Kailahun, Zimmi and Freetown's urban slums, looking at child protection issues in each local context. The films will be used as a training and awareness-raising tool. And 10 children from children's clubs in Freetown have made a film about health and food, for which they interviewed government ministers, the Mayor of Freetown and the First Lady of Sierra Leone. The film is being used for our international advocacy work, helping us to get children's views directly to the people who are making decisions that affect them.

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 improving people's access to healthcare

We're helping the poorest people get access to free healthcare. In 2008, we expanded our health work to 49 primary healthcare units in three districts: Kailahun, Pujehun and Freetown, providing better healthcare for 57,733 children. We renovated eight clinics (one in Kroo Bay and seven in Kailahun), and provided four of them with medical supplies and equipment. And we're training 112 community members to screen and treat children with malaria, one of the biggest killers of children under five.

Sierra Leone is a 'premier' country in Save the Children UK's newborn and child survival campaign. We're investing heavily in maternal healthcare to prevent mothers dying during or shortly after childbirth. We've set up two basic emergency obstetric care units that are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, run by 45 specially trained and supervised staff. We've established emergency referral clubs in six communities, that make sure women who need it get fast access to emergency medical care (for instance, by covering financial support for transportation, medical fees, and other costs).

We've set up 'Belly Woman' support groups in seven areas, involving 178 women. They help women prepare for childbirth and give them access to skilled birth attendants. There are also more pregnant women attending antenatal clinics (6,163 last year, compared to 2,033 the year before). 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.

We're lobbying government to provide free healthcare

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 so that healthcare is free at the point of access. We co-organised a high-level meeting in early 2009 to share and discuss experiences of pro-poor health financing. The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has proposed

immediate implementation of free healthcare in the short term, while planning for medium-term financing mechanisms such as health insurance. These changes, if fully implemented, would benefit a further 3 million children throughout the country.

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 34 children's clubs and school health 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 write to 'Sissy Aminata', a respectable older sister, for advice on relationships and sex, including the risks associated with teenage pregnancy, harmful traditional practices, and HIV and AIDS.

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. Government spending on education fell last year, and is now around 16%. We're calling on the government to increase this to 20%, in line with the World Bank's Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) asked Save the Children to help develop the basic education component of its 10-year Education Sector Plan (ESP), which aims to improve education for all children in the country. As well as promoting child protection and inclusive education, we developed a new chapter on emergency preparedness. The review was completed late in 2008 and is still awaiting full approval from the Ministry and key development partners.

We're improving children's access to education

We're helping 20,162 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. We're working through the Ministry, with support from Save the Children Denmark. In 2008, we provided support to 59 primary schools, including 452 teachers, 215 members of school management committees and 669 children's club members. By the end of this year, we'll support 90 schools in Kailahun, Pujehun and Freetown.

We're making schools better places for children to be

We're making schools safer and more welcoming for children so that fewer children drop out because of poor quality teaching or violence. We're running workshops for teachers on child-centred teaching and learning methods, and pupils report that teachers are piloting different methods in class such as group work.

We've been working with the Ministry on a National Code of Conduct for teachers based on zero tolerance of corporal punishment, violence and abuse in schools. As a result of our work with teachers, children, and school management committees, there is anecdotal evidence from pupils that corporal punishment is being used less frequently.

Through the school management committees, we're encouraging teachers and parents to get children actively participating in how schools are run. We've renovated two school buildings and built two new ones, and provided furniture, learning materials and play equipment for them. The committees and children's clubs actively find ways to help the most vulnerable children (particularly girls) to enrol and stay in school.

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 unnecessary 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, and what we're doing to help. So far, 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 more than 200 Blue Flag volunteers to identify and treat cases of diarrhoea.



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