



Integrated Country Strategy

SIERRA LEONE

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Sierra Leone, a West African country the size of West Virginia with a population of 8 million, is rebounding from a difficult and painful recent past. Within the last 25 years, Sierra Leone has suffered from: a brutal civil war that led to 50,000 deaths and 2.5 million displaced; an Ebola epidemic that infected 13,000 people and killed 4,000; and now the Covid-19 pandemic. The result of these consecutive external shocks is that Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries on earth. Sierra Leone ranks in the bottom ten of the UN's Human Development Index and its citizens have an average lifespan of only 55 years. Sierra Leoneans still die from preventable and treatable diseases such as malaria, typhoid and even polio. In addition to these external shocks, Sierra Leone is plagued by corruption at all levels of government, a weak private sector, and a workforce that lacks necessary education and skills. Not surprisingly, the country is heavily dependent on foreign aid.

But Sierra Leone is also a story of resiliency. Despite these setbacks, Sierra Leone is a multiparty democracy that has successfully held four consecutive elections deemed generally fair and free. In the last election held in 2018, the opposition party won by a slim margin and peacefully took the reins of power. The country is rich in natural resources, and, prior to the Covid outbreak, the economy was growing at over 5 percent. It is expected to rebound in the coming years. Long-standing religious harmony exists between the Muslim majority and Christian minority. And despite some lingering ethnic tensions, the country is at peace.

The United States has a long-term, close and positive relationship with the government and people of Sierra Leone. With the resolution of outstanding visa and commercial disputes, bilateral relations are generally headed in the right direction and our engagement is expanding. In December 2020, the country was deemed eligible to negotiate an MCC Compact, tangible evidence of the strides Sierra Leone has made in policy and governance during the preceding years. We are hopeful that the upcoming MCC Compact will have a significant positive impact on economic development over the next several years. We are also looking forward to the return of Peace Corps volunteers in 2022.

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The ideals and values of the United States are popular in Sierra Leone. We are looked to as a friend and supporter of the country. We will continue to nurture that positive relationship as we partner with the country to improve health care access and capacity, strengthen their democratic system, and support their economic development through trade and investment. We will also focus on internal improvements in the embassy, particularly to improve our human capacity and our financial management systems.

Our goals are:

Promote Health Security. The lack of adequate health care is one of the biggest obstacles to the growth and development of the country. This is likely where we can have the biggest positive impact. We will continue our long-term efforts to help Sierra Leoneans strengthen their health care system to provide equitable and high-quality health care services to all its citizens.

Strengthen Democracy. Sierra Leone is a fragile multiparty democracy that generally respects the rights of citizens. We will work to enhance the government's accountability to its citizens and strengthen its democratic institutions. We will work with civil society to improve their capacity to contribute to good governance and with the security sector to uphold democratic norms and human rights and keep U.S. citizens safe.

Accelerate the Transition to a Market-Based Economy. We will work with the government and the private sector to improve the business climate and increase private sector investment in the economy. We will promote green energy and sustainable agriculture and aquaculture to improve food security and protect the environment.

To support these ICS goals, our management objective is to **Strengthen our Diplomatic Support Platform.** We will strengthen Embassy operations by investing in human capital and strengthening our internal management controls. We will develop a workforce and mission culture to embrace change, accountability, and results. We will work to improve our workplace and residential infrastructure and security.

Sierra Leone is a difficult environment in which to operate. We face a plethora of political, economic, and social challenges in one of the poorest countries in the world. Although the country shows encouraging signs of progress, that progress is fragile and there have been setbacks along the way.

It is in our interest that Sierra Leone become a stable, peaceful, prosperous, and healthy country. This Integrated Country Strategy details how we will help Sierra Leone achieve that goal.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Promote sustainable and integrated health security.

- **Mission Objective 1.1:** Sierra Leone strengthens its health system to provide equitable and high quality health care services and improved health seeking behaviors.

Mission Goal 2: Strengthen Sierra Leone's democracy, enhancing accountability to its people and their human rights while advancing mutual peace and security interests.

- **Mission Objective 2.1:** Sierra Leone strengthens democratic institutions and processes that are increasingly inclusive, transparent and responsive to the population.
- **Mission Objective 2.2:** Sierra Leone improves civil society, media, and civic capacity to contribute to governance and political processes, and to peacebuilding in communities.
- **Mission Objective 2.3:** Sierra Leone's security sector serves as capable, responsible forces upholding democratic norms and human rights, able to secure U.S. citizens and interests.

Mission Goal 3: Support the transition of the Sierra Leonean economy from donor-based to market-based.

- **Mission Objective 3.1:** Sierra Leone increases private sector investment opportunities to sustain economic growth and development.
- **Mission Objective 3.2:** Sierra Leone combats climate change by promoting green energy and reducing environmental degradation.
- **Mission Objective 3.3:** Sierra Leone advances sustainable aquaculture and agriculture practices to reduce environmental impact and promote food security and economic growth.

Management Objective 1: Strengthen our internal management controls.

Management Objective 2: Develop workforce and mission culture to embrace change, accountability, and results.

Management Objective 3: Improve chancery and residential infrastructure and security.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1 | Promote sustainable and integrated health security.

Description | Sierra Leone's 12-year civil war that ended in 2002, a cholera outbreak in 2012 and an Ebola outbreak in 2014 tested the health system and exposed its fragility. The country remains in the bottom quartile of the least developed countries with one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, high mortality rate for children under five years of age, and low life expectancy. The health system – both human and animal – faces a multitude of challenges including a lack of trained human resources, financial resources, health infrastructure, and affordable health care services. The U.S. Government (USG) will help build capacities to sustain the delivery of essential services for improved health. This includes supporting attainment of the International Health Regulations (2005) core capacities towards health security with multi sectoral collaboration, One Health approach and community engagement. It also includes a dedicated focus on family planning, reproductive health, and mother and child health, including addressing infectious diseases like endemic malaria that is the leading cause of death in children under five years of age. USG contributions will build on existing capacities and will address gender inclusion, sustainability and private sector engagement.

Objective 1.1 | Sierra Leone strengthens its health system to provide equitable and high-quality health care services and improved health seeking behaviors.

- **Justification |** The health system continues to improve after the 2014-2016 Ebola outbreak; however, the country still needs support from partners to strengthen the capacity of health systems to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats; to protect and secure essential healthcare services and demand; and to reduce morbidity and mortality of high burden diseases and conditions such as malaria. The 2020 outbreaks of COVID-19 and polio in Sierra Leone, along with the 2021 Ebola and Marburg virus threats in the region, resulted in the health sector's shift of focus to deal with these emergency situations. Subsequently, essential health services declined significantly as personnel and resources were reallocated to health emergency

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responses. This demonstrates the need to strengthen capacity to build resilient public health systems to protect the continuity of essential healthcare services, thus ensuring that the system can manage high burden diseases and essential services equitably.

Mission Freetown supports improving upon governance and leadership best practices; however, mechanisms for sustainable financing are needed to capitalize upon improvements made thus far and to foster increased sustainability of efforts to protect the health and welfare of citizens. Civil society organizations play a significant role in strengthening health systems, facilitating dialogues between the communities and the government, improving the health service delivery and contributing to evidence-based policies.

- **Linkages** | Mission Freetown's assistance to Sierra Leone's health sector links to and supports the USG National Strategy to Advance Global Health Security and Biological Preparedness, which includes strengthening the international COVID-19 response. USG assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone's (GoSL) implementation of their national health strategy is aligned with the following priorities: President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), Global Health Security Agenda (GHS), Act to End Neglected Tropical Diseases (ActNTDs), the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), and Preventing Child and Maternal Deaths. Since the designation of Sierra Leone as a focus country for the Global Financing Facility (GFF) in 2017, USAID has also collaborated with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS), World Bank, and other donors to shape the Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adult Health (RMNCAH) investment case. This complements programming under the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), which works to strengthen and expand facility and community-based malaria diagnosis and treatment, increase capacity for prevention of Malaria in Pregnancy (MIP). (**JSP Objective 1.1, JSP Objective 3.5, JRS Objective 4.1**)
- **Risks** | Since the civil war, the health system's dependency on external development partners increased drastically. Infectious disease remains an ongoing concern, given the presence of COVID-19, Lassa fever and potential for future Ebola, Marburg, or other health issues. With the ongoing COVID-19 response, as well as Ebola

preparedness and polio vaccination programs taking place in Sierra Leone, most government agencies and partners are focused on supporting those emergencies. Therefore, less attention is given to other health-needs. There are limited resources to respond to the rampant outbreaks of Transboundary Animal Diseases and zoonotic diseases. Continuous mobilization for additional resources from other partners, as in the case of the World Bank REDISEE project and European Union, as well as engagement of the private sector will be employed to bridge this gap. Malaria is one of the primary drivers of morbidity and mortality in Sierra Leone, especially for vulnerable risk groups such as children under five years of age and pregnant women and mitigating risks will have a clear protective effect for Sierra Leone's population. Because malaria is so prevalent, the GoSL will continue to prioritize malaria control, but there is a risk of misallocation of resources for this purpose. The PMI program will mitigate the risk to USG funding by working through independent implementing partners. Turnover and poor leadership in some of the key directorates within the MoHS and their inability to execute activities as planned within the prescribed time frame has resulted in inefficiencies in the utilization of funds from various donors. Better coordination among donors and with the government is expected to improve this situation.

Mission Goal 2 | Strengthen Sierra Leone's democracy, enhancing accountability to its people and their human rights while advancing mutual peace and security interests.

Description | The mission will support transparent, accountable, democratic governance in Sierra Leone. Post will broaden engagement with civil society to more effectively advocate for human rights and access to services for all Sierra Leoneans including women and girls, LGBTQI individuals, and people with disabilities. Prioritizing U.S. citizen services and security, the mission will partner with the security sector to foster professional military and law enforcement agencies.

Objective 2.1 | Sierra Leone strengthens democratic institutions and processes that are increasingly inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the population.

- **Justification** | While there have been incremental improvements in the government's responsiveness and effectiveness over the last twenty years, public service delivery does not meet the basic needs of Sierra Leone's people. Sierra Leone continues to face substantial challenges in relation to government accountability, inclusive governance, and responsive public institutions. Widespread and systemic corruption throughout the government has eroded public confidence and undermined the effective functioning of the judiciary, the police, and other government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). State mechanisms for control and oversight of government institutions and officials are weak and politicized. The exclusion of women and minority groups from civic processes has also limited the ability of the government to fully meet the needs of Sierra Leone's population.
- **Linkages** | Support for strengthening democracies, working with like-minded partners, combatting corruption, and protecting the human rights of women and girls, LGBTQI individuals, and persons with disabilities is included in the U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance 2021. **(JSP Objective 1.4, JSP Objective 3.1, JSP Objective 3.3, JSP Objective 5.1, JRS Objective 1.1, JRS Objective 3.1)**
- **Risks** | Current threats to Sierra Leone's stability include increased politically-motivated violence, erosion of public trust in government, and ruling party manipulation

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of democratic processes, including elections. Other significant human rights challenges include overcrowded and dangerous prisons; trafficking in persons, including forced child labor; and discrimination and violence against women, LGBTQI persons, and other vulnerable groups. Many of the root grievances leading to the civil war remain unaddressed, including limited access to justice, extreme poverty, and endemic corruption, and combined with the potential for external threats and radicalization of a disenfranchised youth, may lead to internal conflict.

Objective 2.2 | Sierra Leone fosters civil society, media, and civic contributions to governance and political processes, and to peacebuilding in communities.

- **Justification** | Good governance depends not only on the capacity and commitment of government institutions to lead, but also on the informed participation of citizens. A strong civil society plays an essential role in democracies, by providing routes for organized advocacy and government oversight, while effective media is key to informing citizens. In Sierra Leone, the issue of increased political tensions, sometimes resulting in violence, also calls for a grassroots peacebuilding and conflict mitigation response that engages civil society writ large, including traditional leaders. The mission will support governance and violence prevention programming that engages civil society on local governance and justice issues, as well as community peacebuilding and conflict mitigation.
- **Linkages** | The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance 2021 specifies that the USG will invest in civil society in Africa, build partnerships, and strengthen commitment to democratic progress and the rule of law. Efforts to support locally-driven solutions to address the drivers of fragility are in line with the Global Fragility Act and the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability. **(JSP Objective 1.5, JSP Objectives 3.2-3.3, JSP Objective 5.2, JRS Objectives 3.2-3.3, JRS Objective 4.4)**

- **Risks** | Constrained civic space, limited media freedoms, and insufficient funding for civil society prevent the population from effectively advocating for their rights and services or from making informed decisions on electoral candidates. Misinformation and disinformation, including from external actors, may exacerbate existing tensions or shift public opinion away from the United States.

Objective 2.3 | Sierra Leone's security sector serves as a capable, responsible force upholding democratic norms and human rights, and able to secure U.S. citizens and interests.

- **Justification** | The probability of natural or man-made disasters occurring in Sierra Leone is high; poor infrastructure (i.e., roads, hospitals, emergency services, inaccessible airport) makes even routine emergency responses challenging. Seasonal rains cause extensive flooding and the lack of vehicle safety enforcement or road maintenance regularly leads to fatal traffic accidents. Infectious disease outbreaks, poor sanitation, and inadequately resourced health care facilities pose health risks to American citizens in Sierra Leone. The mission must be ready to assist the resident population of U.S. citizens in Sierra Leone, many of whom are dual nationals, as well as American citizen visitors, in the event of a major crisis. Protecting and supporting U.S. citizens and their interests in Sierra Leone is a top priority for Mission Freetown.

Regarding security partnerships, RSLAF has earned a reputation as a relatively effective organization and the GoSL has increasingly relied upon it for domestic civilian operations, including providing election security and responding to natural disasters. However, Sierra Leone remains vulnerable to transnational organized crime, including narcotics and human trafficking and smuggling; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and international financial crimes, issues that are exacerbated by frequent unofficial crossings along Sierra Leone's porous borders and by an unmonitored maritime domain. Therefore, the U.S. government will continue to support programs that develop professionalism and robust civil-military relations, including the promotion of human rights. U.S. efforts will focus on reinforcing RSLAF's core military mandate to

ensure territorial integrity and security, and to participate in international peacekeeping operations.

- **Linkages** | The U.S. Interim National Security Strategic Guidance 2021 states that our “most solemn obligation” is to protect the security of the American people. This includes responding to challenges from great powers and adversaries, as well as violent and criminal non-state actors and extremists. **(JSP Objective 4.3, Objective 5.1, JRS Objectives 1.2-1.4)**
- **Risks** | Unprofessional, politicized, and weak security services are more likely to use excessive force and engage in corrupt practices, undermining human security and democratic governance.

Mission Goal 3 | Support the transition of the Sierra Leonean economy from donor-based to market-based.

Description | Sierra Leone is ranked as one of the least developed countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (182 out of 189 countries in 2019). Following the end of the civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone has experienced extraordinary levels of donor support and was seeking to attain middle-income status by 2035. The country's GDP expanded rapidly in the mid-2010s due to the boom in iron ore export, but the Ebola epidemic outbreak in 2014 ended this trajectory. In 2019, the government came up with the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019 – 2023) to promote a new direction for improving education, inclusive growth and building a resilient economy. The strategy will pursue private sector-led growth by attracting foreign direct investment and forging partnerships with the private sector, especially large-scale projects.

Objective 3.1 | Sierra Leone increases private sector investment opportunities to sustain economic growth and development.

- **Justification** | The Integrated Country Strategy (ICS) aligns with Sierra Leone's development aspirations as articulated in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023. The MTNDP's agenda prioritizes human capital development, economic diversification, infrastructure, and economic competitiveness, among others, to facilitate the transformation of the economy into a prosperous, democratic country. Informed by extensive consultations, the plan would require investments from various sources.

Along with investment in human capital development, prioritizing diversification in agriculture, fisheries, and tourism, with accompanying investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and technologies, would transition the country away from the dependence on aid and extractives and propel economic development. Diversifying into agriculture, fisheries, and tourism and strengthening infrastructure could spur economic growth, provide employment, and raise the standard of living of the entire population. Improving Sierra Leone's investment climate would attract U.S. businesses eager to

invest in Sierra Leone but require a predictable and efficient regulatory system. The government has created the National Investment Board to facilitate all investments activities within a conducive and reliable business environment.

The mission will encourage the government to enhance fair competition and improve the investment climate to attract U.S. investors. An improved investment climate will support the economy's transition away from aid dependency and extractives, and towards value-added commercial agriculture, renewable energy, and services, among others, to spur economic growth and attain self-sufficiency.

- **Linkages** | Improving Sierra Leone's investment climate and institutions will spur private sector growth, ultimately helping Sierra Leone become self-sufficient. This aligns with the interim 2021 National Security Strategic (NSS) guidance on international trade and institutions. The NSS guidance seeks to sustain international systems underwritten by strong and effective institutions, including enforcing existing trade rules and creating new ones that promote fairness, durability, and equity. **(JSP Objectives 1.2, 2.2, JRS Objectives 2.4, 4.2, 4.4)**
- **Risks** | A prolonged COVID-19 pandemic or the spread of another unanticipated outbreak in the region would further hinder economic growth and activity. The high likelihood of natural and manmade disasters would inhibit private sector growth and redirect already limited foreign assistance away from promoting commercial activity to emergency response. Furthermore, delays in improving the investment climate and failing to create and maintain a level playing field for all businesses will limit foreign investment in Sierra Leone. Corruption and the lack of the necessary infrastructure like electricity, good roads, etc., will pose challenges to private sector investment.

Objective 3.2 | Help Sierra Leone combat climate change by promoting green energy and reducing environmental degradation.

- **Justification** | The government of Sierra Leone has protected only 3.3 percent of the country's territory from environmental damage, a far smaller share than most countries. Indeed, much of the country's ecological problems result from open mineral excavation and deforestation. Recently, a mudslide attributable to deforestation caused significant damage. Sierra Leone is highly energy deficient, but its tropical climate and several rivers offer enormous potential for renewable energy from solar and hydropower. Most energy sources impact the environment, but green energy has an impressive advantage over other sources. The benefits include less air and water pollution, less wildlife and habitat loss, no or lower greenhouse gas emissions, etc. Climate change promoted by green energy helps reduce environmental degradation and dependence on imported fuel. Furthermore, green energy is essential for the environment as it replaces the adverse effects of fossil fuels with more environmentally friendly alternatives.
- **Linkages** | Sierra Leone, with poor infrastructure, is highly prone to the adverse effects of climate change. The government in 2020 established the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) to augment the Office of National Security (ONS) in responding to disasters like flooding, disease (cholera) outbreaks, mudslides, etc. The Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security have instituted measures to combat environmental degradation. Overall, the objective aligns with the MTNDP's aim of generating and distributing adequate electricity and power from renewable and clean sources for increased access by most of the population. **(JSP Objectives 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 2.4, JRS Objectives 4.2, 4.4).**
- **Risks** | The initial costs of setting up a renewable energy infrastructure are massive, making it difficult to switch from thermal energy infrastructure.

Objective 3.3 | Support sustainable aquaculture and agriculture to reduce environmental impact and promote food security and economic growth.

- **Justification** | Sierra Leone imports 80 percent of the food it consumes. The country is endowed with a favorable agricultural environment comprising arable land, abundant rainfall, a temperate climate, and several rivers with significant irrigation potential that could support the production of enough food to meet local consumption and export demands. However, of the estimated 5.4 million hectares of fertile arable land, 75 percent remains uncultivated. Besides, smallholder subsistence farmers utilizing local traditional tools with outdated methods and limited farm inputs dominated the agricultural sector.

Aquaculture can increase the availability of aquatic nutrients, improve food security and nutrition, and boost economic growth. It provides employment opportunities and a stable supply of fish products, but the practice is new in Sierra Leone.

- **Linkages** | Investment in this sector will guarantee food security and alleviate hunger (SDG Goal2). The government has realized the need to diversify its economy to absorb economic shocks. The MTNDP identifies investment in agriculture as a critical component in diversifying the economy to enhance economic development. **(JSP Objective 2.2, JSP Objective 3.5, JRS Objective 4.3)**
- **Risks** | The land system in the provinces pose a challenge for large-scale farming, and the lack of necessary infrastructure makes it very expensive for industrial agriculture. Aquaculture might require the use of large amounts of antibiotics. Also, water pollution, and the possible outbreak and spread of diseases might be problematic.

5. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1 | Strengthen our internal management controls.

- **Justification** | To support the growing Mission, Management is focused on strengthening management controls, improving infrastructure, and increasing efficiency. Regional service providers can support post operations and provide technical and administrative support during staffing gaps and with many first and second tour officers. However, there is no substitute for experienced, on-the-ground management controls and guidance to ensure service delivery and regulatory compliance. Coordinating with the State Department's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO), post works to provide safe and secure housing and office space. Management is working to identify ways to provide the oversight and training needed to create an environment that supports best practices, implements management controls, and uses data analytics to measure performance and ensure management activities are in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations.
- **Linkages** | An effective and stable management platform is essential to the successful implementation of consular, program, and inter-agency goals. Creating and sustaining an effective and reliable management platform is dependent on well-trained supervisor who understand and share the values of mission and its overarching goals, which include developing an efficient, well trained staff capable independent operations and will guard against fraud and abuse. **(JSP Objective 4.3, JRS Management Objective 1.3)**
- **Risks** | Risks include the inability of staff to provide services needed to fulfill mission requirements and the unavailability of resources when needed.

Management Objective 2 | Develop workforce and mission culture to embrace change, accountability and results, with a focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA).

- **Justification** | The mission must ensure that the workforce, policies, and procedures reflect USG best practices, regulatory requirements, and operational needs.
- **Linkages** | All sections benefit when the workforce is aware of proper policies and procedures to ensure smooth functioning of the embassy. **(JSP Objective 4.1, JRS Management Objective 1.1)**
- **Risks** | The inability to meet performance and accountability requirements or support sections and agencies in meeting their own ISC objectives are risks to the success of this objective.

Management Objective 3 | Improve chancery and residential infrastructure and security.

- **Justification** | The mission must ensure a safe workplace and home environment for all personnel. Management personnel are essential to ensuring facilities and residential properties meet regulatory and safety requirements.
- **Linkages** | A safe home and work environment is needed to optimize operational efficiencies and allow staff to focus on mission goals and objectives. **(JSP Objective 4.3, JRS Management Objective 1.3)**
- **Risks** | Risks include loss of time at work due to illness or injury and lack of personnel bidding on mission Freetown due to a bad reputation for taking care of personnel.