

Sierra Leone



VSO Sierra Leone Strategy

2012-15

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Quick facts

Population:

5.9 million with median age of 19 years

Official languages:

English, Mende, Temne, Krio (English-based Creole, spoken by the descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in the Freetown area, a lingua franca understood by 95% of the population)

Human Development Index (HDI) rating:

180 out of 187

Literacy rate for youth (15–24 years):

68% for males, 48% for females

Life expectancy: 47 years

Economy:

US\$340 Gross National Income (GNI) per capita



Foreword

VSO is a leading, independent, non-governmental organisation (NGO). We believe that change happens because people make it happen. Providing food, infrastructure and machinery is important, but we believe people are the key to overcoming poverty.

That's why we work through volunteers. Drawn from many countries and all walks of life, our volunteers give of their time, expertise and passion. Volunteers share their skills within carefully selected partner organisations, ranging from grassroots groups to government ministries. It's a powerful, cost-effective way to create lasting results.

Together we work to improve poor people's access to quality essential services, information and ideas that link them to the wider world. The VSO network helps poor and marginalised people understand their rights and empowers them to participate as equal, fully-valued members of their society.

What we do

Work together: Our global volunteers transfer knowledge and experience not accessible locally. Local partners use their skills and cultural understanding to make an impact in their own communities.

Knowledge brokering: Through workshops, conferences and national and international exchanges we connect individuals and organisations so they can share knowledge, perspectives, ideas and practices. This provides access to knowledge for those who are often excluded.

Advocacy: We conduct research, pilot and evaluate innovative approaches, give voice to the poor and bring knowledge to those responsible for deciding on and implementing policy. Evidence provided through research informs our advocacy work and consequently shapes policy, plans and interventions with the Sierra Leonean government.

How we do it

Our efforts focus on increasing the impact of existing government and civil society development efforts to strengthen organisational and human capacities. We work alongside our partners, volunteers and ultimate beneficiaries in a consultative, inclusive and respectful manner in all stages of programme design, monitoring and evaluation as we consider sustainability, empowerment and capacity-building our overarching goals. The work and ambition outlined in this plan recognises and appreciates existing accomplishments and reflects our commitment to ongoing consultation and collaborative implementation.



The context in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is still recovering from the brutal 10-year civil war that destroyed lives and infrastructure and forcibly displaced roughly a third of the population (2 million people). The war ended in 2002 and Sierra Leone has made some impressive progress in the political sphere by holding elections and decentralising power. Poverty and inequalities are still pervasive, however, with well over half the population unable to meet their basic needs. The country is rich in mineral, agricultural and fishery resources, but nearly half the working-age population engage in subsistence agriculture. Many work without pay.

The Sierra Leonean population is young, with 76% under the age of 35. These millions of young people are transitioning to adulthood with limited opportunities for viable livelihoods. They grew up during a war that disrupted every aspect of their lives. Most were unable to attend school regularly, had to migrate in search of safety and experienced the traumatic loss of parents or other family members.

As this young generation now begins to establish their own households, most have no job skills or business networks and a staggering 46% are unemployed. Young women face particularly harsh challenges and often start families when they are still adolescents themselves, before they've been able to gain skills and stability to support themselves.

Historically, both young men and women have been excluded from the political and civil society decisions that impact their lives, particularly in rural areas. This disenfranchisement was one of the primary factors that led the country to war. It could threaten to do so again, unless this group are able to participate as active and contributing members of society.

VSO in Sierra Leone

VSO has been operating in Sierra Leone since 1961. VSO Sierra Leone's country strategy is anchored around youth and seeks to simultaneously improve access to youth-friendly health services, build skills of the young workforce, create job opportunities and influence policies and attitudes that will help young men and women become healthy and active citizens capable of transforming society.

To advance this strategy, we work in four interconnected programme areas: livelihoods, health, governance and education and host 40-50 long-term international volunteers, 40+ young volunteers, and over 3,000 national volunteers through our partner network annually. We hope to reach more than

Who we work for

Our strategic focus is on young people (aged 15–35) in nine targeted districts spanning all four regions across the country: Kambia, Tonkolili, Bombali, Koinadugu, Kenema, Kailahun, Moyamba and Bo plus Western Area.



450,000 young people through our programmes between 2012 to 2015. Some of our accomplishments include:

- strengthening the institutional and staff capacity of more than 50 partner organisations including government ministries, civil society organisations and community-based organisations
- establishing a national-level network of volunteer organisations called VIONET, which promotes volunteering within the country
- deploying national volunteers to monitor the health service delivery in government hospitals with a specific focus on maternal and child health issues
- implementing a pilot initiative with tertiary education institutions to send senior agriculture students to support

farmers in improving productivity

- supporting the National Commission for Social Action / Peace and Development Corps (NACSA/PADCO) to deploy young graduates as volunteers to assist various government institutions – providing both valuable work experience for graduates and increased capacity of local government units
- promoting agribusiness through technical advice from agronomists, business development services (BDS) and value chain experts
- improving the health sector through system strengthening in health management, service delivery, financial management and professional training.

Sierra Leone livelihood facts

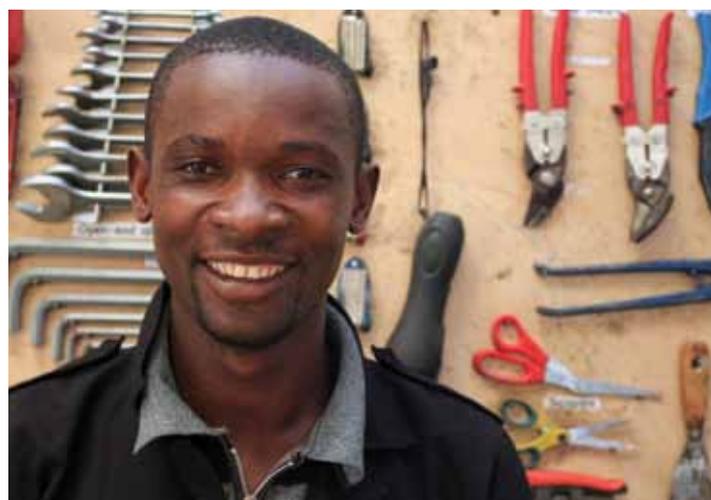
- Sierra Leone's economy needs to grow at 7% annually for the next decade in order to create enough jobs for the currently unemployed and under-employed youth.
- Approximately 70% of the population in Sierra Leone depends on agriculture for its livelihood, making it the largest economic sector in the country as it generates about half of the country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Key livelihood programme strategies

Getting young people into sustainable jobs is a top priority for the country and a pre-requisite for maintaining peace and promoting pro-poor growth. VSO Sierra Leone agrees with the government assessment that the major barriers to youth employment are both demand and supply driven – job skill development must be linked to market needs. Training and opportunities must be available at community and district levels for greatest effect.

Examples of VSO Sierra Leone approaches

- To increase the capacity of partner agricultural business centres (ABCs) and business development service (BDS) to train and coach young people in relevant formal and informal market-oriented skills.
- To support national volunteering and internships as a way for young people to gain work experience and on-the-job training while contributing to the economy.
- To strengthen the agriculture value chain by linking young farmers and producers to processors and other buyers of their products.
- Through training and coaching, to support the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development as well as local councils to integrate youth job creation programmes into local economic development initiatives.



Sierra Leone health facts

- One in 21 chance of dying from a pregnancy-related illness or complication.
- One in 11 children die before their first birthday and one in seven die before reaching their fifth birthday.
- The United Kingdom (UK) has 2.7 physicians per 1,000 inhabitants – Sierra Leone, however, has only 0.016 physicians per 1,000 inhabitants. (The UK has 171 times the number of doctors for the same population).

Key health programme strategies

Young people face many health challenges that impair their overall well-being and ability to work, develop their skills and provide for their families. Young women are at particular risk with most women giving birth before they turn 19. Without proper knowledge of sexual and reproductive health issues and life skills, young people are at risk for sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV and AIDS, as well as pregnancy-related complications and death.

In April 2011, Sierra Leone launched a free healthcare initiative to help ensure pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under the age of five can access free health services at public health facilities throughout the country. VSO Sierra Leone works with the Ministry of Health and the health service providers to provide safe, youth-friendly health facilities, messages and treatment to improve practical access to quality healthcare for young people.

Examples of VSO Sierra Leone approaches

- To support training institutions to produce more qualified health workers (doctors, nurses, midwives) focused on maternal and child health.
- To support the Primary Health Care, Finance and HR Directorates of the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to train and coach district health management teams, and clinical and administrative staff to ensure youth-friendly health systems at all levels.
- To help develop and disseminate appropriate reproductive and sexual health messaging to in and out of school youth, as well as at the community and national level.





Sierra Leone governance facts

- Young people's frustration over government corruption and poor delivery of services such as education, health, water and sanitation was a significant contributor to the war.
- Women are under-represented in public life with only 17 female candidates successfully elected (out of 112 elected seats) in the 2007 election.

Key governance programme strategies

VSO will work with local and district councils to strengthen their ability to engage with young people to provide meaningful livelihood opportunities and access to appropriate basic services in education, health and other sectors. At the same time, we will engage with young people in the communities and strengthen their capacity to hold representatives accountable. Women's voices and issues are of particular importance and VSO Sierra Leone will strive to bring greater gender awareness to all interventions.

Examples of VSO Sierra Leone approaches

- To increase young people and women's representation on local and district councils.
- To empower young people in rural communities to engage with their elected leaders and to advocate for improved financial, employment and health services.
- To raise awareness among young people and their communities about the role they can play in holding their leaders accountable and reducing corruption.
- To train and coach new staff at the National Youth Commission to develop and implement appropriate youth policies.
- To promote inclusion and participation of youth and women in local economic development planning processes.

Sierra Leone education facts

- The majority of unemployed youth are poorly educated or illiterate.
- One of the major contributors to girls dropping out of school is pregnancy – an estimated 40% of women give birth before they turn 18 years old.

Key education programme strategies

Evidence shows that education attainment levels in young people are closely linked to unemployment and health behaviours and attitudes, giving a strong justification to treat education, livelihoods and healthcare challenges in tandem. VSO works to support the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, local government structures, the National Youth Commission and civil society partners to enhance the employability as well as health and well-being of young men and women for them to be active and productive members of society.

Examples of VSO approaches

- To support the review of the non-formal education sector to ensure it enhances youth employability.
- To help develop capacity at central and district level and improve coordination of inputs from all stakeholders.
- To help strengthen the Education Management Information System (EMIS) in order to facilitate decision making at all levels.

Partnership: the way we work

VSO Sierra Leone works through local partners operating at all levels of society to achieve long-lasting and sustainable impacts. Our partners include:

Government partners

We have existing partnerships with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation; the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Forestry; the Ministry of Youth Employment and Sports; the National Youth Commission; and the National Commission for Social Action.

We seek to develop new partnerships with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology; the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; the Diaspora Office; the Chamber of Commerce and the Meteorological Department.

Civil society partners

We will maintain our existing partnerships with a range of civil society organisations who: advocate for pro-youth policies; provide market-lead, skill- development programmes for young people; offer business development services for aspiring young entrepreneurs; provide rural finance opportunities for young people aspiring to start and develop their own businesses; advocate for the participation of women in local governance and develop the capacity of elected women officers.

Stakeholders

We continue to connect with other stakeholders and promote dialogue among all groups that work in the same sector, geographical area or policy sphere. Such groups include private enterprise, funders, international and national non-government organisations, networks and coalitions, professional associations and advocacy institutions.

Implementation through volunteers

We work through a range of volunteer models:

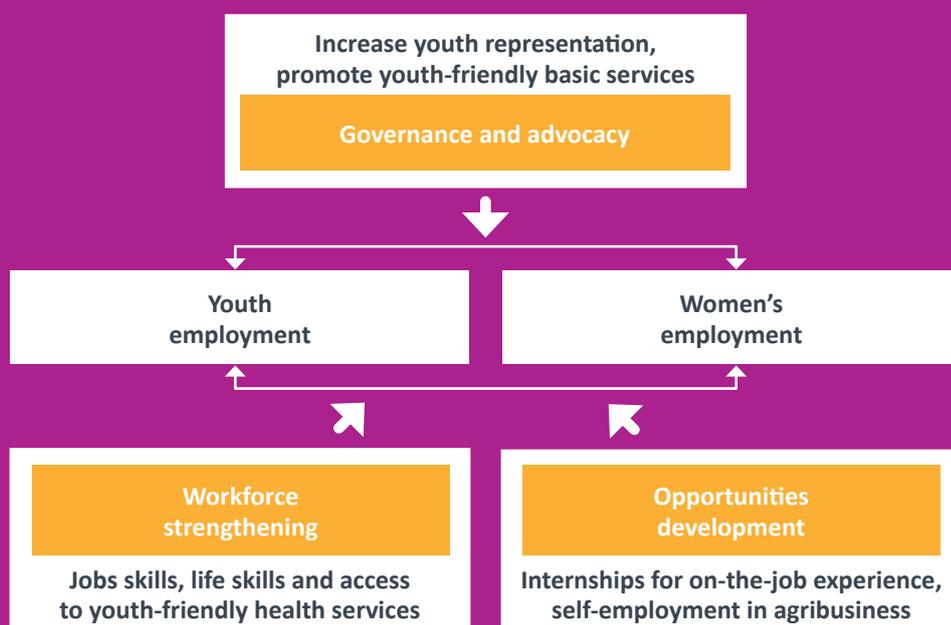
- Long-term overseas volunteering (professional placements of up to two years): Our volunteers help build human resource capacity by passing on their expertise. They come from both developed and developing countries.
- Short-term specialist assignments (positions of six months and under): Our experienced professionals provide support on short-term assignments ranging from research studies and training seminars to exchange visits by members of parliament.
- Diaspora volunteers: We provide a mechanism for diaspora members to contribute back to their country of origin in a meaningful and targeted way.
- Youth volunteers: Through the DFID-sponsored International Citizen Service (ICS) initiative, 18-25 year olds from the UK and Sierra Leone work together for three months on placements focused on youth issues.
- Corporate volunteers: We offer private companies a unique way to support international development efforts and encourage employee engagement opportunities.
- National volunteers: Volunteerism is the backbone in many of our communities. We support groups of community volunteers as well as associations of volunteers operating in our country.

Key volunteering skills needed

We look for a range of volunteering skills including doctors, midwives, nurses, and health managers; agronomists, business development specialists, marketing experts, fundraisers, finance and IT professionals; curriculum development managers and youth education advisers, as well as people with policy and advocacy, education management information systems, and quality assurance expertise.

Our impact

VSO Sierra Leone has an ambitious vision that guides our country strategy. We strive to contribute to a society where young people have opportunities to lead a healthy, productive and dignified life by acquiring the skills they need to succeed, by seizing opportunities created around them and by participating in peaceful, democratic governance of their country. If achieved, the impact of our work will be felt for generations.



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