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UNICEF Sierra Leone




Joint Evaluation of Improving Access to Water, Sanitation, And Hygiene (WASH) in Rural Fishing Communities Programme in Sierra Leone (2019-2023)



Programme Objective

To enhance access to safe water, improved sanitation, and hygiene services in some of Sierra Leone’s most underserved rural fishing communities, supporting health, dignity, and sustainable development.

The programme aimed to:

-  **Construct/rehabilitate water points and sanitation facilities**
-  **Promote hygiene behavior change**
-  **Strengthen community-based WASH structures**

Evaluation year: **2024** Last updated: **December 2024**

Duration: 2019 – 2023

Implementing Partners:

- Government of Sierra Leone (Ministries of Health, Water Resources, and Local Government)
- UNICEF
- Local Councils and NGOs

Donor: Government of Iceland (through UNICEF)

Budget: USD 5 million, funded by the Government of Iceland through UNICEF.






Geographic Location






The programme targeted **40 fishing communities in four coastal districts** of Sierra Leone: Bonthe, Pujehun, Port Loko, Western Rural.

These areas were selected due to their extreme vulnerability, poor WASH coverage, and exclusion from many national development initiatives.



Key Programme Outcomes

Key Achievements				
 <p>Improved Access to Safe Water and Sanitation The programme increased access to safe drinking water, with the share of households reporting safe drinking water rising by 9-24 percentage points, reaching up to 100% in some communities.</p>	 <p>Positive Behaviour Change Programme led to observable improvements in handwashing practices, latrine use, and safe water handling. Household water treatment practices improved, with increased use of safer methods from 52% to 60% and a sharp decline in reliance on straining alone from 71% to 30%. The programme also increased youth participation in waste recycling and encouraged adoption of improved fish processing practices among women.</p>	 <p>Community Ownership and Sustainability Structures The establishment of Water Management Committees and training of community members strengthened community ownership and improved the prospects for sustaining WASH infrastructure.</p>	 <p>Targeting of Vulnerable and Marginalized Populations The programme reached remote and underserved fishing communities and reduced the time needed to fetch water. The share of households spending 30 minutes or more collecting water fell from 52% to 16%, while the share accessing water within 30 minutes increased from 37% to 62%.</p>	 <p>Contribution to National WASH Goals The programme aligned with Sierra Leone's national development and WASH policies and contributed to SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).</p>

Main Challenges				
 <p>Operation and Maintenance Considerations Ongoing governance and financing challenges continue to affect the long-term sustainability of WASH infrastructure in some communities.</p>	 <p>Strengthening Integration Across Sectors Further efforts are needed to strengthen the integration of WASH with health, education, and livelihoods initiatives, to enhance cross-sectoral synergies and maximize development impact.</p>	 <p>Enhancing Data Availability and Monitoring Improving baseline data availability, monitoring systems, and documentation remains important to support stronger evidence-based planning, learning, and impact tracking.</p>	 <p>Advancing Gender and Social Inclusion While women and youth were engaged, additional measures are needed to strengthen their participation in decision-making processes and to more systematically apply disability-inclusive approaches.</p>	 <p>Building Environmental and Climate Resilience There is an opportunity to further strengthen climate- and risk-informed approaches to ensure the resilience of water infrastructure in flood- and drought-prone areas.</p>



Why Sustained Engagement in Rural WASH Matters



Protecting essential gains for the most marginalized

The evaluation shows that targeted WASH interventions can significantly improve access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene in remote and historically excluded fishing communities, directly contributing to health, dignity, and equity.



Ensuring sustainability in fragile contexts

Without continued engagement, gains remain vulnerable due to weak operation and maintenance capacity, climate risks, and limited local resources—putting essential services at risk of early deterioration.



Advancing national and global commitments

Sustained WASH engagement supports SDG 6, Sierra Leone's national WASH priorities, and broader child survival, health, and education outcomes, particularly in underserved rural areas.



Strengthening resilience and inclusion

Continued efforts are critical to integrate climate resilience, strengthen community governance, and ensure women, youth, and persons with disabilities are meaningfully included in WASH decision-making.

for every child,

Whoever she is.

Wherever he lives.

Every child deserves a childhood.

A future.

A fair chance.

That's why UNICEF is there.

For each and every child.

Working day in and day out.

In more than 190 countries and territories.

Reaching the hardest to reach.

The furthest from help.

The most excluded.

It's why we stay to the end.

And never give up.

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