



# ONE HEALTH NEWSLETTER

*"Improving Quality of Life through One Health"*

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## Sierra Leone One Health Platform Record High Scores - JEE Report



Participants at the JEE workshop

Sierra Leone's health indicator for 2022 has increased in the International Health Regulation (IHR) State Party Annual Report (SPAR). The performance of the country on the international health index was revealed at the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) workshop using the 3rd edition tool, conducted for Ministries Departments & Agencies (MDAs) together with partners on 26-27 January 2023 at Occasion Hotel, Lakka. Seventy-five participants attended the workshop with 50 from the government and 25 from development partners. The purpose was to develop the 2022 International Health Regulation (IHR) State Party Annual Report (SPAR) that assesses and determines the score for each of the 35 indicators in the revised SPAR tool.

The country has done very well under the One Health (OH) approach in consistently conducting SPAR every year. Good progress has been made in improving the SPAR scores in Sierra Leone over the years with the score for 2021 being 51% which was an improvement from 49% in 2020. The score has increased in certain indicators such as RCCE, surveillance, laboratory, etc., while more is needed to be done on legislation, gender equality, and some other indicators where the country scored low marks.

Sierra Leone is the first country in the African Region and the third country in the world to conduct the second round of the JEE using the 3rd Edition tool. The scores of the country demonstrated leadership, strong commitment, and confidence in the process on the part of the government. The country was commended for the tremendous success recorded over the past few years in the health sector, especially in the animal health sector, where Sierra Leone moved from 32% in 2018 to a 51% score rate in 2021.

SPAR is an important self-assessment report that shows progress in the implementation of International Health Regulations. The IHR (2005) represents an agreement between 196 countries including all WHO Member States to work together for Global Health Security. Through IHR, countries have agreed to build their capacities to prevent, detect, assess, report, and respond to public health events. The WHO plays the coordinating role in IHR and, together with its partners, helps countries to build capacities. IHR also includes specific measures at seaports, airports, and ground crossings to limit the spread of health risks to neighboring countries, and to prevent unwarranted travel and trade restrictions so that traffic and trade disruption is kept to a minimum

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The World Health Organization (WHO) supports Member States to develop and maintain core and additional capacities for the implementation of IHR and the Global Health Security Agenda through the whole of government multi-sectoral National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS). Sierra Leone conducted the first Joint External Evaluation (JEE) in September 2016 and subsequently developed the NAPHS (2018-2022). The term evaluation of the NAPHS revealed a 52 % activity implementation rate (at 3 and a half years) in June 2021, and the JEE Score Card for 2021 revealed a 51% score for both human health and animal health.

In a follow-up workshop, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS), Ministry of Health (MoH), and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) and other partners participated in a five-day JEE workshop from the 27 February to 3 March 2023 using the JEE 3rd Edition Tool at the Bintumani Hotel, Aberdeen, Freetown to measure the country-specific status and progress in developing the capacity to prevent, detect and rapidly respond to public health threats in Sierra Leone.

The workshop is a multi-sectoral approach with attendants of high-level delegates across Africa in the human, animal, environment, and security sectors. The event was wrapped up with site visits to the 34 Military Hospital, Connaught Hospital, the Public Health National Emergency Operation Centre (PHNEOC), Laboratory – CPHRL, Central Veterinary Lab Teko, UNIMAK, and Points of Entry - Kambia ground crossing and Lungi. The purpose was to confirm the status of IHR implementation at selected sites in partial fulfillment of the JEE mission.



participants during the JEE Evaluation meeting

During the field visit, 27 participants took part with 14 external evaluators, four development partners, and nine government officials. The teams were divided into four groups and two sites were assessed per group using the recommended JEE site visit process, which allowed the teams to measure progress on IHR implementation at the various sites and identify current IHR capacity, gaps, and needs. It also identifies the most urgent needs in the areas of agriculture, health, the environment, and trade to prioritize enhancing preparedness, operational readiness, response, and action to engage with the current and prospective donors, as well as partners including UN agencies, local and international non-governmental organization (NGOs) to target resources effectively.

## MAFS and ECOWAS Conduct Training on the Use of the National Pesticides Management Committee Portal

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security's Crop Protection Unit, in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), recently conducted a three-day national training workshop on the use of the National Pesticides Management Committee (NPMC) Portal of the West African Pesticides Management Integrated System (WAPMIS). The objective of the workshop was to boost pesticide inspection, control, and management using a scientific approach in the West Africa region. The training was provided to various national authorities involved in pesticides and their sustainability.

The NPMC's portal was also highlighted as a resource that can be utilized by sister countries in West Africa, including Sierra Leone. The Chief Agriculture Officer of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, Dr. Mohamed Ajuba Sheriff, expressed his utmost satisfaction with the workshop. He emphasized the significance of the Regional Harmonization Module in the livelihood and the government's prioritization of agriculture as its flagship program.

The Technical Secretary of the West African Pesticides Registration Committee (WAPRC), Ouedraogo Richard, elaborated on the operationalization of WAPRC and the Sahelian Pesticides Committee's framework, which is committed to the modernization of working tools and the platform for the life cycle of pesticides. The integrated system for pesticides management in West Africa is structured around five pillars called modules, with the implementation and operationalization of the NPMC module aimed at improving the inspection and control of pesticides by the Member States in accordance with provisions of the regional regulations on pesticide management.

The workshop provided a comprehensive understanding of the operations of WAPRC and the management of the portal. Recommendations were made, including the need for NPMC members to take ownership and ensure the successful functioning of the platform, consistency of representation to the NPMC, and the translation of tools from French to English by consultants. The consultants were also advised to consider recommendations from NPMC members regarding the improvement of the portal.



# EPA Celebrates World Environment Day With the Global Theme 'Beat Plastic Pollution'



Dr. Bondi Gevao, the Executive Chairman of EPA - SL speaking during the WED commemoration

In his remarks to stakeholders at the culmination of the five-day event, Dr. Bondi Gevao, the Executive Chairman of the Environment Protection Agency Sierra Leone (EPA - SL) made a plea for immediate sustainable action to be taken to address plastic pollution. He urged Sierra Leoneans to consider the harmful impacts of plastic waste and collaborate to find workable solutions. The Executive Chairman expressed the hope that the campaign will trigger pervasive discussions about proper waste disposal practices.

World Environment Day (WED) is celebrated every year on June 5th and this year, Sierra Leone joined the rest of the world in a weeklong celebration across the country. WED is the largest global platform for public environmental outreach and is celebrated by millions of people around the world yearly. It is a day set aside by the United Nations (UN) since 1973 to highlight pressing global environmental issues and seek urgent action to address them.

At the United Nations Environmental Assembly in Kenya last year, the issue of plastic pollution was raised, prompting a global discussion. This year, the global campaign theme for WED was "Beat Plastic Pollution," with the purpose of raising awareness of the threat plastic pollution poses to human and marine life. Plastic pollution affects all aspects of the One Health approach, including the environment, human and animal health, with many interactions occurring between them. For example, plastic waste on land eventually ends up in the ocean, where it breaks down and is consumed by marine life, which is further broken down and eventually ingested by humans. Plastic has become a hugely popular material since the 1950s due to its strength, durability, lightweight and affordability, making it a common sight in everyday life. However, this has led to a significant increase in plastic pollution across the planet with plastics being found in oceans, coastlines, and everywhere in the environment.

"Plastic pollution in our environment has become a menace, as evidenced by the pollution on our beaches. During rainfall, people often dispose of waste, including plastic into waterways which eventually finds its way into the ocean or clogs drainage systems, disrupting marine life and causing flooding", he highlighted. He concluded that the four-day initiative to collect plastic waste in the Capital City and at the Regional headquarter towns in Sierra Leone aimed to visually depict the problem of plastic waste in our surroundings.

Further, Holger Rommen, the European Union's Head of Rural Development and Infrastructure for Sierra Leone made a statement on the EU's efforts to combat the issue of plastic pollution. He revealed that the EU had enacted a legislative instrument in 2019 that prohibited the sale of certain plastic products with the aim of reducing their environmental impact. He also stated the EU's unwavering commitment to putting an end to plastic pollution by advocating for legally binding documents and prioritizing it within their circular economic action plan under the European Green Deal.

He also mentioned that "this year in Paris, the second session of the Inter-governmental Negotiation Committee was held with the objective of developing an internationally binding agreement on plastic pollution with the mandate to prepare a zero draft before the next session in November". He expressed his enthusiasm about this progress and urged people to keep an eye on the development.

Mr Rommen applauded the efforts of the EPA as a positive sign in the right direction and called on everyone to take swift action in protecting the environment. He concluded by saying; "we all need to work together, or we risk sinking the ship,"

James Sulaiman Fofanah, the Chief of Party of Breakthrough ACTION also made a statement and called for solutions for sustainable plastic waste management in the country. He emphasized the significance of the individual responsibility of Sierra Leoneans regarding their actions in plastic waste disposal. He urged everyone including students, traders, pedestrians, and the private sector to act toward the proper disposal of plastic waste. He added that this action is crucial to the elimination of plastic pollution from waterways and creating a cleaner and safer environment for everyone.



Left: James Sulaiman Fofanah, the Chief of Party for Breakthrough ACTION, and right: Dr. Bondi Gevao, the Executive Chairman of EPA - SL

Mr. Fofanah expressed optimism that with the unity of Sierra Leoneans, we can address this issue and build an environmentally friendly society. He closed his statement by saying "Individual action is crucial for cleaning up Freetown and its waterways from plastic pollution. Proper disposal of plastic waste is everyone's responsibility for a cleaner environment.

"Finally, the WED celebration was marked with a range of activities including a press conference, airing of jingles on this year's theme, and a statement from the then Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Prof. Foday Moriba Jaward. Radio and television programs were conducted, and a four-day plastic waste collection drive was completed in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and Kono districts respectively. The closing ceremony was held on Monday 5th June in front of the National Tourist Board and was attended by various stakeholders including heads of ministries, departments and agencies, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, diplomats, and Students.



Mrs Massaquoi, the Director of Public Relations and Inter-Sectorial Collaboration - EPA, with a team of volunteers collecting waste in Freetown



## EPA-SL Engages School Nature Clubs to Strengthen Environmental Education in the Western Area Urban

The Environment Protection Agency Sierra Leone (EPA-SL) has engaged six secondary schools with Inter-schools and debate competitions in Freetown on issues impacting the environment with the aim of stimulating their interest in environmental management and sustainability issues.

These senior secondary schools include Albert Academy, Ahmadiyya Muslim, FSSG, St Joseph Convent, Colligate, and Municipal. The schools were engaged during assemblies, educating the pupils on the realities of environmental challenges facing the environment in the country including climate change.

As a key function of EPA-SL, the Agency was raising awareness on issues affecting the environment and building the skills of school-going pupils with the requisite knowledge that inspires them to serve as environmental ambassadors. This discernible approach is used to transform the mindset of the pupils on the effectiveness of tree planting, waste management and disposal, and awareness raising on environmental protection within their respective schools and communities. The pupils' capacity was built to be able to play greater roles beyond the academic sphere in influencing their peer groups, parents, and communities in promoting best practices thereby achieving a sound and sustainable environment.

"Environmental education is not just about learning but comprehending the challenges in the environment", Ramatu Massaquoi said. Madam Massaquoi is the Deputy Director of Public Relations and Inter-sectorial Collaboration EPA-SL. She made this statement while addressing the School Nature Clubs and focal teachers highlighting issues confronting the planet Earth and therefore called on all Sierra Leoneans to adopt a behavioural change approach that mitigates the risk of climate change.

*"It is obvious that human inducements such as deforestation, carbon emission, improper waste management, etc, have posed serious health and environmental threats to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land)", she went on, highlighting that many efforts had been integrated to reduce the footprints of climate change in Sierra Leone and the wider world.*



Mrs Massaquoi , the Director of Public Relations and Inter-sectorial Collaboration - EPA, addressing pupils at Albert Academy.

The agency believed that effective public participation in environmental governance and management may not be easily attainable if members of the public lack the requisite understanding as to what environmental protection for sustainable development is all about. Hence the initiative to nurture school pupils and teach them to protect the environment. As the saying goes, 'Catch Them Young'. EPA-SL is using this approach to build the understanding of school pupils on the impact of human actions to the environment and the need to work together in achieving a sustainable environment, adequate for the well-being of all Sierra Leoneans.



# MoECC Calls for Popularization of the Sierra Leone Plastic and Plastic Waste Management Policy



The former minister of MoECC, Prof. Foday Jaward presenting the plastic policy to the World Bank visiting team.

He added that RUSLP also focused on resilience and sustainability of urban cities through urban planning and urban control that could have a major impact on the environment. He recognised the different components under RUSLP noting that the first component focused on strengthening capacity of key cities and for government to effectively plan and organize cities in a more sustainable way.

Mr. Reid continued that the second component was infrastructure, particularly on solid waste management and the new establishment of a new landfill to serve the Western area to enable upgrading activities in Freetown. He maintained that the component of disaster preparedness was supportive to the operational center of Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency National Water Resources Management, and National Disaster Management Agency.

He applauded the Ministry for securing approval of the Plastic Policy from Cabinet. He maintained that the policy itself laid out a strong framework for action and considered the critical aspect of making the policy noticeable to the public.

The former Minister of Environment and Climate Change (MoECC) Prof. M Jaward has called for the popularization of plastic policy in the country. He made the pronouncement during a visit by the World Bank team to his office when he was the minister of MoECC, "Plastic policy has been one of the main priorities for the Ministry", he disclosed. He reminisces his historic visit to Rwanda where he understudied the Rwandan plastic policy when he was head of EPA. He noted that the study focused on the successes, methodology, and challenges involved in developing the plastic policy in that country. He explained that it took the Rwandans 14 years to have a strong policy on plastic. Dr Jaward highlighted the achievement of Rwanda, which necessitated his action to develop a plastic policy for Sierra Leone.

"Single-use plastic waste is a menace in our environment", the Prof. mentioned, adding that it has become one of the most popular resources in the modern world due to its low cost, durability, lightness, and easy production. He noted that single-use plastics are produced globally and are designed to be disposed of after being used for the first time. "Disposals could accumulate either in the soil or underneath, in the oceans thereby leading to plastic pollution, and a contributing factor to flooding", he said.

The Professor referenced the Draft 2019 Plastic Waste Policy that was disapproved by the cabinet due to a lack of stakeholder engagement and a proper implementation strategy. He emphasized that the purpose of the said policy was to eliminate plastic pollution and not to ban plastics. He alluded to the traditional practices of plastic usage that revolved around production, usage, and disposal. He called for new added value to be incorporated notably, recycling and manufacturing components to support economic growth.

Prof. Jaward noted that the Sierra Leone public is gullible to the issues of plastic use. "We need to inform and educate the public that the policy does not seek to ban plastics but to eliminate the single-use plastic", he affirmed. Consequently, he said that single-use plastics are impacting the marine ecology negatively, emphasizing popularisation of the policy across the country, and submitting printed copies to relevant MDAs, development partners, the private sector, civil society organizations, and the media.

He said the policy should be legally binding and ensuring compliant. Ministry is determined for it to become a law to serve as a deterrent to stop plastic menace in the country. He commended the World Bank and the Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project (RUSLP) for supporting the government in having a strong policy that supports economic growth and environmental sustainability. In short, "We have to reengage to popularize the policy", he concluded.

Explaining the purpose of the visit to the then Minister of Environment and Climate Change, the Task Team Lead from the World Bank, Robert Reid said that RUSLP generally focused on sustainability, resilience, and the Ministry's mandate on the preservation of the environment.



The World Bank visiting team in a meeting with the former minister at the MoECC conference room.

In addition to this, the team lead underscored the relevance of moving the policy in the right direction through continuous dialogue with multi-sectorial and multi-stakeholder levels including the private sector, service providers, and civil society organizations. The Task Team Lead confirmed that the policy set out good proposals that identified some of the few key recyclers and operators in the plastic sector. He furthered that these proposals sought the development of a platform that could help to profile key informal and formal actors and empower them to do more on environmental sustainability from manufacturers to recyclers to the end users.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), only 9% of the 9 billion tons of plastic produced are recycled, and when not recycled, they end up in land fields, dumps, and sometimes ingested by animals, clustered in drainages leading to flooding. Eighty percent of environmental wastes found in drainages had a potential impact on human and animal health.



The Paramount Chiefs and other participants during the meeting in Makeni

Africa CDC has conducted a training of trainers workshop on Event Base Surveillance (EBS) and the adaptation of the Africa CDC framework and formation of a priority zoonotic diseases list for Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in five days of training, on the 5 – 9 June 2023 at Sierra Palm Hotel, Lumley Beach, Freetown. Fifty participants, from the Technical Working Group members to national stakeholders attended, using the One Health approach. Participants were drawn from EPA, Wildlife, MAF {Plants, Animal}, 117 call centers, Risk Communication, POE, EPR, EPI, PHC, National Surveillance, and EBS Analyst including development partners like USCDC, WHO, IFRC, AFENET, IFRC & Metabiota, ICAP, and Jhpiego.

The purpose of the training workshop was to build the capacity of National Officers on EBS, using the Africa CDC manual to adapt the Africa CDC framework on EBS, to identify the priority disease list for EBS in the Sierra Leone context, and to form a functioning OH TWG on Event Base Surveillance.

Event-based surveillance is the organized and rapid capture of information about events that are a potential risk to public health. This information can be rumors and other ad-hoc reports transmitted. Public health surveillance is the ongoing systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of health data. Through public health surveillance, various broad disease control and prevention objectives have been attained, e.g., disease eradication, elimination, etc. Event-based surveillance is a system designed to look at reports, stories, rumors, and other information about health events that could be of serious risk to public health. It is used as an early warning system of epidemic diseases or diseases that are of public health concern. After the Ebola outbreak, the EBS was introduced through the IDSR and IBS systems. The EBS was not actively implemented because of the capacity gap. The coming of the COVID-19 pandemic was an eye-opener to its activation, hence the need for the Training of Trainers workshop.

In 2021, the US-CDC and WHO did a crash course on event-based surveillance and epidemic intelligence for open source, as a means of picking early warning signals and events that will be of potential public health threat. Event-based surveillance is also a requirement set out in the assessment tool for Joint External Evaluation (JEE) of national capacities for public health security

On February 16, a one-day orientation meeting was held at the Bombali District Council Hall in Makeni to increase the coverage of COVID-19 vaccination in the country. Fifty-three Paramount Chiefs (PCs) from the North, Northwest, and Eastern Regions of Bombali, Kono, Tonkolili, Koinadugu, Falaba, Karene, and Port Loko districts attended the meeting.

The Government of Sierra Leone, in conjunction with the Health Education Programme and the Child Health/Expanded Programme on Immunization in the Ministry of Health organized the orientation meeting. The Ministry of Local Government and the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society provided additional support through the Africa CDC Saving Lives and Livelihoods project.

Dr. A.J Mo'osa, the Deputy Director of DHSE, addressed the Paramount Chiefs regarding the COVID-19 vaccine uptake. He expressed concern about the low vaccination rates in some chiefdoms and asked for their help to improve coverage equally across the country. He emphasized the importance of community ownership in improving vaccination rates and invited the chiefs from low-coverage areas to the meeting for this reason. As leaders and custodians of their people and communities, their support is critical in achieving equitable coverage.

Speaking on behalf of his colleagues, the Paramount Chief of Gbanti Chiefdom, P.C. Yelli Ntham III made commitments that they will work with their subjects to ensure that they increase the uptake of the COVID-19 Vaccine "Using the IEC materials shared, we will cascade the information and ensuring that people adhere to COVID-19 key messages and willingly accept the COVID-19 vaccine to increase the coverage on COVID-19 vaccination", the Paramount Chief stated, ending that irrespective of the localities they will disseminate the key messages and visibility of the COVID 19 vaccine and vaccination.

Sierra Leone recorded the first COVID-19 case on March 31, 2020. The President of Sierra Leone, Rtd Brigadier Dr. Julius Maada Bio, received the first dose of the COVID-19 Vaccine on March 15, 2021, which marked the beginning of the vaccine rollout in the country. To encourage more people to get vaccinated, the government introduced monthly surges to vaccinate 70% of the population by the end of 2022. As of 13, September, 2022 the country has achieved 61% (3,034,524) coverage with at least one dose among the population targeted for vaccination. Of this number, 47.4% (1,437,055) are males, 52.60% (1,597,469) are females, and 46.9% (2,333,578) have completed their vaccination.

### Fifty-three Paramount Chiefs Convene to Strengthen the Implementation of Measures Against Covid-19 Vaccine



The Deputy Director of DHSE, Dr. A.J Mo'osa addressing the Paramount Chiefs



# Sierra Leone One Health RCCE Pillar Leads Attend West Africa One Health Meeting to Foster Multi-sectorial Collaboration

Asst. Director, Public Relations and Inter-sectorial Collaboration, EPA-SL Madam Fatmata Bakarr-Sesay; RCCE Pillar Lead, Mr. Harold Thomas and Deputy Patrick Lansana at a regional RCCE capacity building meeting in Praia, Cape Verde to expand the ECOWAS Regional network of RCCE to the environmental, human and animal health sectors.



To foster collaboration and build the capacity of the Risk Communication and Community Engagement One Health Technical Working Group (OH RCCETWG) country team, the West African Health Organization (WAHO) with financial support from the African Development Bank and through its Regional Center for Surveillance and Diseases Control organized a three day regional workshop between 13 - 15 June 2023 in Praia, Cape Verde. The three-day workshop aimed to establish and make functional the regional RCCE Technical Working Group

The meeting brought together the RCCE experts from all sectors in the West African region, and provided technical expertise responsible for coordinating the RCCE One Health strategy in the ECOWAS region.

#### OBJECTIVES:

1. Promote the implementation of RCCE systems that facilitate and coordinate community engagement before, during, and after an event as part of the One Health initiative.
2. Train RCCE officers on the impact of zoonotic diseases on public health and the essential role of RCCE in their control.
3. Sharing of experiences of member states that have established RCCE technical working groups based on the One Health initiative: processes, successes, challenges, and lessons learned.



# EPA Engages Communities on the Impact of Deforestation

Deforested land in the east of Sierra Leone



These groups are organized to promote community participation in the protection and sustainable management of the environment. For example, Jojoima town in Malema Chiefdom, Kailahun District is one of the communities that has benefited from the structure setup, and in one of the sensitization engagements with the environmental committees.

Haja Alice Ngevao expressed delight that her community was chosen by the Agency to participate in the protection of the environment in the district. She elucidated that she has realized the adverse impact of slash and burn farming methods, and noted that deforestation has been a challenge as the community forest which had been preserved for years was exhausted due to their activities. With the knowledge acquired from EPA during the engagement sessions, she encouraged other farmers to embark on Inland Valley Swamp (IVS), which she said would lead to more agricultural yield and required less labor. She pleaded with the people to unite against deforestation and adopt best environmental forest management practices.

In an engagement with Jojoima Community, Kailahun District, the Environment Protection Agency Sierra Leone (EPA-SL) has warned that the massive removal of forest cover through anthropogenic activities is threatening human life in the country. The Agency cited slash and burn farming, charcoal production, illicit mining and logging and related factors as rife, thus, presenting a compelling challenge in the fight against climate change. The unprecedented cutting of trees poses an existential threat to human existence.

Sierra Leone is endowed with abundant natural resources yet our approach to nature has been brutish leading to serious environmental degradation. The persistent obliteration of the Sierra Leone natural resources equates to the deliberate destruction of life supporting systems in our ecosystems. Forests which should be preserved and/or utilized sustainably for human existence and for carbon sink are being destroyed at an alarming rate resulting in massive deforestation.

Deforestation reduces carbon sequestration and releases carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere which results in global warming and affects weather patterns. These long term changes in weather patterns, termed climate change impact the globe by causing droughts, floods, cyclones and heat waves.

This disrupts the normal balance in ecosystems and reduces agricultural productivity. Mechanized agriculture and mining activities have environmental management systems and are regulated by law unlike the illicit mining which affects the biodiversity of the ecosystem.

EPA regional staff in an engagement meeting with Jojoima Community in Kailahun District on the impact of deforestation.



Finally, the Regional EPA Manager, Eastern Region, Emmanuel During reminded stakeholders in attendance about the loss of biodiversity which was as a result of deforestation and the destruction of animal habitats. He added that, the combined impacts of deforestation driven by human activities have led to widespread environmental degradation. He further stated that, efforts in sustaining public environmental awareness and the National Tree Planting Program should be maintained through the promotion of community ownership which aims at ensuring effective management of forests and restoration of degraded areas.



Community mobilizers, together with the Breakthrough ACTION lead, John Koroma after the training at Waterloo.

The One Health Risk Communication and Community Engagement (OH RCCE) with support from Breakthrough ACTION has launched an awareness-raising campaign on dog bites and rabies in the Western Rural and Moyamba districts. The campaign was aimed at promoting the prevention of dog bites, seeking immediate care, promoting referral, and reporting dog bites and rabies. In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Environment Protection Agency, and the Ministry of Health, Breakthrough ACTION identified and trained community outreach groups in the two districts to roll out the campaign for four months.

Research indicated that rabies is one of the highest-ranked priority zoonotic diseases in Sierra Leone, yet the human rabies vaccine is not widely available or affordable for most citizens. Once symptoms of rabies develop and start to show in a person, it is unlikely that the person will survive. That makes stopping dog bites the best way to prevent rabies. Research evidence from the Western Area Urban District has also shown that correct knowledge about rabies is limited, including its causes, symptoms, prevention, and reporting of dog bites. It is also evident that misconceptions are common, including among health workers, which the campaign sought to address

Building on the success of the last campaign and community engagement efforts in Western Area Urban, the organization has further supported the OH RCCE TWG at the national level to expand community engagement in the selected districts. The scale-up aimed at stopping dog bites, which could also help to stop rabies through community engagement, messaging, and promoting behaviors.

Pa Alimamy Kargbo, the chief of Rogbanga Community highlighted the many dog bites his community was experiencing before the campaign activities. "Dog bite was alarming in my community, but since sensitization on dog bites and rabies began, it has dropped drastically", he commended.

The chief pointed out the community measures he has put in place to address the problem. "Having acquired the knowledge, I called a meeting and we introduced bylaws around the ownership and control of dogs", the chief of the Rogbanga Community said. "Every dog is now under control in my community", he went on, explaining that the community has a team of volunteer youth that investigate the ownership of any dog they saw in the street without control. "We will call those owners to strictly warn them of chaining their dogs and sometimes fine them for negligence", the chief noted.



Representatives of the persons with disabilities communities join the mobilization for the dog bites and rabies campaign in the Western Area Urban

Mariama Bah, a resident of Rogbanga shared her experiences on the knowledge she had acquired with the community mobilizers during the engagement sessions. She also spoke of the community measures put in place for the control of dogs in the Rogbanga community. "The chief announced through the youths that anyone who owns a dog should take good care of it", she said, "You hardly see a dog running around the community without an owner", Mariama went on, continued that with the bylaws introduced every dog owner were urged to control their dogs.



# SPECIAL FOCUS ON ANTHRAX DISEASE

## Breakthrough ACTION Provides Support to the Bombali District OH RCCE to Increase Awareness About Anthrax Disease

Breakthrough ACTION provided support to the Bombali District One Health Risk Communication and Community Engagement (OH RCCE) team to prevent the spread of Anthrax disease in Bombali and other areas of the country. The outbreak occurred on March 24, 2023, at Alimu Ranch, located between the Fullah Town One catchment facility and the Yakainssa catchment facility. The OH RCCE team in Bombali took prompt action to increase awareness and engage with the affected communities to prevent the disease from spreading beyond a single chiefdom. The OH RCCE pillar is responsible for supporting preparedness and response efforts to health threats and emergencies in the country, using communication and community engagement.

### Orientation Meetings with District Stakeholders



The Bombali District Social Mob. lead, Mr. Conteh, leading on an anthrax training

On the 12th and 13th of May 2023, the Bombali District OH RCCE team held meetings with 140 stakeholders in the district as part of their mitigation strategy. On the first day, Paramount chiefs, butchers, animal rearers, traditional healers, security officials, civil society organizations, and the media attended the awareness-raising meeting and on the second day, religious leaders, drawn across the twelve chiefdoms in the district attended. The meeting was to raise awareness among stakeholders of Anthrax on the mode of transmission, signs and symptoms, risk factors, prevention, and control measures aimed at disseminating accurate and consistent messages on the disease.

In public health emergencies, the management of rumors and misinformation is critical to breaking the chain of the disease. The dissemination of information and getting stakeholders' buy-in as agents rather than victims are key to reporting. During the engagement meetings, their roles and responsibilities were explained to them.

The Paramount Chief of Gbanti Chiefdom, P.C. Yelli Ntham III applauded the meeting as timely, with a commitment to work with other stakeholders in confronting the sick at the locations of the outbreak. "I am calling on colleagues paramount chiefs to call communities and institute bylaws", the Paramount said in determination to beat the spread, highlighting 'no butchering and eating of dead animals, no killing and butchering of animals without examination and permission from the ONS, reporting all cases of animals killed to either the community authorities or MAFS immediately'. The PC called on the cattle rearers to comply with the bylaws.

At the end of the orientation meeting, participants accepted the disease and identified themselves as critical players in the fight to mitigate the spread in their communities. They identified the problems, key actors in the chain of transmission, and actions to break the chain. The Police Health Sister in Bombali District who represented the AIG North in the meeting called on the cattle rearers not to show resistance in reporting sick or dead animals to MAFS and the nearest health facility. "If we begin to experience or see any signs and symptoms of anthrax either in animals or humans, it is the responsibility of every one of us to report to the nearest health facility regardless of who is involved", she said. The Chairperson of Cattle Rearers- Bombali District assured fellow stakeholders of their prompt action of immediate reporting of any sick, dead, or any signs and symptoms of anthrax in animals.

### Social Mobilization and Community Engagement with Comedians



Local comedians in Bombali, engaging one of the affected communities in Makarie chiefdom.

MAKENI PROFESSIONAL COMEDIANS (MPC) group in their stage names Marco, Sana, and M'balu with support from the OH RCCE team, led the social mobilization and community engagement activities at the identified hot spot communities in Makarie Chiefdom for 10 active days, started on the 11th of May 2023. The communities include Makoth, Lungi Acre, Fullah Town 1, Madrissa, Makeni, Tima, Maronko, Rocompound, Roketha, Barray Line, Worreh Yeama, Gbom Tarawally, Romarro community, Chain Sanfa, Barray Curr, Worreh Mankry, Worreh Tabai and Roketha.

Mounting a PA system at the back of a pick car, the comedian group performed drama in the form of a role play with humor and dancing sending messages on case definition, signs and symptoms, mode of transmission, prevention, and control of Anthrax disease. The comedians capture the attention of their audiences through the Anthrax jingle, which gave general information on the disease and community action to reduce the risk of spread. They also do role play and message dissemination in the form of a drama.

The audience ask questions or raised concerns about the Anthrax disease. The district OH RCCE team addressed key issues on rumour management during the engagement in which 959 males and 772 females were directly reached with social behavioral change messages.

### Anthrax – A Recurring Public Health Risk in Sierra Leone

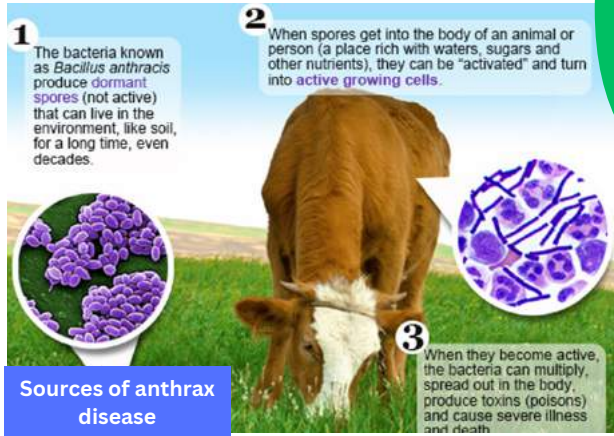
Sierra Leone has been responding to various public health emergencies in recent times, from the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in 2014 to the COVID-19 pandemic, Marburg Virus Disease (MVD), polio, and other diseases, of which Anthrax has been a common public health occurrence of importance to human and animal health.

In April 2022, Sierra Leone responded to an Anthrax outbreak in the Port Loko district, north of the country with 304 confirmed animal cases and 6 confirmed human cases. Four districts (Port Loko, Karene, Western Area Urban, and Kailahun) were affected by the anthrax outbreak. On 24 March, 2023, another outbreak in Bombali, and on July 6, 2023, 36 cows were found dead at Kelima Bendu Town in neighbouring Liberia, suspected to be Anthrax, 4 miles from the Kailahun district border. In a Press Release dated July 17, 2023, the government of Sierra Leone instituted several preventive measures which include, a temporary ban on the movement of cattle, sheep, and goats along the Liberia-Sierra Leone border, prohibited the entrance of meat and meat products between the two countries, step up surveillance activities, etc.



A Black skin sore, a typical sign of anthrax in humans.

# Anthrax disease



Sources of anthrax disease

Anthrax is caused by bacteria known as *Bacillus anthracis*. Anthrax sickness in people and animals ranges from not too serious to serious, and even death. Humans can get anthrax from an animal in two ways. One way is through an opening in the skin, like a cut, scrape, or sore. Another way is through the mouth by eating or drinking something with anthrax or by touching something that has anthrax and then touching your mouth.

Humans get infected with the disease when they come in direct contact with infected animals or contaminated animal products. If a person sick with anthrax does not get early treatment, the sickness can get worse, leading to death. Anthrax through the skin is the most common type in people. An itchy bump that looks like an insect bite quickly changes into a painless sore with a black center. Most times it is on the face, neck, arms, or hands or swelling around the sore.....

Anthrax is naturally present in the soil, where it can survive for many years. Anthrax can also live on the wool or hair of an animal with anthrax. It is mostly found in grazing animals including sheep, cattle, horses, and goats.

## Protecting Against Anthrax



Anthrax in animal

The best form of protection is by avoiding direct contact with sick and dead animals. It is safe to avoid animals that look sick, and animals found dead. Do not touch or butcher sick and dead animals. For the safety and security of yourself and your family, call Community Animal Health Worker (CAHW), Community Health Worker (CHW), Environmental Officer, traditional healer, religious leader, or chief for immediate advice. Animals are an important food source. To keep healthy, it is important to never prepare, eat, sell, or give away an animal that looks sick or found dead. Sick animals and animals found dead can quickly spread the Anthrax disease.

# Over the death of 36 Cattle in Liberia, the One Health National Rapid Response deploys Investigation Team in the Border

National Rapid Response Teams from One Health were dispatched to the districts of Kailahun, Kenema, and Pujehun to conduct a thorough investigation into the recent occurrence of 36 cattle deaths in neighboring Liberia.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) in Liberia has reported that thirty-six dead cattle were found in Kelima Bendu town, located in the Foyah District in Lofa County on July 7th, 2023. The MoA's Field Office in Lofa County provided this information. Kelima Bendu is located 296 kilometers away from Monrovia, Liberia's capital, and is situated 10 km and 16 km away from the neighboring Republics of Sierra Leone and Guinea, respectively. At this time, it is uncertain what impact this discovery will have on Sierra Leone.

A Rapid Response Team was formed with the help of the Africa Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) to conduct a rapid risk assessment in Kailahun, Kenema, and Pujehun districts. The team aimed to investigate possible Anthrax spillover affecting domestic animals, assess surveillance systems, evaluate awareness, and identify gaps. They met with local authorities, visited communities and health facilities, and conducted community engagement activities. The Ministry of Agriculture in Liberia later confirmed that no infectious animal-to-human diseases were found in laboratory examinations of 36 dead cattle, which were attributed to severe lightning strikes.



# Vice President Launches UHPR



The Minister of Health, Dr. Demby, making a statement during the launch of the Universal Health Preparedness Review.

In a bid to enhance an effective health emergencies system in Sierra Leone, the Honorable Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone Dr. Juldeh Jalloh officially launched the Universal Health Preparedness Review (UHPR) on the 4th May 2023 at the Bintumani Main Conference Hall Aberdeen, Freetown. The vice president expressed the government commitment to the UPR and the establishment of the National Public Health Agency.

Together with a high delegation from the WHO, the Sierra Leone Health Ministry announced the launch. As the first country in West Africa to pilot this process, Sierra Leone is better placed to respond to health emergencies. With the launch of the Universal Health and Preparedness Review, the country is well-positioned to prevent, prepare, and respond to disease outbreaks. Ensuring that the devastations of Ebola will never repeat itself.

## MOH and Partners Celebrate Hand Hygiene Day



Participants during the Hand Hygiene Day celebration

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation in collaboration with the World Health Organization celebrated the Hand Hygiene Day on 5th May 2023 at EOC Wilkinson Road. With the theme 'Accelerate Action Together.

“Proper hand hygiene prevents infections and slows the spread of antimicrobial resistance”, Dr. Alieu Wurie, DCMO - Public Health said.



**MoECC Launches the Establishment of Nursery Production and Planting of Trees; with key interest to show the government's commitment to improve on ecosystem services through agroforestry plantations**

The former minister of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Prof. Foday M. Jaward launched the establishment of nursery production and planting of trees in Mokassie village, Moyamba District when he was in the office. In attendance were local chiefs, women, youths, and school-going pupils. The launching ceremony for the establishment of nursery production and planting of trees under the National Resource Management (NRM) portfolio is implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change with support from UNDP.

Addressing the community stakeholders, the then Minister of the Environment and Climate Change said that climate change is real and further entreated the community people to consider its impacts on the environment. He noted the impact of climate change on the environment which was a result of the accumulation of greenhouse gases in the environment.

He affirmed there are four critical areas relevant for the protection of the environment notably, environmental governance, ecosystem conservation, environmental protection, and environmental education. He maintained that the ministry has successfully revised six pieces of legislation that have been enacted by Parliament to ensure that the environment is protected for everyone.

Prof. Jaward referenced the national tree planting project, noting that the ministry plans to plant five million trees by the end of 2023. He confirmed that 2.8 million have already been planted nationwide with 2.2 million remaining. He said that the tree-planting project is fully funded by the Government of Sierra Leone, where he disclosed that the government was seeking funds from donor partners to plant additional trees hence, the support from UNDP under the NRM portfolio. He maintained that the launch of the project showed the government's commitment to reduce carbon emissions and to strengthen climate change resilience.

The former minister emphasized that the project would be a community base with a clear cut of community ownership. He continued that the community people would primarily manage the project to sustain their livelihood. He said the establishment of nursery production would have a mix of economic trees and ecological trees.

He noted that people need to be educated on the indiscriminate cutting of mangroves in coastline communities and the degrading of the forests in protected areas



Sample of the nursery tree in the field at Makassie in Moyamba District

Prof. Jaward stated that the ministry has embarked on lots of environmental education and awareness-raising programs through the print and electronic media. He confirmed that the government has put measures in place to inculcate environmental studies in the school systems for pupils to learn about tree planting and climate change issues.

During the launching, the UNDP Project Coordinator at the Ministry, Andrew Katta gave a brief purpose of the NRM portfolio project, noting that it is one of the UNDP portfolios that encompassed biodiversity conservation for local communities. He said that the Minister of Environment and Climate Change has been coordinating all NRM portfolios that are being implemented by Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). He affirmed that the visit of Prof. Jaward to launch the project was timely and relevant to improve upon agroforestry plantations for the people of Mokassie village.

The Coordinator of the Kpangba Forest Management Committee, Emmanuel G. Alie intimated that the launching of the establishment of nursery production and planting of trees under the National Resource Management (NRM) portfolio would be a remarkable legacy for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change. He noted that the project would lure in employment and economic benefit for the people of Mokassies village. He stated that the project sought the protect the environment through sustainable agroforestry plantations in the Moyamba District. He said the people of Mokassie village would realize potential benefits from the project in years to come. He thanked UNDP for funding the project and the Ministry for implementing the project.

Meanwhile, members of the Kpangba Forest Management Committee were introduced to the minister as the designated group that would carry out the agroforestry planting exercise. This was followed by a symbolic planting of nursery seed by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change to use the tree-based model for adaptation and mitigation.



The former minister of MoECC together with of participants.



## Environment Protection Agency Intensifies Raids on Dredge Mining and Destroys 80 Dredges during Special Operations



The EPA field operation team in readiness for the dredge operation.

According to the EPA the high rate at which dredge mining is being carried out on the Sierra Leone rivers is alarming, and if robust actions are not taken soon, the country will suffer devastating effects in the near future. The EPA has therefore stepped up efforts to confront the problem.

Dredge mining is the act of removing silt and other materials from the bottom of bodies of water using suction dredges with a nozzle deep down the waterways. A placer deposit is also used in a natural watercourse or an ancient river channel. Dredge mining damages the ecology by directly affecting its physical habitat, disrupting riverine processes, and reducing the connectivity with the floodplain. Dredge mining also contaminates water sources thereby causing huge problems for communities that depend on these rivers downstream.

As the menace of dredge mining continues, the Executive Chairman of the EPA-SL, Dr. Bondi Gevao through the approval of the Board and Management of the Agency procured

two high speed Jetskies to patrol within the water and chase out these illegal miners away. Before the procurement of the high-speed Jetskies, the illegal miners had been working away from the EPA Field Operations Officers and easily maneuvered their way to locations deeper into the rivers that were hard for Sierra Leone security forces to penetrate. With the presence of these Jetskies, the agency is now chasing the illegal miners away from the Sierra Leone waterways.

To enhance operations, the agency hired the services of technical personnel to train a dedicated special team for the agency to conduct raids on illegal mining operations.



The EPA field operation team at the river during the operation

Like the US Special Forces and Navy SEALs, this dedicated team of the agency swims, surf and dive to intercept all illegal dredges operating in Sierra Leone water and destroy/burn them.

Within a duration of three weeks starting from 7-26 August 2023, the special team of the EPA-SL has burnt down many dredges. The operation was conducted in close collaboration with the Sierra Leone Police started in Boajibu in the Sewa River in the Kenema District and slightly stretched to Sumbuya Town in the Bo District where a significant number of dredges were destroyed. The agency is acting on a June 2021 Presidential Directive to curb all illegal dredge mining activities on the country’s waterways.

The special operation is aimed at destroying all illegal dredges and if possible, arresting any local and foreign national engaged in the activity.

The EPA team is engaged in active operations in the waterways, from the Sewa, Tia, and Jong Rivers in the South, and the Pampana River in the north where the team successfully destroyed 20 dredges in one location. As the crackdown on illegal mining activities continues, as of 17, August 2023, the team has successfully burnt down or destroyed 80 dredges across the country in the east, south, and north.

Over the course of the operation, EPA investigations have found that additional activities are going on at dredge mining sites. To make matters worse, the investigation team found illicit drugs and other paraphernalia that are of high risk to the country’s national security.

Another challenge encountered during the operation was the connivance of some community members with the miners. In some instances, a community member would serve as an informant using motorbikes and mobile phones to communicate with them and provide them warning of EPA officials. For example, in Yele in the Gbonnkolenken Chiefdom, the team could have captured most foreign nationals, but they ran away after being tipped off.



A dredge recently destroyed by the team during an operation

The crack-down on the illegal mining had received a commendation from many environmental advocates and on social media platforms with requests to add more efforts in curbing dredge mining from the country's waterways. The Chief Minister, Dr. David Moinina Sengh had already appreciated the efforts of the EPA and its leadership in ensuring that the environment is protected from all man-made disturbances. “This operation is not going to stop, as long as the dredge miners do not stop, we are not going to stop our operations”, Dr. Gevao, confirmed.



# PICTURE NEWS



The Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Health concluded the Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP), graduating the 13th Cohort of 13 participants for the frontline program at the Hub Hotel, Spur Road, Freetown.



MAFS and ECOWAS conduct training on the use of the national pesticides management committee portal.



Stakeholder engagement meeting on anthrax at the SLTU Hall in Makeni.

# PICTURE NEWS



Acting Director of Environmental Emergency, Lahai Samba Keita on field assessment at Cannaught Hospital in the company of the Care Manager in a effort to refute the social media outburst on flash flood that occurred at the hospital at the hospital.



Asst. Director, Public Relations and Intersectoral Collaboration, EPA-SL Madam Fatmata Bakarr-Sesay; RCCE Pillar Lead, Mr. Harold Thomas and Deputy Patrick Lansana at a regional RCCE in capacity building meeting in Praia, Cape Verde to expand the ECOWAS Regional Network of RCCE to the environmental, human and animal health sectors.



EPA officials and partners in Bo, in an awareness raising campaign on plastic pollution during the 2023 WED celebration.



# PICTURE NEWS



EPA Regional Manager North, Joseph Gbassa making a statement in an ESHIA public disclosure meeting of Belamer Mining Company Limited in Matotoka, Tonkolili District.



EPA Officials Kenema conducting audit exercise on the operation of Sierra Diamond in Tongo.



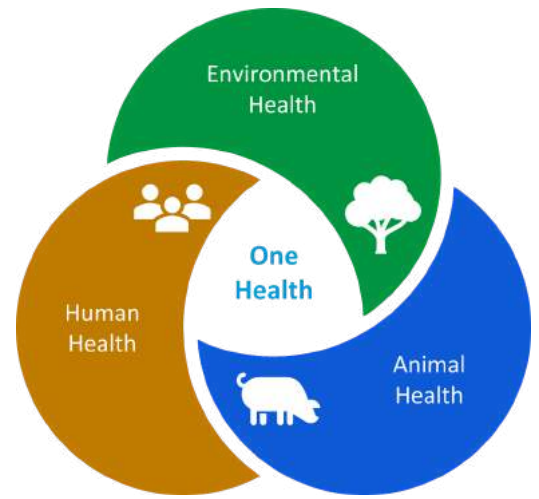
EPA Officials in Kono District carrying monitoring on the operations of Koidu Limited.

# ABOUT ONE HEALTH

'One Health' refers to the collaboration of multiple disciplines and sectors working locally, nationally, and globally to attain optimal health for people, animals, and the environment. One Health offers the opportunity to acknowledge shared interests, set common goals, and drive toward teamwork to benefit the overall health of a nation. The complex links between human, animal, and environmental health require coordinated multidisciplinary and multipronged collaboration to address the threats from zoonotic diseases.

The One Health approach drives innovations that are important to address emerging, re-emerging, and endemic health problems of public health concerns. It also offers synergy across systems, resulting in improved communication, evidence-based solutions, development of a new generation of systems-thinkers, improved surveillance, decreased lag time in response, and improved health and economic savings.

Considering the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone during 2014-2016 and other zoonotic diseases, political commitment led to the establishment of the National One Health Platform in 2019, followed by the development of the National Strategic Plan for One Health.



Several factors have enabled the One Health implementation in Sierra Leone including an elaborate National One Health Platform, collaboration between human animal, and environmental health sectors as well as the security sector, existing rapid response teams, national academic partnerships willing to look more broadly than at a single disease or population, and relative equity between female and male health professionals.

The One Health approach can be done as an integrated, unifying approach that aims to sustainably balance and optimize the health of people, animals, and ecosystems – which is key to addressing zoonotic public health threats, environmental issues, and neglected tropical diseases.

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**RABIES is a very serious sickness.**  
Both animals and people can get rabies.  
Almost everyone who gets rabies gets it from the bite of a dog that has rabies.

**TO STOP DOG BITES:**

- Do not disturb dogs — especially when they are sleeping, eating, or with their young.
- Take your time — when passing or entering where a dog lives.
- If you see a dog that is acting strange or looks sick — stay away and call an animal health worker, community health worker, or 117 for advice.

**IF A DOG BITES YOU:**

- Wash the bite right away with soap and water 20 times.
- Then go quickly to the hospital.

**STOPPING DOG BITES HELPS STOP RABIES.**

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**The One Health Platform  
Ministry of Health and Sanitation  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry  
Environment Protection Agency**

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