



CHURCH PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

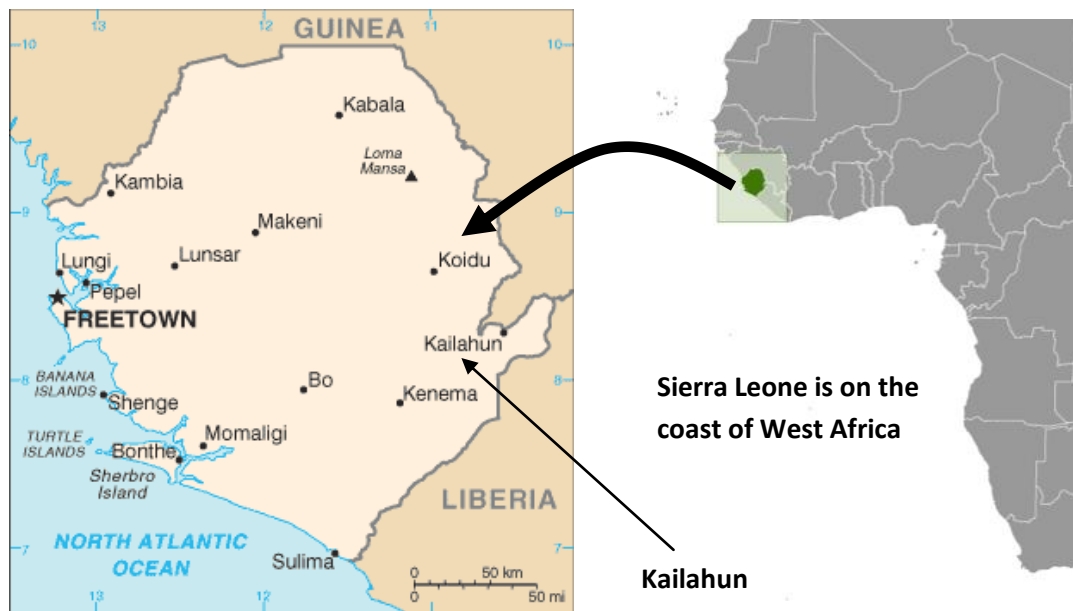
Sierra Leone Health project news

The September Circuit meeting confirmed the decision to support a Christian Aid project in Sierra Leone during 2012. This is similar to the Burkina Faso project in that for every £1 we raise a further £3 will be added from EU funds.

Christian Aid tell us that "this exciting new initiative is seeking to improve the quality of emergency care services to communities located close to Sierra Leone's eastern border in the Kailahun District.

Sierra Leone is one of the least developed countries in the world and the quality of health care available to most people is very poor. It has one of the highest maternal and child mortality rates, and over 60% of the population is illiterate.

Although the government established a health care system shortly after the end of the civil war in 2003, little has been done to develop medical services in rural areas like Kailahun, one of the regions worst hit by the war.



Women and girls in particular continue to suffer from lack of access to education, training and health services. They remain the most impoverished and vulnerable members of society.

Through this project, two Christian Aid partners, the Methodist Church of Sierra Leone and SEND-West Africa, are working with local institutions and communities to increase the quality of care offered to mothers and babies at two local hospitals and more generally improve health services in the area.

Work is already underway. A baseline survey of health services has been completed and a local theatre group is working on a short drama to communicate the aims of the project to local communities.

We can make a real difference to the health care available to women and children in Kailahun by joining the recently launched health partnership project.

Sierra Leone's rainy season (which lasts from May to October) should have come to an end by now. Kailahun feels its effects more than most areas of the country. Here it is also known as 'the hungry season', as the already limited supply of foods dwindles, and farming becomes near impossible, meaning that malnutrition rates soar; yet another strain placed on families, communities and local health services.

Even though Kailahun is a hugely fertile area, with the potential to not only feed itself but also much of the country, agriculture is a relatively minimal activity, with most people tending smallholdings to supply food for themselves. Previous government promises to invest in the sector have been slow to materialize, though a major new World Bank agriculture project in West Africa is bringing hope of this changing. But greater challenges also exist, such as the problem of accessing markets, even if enough food was being produced for it to be worth selling. Road quality is very poor, and it takes at least four hours to reach the nearest major city, Kenema. (We were told that on one day in this region, the roads were so poor that one group took eight hours to travel just 120 miles.)

Local and national elections are due to take place in the second half of 2012. These have the potential to cement in place the progress that the country has made since the end of the war, but there are also tensions in areas like Kailahun. Government promises on areas such as economic growth and youth unemployment are yet to deliver significant progress, presenting a potential for conflict. The elections also have a tendency to draw MPs and councillors' minds away from their daily business and towards the process of re-election, and our partners' projects will face a challenge in maintaining support.

The health project, though at an early stage, is built on very strong foundations, and is already starting to make significant inroads in the District. The local implementing partners, SEND and MCSL, have developed strong links with a range of local stakeholders, from the district council to other international organisations working on complementary projects, and a local health summit will help to consolidate this project in the District. Particularly relevant is a link with Marie Stopes who are working on core training and infrastructure around childbirth, to try to ensure trained birth agents are present at deliveries to address the maternal mortality rates in the District. SEND also operates a number of other projects which will support and complement the health work, such as having created a network of over 5000 local women, and developing a highly effective micro-savings and credit scheme which is allowing local people to access funds to develop businesses and agriculture, which is directly impacting on health indicators.

As well as your prayers for next year's elections to run well, there are Liberian elections coming up, which are important in this area, as Kailahun is so near the border. Our partners have asked us to pass on a request for you to please pray that these are conducted fairly and peacefully.