



SIERRA LEONE

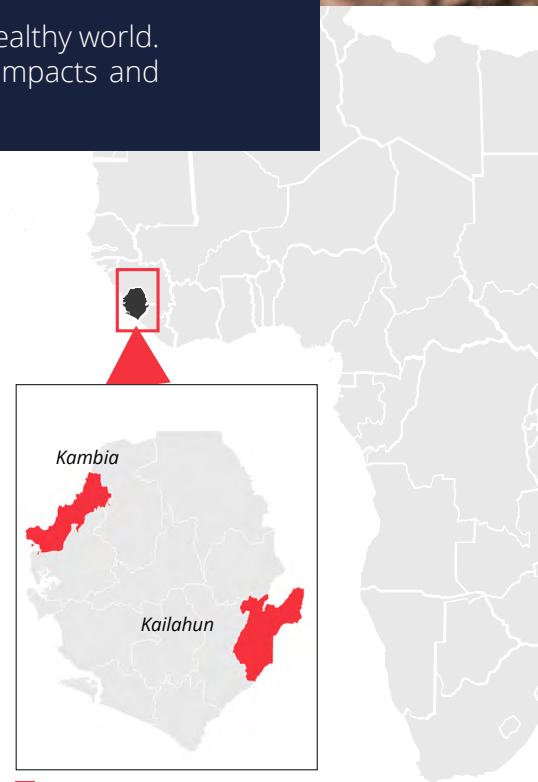
COMMUNITY EPIDEMIC AND PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PROGRAMME

Early detection. Early action. Healthier communities.

Epidemics and pandemics are some of the biggest threats to a safe and healthy world. But with effective preparedness and response, we can minimize their impacts and even stop them in their tracks.

Sierra Leone has one of the lowest life expectancy in the world in addition to having one of the highest mortality rates for children under five years of age. Six of the top ten causes of death in Sierra Leone are related to infectious diseases. Acute watery diarrhea, measles, viral hemorrhagic fevers, and rabies are among some of the most critical health concerns in the country. From 2014-2015, the country faced the worst Ebola outbreak in history, which killed almost 3,600 people in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Red Cross, with support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and funding from USAID, has been helping communities prepare for, and prevent, the spread of diseases, including acute watery diarrhea, measles, viral hemorrhagic fevers, and COVID-19. Focused in Kailahun and Kambia, Sierra Leone Red Cross is working with governments, communities, local responders, and humanitarian partners to collectively prepare for, and respond to, epidemics. Sierra Leone Red Cross is providing critical information, community-based surveillance (CBS), and referrals in coordination with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and Ministry of Education to help prevent and contain disease outbreaks.



■ Programme focus areas

566

traditional healers engaged in epidemic preparedness and response from September 2018 to December 2023.

522

volunteers trained on epidemic preparedness and response from September 2018 to December 2023.

5

confirmed cases raised via CBS (2 cholera, 1 measles, 2 peste des petits ruminants) between September 2018 and December 2023.



OUR WORK



Preparing communities

We make sure communities have critical information about the spread of diseases and how to prevent them, systems to detect outbreaks and mechanisms that ensure information sharing and community engagement. Activities include:

- Engaging communities through house-to-house visits, mobile cinemas and group discussions.
- Strengthening community-based surveillance systems.
- Engaging, training and collaborating with community influencers, such as leaders and traditional healers.



Preparing first responders

Sierra Leone Red Cross has more than 16,000 volunteers across the country which gives extraordinary reach into communities. Through its auxiliary role to government, it is often central to emergency response during disease outbreaks. Activities include:

- Strengthening partnerships with different sectors and ministries.
- Training and readying community-based volunteers.
- Strengthening systems to enable a fast, scaled-up response.
- Contingency planning with government and key partners.



Preparing stakeholders

Epidemics don't just threaten lives. They threaten all parts of society, including trade, transport, and education. We work with a wide range of stakeholders in epidemic preparedness and response. Activities include:

- Helping prepare One Health partners to respond to epidemics.
- Training and collaborating with media to communicate lifesaving information to affected populations.
- Engaging schools, teachers, and students on critical epidemic preparedness activities and messages.

Stopping a measles outbreak in its tracks

In early 2022, the Makuma community detected symptoms of a mystery illness, prompting Momoh, a trusted CP3 volunteer, to identify it as suspected measles and alert authorities through a digital community-based surveillance system. The supervisor swiftly confirmed the situation and notified district health authorities, leading to a rapid response. The following day, the district hospital's Rapid Response Team conducted testing, vaccinated around 800 children, and provided care to patients, ultimately recording 124 measles cases with no fatalities, thanks to Momoh's early action.

“My son Morlai fell sick. I had no idea what the illness was and I felt worried and restless. Momoh held a community meeting to let people know he thought it was measles. He told us what he knew about the disease and asked people to tell him if they noticed anyone with the same symptoms. He told us to keep our environment as clean as possible, wash our hands properly, and isolate anyone who showed signs of the illness. I felt really happy because the health services came really quickly.”

N'Mah Kamara

