



UNN CAPACITY STRENGTHENING



UNN-REACH
supports high-impact
Sierra Leone National
Nutrition Fair

Tale II

This year's National Nutrition Fair, held on 5–7th February in Freetown, featured panel discussions and booths from international and local organizations, showcasing their nutrition projects. There were theatre performances by the Children's Advocacy Forum, a local non-profit, as well as the opportunity for malnutrition screening for children. Participants also included school-age children and health workers.



Exhibition booth at National Nutrition Fair underscores the role of healthy diets in good nutrition, February 2020
WFP/Evelyn Fey

A poster on display, developed by UNN-REACH asked: Are children receiving the nutrition actions they may need? The answer was portrayed in two formats. One graphic showed various interventions children receive, such as deworming tablets, Vitamin A and optimal maternal breastfeeding, among others. Second, a map of Sierra Leone broke down nutrition interventions by district, revealing the number of actions that reach at least 30 percent of the target population.

Panels focused on the underlying issues leading to malnutrition, such as household food insecurity, inadequate primary health services, unhealthy household environment (including limited access to safe water and sanitation facilities) and suboptimal care and support. The latter is the leading cause of death among children below the age of five in Sierra Leone. Nevertheless, the country has made some progress in reducing acute malnutrition between 2010–2019, which went from 6.9⁴² percent to 5.4 percent.⁴³ The national prevalence

42 2010 SMART Survey.

43 Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF. 2019. *Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019: Key Indicators*. Freetown and Rockville. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/PR122/PR122.pdf>.

of under-five stunting is 29.5 percent,⁴⁴ as compared to the developing country average of 25 percent⁴⁵ and the regional average in West Africa 27.7 percent – all within the ‘high’ range of public health significance.

Resources, such as the Nutrition Stakeholder and Action Mapping book, were displayed in both the SUN and UN booths. This book profiles key findings from a sweeping mapping exercise undertaken in 2019, including where intervention coverage is low. The mapping was conducted with the UN Network (UNN) tool, with support from the UNN Secretariat under the auspices of the UNN-REACH country engagement. The book gave participants a reference point for how the country’s nutrition profile was progressing, along with *Tales Be Told*, Series 1,⁴⁶ to promote learning across borders.

The UNN-REACH Facilitator worked with several United Nations agencies to ensure that high-level representation from government was present and that successful resource mobilization from the agencies and other in-country development partners was achieved. In addition, UNN-REACH resources were utilized to support the participation of district nurses and nutritionists as well as representatives from mother support groups.



Mr. Sheriff, SUN Focal Point, and Mrs Nenebah Jalloh, SUN National Coordinator, stand with other participants, February 2020

WFP/Evelyn Fey

44 Ibid.

45 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019. *Global Nutrition Report; Sierra Leone country profile*. Available at <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/africa/western-africa/sierra-leone/>

46 UN Network Secretariat. 2019. *Tales Be Told. Series 1*. Rome. Available at <https://bit.ly/36BUNGn>.

What made this year's event a success, especially compared to the previous one held in 2017, was the participation of high-level officials, including the Vice President, the Minister of Health, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, heads of agencies from the United Nations, including the UNN chair and other non-governmental organizations that took part.

Ms. Gerda Verburg, the United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, who is also the Coordinator of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement, helped to create momentum in the lead-up to the Fair during her visit to Sierra Leone on 2–5 February 2020. For the soccer fans in the audience, Gerda also spoke about the possibility of winning the World Cup sometime in the next two decades. The Olympics and the World Cup are both goals the entire population can get behind. Gerda's appeal not only focuses national passions, it also addressed a growing obesity problem, with levels estimated at 13.3 percent for women and 3.8 percent for men in 2016.⁴⁷

During her visit, Gerda also met with the First Lady, Mrs. Fatima Maada Bio, who is not only an advocate of better nutrition, but also chairs a regional campaign called 'Hands off our Girls'. Both the UNN-REACH facilitator at the time, Sulaiman Sowe, and the former facilitator, Dr. Philip Kanu, were represented during the meeting with the First Lady. Dr. Kanu is the co-chair of the campaign, which works to reduce teenage pregnancies and to protect girls. Empirical evidence suggests that there are links between adolescent pregnancies, low birthweight (under 2.5 kg), stunting and overweight and obesity.

Pledges were made, including by a committee organized by the Vice President that would include line ministries and civil society, to make commitments leading up to the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) summit that will take place in Tokyo. Finally, President Julius Maada Bio, who was attending an African Union summit in Addis Ababa at the same time, offered to become the 'nutrition champion' for the country, in coordination with the First Lady's campaign.

47 Development Initiatives Poverty Research Ltd. 2019.