

Alaina Eiden
Greenway High School
Coleraine, Minnesota
United States, Healthcare in Sierra Leone

Living With Disease In Sierra Leone

Many of us wake up in the morning and breath in the fresh air. Many eat a nice breakfast, hug and kiss their parents goodbye and head off. It's foreign and new to people to think that touching someone could give them a disease or eating a food can send them to the hospital. That is all the reality in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone's population is categorized as "very high risk" in the spread of infectious diseases. Many of these diseases come from the lack of sanitary or clean water, the inaccessibility of fresh food and the touching of other infected people's bodily fluid. Lack of knowledge of these diseases may hurt the people of Sierra Leone as they don't know how to prevent or take care of it. Sierra Leone's healthcare system in place is very poor, which means people are not getting the medical attention they need. Sadly, many people die from diseases very young. The life expectancy rate is age 53 (Who, 2018).

Sierra Leone has a presidential representative democracy, which the president acts as both head of state and government. The population is around 7.7 million in 2018 ("Sierra Leone Population", 2019). The urban population of Sierra Leone was reported as 40.32 % in 2016 ("Sierra Leone - Urban population", n.d.). Sierra Leone's climate is tropical and dry in the winter time, but wet during monsoon season ("Climate", n.d.). Sierra Leone has four distinct regions: plateaus, mountains, lowland plains and forests ("Sierra Leone", 2017). Some major cash crops for Sierra Leone include: cocoa, coffee, oil palm and cashews ("Agriculture and Food", 2019). A typical day for a Sierra Leonean my age would be waking up in a house full of their entire family, extended included. Either their mom or dad takes care of the entire family financially, but only one of them. They go to school where they have quite a bit of rules. To maintain a good grade they must turn in daily homework, perform well on tests and participate in class. They usually aren't allowed to do extracurricular activities as their parents believe they are distractions, but they do it behind their backs ("Youth for Understanding", 2013). They cannot get a part time job and are not allowed to sit around. They usually help clean. A typical family consists of 6 people, all living in one home primarily made of sticks with mud walls and thatch or grass roofs. They live in close proximity with each other. Their diet consists of rice, meat or fish, sauces, stews, fruits and vegetables. They either grow or catch their food, but they also get it at markets ("Cuisine and Etiquette", n.d.). Being in such close proximity with each other, it can be very easy for a disease to spread. Without proper food checks and regulations and proper healthcare facilities, it's hard to prevent the spread of disease. Many people catch diseases from the food, from contact with another person's bodily fluid or from the water they drink.

For many people this is a hard thing to take in. With a death rate of 11.03/1,000 inhabitants, it's hard to think of this happening. Lacking clean and sanitary drinking water is something many don't have to worry about. In Sierra Leone, they may catch a disease from the water they drink.

Typhoid fever is a very common disease in Sierra Leone that is spread through the consumption of food or water that has been contaminated, primarily by fecal matter or sewage. It can also be transmitted from person to person if the person has the disease (“Water in Crisis”, n.d.). The CDC has reported nearly 26 million typhoid fever cases worldwide. 64 percent of people are infected with typhoid fever in Sierra Leone alone. Water is incredibly scarce and only 8 out of 10 people have access to a decent toilet. Many of times sewage and fecal matter can get into the water that people drink and use due to the lack of sanitation. This is one of the biggest ways people get an infectious or dietary disease (“CDC”, n.d.).

Diseases are primarily spread through bodily fluid of an infected person. The most common bodily fluids that you can contract an infectious disease from is: blood, sweat, semen, breastmilk, saliva, tears, feces, urine, vaginal secretions, vomit and diarrhea. Without the knowledge of people having a disease, they may spread it this way. A common disease spread this way is Ebola. In 2014, Africa had an outbreak of the Ebola virus. Sierra Leone was one of the places that was affected by it. Many people contracted this disease from others through sexual intercourse, the contamination of feces or urine in water and young children got it from breastfeeding. Many have died from this disease and many are still carrying it today (“Common Diseases”, 2018).

Proper education and healthcare facilities/sanitation stations will help Sierra Leone get a jump start on the slowing down and eventually stopping the spread of infectious diseases. The more people are educated on how diseases are spread and what they can do to prevent them, they will be going down the right path. Having classes or training sessions for people to come in and learn about them and how they spread can plant that seed of knowledge in their head so they know to be cautious about the things they drink or eat or who they go around. Being able to have classes with people who work in the medical field can ensure that these people are getting the correct information. Having caring people who can build bonds and trust with others will be a necessity.

Having people from Doctors Without Borders or any charity or non-profit will help give numbers to this project and they are well educated and trained. The health professionals from these non profits can come in for a month or two to teach the Sierra Leonean doctors how to treat and look for the signs of a disease. Then the doctors will have the tools they need to teach the rest of the people about what they have learned. This will result in more people being informed with a little less foreign aid, as some people might not want to take the information from a foreigner. The classes can be located in a pop up clinic near the hospital so there can even be demonstrations. The demonstrations would be more engaging and help people learn more. There should be at least two of these in each city of Sierra Leone.

There can be many ways to get funding, but a somewhat effective way is to get a donation or to be funded by a company who finds value in your project. I feel if a non-profit were to be funded like Doctors Without Borders and to go over there, they would have to immerse themselves in the culture first and get to know the people. Some countries and people are not very open to

foreigners aid, but if you stay there and learn from them as well, they could possibly feel more comfortable. Also if most of the people learn from their own health professionals, they may also help them grasp the concept more and be more willing to listen. Having proper sanitation stations and food/ water checks can help with the contamination of food and water.

Water filtration is going to be the most key component to helping to stop the spread of disease. There are many ways to filter water safely and effectively. The use of eco-friendly carbon water filters are a good way to safely filter water so it's safe to use and drink. It is also biodegradable, so you are not killing the planet at the same time. A point-of-use carbon water filter can cost up to 100 dollars. A full carbon filter can cost close to 2,000 dollars ("Whole House", 2019). They are very cheap and easy to make. Carbon filters work by absorbing the contaminants. It sticks particles to it, almost like Velcro. The filter has tiny microns, they are tiny pores in the filter. A carbon filter can range from having larger microns or smaller microns. The smaller the micron, the better the filtration will be. Carbon filters would be beneficial to implement as they are cheap and work great.

A good organization to fund this would be The Bucket Ministry. Their goal is to bring and create clean water around the world. They take ordinary people from everywhere that are willing to help and go on mission trips to these countries. They make money from donations from either normal people or from corporations. They first receive word about these places from a missionary or a member of the church. They then assess the place they are going. They assess the village, how many people in the village, the average amount of people in one household and the water supply they have now. Then they round up their crews and go to the place. Members of the Bucket Ministry then teach the members of the church how this works and what they are doing. Then the members who learn then teach their people. The plan is put into action. The people of the village who are helping receive an antiparasitic from a nurse. Then everyone proceeds to do the job. They are a great organization to help with this as they have already been implementing water plans for a little while now ("Bucket Ministry", 2019).

Right now, Sierra Leone is on the climb, but they still don't have proper water to drink from. Being able to get funding and building these and showing the people how to build and use them will not only ensure they are getting their water properly filtered, but they also know what to do and even who to fix/replace it. It's important to teach the people who to use all these things, but also to utilize the government and teach them and show them how they can buy these things and still have their economy climb.

Food checks also will be good to use. Many foods are bought at markets from local farmers or are shipped over. Checking the soil and water they use for bacteria or other signs of disease will help with contaminated food. Also, checking the food that is coming into Sierra Leone before it is sold at the market. The use of an easy, eco friendly sanitary station is also a huge jump they need. They do not have to have a stunning bathroom, but help with the sewage backup in the country and have more places people can go to the bathroom. Having plumbing that can be put in

place to ensure the waste isn't going into their water sources, but rather a basin or some other type of holding place. Making sure there is proper bathrooms and sanitary stations everywhere for many people to use.

The government can play a huge role in the development in Sierra Leone. If the government is willing to implement these plans, it will be easier for the non-prophets to come in and help. The government can help fund what needs to go into the projects and can encourage the people to help and cooperate. The people can also help, say if the government isn't so willing. They can get a band of people together to report why this would be helpful to their country. Sierra Leone got out of a civil war and is now trying to build their government and economy back up. This could cause some problems. However, since their economy is back on the rise and they are rebuilding themselves, the government may find it beneficial to have people come in and help with problems that they have had for a long time.

Before implementing any plans, I feel it is extremely necessary to get to the people of the country and the culture. If you come into a country and force a new thing on people who may not understand, they will be less willing to cooperate with the plan. Going to the country and learning and taking in the culture can help you better connect with the people there. Connecting and getting to know the people can also better the cause. In order to make anyone feel safe and want to listen, learning about and with them is a good way to do that. Indulge yourself into their culture, earn their trust. It will be much more likely for them to want it and want to help you.

Having places that can filter clean water for drinking and cooking, having proper bathrooms and toilets and having routine food checks for anything sold out of a market can help with the spread of disease through food and water. Taking proper steps can reduce diseases spread throughout Sierra Leone and help with keeping them clean and healthy and also keeping the country clean. Making sure the government is involved as well as the people will also be huge. Knowing that the country wants help and is willing to bring people in to have it will make the process easier in the long run. Connecting with non-prophets and reaching out to get funding will also help the effort. Knowing the cost and how everything works and should be implemented. Working hand and hand with the people and getting to know their culture before you start doing the work. Having community involvement. Doing all of this can help Sierra Leone in their infectious disease crisis and can get them on the road to recovery.

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