MARKING THE 75TH YEAR OF THE UNITED NATIONS

To mark its 75th anniversary in 2020, the United Nations is igniting a people’s debate: UN75. Launched by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, it promises to be the largest and furthest-reaching global conversation ever on building the future we want.

The purpose of the campaign is to generate renewed support for multilateralism from all segments of the society. Covid-19 is a stark reminder of the need for cooperation across borders, sectors and generations. Our response will determine how fast the world recovers, whether we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and how well we handle pressing challenges: from the climate crisis to pandemics, inequalities, new forms of violence, and rapid changes in technology and in our population. It also seeks to make global decision-making and governance more inclusive and accountable. Through UN75, the United Nations is encouraging people to put their heads together to define how enhanced international cooperation can help realize a better world by 2045, the UN’s 100th anniversary. Each conversation can also be an opportunity to encourage individuals to take actions in their own lives, in line with what they have heard and learned.

As the survey results and dialogue feedback, including the ideas and solutions generated will be presented to world leaders and senior UN officials at meetings and events the UNCT Sierra Leone has embarked on a series of UN75 advocacy activities that include media interviews with the Resident Coordinator, Sunil Saigal and various Heads of Agencies; UN75 Virtual Dialogues; newspaper ads, and; polling in the districts to ensure inclusive participation in all segments of the society.

To have your say, log-on to www.un75.online.
UNITED NATIONS COMMISSIONS
COVID-19 TREATMENT CENTRE

Freetown, Sierra Leone—The United Nations in Sierra Leone has successfully constructed and handed over a specialized COVID-19 treatment centre at the 34 Military Hospital to the Government of Sierra Leone as part of the UN support to the national COVID-19 efforts.

The 13-bed treatment centre which was commissioned on 28 May 2020 by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone represents shared efforts between the UN family in Sierra Leone, national authorities and the 34 Military Hospital.

UNFPA provided the overall coordination, technical leadership and funding for the construction of the specialized treatment centre, with the construction alone costing approximately $120,000. UNDP led the way in developing a Memorandum of Understanding with the 34 Military Hospital; WFP provided technical leadership in the design and the on-the-ground execution of the project, and also provided the huge ‘Rubb Hall’ tent under which the facility was constructed; WHO provided technical guidance to ensure adherence to quality standards; The Health Manager of the UN Joint Medical Services provided on-site technical support throughout the process.

In his statement at the commissioning, the United Nations Resident Coordinator, Mr. Sunil Saigal said “This treatment centre is just one part of the UN support to the COVID-19 preparedness and response efforts in Sierra Leone. In addition to the public health response, we are also supporting, together with many other partners, food and nutrition, water and sanitation and socio-economic recovery. The last part covers work in many different sectors to help mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic and to allow society to recover from the pandemic – to build back better.”

Mr. Sunil Saigal further said “While we are still refining our figures, we initially estimate the collective UN Response at over $ 150 million. This amount includes activities and resources within the existing UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, which we have been able to rapidly realign, as well as funding being requested under the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan.”

Speaking at the event, the Country Director of DFID, Kobi Bentley, remarked that “DFID is pleased to have played a role in establishing this treatment centre here at Military 34 hospital. As the world faces the unprecedented challenge of coronavirus, we must work together. In addition to over £760 million of UK aid made available to global response instruments,
including £10 million to UNFPA, the UK continues to support the Sierra Leonean health system. We will help to maintain vital health services and to tackle coronavirus through the Saving Lives in Sierra Leone programme and our partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone and the UN. The UK stands with Sierra Leone in these difficult times.”

Commenting as she showed guests around the treatment center, the UNFPA Country Representative, Dr. Kim Eva Dickson explained that “this center is a specialized facility that has intensive care equipment that will boost the capacity of the 34 Military Hospital to manage critically-ill COVID-19 patients. Even after the COVID pandemic is over, the center will be available to provide intensive care facilities for other ailments.” She thanked the government of the United Kingdom for providing funding through UK aid for the equipping of the specialized treatment centre through the Saving Lives in Sierra Leone Programme.

Dr. Kim Eva Dickson also remarked “I am very pleased that UNFPA has been an integral part of this joint UN effort, this is an example of UN collaboration at its best. UNFPA remains committed to supporting the national COVID-19 response whilst ensuring that we remained committed to support the government to strive towards achieving zero preventable maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning and zero gender-based violence and harmful practices against women and girls.”

SAFETY FIRST AS LUNGI AIRPORT REOPENS

Freetown, Sierra Leone— After being closed for four months, Sierra Leone’s only international airport is open again to foreign commercial flights.

To open Freetown International Airport (FNA) safely, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) last month conducted a capacity assessment to identify areas that need urgent support before the resumption of scheduled operations. IOM also undertook special training of Sierra Leonean “Frontliners,” the first officials to contact arriving travelers.

“The successful reopening of the Freetown International Airport depends on the level of preparedness of airport frontliners who are responsible for ensuring adherence to all public health measures, as well as safety of travelers,” explained Kunikazo Akao, Project Manager at IOM Sierra Leone.

Like most West African countries, Sierra Leone on 22 March closed its borders—including its airspace—to international passenger traffic to limit the spread of COVID-19. That, however, negatively impacted the country’s economy.

Moreover, the growing number of Sierra Leoneans stranded abroad and wishing to come home added pressure to reopen as soon as safety allowed. That spurred IOM to complete its assessment of 450 FNA workers, including immigration officials, airport authorities and customs officers. Most were trained on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) and the use of updated airport COVID-19 measures to improve entry and exit health screening processes.

“These refresher trainings have provided airport personnel the requisite knowledge to take precautionary measures to reduce the possibility of infection and have the confidence to manage a suspected case,” said Moses Tiffa Baio, Director General of the Sierra
Leone Civil Aviation Authority (SLCAA). A simulation exercise was carried out on Monday (20 July) to evaluate real-time preparedness and readiness of airport officials.

In addition to the training and simulation exercise, IOM also provided FNA with IPC materials and equipment including screening devices, handwashing stations, infrared thermometers, facemasks, and electronic sensor hand sanitizer dispensers. Additional equipment—such as wheelchairs for disabled passengers and rain canopies for arriving passengers—were provided as well.

IOM has worked with the Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority (SLCAA), the Sierra Leone Airport Authority (SLAA), the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS), the National Coronavirus Emergency Response Centre (NACOVERC) and the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure that all the necessary safety and public health measures are in place to detect potential cases of COVID-19 and prevent unwanted infections upon arrival and departure.

Since the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone on 31 March, IOM has actively supported the Sierra Leonean Government through Points of Entry (POE) assessment and reinforcement including building the capacity of border officials, risk communication and community engagement, as well as the provision of thousands of personal protective equipment to COVID-19 frontliners and responders.

IOM’s support to Sierra Leone’s airport COVID-19 preparedness and the response was made possible with support from the Governments of Japan and Norway.
GoSL LAUNCHES ONE STOP CENTRE FOR SGBV SURVIVORS

Freetown-- His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone officially launched the One Stop Centres for survivors of rape and domestic violence in six district referral hospitals across the country. His Excellency, along with the Executive Directors of UN Women and UNFPA, UN Resident Coordinator, and UN Women Country Representative all made remarks to commemorate the occasion.

Under the leadership of the Minister of Gender and Children’s Affairs, the coordination of the launch was supported by UN Women and partners, with financial support from the Embassy of the Republic of China and the Embassy of Ireland in Sierra Leone. This initiative was born out of the His Excellency the President of Sierra Leone’s declaration of a national State of Emergency over sexual and gender-based violence after the country’s recorded cases of rape and assault doubled in February 2019.

The One Stop Centres address a critical need for holistic, comprehensive services under one roof, provided by a multidisciplinary team. The One Stop Centres will begin providing services immediately at Port Loko Government Hospital, Moyamba Government Hospital, Pujehun Government Hospital, Kabala Government Hospital, Kailahun Government Hospital, and King Harmon Road Government Hospital. Each Centre will provide medical, psychosocial counselling, and legal aid for survivors in an environment that is confidential, private, safe, respectful, and non-discriminatory. The added benefit to this type of arrangement is that civil services like police is available to the victim at the One Stop Centre, as suggested by its name. The purpose of this response is making sure that the citizens of Sierra Leone get the help they need, in a comprehensive, integrated, and survivor-centered setting. The services will be provided free of charge. The “One Stop Centre” was in the making since 2018. In 2018, UN Women funded a study tour to Trinidad and Tobago, which was used as a model for setting up the One Stop Centre in Sierra Leone. The Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs officials were able to use best practices from Trinidad and Tobago’s justice model and also learn from the link between medical and psychosocial counselling.

UN Women as part of its support to the Ministry of Gender and Children’s affairs in response to the Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGVB), negotiated for the space needed to establish the “One Stop Centre” in the pilot hospitals. With support from the Embassies of China and Ireland, space provided by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation was renovated and refurbished in a way that adheres to the guiding principles of privacy, safety, respect, and non-discrimination. As well, the establishment of the One-Stop-Centres within the Covid-19 Response Platform makes them part of the Essential Services and will provide these much-needed services to survivors within the context of Covid-19 and beyond.

In preparation for the launch of the “One Stop Centre” initiative, new personnel were assigned and trained by the Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs. Nurses, midwives, Family Support Unit (FSU) officer, legal aid councilors, and center managers were trained in SGBV and how to operate a One Stop Centre.

“Sexual abuse of woman and girls has never been and will never be acceptable as it is a gross violation of human rights and a crime and we must do everything to stamp it out of society” said Mary Okumu, UN Women Country Representative, Sierra Leone.
ENHANCING RESPONSE TO COVID-19

WFP Aviation in support of the Government of Sierra Leone in the fight against COVID-19 has started humanitarian passenger air services. The first passenger service flight landed at Lungi International Airport in Sierra Leone on 02 June 2020. Connecting a number of capitals in Africa from the hubs in Accra and Addis Ababa as well as some countries in Asia and Europe, WFP Global Air Services are aimed at overcoming the lack of available commercial capacity and ensuring humanitarian personnel can deploy close to or into affected regions. The flights to Freetown are scheduled twice a week on Mondays and Wednesdays.

WFP in support of containment measures by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation delivered assorted food commodities to six COVID-19 Treatment centres in Freetown and Port Loko. Also, in order to meet the food and nutrition needs of vulnerable groups during the 3-day nationwide lockdown, WFP provided food assistance consisting of rice, pulses and vegetable oil to some 4,486 vulnerable individuals including street children, orphans, people living with disabilities, people living with mental illnesses and homeless in shelters and institutions managed by Ministry of Social Welfare, Street Child, SOS Children Village and Don Bosco across 10 districts (Bo, Kailahun, Kambia, Kenema, Kono, Port Loko, Bombali, Tonkolili, Western Area Rural and Western Area Urban).

WFP distributed 8.6MT of mixed food commodities as the first shot of Food Assistance for Assets to support 875 beneficiaries in border communities in Tambaka chiefdom, Karene engaged in cultivation in nutritious vegetables to be harvested during the lean season. WFP also distributed agricultural tools and seeds to vulnerable smallholder farmers living in the areas identified with higher food insecurity by the latest food security monitoring (January 2020). Ten sites in were targeted in Falaba district whilst eleven sites were reached in Kambia district. This Government of Japan supported project will benefit 1,150 vulnerable farming households (representing 5,750 beneficiaries) in Falaba, Karene, Kambia, Kailahun and Pujehun districts with 40 days FFA, tools, seeds and training in improved agricultural practices to cultivate 92 hectares of land.
EMERGENCY CASH TRANSFERS FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE FAMILIES

Freetown—For the past 18 years, single mother, Umu Kamara has frequented the streets of Freetown in Sierra Leone, carrying a basket load of lotions and cosmetics for selling. The income from this daily ritual, though meagre, has helped put food on the table for her four children and has also helped buy their school materials.

Sadly, the current Corona Virus Disease, COVID-19 pandemic, has dramatically changed her fortunes. Profits from her daily sales have significantly dwindled, while on the flip side, the prices of basic commodities such as rice have gone up.

"The money I used to get from selling used to be enough to feed my children and keep them happy, but in the last two months, people have been following the advice to stay home so that they are protected from corona – this means there are less customers out there," says Umu, as she explains the difficult situation that she and other informal traders across Sierra Leone are facing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Poverty in Sierra Leone has been pervasive, with nearly 60% of people living below the poverty line. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many into deeper levels of poverty as financial resources have depleted. For Umu and many others in her situation, children are also now being forced to take on economic activities to help supplement the household income.

"Normally my children would either be in school or at home while I am in the street trading, but now that they are not going to school, my 17-year-old son is also selling various items on the streets. I know he should be at home, safe from contracting the diseases and also catching up with his studies, but this has not been possible until now," says Umu, who today is elated to be chosen as a beneficiary of the current COVID-19 Emergency Cash Transfer programme targeting informal workers in urban areas.

This programme which is managed by the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), with World Bank and UNICEF support, is part of the national social protection response to COVID-19, designed to reach out to the extremely poor population with cash disbursements during this time of the pandemic. Under this programme, Umu, along with 29,000 other heads of households of informal workers in urban areas, are receiving a once off Le1,309,000 (USD$135) disbursement which will make these difficult times more bearable. A further 35,000 households will be enrolled to receive assistance under the National Social Safety Net (SSN) programme, which is the national flagship social protection programme for vulnerable households.

All cash recipients have undergone a rigorous targeting and verification exercise to assess their level of vulnerability during these unforeseen times. Teams of social protection volunteers from National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), Community...
TACKLING MALARIA AMIDST COVID–19 PANDEMIC

Mass distribution of long-lasting insecticide treated bed nets (LLINs) is underway in Sierra Leone’s capital city, Freetown and its suburbs to complete a nationwide household distribution of 4.6 million mosquito nets. The campaign started in mid-May with nets distributed in 14 of the country’s 16 districts. The remaining two districts (Western Area Urban and Western Area Rural), in the capital and its suburbs account for around a fifth of the 7-million population and has also been accounting for nearly 60% of the confirmed COVID-19 cases.

“A special strategy was needed to carry out the distribution of the bed nets in these COVID-19 hotspot communities”, says Evans Liyosi, WHO Country Representatives in Sierra Leone. “Safety of the frontline personnel implementing the interventions and safety of the beneficiaries was carefully thought out to mitigate people getting infected with COVID-19 in the process of protecting them from malaria”.

The incidences of malaria also remain high in Freetown particularly in areas with poor sanitation such as the slum communities and informal settlements. Sub national data reported in the World Malaria report 2019 showed that 15% of all malaria cases and 26% of all malaria deaths in Sierra Leone occurred in these two districts.

The campaign is part of the government’s commitment to continue with the provision of uninterrupted essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Malaria is widespread in Sierra Leone with the entire population at risk of the disease, and where it remains the leading cause of ill health and deaths among children and pregnant women. According to the National Malaria Control Programme, the disease accounts for nearly 40% of the disease burden among all outpatient visits and an estimated 1,000 deaths annually among children under 5 years.

According to a modelling analysis conducted by WHO and partners, undertaking the 2020 nationwide...
mass LLINs campaign and continuing to provide malaria prevention and control services will avert an estimated 13,000 deaths and reduce the number of malaria cases by 29% in the country in 2020 alone.

Sierra Leone relies on multiple interventions to tackle the prevalence of malaria and reduce its devastating effects. Malaria treatment is free in the public health facilities, as is intermittent preventive treatment for infants and pregnant women and the routine distribution of LLINs.

Once the Freetown campaign ends, Sierra Leone would have made a significant gain in achieving Universal LLINs Coverage to protect its entire population against malaria even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Malaria is a preventable disease. Yet, millions of people across Africa suffer from it every year. “If individuals, families and communities adhere to and adopt correct measures, such as improved sanitation and consistent use of insecticide-treated nets, among other precautions, they could avoid the devastation that the disease can cause,” says Dr Louisa Ganda, WHO Malaria Programme Expert in Sierra Leone. “Protecting against malaria has health and economic benefits to families and communities – it saves lives and blocks interruption of economic and livelihood activities.”

The country has successfully conducted multiple LLIN campaigns in the past to protect families and communities from malaria. However, this is the first time the WHO-recommended PBO (piperonyl butoxide) insecticide treated nets are being distributed to every family unit in a national malaria prevention campaign. PBO enhances the effectiveness of long-lasting insecticide nets.

The nets are distributed following registration and allocation of vouchers to households that the beneficiaries would present at LLIN collection sites to redeem their nets. “I collected my nets on the second day after start of the distribution. We had two but they have almost worn out. So, the new ones are very timely, and we are happy that we are now able to replace the old ones”, says Yeanoh Conteh, a mother of three in Freetown. “I introduced my children to sleeping under nets from the day they were born, and it has helped to keep us safe from malaria”.

The 2020 campaign is led by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, with technical support from the Roll Back Malaria Partnership, which includes WHO, and financial support from The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the President’s Malaria Initiative with the United States Agency for International Development. WHO facilitated the training and coordination of independent monitors brought in to reinforce a good-quality distribution campaign.
‘BREAKING THE SILENCE’ ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

In 2019, female honorable members of Parliament of the Sierra Leone Parliament were engaged in the implementation of Women, Peace and Security agenda as espoused in the various National Action Plans on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR-1325). This engagement proved to be a good initiative for women parliamentarians and particularly for a new Parliament at the time. In the outcry of the COVID-19, what has been slower to emerge is how regulations and byelaws instituted could embrace gender specific issues that affect women.

Today, all 16 current female Members of Parliament (MPs) of the Sierra Leone House of Parliament are now leading and are ‘breaking the silence’ on women, peace and security issues in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in Sierra Leone. With support from UNDP, the Female Caucus of the Sierra Leone Parliament has taken a step further to invest more time and dialogue with stakeholders to increase understanding of the impact of the COVID crises on women’s peace and security, to call for action that would incorporate gender sensitive community byelaws at constituency level, while at the same time partnering with TV and community radio stations to accentuate these issues.

“You don’t have much voice when you are not at the helm of affairs. We are calling for total inclusion of women into every structure of the COVID-19 response in Sierra Leone from district to national level. This is true because out-of-pocket-cost for women wellbeing (healthcare, transportation of market/business products, and other social needs) has significantly increased during the pandemic. Women are also facing increasing distressing challenges especially with petty trading, intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, and abuse of women and girls are exacerbated under lockdowns,” says President of the Female Parliamentary Caucus-Honorable Veronica Kadie Sesay of Constituency 094 Moyamba District.

According to the country’s 2015 Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Economic Characteristics, women account for about 57% of the informal sector’s workforce. Economically therefore, women who form the bulk of petty traders, suffer economic loss due to limited trading hours and increase cost of transporting goods-associated with the inter-district lockdown in the country. The halt to cross border activities and the accompanying forced compliance measures have far reaching implications for women. With limited access to basic services and in desperation to perform their reproductive roles of nurturing, women are found in conflict with the law with dire consequences. The current COVID-19 preventive measures taken seem to threaten women’s peace and security. This prevailing economic challenge and lockdown measures could also increase potential for domestic violence within families while making women and girls vulnerable to sex perpetrators.

Thanks to the female honorable MPs who have recognized the current need to translates down to the country context, an engendered response to women vulnerability during a pandemic in line with international commitments.

Interestingly, Paramount Chief Member of Parliament who are the custodians of the country’s cultures and traditions are not left behind either, as part of the Female Parliamentary Caucus, they are highly revered with much need reverence just as well as in their various districts.
Already, women in the various constituents have embraced the unwavering leadership of the Caucus with positive sentiments and feedbacks being garnered during phone in sessions—an airtime slot allocated during the MPs radio and TV discussion programs to solicit real-time concerns from the general population for further engagements. The media campaigns at district level are followed by direct engagement with community structures, women’s groups, and the large constituents as well as people’s elected representatives so that collectively, they can map out ways to implement preventative measures from a gender perspective more so when they relate to women’s peace and security. This initiative is made possible with funding from the Norwegian Government.

ENHANCING RURAL FARMERS’ RESILIENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC

As Sierra Leone advances its fight against the immediate health threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic impact on jobs, livelihoods, and food security are likely to be greater. The country faces an increasingly difficult food security challenge, as the crisis continues. In the short term, as a net importer of rice, the country is likely to experience severe shortage of food, as global food supply chains are interrupted because of the pandemic.

Data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) suggest that the national food insecure population increased from 34% in February 2019 to 47.7% in January 2020. Based on preliminary findings of the recent Emergency Food Security Monitoring Survey conducted by MAF and its partners (WFP, IFAD & FAO), this trend is likely to increase.

So, as part of the steps to address the emerging socio-economic challenges, IFAD in collaboration with MAF through the Agriculture Value Chain Development Project (AVDP) has repurposed about 2 million USD of its financial support to the government to provide livelihood support to 11,700 farmers. This complements the broader economic and food security response of the government in line with its Quick Action Emergency Response Programme which places agriculture under Pillar 5 and MAF is charged with the responsibility to address local food production in tackling any shortfall in food availability in the short and medium terms.

Repurposing IFAD’s resources to respond to the COVID-19 crisis is crucial as it will boost domestic food production through the emergency production and processing of cereal, tuber crops, vegetables, and pulses and in the process mitigates the impact of the pandemic on food and nutrition security.

Justifiably, rice and cassava constitute the main staple food and its availability during and after this period is key to preventing people from moving around in search of food. While maize is the principal crop in the production of livestock feed; assorted vegetables are consumed with Sierra Leone’s staple food to improve food and nutrition security. However, production levels of these crops have dropped significantly and importation to fill in the gap has become difficult due to travel restrictions. Therefore, in partnership with IFAD & MAF, AVDP is responding to the urgent need to rapidly increase food production while minimizing physical human contact during farming activities.

With activities already ongoing, IFAD’s financial support through the AVDP is supporting farmers to cultivate 2,500 ha of IVS using legacy farmers (farmers supported by past IFAD projects) benefitting approximately 7,500 farmers in the 15 agricultural
districts. Given an estimated yield of 2.5 metric ton per hector of lowland rice, the cultivation of 2,500ha of lowland rice is crucial, as it will expand domestic production by 6,250 metric tons. The production of 100ha of legumes and maize will provide incomes to farmers in the short run. This intervention will also support poultry feed production to help fill the importation gap for poultry products. Cultivation of 300ha of tuber crops is expected to increase production of gari, foo-foo and other cassava-related by-products frequently consumed in the country. The cultivation of 300ha of vegetables will increase resilience and nutrition security of vulnerable farmers.

Community radio outlets are being used to sensitize beneficiaries on the pandemic. Safeguard materials (veronica buckets & hand-sanitizers) were distributed to majority of the farming population and stakeholders to reduce the disease spread. There is also continuous work with MAF’s Planning Evaluation Monitoring and Statistics Division (PEMSD) to digitalize Agricultural Market Information while building on the existing structures and experience of PEMSD in collecting agricultural market data, processing and disseminating the electronic data through community radio stations and mobile phone companies.

ENCOURAGING PREGNANT WOMEN TO USE HEALTH FACILITIES

Freetown-- The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Sierra Leone has commenced the distribution of Mama-baby bags to mothers in the maternity wards of selected health facilities. This initiative aims to encourage pregnant women to use health facilities for safe labor and delivery services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since Sierra Leone registered its first case of COVID-19 on 31 March 2020, reports have indicated that women are staying away from health facilities for family planning and safe deliveries due to their fears of exposure to the COVID-19 virus.

UNFPA commended the distribution of Mama-baby bags on 2 June 2020 to new mothers reassuring recipients that maternal health services are still available and safe despite the COVID-19 pandemic. The distributions, expected to last for two months, commenced at the maternity units of the King Harman and Rokupa Maternal and Child Health Hospitals – specialized maternal and child hospitals constructed and supported by UNFPA. Further distributions included the Princess Christian Maternity Hospital (PCMH), Regent and Ross Road Community Health Centers (CHCs), as well as the Aberdeen Women’s Center. The distributions will go beyond Freetown to selected district hospitals and CHC’s in districts highly affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Each Mama-baby bag contains hygiene and essential products for new mothers including; bathing soap, washing detergent, towels, sanitary pads, hand sanitizers, face masks and underwear as well as items for baby including; wipes, soap, diapers, blankets, towels, wrappers, baby clothes, socks and caps.
The distribution of the Mama-baby bags is a key element of UNFPA’s campaign to encourage expecting mothers in Sierra Leone to access health facilities to safely deliver their babies. The initiative furthers the progress towards achieving UNFPA’s three transformative goals, in particular the goal of achieving a world with zero preventable maternal deaths. This novel initiative is funded by the Government of Iceland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNFPA.

Commenting on the distribution of the Mama-baby bags, the UNFPA Country Representative, Dr. Kim Eva Dickson noted that this ongoing effort by UNFPA is part of the efforts focused on ensuring the continuity of essential reproductive and maternal health services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Kim Eva Dickson remarked “Women continue to get pregnant and to give birth even during the COVID-19 pandemic, we need to encourage women to continue to visit health facilities for safe deliveries so that their lives and those of their newly born babies are safe and protected. She further said, “These are critical moments. UNFPA is prioritizing maternal and newborn health in response to the pandemic and we call on others to work with us to ensure that all women continue to access life-saving services. We can only get to zero preventable maternal deaths if we work together.”

Dr. Dickson also acknowledged the support received from The Government of Iceland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “UNFPA really appreciates the support of the Government of Iceland, who promptly responded to our call for support to adapt our programme to respond to the unique challenges the COVID-19 pandemic presents. These beautiful Mama-baby bags will most certainly attract more women to come to health facilities for deliveries.”

Sierra Leone has among the world’s highest maternal mortality ratios. The 2013 Demographic and Health Survey recorded the maternal mortality ratio at 1,165 deaths per 100,000 live births in the country. The country’s 2016 Maternal Death Surveillance and Response report showed that from January to December 2016, a total of 706 maternal deaths were recorded from all districts, with bleeding after delivery accounting for 33 percent of all deaths. Most causes of maternal deaths, like excessive bleeding, anaemia and malaria, are largely preventable when identified early and with appropriate interventions taken.

UNFPA continues to invest in improving access to life-saving maternal health care and supporting the Government of Sierra Leone to address the causes contributing to the country’s high rate of maternal mortality.

UNFPA works to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.