

MINISTERIAL BRIEFING NOTE ON THE HEADS OF STATE INITIATIVE FOR WASH FOLLOWING THE LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS WORKSHOP IN FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE.

Introduction



The Heads of State Initiative for WASH is a global movement aimed at accelerating progress towards universal access to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services, particularly in countries facing significant challenges in these areas.

The initiative, supported by Sanitation and Water for All (SWA), the Government of the Netherlands, and UNICEF, encourages Heads of State to elevate WASH as a national priority and mobilize political will and resources to address key barriers. Sierra Leone is preparing to join this initiative as part of its broader commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6: ensuring access to water and sanitation for all by 2030.

Sierra Leone's WASH Landscape

Sierra Leone is at a critical juncture in its efforts to improve WASH services. Despite some progress in expanding access to clean water and sanitation, significant challenges remain, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The key barriers include:

- **Governance Weaknesses:** Fragmented roles among Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) leading to poor coordination and inefficiencies in service delivery.
- **Inadequate Investment:** A lack of sufficient funding for both infrastructure development and maintenance of existing WASH systems, leading to high rates of non-functionality of water points and sanitation facilities.
- **Climate Vulnerability:** The impact of climate change, including floods, droughts, and environmental degradation, exacerbates existing challenges in water supply and sanitation.
- **Limited Public Awareness:** Low levels of hygiene awareness and inadequate community engagement result in poor sanitation practices and low levels of public participation in WASH management.

Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene facilities and services:

Sierra Leone government has made commitments to increase resource allocation as one of the measures to accelerate access to safe water and sanitation for all. Tremendous efforts have been made to increase access to safe water. To date, up to 60.2% of the population has access to safe drinking water sources (UNICEF, 2017). This implies that an estimated 39.8% of the people are still drinking water from unsafe sources; placing undue burden on households and their communities – while also negatively impacting the already weak health system.

Substantial efforts have been made to increase access to improved sanitation from 13 percent (post Ebola), to 16 percent nationally (MICS6 2017). Open defecation stands at 25% nationally, placing huge burden on communities and by extension the government. Data on WASH in health facilities and in schools show an estimated 75% and 74% coverage respectively (UNICEF, 2017).

Cost of Inaction

Access to adequate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services saves lives and is essential to uphold the health and dignity of the populations in need. The provision of water and sanitation infrastructure and services, coupled with the promotion of good hygiene practices, reduce the risk of water-related disease transmission, impacting positively in health and nutrition outcomes. The cost of

inaction may lead to: Increase in household income expenditure, absenteeism from school, low school enrollments, poor academic performance, low productivity and high morbidity and mortality.

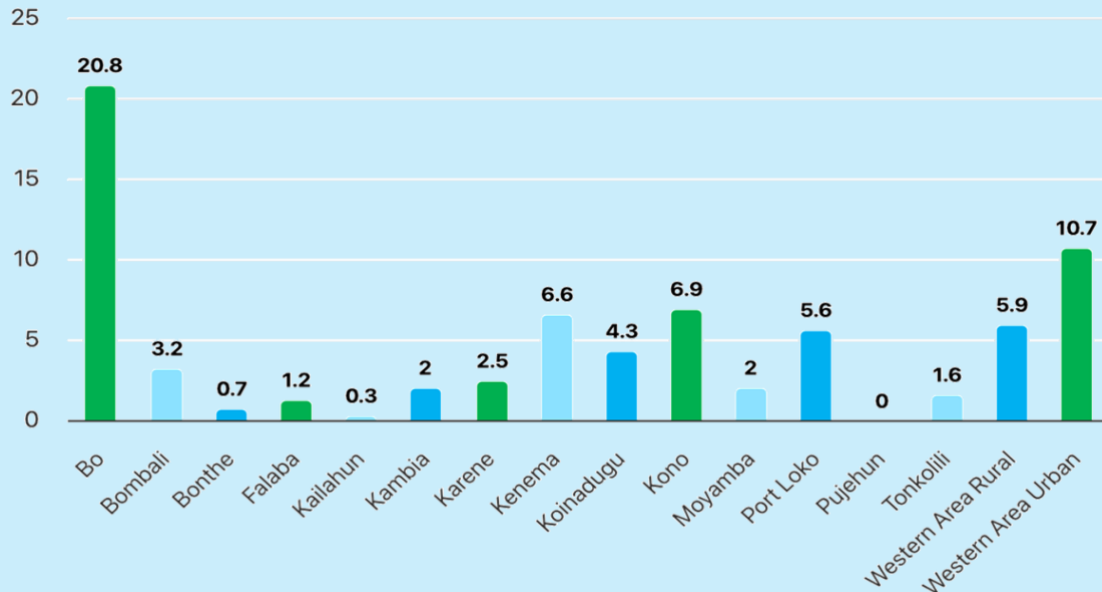


Figure 1: Percentage of Population with composite access to WASH at the district level

AN ECONOMIC CASE FOR INVESTING IN WASH

There are strong economic arguments for investing in WASH. According to the UN's Human development report, lack of safe water, sanitation and hygiene causes Sub-Saharan African countries annual losses equivalent to 5% of GDP, more than the entire continent receives in development aid. In Sierra Leone government losses 5% of its GDP to WASH related illnesses (WASHNET, 2017). In addition to lowering of economic productivity of women and school retention of the girl child. This significantly fits into President Rtd. Dr. Julius Maada Bio's BIG FIVE Game Changers – The Medium-Term National Development Framework.

The economic case for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) is widely recognized. For example:

- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that for every US\$1 invested in water and sanitation, there is an economic return of US\$8 by keeping people healthy and productivity, while at the same time estimating that the cost of delivering universal access to WASH would result in significant financial savings to the global economy
- The World Bank has stated that hygiene promotion is one of the most cost effective health interventions.

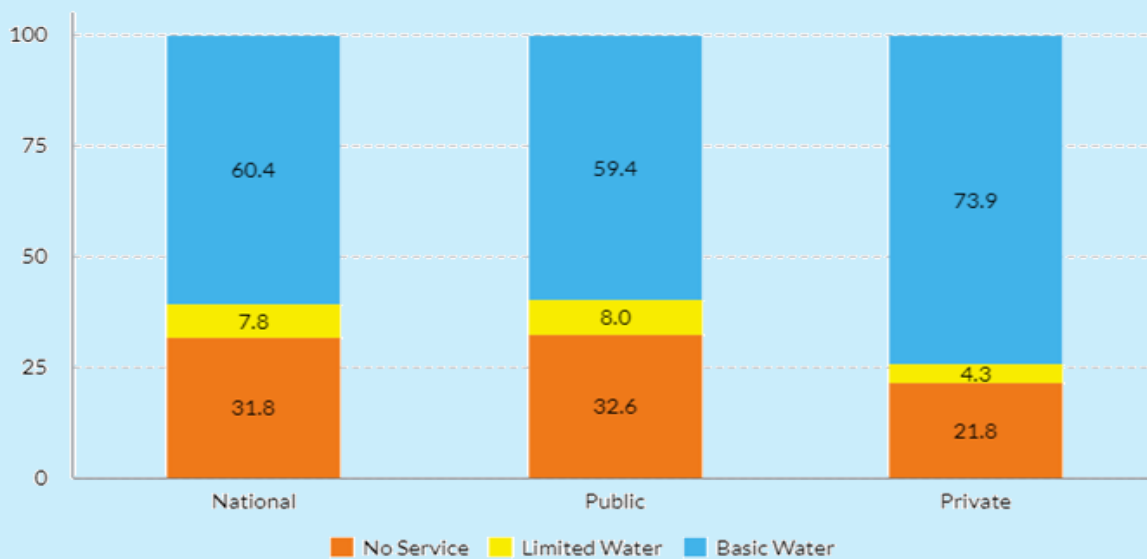


Figure 2: Water Supply Service Ladder for HCF

Objectives of the Heads of State Initiative for WASH

The Heads of State Initiative provides an opportunity for Sierra Leone to strengthen its political and financial commitment to addressing these WASH challenges. By joining this initiative, the country aims to:

1. **Mobilize Political Will:** Elevate the importance of WASH issues to the highest levels of government to ensure that WASH is prioritized in national development agendas and policies.
2. **Strengthen Sector Governance:** Improve coordination among government agencies and stakeholders to ensure more effective and efficient WASH service delivery.
3. **Increase Investment:** Secure increased domestic and international funding for WASH infrastructure, maintenance, and innovative financing mechanisms.
4. **Enhance Resilience to Climate Change:** Integrate climate adaptation strategies into WASH systems to mitigate the risks posed by climate change and ensure the long-term sustainability of water and sanitation services.

Key Recommendations for Advancing WASH in Sierra Leone

Based on discussions during the Landscape Analysis Workshop and the preparation for joining the Heads of State Initiative, the following key recommendations have been identified to accelerate progress in the WASH sector:

1. **Enhance WASH Sector Governance and Coordination:** Strengthen the coordination between MDAs, local governments, civil society, and development partners to ensure that roles are clearly defined, avoiding overlaps and improving efficiency in service delivery. Establish regular WASH coordination platforms at both national and district levels.
2. **Increase Investment in WASH:** Increase the national budget allocation for WASH and establish innovative financing mechanisms such as public-private partnerships (PPPs) and climate finance to address funding gaps. Prioritize maintenance and preventive measures to ensure the sustainability of existing infrastructure.
3. **Promote Climate Resilient WASH Systems:** Integrate climate adaptation measures into water and sanitation infrastructure to safeguard against climate-related risks. Adopt resilient infrastructure designs and ensure proper management of water resources to reduce the impact of climate change.
4. **Strengthen Community Engagement and Awareness:** Empower communities through participatory planning, management, and maintenance of WASH services. Launch national campaigns focused on improving hygiene practices and ensuring that facilities are accessible to all, particularly women, children, and persons with disabilities.
5. **Improve Data Management and Accountability:** Develop a robust data management system for real-time monitoring of WASH service delivery. Implement transparent accountability frameworks to track financial disbursements and ensure that WASH services are delivered efficiently and transparently.

Conclusion

Sierra Leone's membership in the Heads of State Initiative for WASH presents a crucial opportunity to accelerate efforts to provide universal access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene. By focusing on enhanced governance, increased investment, climate resilience, community engagement, and accountability, Sierra Leone can address its WASH challenges and move closer to achieving SDG 6 by 2030.

This initiative will require strong leadership, coordinated action, and significant investments from both the government and its partners. As we move forward, it is essential to maintain a commitment to long-term sustainability and inclusive development to ensure that every Sierra Leonean has access to clean water and sanitation services.