

SUMMARY

Working in partnership to build a strong and resilient health system

Sierra Leone Strategy 2022-2027



WHO WE ARE

King's Global Health Partnerships (KGHP) works to strengthen health systems and improve the quality of care in four countries: Somaliland, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zambia. We bring together health, academic and international development expertise from King's College London, the UK's National Health Service (NHS) and our international partners to:

- Educate, train and support healthcare workers
- Strengthen healthcare and training institutions
- Enhance national health policies and systems.

We connect UK and African health professionals, providing training, mentoring and hands-on support; and undertake collaborative research to inform policy and practice. We also support our partners by providing access to funding, networks and development opportunities. Through long-term partnership, we promote skills and knowledge exchange, and mutual learning that contribute to building a stronger health workforce and improved quality of healthcare.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE KING'S SIERRA LEONE PARTNERSHIP



Providing advice and hands-on support to the national Ebola response in 2014/15 and to the Sierra Leonean government's response to the recent Covid-19 pandemic



Supporting the development of the national referral system, ensuring that, in an emergency, patients in rural areas can access the care they need as quickly as possible



Improving emergency and critical care: restoring the oxygen factory at Connaught Hospital, thereby reducing mortality rates in the intensive care unit by 20%; introducing triage and the Sierra Leone Early Warning Scores System (SLEWS) to alert doctors to patients needing most urgent attention; training on primary trauma care; and most recently, designing and delivering emergency room training across 16 districts



Supporting the development of a continuing professional development (CPD) system for nurses in Connaught including providing vital signs equipment and training to sustain good quality care



Establishing the first ever stroke register that provides local stroke risk and outcome data, essential to inform the development of stroke services in Sierra Leone



Supporting the development of clinical services for the management of infectious diseases, with a focus on Malaria and HIV/AIDS



Supporting the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS) to **strengthen undergraduate education** for doctors, nurses and allied health professionals

Our approach to health systems strengthening

The King's Sierra Leone Partnership (KSLP) was established in 2011 with the aim of strengthening health systems and improving the quality of care for patients in Sierra Leone. This document sets out our strategic objectives for the next five years (2022-2027), in response to national health sector priorities. We have a deep commitment to working in partnership and we welcome dialogue with people and institutions who share our values and are willing to collaborate to make a difference.

OUR PARTNERSHIP MODEL

Our approach to partnership - bringing together health professionals and institutions from the UK and Sierra Leone - is a central component of our success. This partnership is grounded in high-quality research and teaching, clinical and international development expertise, and in-depth knowledge of the context in which we operate. At the heart of the partnership is a remarkable group of professionals from the NHS and UK universities who dedicate their time and expertise to make this work possible. They work alongside our Sierra Leonean partners, creating opportunities for knowledge exchange and collaborative learning. We aim to co-design and co-deliver our projects. The King's Sierra Leone Partnership's work has significant reach and impact across Sierra Leone because the doctors, nurses and allied health professionals who receive undergraduate and postgraduate training at our partner institutions are deployed in health facilities across the country.

OUR VALUES

- **Working in partnership:** we work by invitation and engage as peers alongside our partners, in all that we do
- **Relevant:** we are embedded within our partner organisations and communities
- **Locally-led:** we are responsive to our partners' needs and priorities and are flexible as these change
- **Accountable:** we are trusted because we are consistent and deliver what we promise
- **Mutually beneficial:** collaboration with our partners enables mutual learning, skills and knowledge exchange.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF A STRONG HEALTH SYSTEM

Our work in Sierra Leone is focused on two of the World Health Organization's (WHO) building blocks for a strong health system: a well-trained and well distributed health workforce; and quality health services¹. We have seen the greatest successes in health systems change when we work at different levels – strengthening the capacity of individuals, institutions and national governance – leading to sustainable, system-level change.

HEALTH SYSTEM CHALLENGES IN SIERRA LEONE

The health system in Sierra Leone has been shaped by a number of challenges in recent times. Most notably, the outbreak of Ebola Virus Disease in 2014 resulted in the deaths of almost 4,000 people (including 257 health care workers) and severely affected the morale of the health workforce. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has again tested health workers in Sierra Leone, though evidence suggests that valuable lessons have been learnt with regards to protecting essential health services².



1 Everybody's Business: Strengthening Health Systems to Improve Health Outcomes. WHO's Framework for Action, 2007.

https://www.who.int/healthsystems/strategy/everybodys_business.pdf

2 OSevalie S, Youkee D, van Duinen AJ, Bailey E, Bangura T, Mangipudi S et al. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on hospital utilisation in Sierra Leone. BMJ Global Health . 2021 Oct 11;6(10). e005988. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2021-005988>

HEALTH SYSTEM CHALLENGES IN SIERRA LEONE CONTINUED

Communicable diseases are the leading cause of death and ill health in Sierra Leone, in particular malaria, TB and HIV/AIDS. An increase in the burden of non-communicable diseases can also be seen with stroke and ischaemic heart disease increasingly affecting the adult population. Patients often present late to health facilities and acutely unwell. Factors that dissuade people from seeking care from the formal health system include the cost and proximity of care, previous negative experiences of care, and personal and community beliefs³.

With the aim of making progress towards achieving universal health coverage, the Government of Sierra Leone has developed a Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023 with the strategic objective of accelerating the human capital development to transform the health sector into a well-resourced and functioning national healthcare system that is affordable and accessible for everyone.

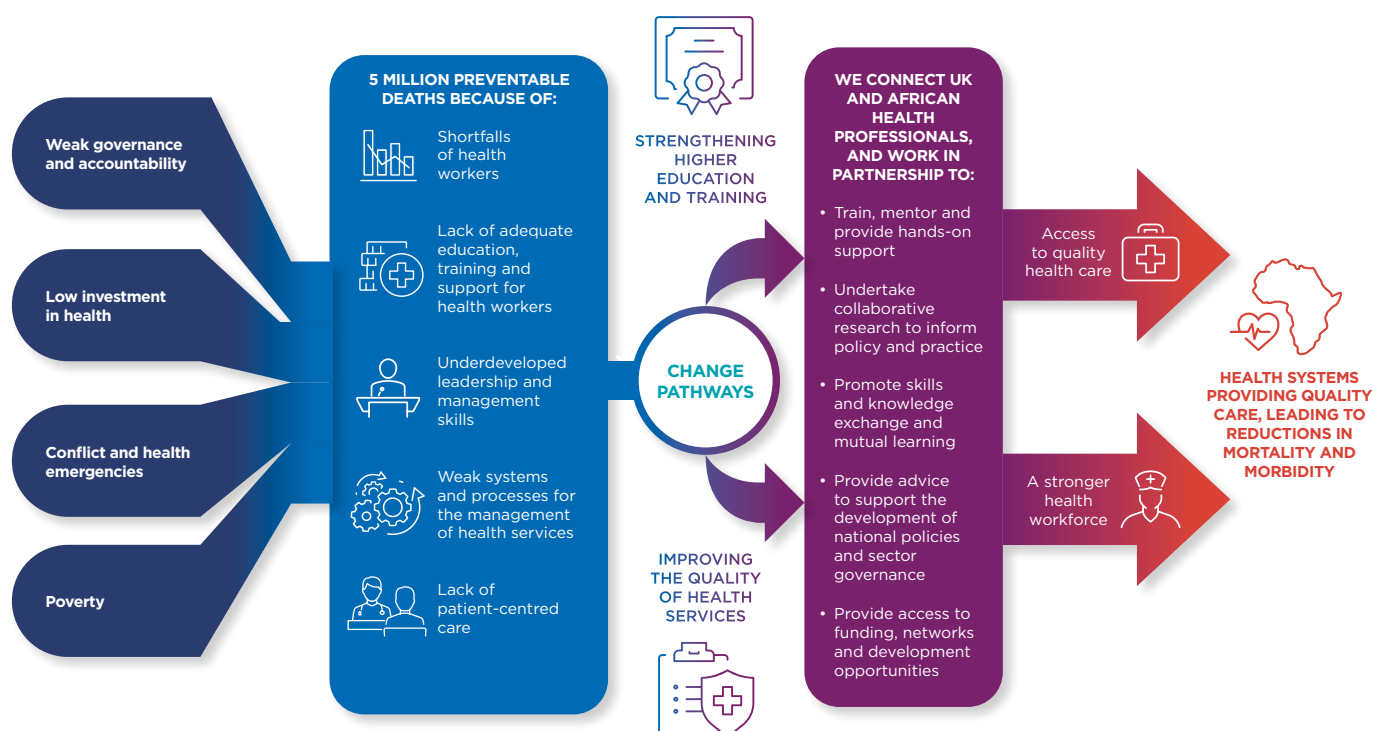
Strengthening the health workforce is a key strategy to improve the quality of patient care. In addition to low numbers of health workers, there is uneven distribution, with the majority based in urban centres, and fewer in remote and rural communities where working conditions are poor. For many health professionals, there are few

opportunities for professional development and little recognition. This lack of recognition in turn leads to low morale and has a negative impact on patient care⁴. Building a health system that values and develops its health workers is critical. This includes supporting the development of leadership capabilities – essential for addressing health system challenges and introducing reforms.

Providing affordable access to health care for all is another challenge. In 2010, the Government of Sierra Leone introduced the Free Healthcare Initiative (FHCI): making a package of basic healthcare services available for free to pregnant and lactating mothers and children under the age of five, aiming to reduce Sierra Leone's high maternal, infant and child mortality rates. However the FHCI's success has been hindered by challenges that have exposed a lack of accountability within the health services.

According to the World Bank, of the total health expenditure in Sierra Leone, household out-of-pocket spending is the main source of health financing (45% in 2018). Out-of-pocket expenditure causes impoverishment to households and represents a challenge to sustaining and expanding health services to meet the growing demand for care.

King's Global Health Partnerships' Theory of Action



3 Idriss A, Diaconu K, Zou G, et al. Rural-urban health-seeking behaviours for non-communicable diseases in Sierra Leone BMJ Global Health 2020;5:e002024

4 Chris Willott, Nick Boyd, Haja Wurie, Isaac Smalle, T B Kamara, Justine I Davies, Andrew J M Leather, Staff recognition and its importance for surgical service delivery: a qualitative study in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Health Policy and Planning, Volume 36, Issue 1, February 2021, Pages 93-100, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapol/czaa131>

Our Objectives

In the next five years we will continue to scale up the impact and sustainability of our work in Sierra Leone, in order to address some of the main health challenges. Our four objectives are to:

1. Support the development of healthcare workers through education, training, creating an enabling environment.
2. Promote a culture of quality improvement and patient-centred, respectful care.
3. Generate quality data that stakeholders can use for decision making.
4. Build the resilience of the health system and leaders to manage emergencies.



OBJECTIVE 1: Support the development of healthcare workers through education, training, creating an enabling environment.

Health workers are at the centre of health systems. A high-quality health system requires knowledgeable, skilled, committed health professionals. Our aim is to support the development of pre-service and in-service education and training, which are the foundations of excellent clinical practice. We also consider it important that health facilities are environments where people want to work, and that clinicians have the basic equipment, supplies and technologies to do their jobs. We have already supported many individuals – ranging from undergraduate students to senior clinicians – in a variety of different ways,

including through practice-orientated teaching, simulation training, mentoring and developing teaching skills, and we want to do more to embed sustainable structures for education and training.

PRIORITIES

- **Support practice-based learning in health facilities**
We will support high quality student learning opportunities, as well as the development of placement structures at Connaught.
- **Embed Continuous Professional Development for health professionals**
We will ensure that professional development and in-service training is valued and supported. We will support the set-up of a continuous professional development structure for nurses at Connaught.
- **Focus on institutional policy, education delivery and assessment at universities**
We will offer technical advice to promote quality improvement through curriculum review and implementation, and staff development.
- **Support the development of national policy and processes that support health workforce development**
We will work with Ministry of Health and Sanitation to set the direction for the health sector, drawing on our direct experience of challenges on the frontline.





OBJECTIVE 2: Promote a culture of quality improvement and patient-centred, respectful care

The Lancet Global Health Commission on High Quality Health Systems⁵ found that poor quality care is a bigger barrier to reducing mortality than access. Quality improvement (QI) requires the engagement of multi-disciplinary teams working together to improve service delivery. Service improvements can be challenging if health workers face time and resource pressure, do not have access to good quality patient data, and feel unmotivated to change practice. The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has defined priorities that we want to support: strengthening of regulation, governance and accountability, improving patient experience at the facility level, and strengthening data systems to support evidence-based decision-

making. At the facility level, we will build on work to improve processes of care. We have seen already concrete achievements, in particular in the areas of Malaria and HIV/AIDS.

PRIORITIES

- **Support healthcare workers to develop cross-facility QI initiatives**
We will engage with healthcare workers and facility managers to design and implement QI initiatives and seek opportunities for peer-to-peer or network learning.
- **Support the development of QI structures across the health system**
We will engage and support Ministry of Health and Sanitation QI teams, using their methodology and approach where possible, and look for opportunities to support the development of QI structures at facility level.



OBJECTIVE 3 Generate high quality data that stakeholders can use for decision making

The availability of quality data to inform decision-making is vital to improve the quality and efficiency of health systems. Health information systems ensure that there is an understanding of the disease burden, patient outcomes and the quality of service delivery. Across the health system, data can support continuity of care as a patient navigates health services. At the national level, it is critical for guiding the allocation of human and financial resources. We are committed to investing in this area and will continue to leverage the academic strengths of King's College London and practical knowhow of our NHS partners in London to support health workers and researchers in Sierra Leone.

PRIORITIES

- **Support to the generation and use of quality data to improve data systems**
We will support institutions to improve systems of data collection and analysis. We will also support health professionals of all cadres to undertake their own research projects, developing a culture of learning.
- **Development of strong links between King's College London and academic institutions in Sierra Leone**
We will engage and foster research collaboration between academic communities in the UK and in Sierra Leone. We will also enable Sierra Leonean and King's College London students to participate in research, seeking reciprocal opportunities for exchange and learning.

⁵ Kruk, M. et al (2018) High-quality health systems in the Sustainable Development Goals era: time for a revolution





OBJECTIVE 4: Build the resilience of the health system and leaders to manage emergencies

The 2014-15 Ebola outbreak and the more recent Covid-19 pandemic have both tested the limits of the health system and its capacity to respond to surges in demand, while ensuring that routine care can continue. We have played a key role in the national responses to Ebola and Covid-19 and we are invested in the development of strong systems to ensure that patients receive high quality emergency care. We will support the development of leadership skills among health workers, recognising the importance of resilient leaders in the context of an emergency.

PRIORITIES

• Focus on building resilience to respond to emergencies

At the level of the health system, we will continue to support the development of integrated care – ensuring patients are supported to access and navigate care. At the facility level, we have identified in particular the importance of developing interdepartmental communication, processes for the management of patient flows and stock management.

• Leadership development

We will seek opportunities to support people to grow as leaders, recognising leadership potential at all levels of the health system and across all cadres of healthcare workers.

• Support emergency preparedness

We will support local planning and preparedness activities to ensure continuity of essential healthcare in case of further disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

OUR FOCUS AREAS

We will focus on:



Critical care



Emergency care



Hospital maintenance



Laboratory



Infectious diseases



Pharmacy



Rehabilitation

With these cross-cutting themes:



Patient experience



Healthcare worker experience



Infection prevention control



Documentation

OUR PARTNERS

We work with stakeholders at different levels of the health system but our main partners include:

- **The Ministry of Health and Sanitation**
- **Connaught Hospital**, part of the University of Sierra Leone Teaching Hospitals Complex (USLTHC). Connaught is Sierra Leone's main adult teaching and referral hospital, based in Freetown. The hospital aims to be a centre of excellence for specialist patient care, training and research.
- **The College of Medical and Allied Health Sciences (COMAHS)**, Sierra Leone's only medical and pharmacy school, and the main institution for basic and specialist nurse training.

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