

# Sierra Leone



## About the Country

The republic of Sierra Leone is located in West Africa. It borders Guinea, Liberia and the Atlantic Ocean and is about the size of South Carolina. It is known for its gorgeous tropical climate. According to archeological findings, people have been residing in the country for at least 2,500 years. In 1492 Sierra Leone was named Serra Lyoa meaning *Lioness Mountains*, by the Portuguese explorer Pedro de Cintra. Between 1668 and 1807, more than 50,000 slaves were shipped from Bunce Island, in the Freetown harbor, to the New World. *Fulas* brought slave caravans of villagers from Sierra Leone's interior for sale. Even after British philanthropists founded what was to become Freetown for freed slaves in 1787 and the British government outlawed the trade in 1807, slave trade continued to grow. Sierra Leone became a British colony and later gained its independence in 1961. From 1991-2002 Sierra Leone experienced a bloody civil war that killed over 70,000 people and displaced 2.6 million people. As a result of this civil war, today the country faces high unemployment and literacy rates. Over 60% of Sierra Leone lives under the poverty line. Sierra Leone has tremendous human capital potential but badly needs human capital development, especially in education and health care. Sierra Leone's infrastructure needs drastic development – power generation, roads, schools with paid teachers and more. Fortunately Sierra Leone is one of the most religiously tolerant nations in the world. In 2014, Sierra Leone was hit with an epidemic of Ebola. Schools were closed for seven months to minimize transmission of the disease and 4,000 people died.

## Education

English is the language of instruction. The law mandates that students receive free primary education, and it requires them to attend six years of primary school and three years of junior secondary school. However, due to insufficient schools, teachers and books, Sierra Leone has a low school enrollment rate. Only about 7% of schools have libraries. The civil war destroyed over a thousand primary schools and pushed a lot of families into poverty. Many students have been forced to drop out so that they can work to support their families. There are over 20 higher education institutions in the country. Fourah Bay College, now part of the University of Sierra Leone, was established in 1827 and is the oldest university in West Africa.

## The African Library Project

In 2012, the African Library Project developed a partnership with the Reading Initiative Salone (RISE) Network to found libraries in Sierra Leone. Each rural community provides the space, furniture and staffing for a library while ALP provides the books and RISE coordinates book distribution and librarian training. Together, ALP and RISE Network evaluate and monitor the libraries. In 2019, the Library Development Initiative (LDI) became the RISE leader and plans to double the number of libraries to be developed with ALP to 60 or more annually. Together, ALP and RISE Network evaluate and monitor the libraries. ALP has helped start or improve 213 libraries in Sierra Leone (as of 2018).

## Quick Facts

- Sierra Leone has a population of about 7.75 million people.
- The overall adult literacy rate is 48%. The rate for women is lower than that of men: 38% vs. 59%.
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence in Sierra Leone is quite low: 1.6% among adults aged 15-49.
- Sierra Leone is home to 16 ethnic groups. Each group has their own language and traditional attire. English is the official language; however Krio is the language that is understood by most of the population. Krio is a Creole language, first spoken by descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who settled in the Freetown area.
- Sierra Leone's economy is heavily dependent on mining diamonds. Sierra Leone is also rich in other natural resources, including gold, titanium, and bauxite. Its main exports are iron and titanium ore, diamonds, cocoa, aluminum and wood..
- Sierra Leone's capital city, Freetown, is a major seaport.

