

World Bank Launches Decade-Long Project to Deliver Clean Water and Sanitation to Five Million Sierra Leoneans

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The World Bank Board of Executive Directors today approved the Sierra Leone Water Security and WASH Access Improvement Project, marking the first phase of a decade-long initiative to transform the country's water and sanitation sector.

The project's initial phase is supported by a **\$40 million International Development Association (IDA) grant**, focused on the Western Area, and is part of a larger **Multiphase Programmatic Approach (MPA) totaling \$180 million** over the next decade. The program is strategically designed to improve sector institutions, strengthen Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services for millions of Sierra Leoneans, and boost the nation's water resources and climate resilience.

Addressing Critical Sector Challenges

Sierra Leone currently faces significant challenges in its WASH sector, including economic water scarcity despite abundant rainfall, weak institutions, limited infrastructure, and inefficient service delivery. Currently, only **63%** of the population has access to basic water, and a mere **23%** have improved drinking water sources on premises. Sanitation access is even lower, with only **32%** having safely managed or basic sanitation.

Abdu Muwonge, World Bank Group Country Manager for Sierra Leone, said: "This project represents a critical step forward for Sierra Leone in addressing its pressing water security and sanitation challenges. By strengthening institutions, improving infrastructure, and fostering community engagement, the project enhances public health and environmental sustainability, while laying the foundation for resilient economic growth and human development. This investment underscores the World Bank's

commitment to supporting Sierra Leone's journey toward universal access to safely managed WASH services and a climate-resilient future."

Comprehensive Strategy for Improvement

The project will employ a multi-pronged approach to tackle these issues. Key actions include:

- **Institutional Strengthening:** Building the capacity of the **Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation** and other sector institutions, carrying out policy and regulatory frameworks, and developing a **national water resources masterplan**.
- **Infrastructure and Efficiency:** Upgrading water supply infrastructure and improving the operational efficiency of the **Guma Valley Water Company**.
- **Sanitation and Hygiene:** Increasing access to toilets and hygiene in schools and health centres, expanding **fecal sludge treatment capacity**, and launching a national behavior change campaign to achieve an **'Open-Defecation Free'** Sierra Leone.
- **Financial Alignment:** Supporting the development of a mechanism to **pool budget and partners' funding** to advance the national WASH agenda.

Xavier Chauvot De Beauchene, World Bank Lead Water Specialist and Task Team Leader, said:

"This project is the first step of a 10-year partnership to support a comprehensive and strategic approach to tackle Sierra Leone's water and sanitation challenges. By strengthening institutions, improving operational efficiency, and promoting better sanitation practices, this partnership will achieve tangible improvements in water security and WASH access in Sierra Leone. It will also contribute to improving public health and implementing climate-resilient approaches for a more sustainable environment for all."

Projected Impact and Beneficiaries

The project is expected to benefit approximately **5 million people** through climate-resilient planning and improved WASH services. Specific outcomes include:

- **400,000 people** in the Western Area gaining access to improved water services.
- **1,300,000 people** gaining access to sanitation and hygiene, with **80,000** benefiting from improved sanitation in public facilities.
- The creation of about **1,400 direct jobs**.
- The strengthening of the capacity of about **600 sector professionals**.
- The expansion of fecal sludge treatment to **50,000 cubic meters per year**.

The project is specifically designed to be inclusive, with **2.5 million women** and **1.5 million youth** expected to be among the beneficiaries.