

Intervention by His Excellency the President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma
Event: High-Level Event on the Millennium Development Goals – Health & Education
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Protocols

Sierra Leone is famous for its natural resources. Our diamonds and gold have received a lot of publicity in recent years. Sierra Leone's most important resource however, has too often been overlooked and in many cases, remains under developed. Our children, our future, are our most valuable asset! Their future, inextricably linked with the future of Sierra Leone, depends on how much we invest in them and investing in them means investing in Education and Health.

Currently almost three in ten children die before their fifth birthday. Less than 45 out of 100 school-age children enter into primary school, with only a fifth of this number progressing to secondary school, something which in this modern age is unacceptable.

As many of you will know, Sierra Leone is still recovering from a decade-long conflict. The war decimated much of our infrastructure and un-did much of the progress made in previous years. The process of post-conflict continues to challenge us and up till today we are still rebuilding the capacity of key institutions and facilities. As a result reaching the Millennium Development Goals continues to be a serious challenge for us. Despite such difficulties however, our nation remains strong and my message today is one of hope! My Government is strongly committed to investing in the health and education of our people. It is my strong conviction that without such an investment we will remain at the bottom of the development ladder. Without this investment, economic growth can never be sustained.

We have therefore spearheaded the development of a Reproductive and Child Health Policy and Strategic Plan for 2008-2010. As 75% of people seeking access to health care delivery are children under-5 and women of children bearing age, the plan's implementation, which targets these most vulnerable groups, is seen as the best possible entry point for health sector reform. It will be rolled out simultaneously across all districts in January 2009 and we expect a decrease in under-five and maternal mortality of 35% by the end of 2010.

Twenty percent of our budget continues to be allocated to education. A comprehensive and ambitious Education Sector Plan for 2007-2015 is already in place and will ensure access to free and good quality basic education for all of Sierra Leone's children, boys and girls alike. We reached concurrence with our Development Partners on the implementation of the Education Fast Track Initiative programme with a commitment of \$13.9Million in 2007. However, to date, disbursement has not been effected.

In order to reach the Millennium Development Goals it is vital that the sustained government commitment is matched by massive investment from the international community. The time is right for change and our development partners hold a key role in ensuring the continuation of the progress already made. I want to commend our development partners for the alignment and harmonisation of their support to the health and education sector plans. Special thanks should go to our development partners for their collaborative role in aid coordination and leveraging resources for the social sectors. Much more support is indeed needed if we want to meet the MDGs.

I also call on Sierra Leonean teachers, doctors, nurses, social workers, etc. who are living abroad to come home. Your country needs you more than ever before.

As I am sure you can tell, as President of Sierra Leone, I am immensely proud of my country. Building on recent improvements in health and education is paramount. Not just in ensuring the rights of our citizens but also for ensuring the development of our nation. I hope that together we can make this happen.

Thank you!