

# Sierra Leone



## About the Country

The republic of Sierra Leone is located in West Africa. It borders Guinea, Liberia and the Atlantic Ocean. 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 Leoa, meaning "Lioness Mountains", by the Portuguese explorer Pedro de Sintra. In the sixteenth century Sierra Leone was a very important center for the transatlantic slave trade. However the country's involvement with the slave trade ended in 1787 after Freetown was established by repatriated former slaves. In the twentieth century, 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 50 thousand people and displaced over 2 million people. As a result of this civil war, today the country faces high poverty and unemployment rates. Over 70% of the population in Sierra Leone lives under the poverty line. However, through the leadership of the current president Ernest Bai Koroma, the country has increased agricultural production and productivity which means rural incomes have also increased. Also, over the years, Sierra Leone's government has worked extremely hard to ensure the freedom of religion. Sierra Leone is one of the most religiously tolerant nations in the world. In 2014, Sierra Leone was hard hit with an epidemic of Ebola. Schools were closed for seven months to minimize transmission of the disease, and 3,300 people died (as of Feb. 2015)

## 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, this has not been happening and as a result Sierra Leone has a low school enrollment rate. 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. Also there is a shortage of key resources such as text books and teachers. Only about 7% of schools have libraries. 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. Founded in 2012, RISE Network is a consortium of organizations committed to the development of libraries and reading rooms in schools in Sierra Leone as a way of promoting literacy and a love for reading. ALP has sent 82 libraries to Sierra Leone (as of 2014).

## Quick Facts

- Sierra Leone has a population of about 6 million people.
- The overall adult literacy rate is 35%. The rate for women is lower than that of men: 24% vs 47%.
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence in Sierra Leone is quite low: 1.5% 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 the mineral rutile, fish, coffee, cocoa, and iron ore.
- Sierra Leone has the third largest harbor in the world.

