



Maintains

Research supporting social services to adapt to shocks

The COVID-19 response in Sierra Leone: Findings from a rapid study

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Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Maintains is undertaking new work on how best to support governments and other actors as they respond, adapt, and recover from COVID-19. In Sierra Leone, this work includes a rapid study of the country's response to COVID-19, which reviews efforts in the first three months of the outbreak, exploring challenges and offering insights for those working in support of this response. Using a systems lens, the study focuses on the leadership and governance of the initial response to the pandemic, and its impact

across social sectors, both health and non-health. Although Sierra Leone was one of the last countries in the world to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has faced a series of institutional and operational challenges that have slowed down response efforts.

This briefing paper highlights the key findings and recommendations from this study, as well as updating on Maintains' further work both in Sierra Leone and globally.

Key findings and recommendations

- 1 The Government of Sierra Leone needs to consider how economic activities can be modified during COVID-19, rather than replaced.
- 2 Voluntary compliance or community enforcement of health measures and social restrictions are paramount for slowing the spread of the virus.
- 3 Current policies and strategies for controlling the virus, specifically for quarantine and disease surveillance, are overly resource-intensive and are not practical as case counts grow.
- 4 Whilst some innovative steps have already been taken to make education more accessible, the Government of Sierra Leone needs to invest more in education that can be delivered outside the classroom.
- 5 Social protection measures, such as cash transfers, have the potential to cushion the economic burdens of not only the COVID-19 crisis but also future emergency situations.
- 6 Whilst the Ebola outbreak is undoubtedly a relevant experience to draw on, our impression is that the Government of Sierra Leone is not sufficiently leveraging the experience of other countries in combating COVID-19.
- 7 Public health emergencies have gendered consequences and disproportionately affect vulnerable communities. The gender and social inclusion dimensions of COVID-19 have not been adequately considered in the Government of Sierra Leone's response.

[Read all the findings and recommendations in the full Working Paper: Sierra Leone's Response to COVID-19](#)

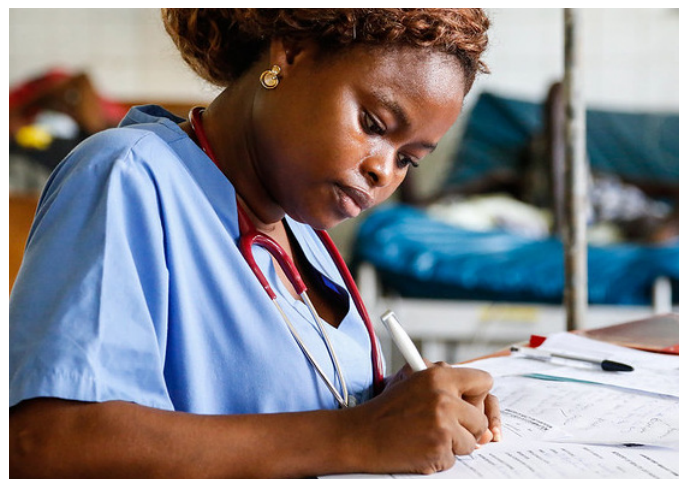
Building on the rapid study of the response to COVID-19 in Sierra Leone

The Maintains research plan in Sierra Leone includes a commitment to carry out a real time case study for a live crisis, to be defined when a suitable shock occurs in Sierra Leone. The COVID-19 pandemic is such a shock, and the programme will carry out this real time case study to evaluate the response and estimate the impact of the pandemic on service provision. It will examine how effectively the health sector is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with specific focus on service delivery, leadership and governance, community ownership and participation, and the health workforce. The findings of the Sierra Leone Response to COVID-19 Working Paper will inform the approaches for this live case study.

Maintains will work with the Government of Sierra Leone and other stakeholders to further explore or address some of the issues identified in the working paper, through further research and/or technical assistance (TA). Current plans include a study into how traditional leaders and other non-governmental actors can be better integrated to improve the effectiveness of the response.

A Maintains global study on social protection systems and their response to COVID-19 will include a specific country case study from Sierra Leone.

Maintains will also work with partners conducting similar research and TA, to help share and increase the reach of their findings.



Maintains' global work on COVID-19

COVID-19 is an extreme shock to social systems that has affected every country in the world, with direct and secondary impacts in sectors in which Maintains was already working: education, gender, health, disaster risk financing, nutrition, governance, and social protection. In parallel to the work in Sierra Leone, Maintains is adding to its established global research programme to focus on how best to support governments to respond, adapt, and recover from COVID-19.

All COVID-19 related outputs are available on the [Maintains website](#). To date this work includes a [synthesis of rapid situation analyses in five countries](#) and a series of eight sector-specific rapid literature reviews exploring the global experience and evidence base on impacts of epidemics and pandemics:

- Disaster risk financing [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Governance and state capability [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Social protection [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Health [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Community health workers [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Gender [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Education [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)
- Nutrition [rapid literature review](#) and [summary](#)

Ongoing work includes a global study on social protection systems and their response to COVID-19.



Maintains health systems and health financing work in Sierra Leone

Alongside these COVID-19 related studies, Maintains is continuing its planned work in Sierra Leone on the health system, which will continue to June 2023. Despite its relatively weak functioning, low level of workforce, poor infrastructure, basic equipment, and drug supply challenges, Sierra Leone's health system must still respond to shocks on a regular basis, including disease outbreaks and flooding. Maintains research focuses on these mid-level shocks as they are often managed and funded from within current government and local donor resources, with limited or no additional international support. Maintains is working directly with the Government of Sierra Leone, the UK Government's Department for International Development, and other development partners for this research, which will examine both the health system and risk financing perspectives on shock responses in Sierra Leone.

Health system

This work addresses the research question: "How can the health system manage new demands from shocks, whilst maintaining service delivery?". Case studies of recent disasters and disease outbreaks, including the COVID-19 outbreak, and a review of

emergency preparedness levels, will provide empirical evidence of how the health sector currently responds to health shocks. This will be used to identify and research specific approaches or interventions that can build shock responsiveness and define crisis levels of care to be provided during a health shock. This will also contribute to an improved state of readiness of the health sector in the event of any future health emergency or outbreak, ensuring that the health system is not severely disrupted in the face of a shock, but can maintain certain core health services.

Health risk finance

This work addresses the research question: "What are the economic and financial costs of health shocks, how are they being financed, and how can financing arrangements be improved?". This research will focus on improving the understanding of associated economic and financial costs of health shocks in Sierra Leone, how they are being financed, and what could be done to improve that system. The products of this work will provide options and recommendations for how the Government and donors could improve the financing system.

Find out more and get involved with Maintains in Sierra Leone

Maintains aims for its research to inform the work of governments and other stakeholders to ensure health, education, and social protection services are able to respond more quickly, more reliably, and at lower cost, during and after a shock.

We welcome feedback, questions, and collaboration with stakeholders who are also working in support of these aims. All the work by Maintains in Sierra Leone and globally will be shared via the website, Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as directly with our contacts.

To find out more or to work with the Maintains team in Sierra Leone please contact:

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About Maintains

Maintains is a five-year (2018–2023) operational research programme building a strong evidence base on how health, education, nutrition, and social protection systems can respond more quickly, reliably, and effectively to changing needs during and after shocks, whilst also maintaining existing services. Maintains is working in six focal countries—Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Kenya, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, and Uganda—undertaking research to build evidence and providing technical assistance to support practical implementation. Lessons from this work will be used to inform policy and practice at both national and global levels.

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For more information on Maintains:

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In collaboration with Oxford Policy Management, Maintains' Sierra Leone programme is being delivered by the Health Resilience Consortium, comprising of Dalan Development Consultants, Institute for Development and Institute for Governance Reform.

