



Canadian Red Cross

## A GLOBAL PORTRAIT FROM SIERRA LEONE

My name is Mariama and I live in rural Sierra Leone in West Africa. Our river and most of our wells have run dry, and it takes three hours return trip to walk to the closest source of clean water. Our dirty village pond gets used for everything -- toilet, bathing, laundry, cleaning dishes, animal care, and water for cooking and drinking. Many children drink dirty water and now they are sick with diarrhoea, including my little sister and brother. In fact, many young children have died from this and other diseases, especially malaria and cholera.



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### Facilitator Questions (for ‘Mariama’ and other participants)

1. What are some problems this village faces?
2. How can children die of such a harmless condition as diarrhoea?
3. Do you think it is possible to immunize every child on earth? What is stopping us?
4. Why doesn't the Sierra Leone government provide Aisha and the other children in her village with access to immunization programs, clean water and adequate sanitation?

### Points to Consider (Teacher Notes)

#### Water / Health

- Lack of clean water and inadequate sanitation are major factors in most of the 12 million deaths of children worldwide each year.
- Half the children of Africa already suffer from illnesses caused by unsafe drinking water, poor sanitation, and a degraded environment.
- Despite significant improvements, one third of the world's population does not have access to clean drinking water.
- Infectious diseases are the world's leading cause of death -- 17 million each year.
- Existing and new vaccines could save the lives of over 10 million children each year.
- Malaria kills more children than AIDS, TB, or any other disease— every 30 seconds one child in Africa dies from malaria.



- Sierra Leone is listed second last on the UN Human Development Index, ahead of Niger. It has one of the world's highest infant mortality rate and one of the lowest life expectancy rates – 40.8 years -- of any country in the world<sup>1</sup>.
- It has only 3 doctors for every 100,000 people (Canada has 192).

### International Debt

- Sierra Leone is classified as a Highly Indebted Poor Country with its debt being over 60% of its GDP.
- There are about 41 nations 'crippled' by debt. But of the 22 nations receiving debt relief<sup>2</sup>, three-quarters will be spending over ten per cent of government revenue on debt this year. Sixteen countries will be spending more on debt than on the health of their citizens, and ten will be spending more on debt than on primary education and health combined.
- These repayments are "crowding out" vital public investments in health, education and other areas.

### Population

- Lack of social and health services means that parents in many parts of the world rely on their children as a kind of 'social security' or 'pension' in their old age.
- Experience shows that couple will choose to have smaller families when they can be sure that their children will survive and that they, as parents, will have a reliable income, and an assured food supply, for many years to come. The result is better nutrition, education, and health for all family members.
- When countries succeed in reducing the number of child deaths, there is a decline in the birth rate within one generation.
- The World Health Organization estimates that for each year of schooling that a girl receives the under-five mortality rate is reduced by up to 10 %, as more educated mothers benefit from their greater understanding of health, sanitation and nutrition.
- One quarter of children in developing countries who start school cannot stay long enough to ensure lasting literacy. Worldwide, 130 million children of primary school age -- **mostly girls** -- are not in the classroom, and thus denied the chance of a better future. In Sierra Leone, only 18% of females are literate (as compared to 45% for males)

### Civil War

- Sierra Leone was shattered by a devastating civil war which raged from 1991 to 2002. During this conflict over 80,000 civilians were killed, and 8,000 more were left maimed, often by brutal amputation. Over 10,000 children were abducted; some were used as sex slaves, while others were forcibly recruited as soldiers and used to commit human rights abuses and atrocities. The civil conflict caused the displacement of two-thirds of the Sierra Leonean population.

<sup>1</sup> [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org) [www.hdrstats.undp.org](http://www.hdrstats.undp.org)

<sup>2</sup> [www.oxfamamerica.org](http://www.oxfamamerica.org)