



SUCCESS STORY

Sierra Leone



Ms. Onitta J. Kposowah (in-charge at Geoma Jargor CHC) demonstrating the refurbished waste zones and materials provided through the project. Photo by: Alpha M. Kabba

NAME: Ms. Onitta J. Kposowah

ROLE: Community health officer in-charge, Geoma Jargor Community Health Centre

LOCATION: Sierra Leone

SUMMARY: The COVID-19 pandemic reinforced already existing challenges to infection prevention and control and water, sanitation, and hygiene readiness at health care facilities in Sierra Leone. MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership interventions greatly improved this readiness at 26 health care facilities, including the Geoma Jargor Community Health Center in Pujehun district.

HEALTH CARE FACILITY CELEBRATES BIG STEPS FORWARD IN INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL

Six months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the Geoma Jargor Community Health Center (CHC) in Sierra Leone's Pujehun district was in desperate shape. Infection protection and control (IPC) commodities and personal protective equipment (PPE) were in short supply. The facility's water supply was unreliable. In addition, the ash, organic, and sharps pits used for waste disposal were nonfunctional either due to a lack of maintenance or because they had been constructed as temporary facilities.

As a result, waste accumulated outside the health facility, creating an environmental health hazard. As Onitta J. Kposowah, the community health officer in-charge at the Geoma Jargor CHC, explained, "The waste zone attached to the facility had been in a dilapidated state for the past two years. It was a challenge to properly dispose of waste materials, consequently causing odor nuisance in the vicinity. The waste zone was infested with rodents that had always been an eyesore to us." Kposowah added, "The hand dug well that serves as a source of water to the facility had not been yielding adequate water supply all year round, and we had constraints in storing adequate water at the facility."

The situation at Geoma Jargor CHC was reflective of other health care facilities (HCFs) throughout the country. In September 2020, district health management teams (DHMTs), together with the U.S. Agency for International Development's MOMENTUM Country and Global Leadership project, conducted an initial rapid assessment of IPC and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) readiness at 26 HCFs in Kailahun, Pujehun, Western Area Urban and Western Area Rural districts. Findings showed that most HCFs had poor IPC/WASH readiness—both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The assessment's initial findings showed an average IPC/WASH readiness score of 39% for the 26 HCFs. Most lacked the WASH services needed to maintain basic IPC standards, and many of the IPC deficiencies could be resolved through inexpensive material solutions and staff compliance to IPC guidelines. Moreover, given the uncertainty around COVID-19 and how it was transmitted at the onset of the pandemic, many health facility staff were reportedly absent from their duty stations for fear of contracting the disease. Clients were also afraid, and some sought alternative care, ranging from self-care to traditional healers, often with poor outcomes.

The MOMENTUM-supported COVID-19 response to ensure IPC/WASH readiness of the targeted health facilities could not have been timelier.

Geoma Jargor CHC, which serves a population of 9,428, was among the HCFs showing low IPC/WASH readiness (36%) at initial assessment and one of seven HCFs requiring rehabilitation. In collaboration with the Pujehun DHMT, MOMENTUM provided technical and material assistance to improve the facility's waste zone and installed a rainwater harvesting system. MOMENTUM trained a cross-section of the facility management committee, including the facility's IPC/WASH focal person, on how to maintain the waste zone, and provided firsthand coaching to HCF staff on IPC compliance.

This key intervention helped move Geoma Jargor CHC IPC/WASH readiness assessment scores from 36% in September 2020 to 85% in February 2021—an impressive increase in only six months.

At the rehabilitated waste zone handing-over ceremony, co-facilitated by MOMENTUM and the DHMT, the Geoma Jargo community and health facility staff, could hardly contain their happiness over the dramatic IPC/WASH improvements. Bintu, the peripheral health unit in-charge at Geoma Jargor CHC, stated that MOMENTUM's help to rehabilitate the waste zone and install a rainwater harvesting system "could not have come at a better time. This is a red-letter day for the facility."

MOMENTUM's help to rehabilitate the waste zone and install a rainwater harvesting system "could not have come at a better time. This is a red-letter day for the facility," said Bintu, peripheral health unit in-charge at Geoma Jargor CHC. Further, she noted, with a rehabilitated waste zone and adequate supply of IPC materials and PPE, "we feel safe from contracting any health-associated infection including COVID-19. Thank you, MOMENTUM!"