GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How does a country's political stability impact its ability to educate and care for the nation’s girls?
- What is the percentage difference between literate woman and literate men in Sierra Leone? How is this discrepancy reflected in Mariama’s life?
- How can young women like Mariama contribute to the future of their country? How can they help ensure their country’s growth?

GENERAL INFORMATION

Capital City: Freetown

Population of Sierra Leone: 6.01 million (2016)

Population of Freetown: 1.007 million

Mobile/Cellular Telephones: 5.657 million

Sierra Leone is a small country in Africa, resting on the continent’s western “bulge.” In 1961, the country became independent after years as a British colony. In 1787 Freetown, the country’s capital, was founded as a settlement for freed slaves. Sierra Leone provides the world with a large portion of the diamonds sold today, both as gemstones and for industrial purposes.

Sierra Leone is bordered by the North Atlantic Ocean, Guinea, and Liberia. The country has a tropical climate, with hot humid summers and a long rainy season. The coastal belt is primarily mangrove swamp, with mountains in the country’s east.
GOVERNMENT

Between 1961, when the country became independent from British rule, and 2005, when UN peacekeeping forces left the area, Sierra Leone struggled to build a civil government. Political leaders wrestled for control and military regimes, with devastating consequences, took over the government. Between 1991 and 2001, approximately 50,000 people were killed. From 2001 to 2005, UN peacekeepers helped protect citizens, establish stability, and assist with rebuilding the country.

Sierra Leone is currently a constitutional democracy. The president serves as both the chief of state and the head of government. Presidents are elected for five-year terms and are eligible for a second term. The country’s ministers of state are appointed by the president but must be approved by the House of Representatives.

THE ECONOMY

Sierra Leone is a poor country where nearly half of the working-age population engages in subsistence farming. However the country’s poor soil, dry season and traditional farming methods yield fairly low and a majority of farms sustain only single families.

A large portion of Sierra Leone’s export revenues are a result of mining - particularly iron ore and diamonds. The country possesses substantial mineral, agricultural, and fishery resources, but is still recovering from a civil war that destroyed most institutions before ending in the early 2000s. In 2014, over 60 percent of the country’s population lived below the poverty line and the Ebola outbreak of 2014 and 2015 caused a significant negative impact on Sierra Leone’s economic activities.

While the World Health Organization declared an end to the country’s Ebola outbreak in November 2015, recovery will depend on increased efforts to diversify the sources of economic growth. Pervasive corruption continues to deter foreign investors, despite international donor support needed to offset the country’s fiscal constraints.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in US$: 4.2 billion
Currency Exchange Rate: 1 US$ = 6,201.4 Leone (2016 est.)

Imports and Exports

- Sierra Leone imported $1.675 billion in foodstuffs, machinery and equipment, fuels and lubricants and chemicals in 2016.
- Sierra Leone exported $1.168 billion in diamonds, rutile, cocoa, coffee and fish in 2016.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Diamonds, titanium, ore, bauxite, iron ore, gold, chromite

RESOURCES

- Khan Academy at www.khanacademy.org
- Sierra Leone Web at http://www.sierra-leone.org
- World Bank’s website at www.worldbank.org

All data was reported in 2015 unless otherwise noted.