



NEWSLETTER | OCTOBER 2024

A MESSAGE FROM THE UN RESIDENT COORDINATOR IN SIERRA LEONE

This publication celebrates the UN in Sierra Leone's efforts to put the youth at the forefront of our development aspirations. Since I arrived in Sierra Leone ten months ago, I have been privileged to witness the incredible potential of the youth across this country. Their energy, creativity, and commitment to driving positive change are genuinely inspiring.

read on...



UN Resident Coordinator Seraphine Wakana with Children Forum Network President Philipa Cride-Dole and Vice President Morison Bockarie. © UN Sierra Leone

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From innovative entrepreneurs to passionate activists, the young people of Sierra Leone are not just the leaders of tomorrow; they are the leaders of today. Their achievements fill us with pride and hope for a better future. I am particularly pleased that the UN Country Team, in close collaboration with a dedicated Youth Advisory Group, has been instrumental in ensuring that we mainstream youth into all our development priorities.

This year also marks a significant milestone with the signing of the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2025-2030. This framework aligns seamlessly with Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024-2030) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It emphasizes six key transitions for the nation's development: inclusive and sustainable economic growth, equitable human development, accountable governance, sustainable environmental management, resilient communities, and gender equality.

Youth are not just part of these transitions; they are at the heart of them. Their role is not just critical but urgent in achieving the ambitious targets we have set.

As we implement this framework, we are committed to empowering young people and providing them with the necessary tools, resources, and opportunities to thrive and lead. The time for their active involvement is now.

This UN Day reminds us again of our young generation's immense potential. It is a resounding call to action for all stakeholders—government, civil society, private sector, and international partners—to invest in youth development, listen to their voices, and, most importantly, collaborate in building a sustainable and prosperous future. Your role in this collaboration is crucial and we urge you to join us in this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

Seraphine Wakana

UN Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone



Six-Year Development Plan Aligned with the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024-2030) Launched

The UN Country Team launched its six-year Plan to support the development aspirations of Sierra Leone on Friday, July 26, at a symbolic signing ceremony at the Freetown International Conference Centre, Bintumani.

The Plan, referred to as the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2025-2030, is a comprehensive framework that sets the strategic priorities for the partnership between the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone. It was launched by the Chief Minister, Dr David Moinina Sengeh, deputising the President, Mr Julius Maada Bio.

In her statement, UN Resident Coordinator (RC) Ms Seraphine Wakana emphasised that the colourful occasion, which was followed by an exhibition event highlighting the impact of the work of the 20 Agencies, Funds, and Programmes operating in the country, marked a significant landmark in the collective drive towards sustainable development, inclusive growth, and improved well-being for all citizens of Sierra Leone. She said these "have contributed to and will be guided by the priorities and principles outlined in this Framework over the coming six years.

The RC thanked the Government, particularly the Minister of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED), Development Partners, Civil Society organisations, the private sector, women

and youth organisations, and all those who contributed to shaping the cooperation framework, expressing deep appreciation for their invaluable contributions.

She also said that the Cooperation Framework's vision on food security, access to services, development of human capital, inclusive governance, and environmental sustainability mirrored the big five game changers of the Government's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024-2030), providing a strong reassurance of its relevance and are aligned with the UN Secretary General's six transitions, which aim to accelerate the implementation of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

In her goodwill message, MoPED Minister Ms Kenyeh Barlay noted that she was pleased that the process of developing the Cooperation Framework was very inclusive. It paid due attention to national systems, procedures and national development agenda.



RC Seraphine Wakana with the Chief Minister Dr David Moinina Sengeh and MoPED Minister Kenyeh Barlay after the signing of the new UNSDCF. © UN Sierra Leone

"Very significantly, it ensured that all stakeholders across all regions of Sierra Leone had their say in the priorities of the UN support to Sierra Leone over the next six years," she said, highlighting the transparent and inclusive nature of the process.

Officially launching the Plan, Dr Moinina Sengh said that the Cooperation Framework is not merely a document, but a testament to our collective aspirations and a roadmap to a future where every Sierra Leonean can thrive, emphasising that the inclusiveness in the drafting process ensured that the document truly reflected the needs and aspirations of Sierra Leoneans.



Above: The RC and MoPED Minister exchange copies of the UNSDCF. Below Left: The RC and MoPED Minister officially sign the UNSDCF. Below Right: Heads of UN Agencies in Sierra Leone participate in the launch event. © UN Sierra Leone



The Chief Minister also said that the government cherishes global partnerships and is ready to work with the United Nations System to deliver a cooperation framework for the betterment of our country.

He also spoke about radical inclusion, transparency, data, results and accountability, stressing the need to support reliable data. In conclusion, he extended his heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of the Cooperation Framework.

The symbolic signing at the ceremony attended by cabinet Ministers, Deputy Ministers, other government officials, development partners, Civil society organisations, local authorities, the private sector, and the media was done first between the Resident Coordinator and the MoPED Minister, and later by the Heads of Agencies of FAO, IOM, UNDP, WFP, UNOPS, UNIDO, UNAIDS IFAD and UNICEF.

The Plan will focus on three pillars: 1) Food Systems, Natural Resource Management, and Climate Change; 2) Human Capital, Essential Services and Employment; and 3) Governance and Economic Transformation. 🌍

More Than 25,000 Adolescent Boys and Girls in Bombali Now Know How to Deal with Sexual Violence and Substance Abuse in Their Schools and Communities

Flanked by a group of enthusiastic adolescent boys and girls at the Baptist Junior Secondary School in Makeni, northern Sierra Leone, Isatu Kamara, an Alternative Disputes Resolution and Outreach Officer of the Legal Aid Board (LAB) echoed, “you must have zero tolerance for sexual violence and abuse and report any incident promptly!”

Isatu and her team were reaching out to adolescents in schools in Makeni to educate and sensitize them on prevention of sexual violence and drug abuse in

school and the community, and other life skills as part of the Peace Building Fund project, “Promoting peaceful elections and social cohesion in Sierra Leone” in the aftermath of the general elections in Sierra Leone in 2023.

To promote peace and maintain a violence-free society, UNICEF, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and with support from the Peace Building Fund, is empowering young people with social life skills education to strengthen social

Adolescents are engaged on peace building, substance abuse and sexual violence during assembly at a school in Makeni. © UNICEF




cohesion in Sierra Leone through civic engagement and civil society partnership.

The first phase of the Peace Building Fund project focused mainly on creating a violence-free election period around June 2023. UNICEF partnered with civil society organisations to train over 120 Young Peace Ambassadors to disseminate messages of peace and political tolerance to their peers and communities for peaceful co-existence.

As a result of the community outreach and messaging, more than 25,000 adolescents

in 53 schools in Bombali District are now educated and sensitized on prevention of sexual violence and drug abuse and are willing to adopt positive behaviours.

“We must put into practice the things we have learnt!”, said 15-year-old pupil, Elizabeth Mansaray. “I will first of all avoid going to places that compromise my integrity and whenever I realize that I am being sexually harassed and intimidated, I will promptly report the issue to the appropriate authorities for action to be taken.” 

Finding Green Hopes on a Migration Route: The Return and Reintegration Story of Barrie from Sierra Leone

Barrie paused for a few seconds, clasped his hands, and, with a gentle smile, looked up to the ceiling as he reflected on his migration story, a journey that changed his life. “I thank God for not only protecting me on that dangerous journey but also directing me to a path where I found hope,” he says, nestling in an armchair inside a building decorated with an advertisement that reads: BARRIE SOLAR ENERGY COMPANY.

When Barrie left home in 2016, he hoped to find greener pastures, which he did as he found “greener skills”. Six years after his return, 30-year-old Barrie became the founder of a solar energy company, which he built on the knowledge gained during his migration journey.

“It all started in 2016 when I dropped out of college because I had no money to continue; at that point, my dream of becoming an Information Technology Specialist was held back,” Barrie recounts. Being the firstborn, Barrie became desperate and decided to travel abroad using irregular routes. Like many Sierra Leoneans, Barrie saw the temple run journey (an irregular migratory route) as a chance for him to find opportunities abroad. “

Determined to reach Europe by any means, the then 22-year-old Barrie sold his computer and other valuables to raise 4,000 Leones (about 200 USD) to start his journey. He spent many months struggling



Above: Barrie works on solar installations in Freetown.
© IOM / Bilal Kamara

to cross deserts and risking his life navigating the North African forests, attempting to cross over barbed wire fences from Morocco to the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. After many unsuccessful attempts, he returned to the capital, Rabat, where he seized the opportunity to become an apprentice to a Solar Technician. “I spent over 13 months being a solar technician apprentice. At first, I had no interest in it, but as time went on, I found myself developing a passion for the job.”

After two years away, Barrie returned home.

He was among the many Sierra Leonean migrants who were assisted in returning home through IOM’s Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) Program. Following his return in 2018, Barrie underwent business skills training as part of his reintegration support.

Barrie utilised the reintegration assistance he received from IOM, gradually investing in starting a micro business in solar installations. Today, he runs a solar company in Freetown, employing over ten youths in the renewable energy sector. 🌍

Investing in the Youth with Skills for Decent Jobs



The Opportunity Salone Programme is a five-year project to support 2,000 to 4,000 young people with technical skills development to scale up production. Isha and Fatima Construction and general services is a female-led construction company in Bo city with experience in maintaining feeder roads in the provinces from 2020 to date.

The team of Isha and Fatima construction company observing ILO standards on occupational health and safety at work, in Bo districts. © ILO

The manager Kadijatu Mamie- Woodie expressed that they came together as young women with engineering experience and skills to form this company for the empowerment of women in their communities in Bo, but state that running the company has been challenging with little or no contracts to maintain feeder roads, as this increases financial burden on the daily activities of the company.

They later registered with the Bo district council and met the ILO which she expressed was a blessing. Isha and Fatima company have gone through the necessary process and were selected as one of the SME construction company the project will work with to empower other Sierra Leonean women, youths and person living with disability in the district of Bo.

Through the ILO intervention, they were trained on standard procedures in maintaining feeder roads which they passed down to their employees to improve on their skills, which she said has given them an edge amongst other competitors.

The company have been able to employ more staff mostly women and they are paid 60 leones per day in total that is 1,800 per month. This has contributed greatly to the livelihoods of these women who are mostly seasonal rural farmers.

She thanks the EU and ILO for changing lives of their community women who mostly bears the financial burdens of their homes, this also have spark interest of more women to acquire skills in routine feeder road maintenance and earn appreciable salaries to contribute to their households.

The Opportunity Salone implemented by the International Labour Organization seeks to promote the creation of decent jobs and advance the promotion of social justice for all which contribute to the reduction of rural households to ensure sustainable development in rural areas. 🌍

From Mining to Sustainable Agriculture

*A Mining area in Kono District.
© FAO*

In Sierra Leone's Kono district, decades of extensive diamond mining have depleted the soils and led to conflicts that escalated into a civil war in the 1990s. However, many years after that trauma, there is a change both in the landscape and in people's mindsets.

"There is life beyond mining," says Success Stanley Lavallie, a 27-year-old farmer involved in the Green Jobs for Rural Youth Employment (GJ4RYE) initiative. The project, implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), strives to boost rural livelihoods and empower youth by promoting decent and green jobs in the agriculture sector.

It focuses on climate resilience by improving soil health and carbon storage, while introducing green agricultural practices and irrigation technology to combat drought. "These efforts help restore the land for organic horticulture and beekeeping, creating employment for youth," says Abdulai Bangura, FAO's National Project Coordinator.

Youth unemployment is a significant issue in Sierra Leone, with nearly a third of the youth population not engaged in work, education, or training. However, over 200 youths in five districts have joined the FAO project, which provides them with decent job opportunities in agriculture and a renewed sense of purpose.

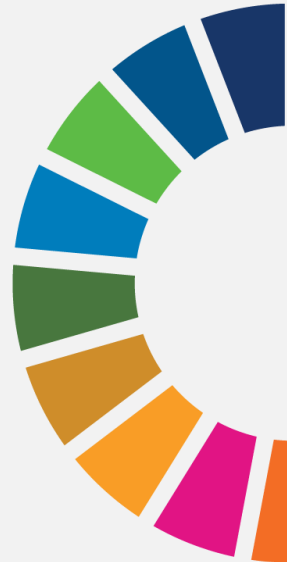
Stanley notes: “We all grew up with the mentality that diamonds are the only solution, but being involved in agriculture has impacted me and even my community as a whole.”

Participants are now cultivating vegetables and staples like maize, groundnuts, and cassava. The hands-on approach of the project ensures that youths learn and implement sustainable farming practices.

Beekeeping and honey production are lucrative alternatives to mining, offering local and export market opportunities. For women like Betty Serai Sam, these initiatives provide financial stability and empowerment. Betty is now able to support her family through agriculture. 🌈



Abubakarr Jenkins, from Western Area Rural Farm, in one of the greenhouses. © FAO





Supporting the Youth through Automotive Skills Training

A new initiative, 'Promoting Youth Employment through Automotive Maintenance Skills Training,' aims to address the skills gap in Sierra Leone's automotive repair and maintenance industry. Funded by the Government of Japan and implemented by UNIDO in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone, the project focuses on enhancing employment prospects for youth, women, and disadvantaged groups.

Central to the project is the establishment of a regional Center of Excellence, designed to provide cutting-edge vocational training. This center plays a crucial role in preparing young people with the necessary skills to succeed in the automotive sector. Additionally, the project builds the capacity of management staff and instructors at the Freetown Polytechnic, ensuring they can deliver a modern, industry-relevant curriculum.

Simeone Lissa, an instructor at Freetown Polytechnic, took part in a capacity building programme designed by UNIDO, which included training in five countries and covered 17 technical modules. Reflecting on his experience, Simeone shared, "I learned different things that I have never learned in my country, like how to overhaul an engine and what are the steps to take before doing the overhauling and the measurement. I look forward to passing on this knowledge to my students."

The training not only enhances the skills of individual instructors but also improves the overall quality of education at Freetown Polytechnic. By equipping educators like Simeone with advanced techniques, the project empowers youth with industry-relevant skills. This initiative helps develop a skilled workforce, giving young people the tools and confidence to pursue meaningful careers and contribute positively to their communities. 🌍

Isha's Journey to Advocate for Gender Equality and SGBV



*Isha smiles for the camera.
© UN Women*

Isha S.Y Suma, A 20-year-old university student who has always wanted to make a difference, has noticed that her community is facing serious challenges in terms of gender equality and violence against women and girls.

“Growing up, I witnessed when women were beaten mercilessly, abused by their so-called husbands and no action was brought against them.” She explains.

The 2022 GEWE Act has proved to be Isha's first argument for happiness as she expressed, “There is never a better moment for me than this moment where we now have the GEWE Act 2022 that protects and promotes the welfare of women to achieve gender equality in Sierra Leone.”

She has benefited from a five-day UN Women training on Sexual and Gender-Based-Violence Referrals, Gender & Entrepreneurship, Leadership, and Sensitization on the Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Act 2022. This was to prepare students to understand the GEWE Act while also expanding young people's knowledge of SGBV as well as women's leadership in Sierra Leone.

Isha says, “I have never benefited from such a transformative and life changing training before. In fact, I had little knowledge about the content of the GEWE Act 2022, know anything on gender referrals pathways even amidst the myriad of SGBV issues in my community.”

Through the interactive sessions, Isha learned how to provide crucial support to survivors of SGBV. She also gained insights into the legal framework of the GEWE Act, equipping her to advocate effectively for women's leadership and gender equality. 🌍

The Contribution of Youths in Transforming Agriculture in Rural Communities



Simbirie supervises the transplanting of rice seedlings to ensure maximum yields. © WFP

In Lensenia village, Sierra Leone's Falaba district, 28-year-old Simbirie Koroma exemplifies progress and resilience. A mother of four and wife to a local teacher, Simbirie balances motherhood, farming, and youth contracting with unwavering dedication. Despite her education ending at grade three, she embraced farming early on, a path that led to a pivotal role in her village's development.

Two years ago, Simbirie was nominated for specialized training by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS). This training in the Technical Package for Rice Production (T-PRP) equipped her with advanced agronomic knowledge that she now shares with fellow farmers. "Being chosen for the training was a turning point," she reflects. "It gave me the skills to help my community grow better rice and secure more food."

As a youth contractor, Simbirie mobilizes and supervises 40 farmers in Lensenia, dedicating two days a week to this work.

Under her guidance, the group has cultivated four hectares of inland valley swamp, significantly boosting rice production. In 2022 and 2023, they sold 1.75 and 1.45 metric tons of rice, respectively, to WFP for the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, ensuring local children receive nutritious meals and fostering community nourishment.

Additionally, the farmers cultivated orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, cassava, groundnuts, and vegetables. Simbirie's instruction in best agronomic practices has led to improved rice yields, enhancing food security and empowering farmers. "It gives me pleasure to see the farmers I support pick up the techniques I teach them," she says.

About 138 youth contractors, trained by WFP and MAFS, are now transforming agriculture in their communities. These youths receive monthly stipends, enabling them to support their families while contributing to local development. Simbirie's stipends help care for her family and contribute to their house construction.

Simbirie's commitment has uplifted her community and inspired her family. Her husband supports her endeavors, understanding the link between education and sustainable agriculture. Together, they demonstrate the power of collaboration in driving positive change.

Her story is a testament to community-led initiatives and the profound impact one dedicated individual can make. Through her efforts, Lensenia has cultivated hope, resilience, and a brighter future for generations to come. 🌈

Transforming Young People's Lives Through UNFPA Safe Spaces

The death of Elizabeth Conteh's father when she was 13 marked a shift in her life and prospects. She was forced to drop out of primary school in Kafogo village in Koinadugu District.

Elizabeth's story is similar to millions of girls around the world, whose schooling is interrupted due to poverty, cultural norms, or lack of parental support. "No one was there to assist me. For two years, I was compelled against my choice to stay at home and not attend school," she explains.

Since 2016, the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme to End Child Marriage has been providing support to reach girls at risk of child marriage in Sierra Leone. The programme promotes the rights of adolescent girls to avert marriage and pregnancy and enables them to achieve their aspirations.

In Koinadugu district, UNFPA is partnering with Restless Development to empower adolescent girls in hard-to-reach areas with school support and life skills

education including training young women who act as mentors to adolescent girls in the safe spaces.

In 2022, Elizabeth enrolled in these sessions after learning about the safe



Elizabeth in her uniform on her first day back to school. © UNFPA / Mohamed Bah

space in her community. Through her participation, she was able to build her confidence and develop her public speaking and advocacy skills. She also learned about the importance of education and was supported with a back-to-school kit. With UNFPA's support, Elizabeth returned to school in late 2022 while continuing to take part in safe space activities.

"I developed many skills, including public speaking. It also helped me to study for and pass the National Primary School Examination (NPSE)," said a joyful Elizabeth.

With the support of her teachers and a dedicated mentor, Elizabeth had an exceptional performance in the NPSE, achieving the highest result in her community in 2023. She is now continuing her secondary school education and hopes to become a nurse.

Despite the challenges she has faced, Elizabeth carries a great ambition to create positive change and contribute to a better future. 🌍



From Start-Up to Success with Young Entrepreneurs in the eCommerce Ecosystem

*Emmanuel Lahai, CEO of SEND Me Sierra Leone.
© UNDP*

Meet Emmanuel Lahai, a 24-year-old engineering student and CEO of Send Me SL, an innovative eCommerce platform and delivery company supported by UNDP's Growth Accelerator Programme (GAP). This youth-led venture aims to boost online transactions in Sierra Leone, driving economic growth and digital inclusion.

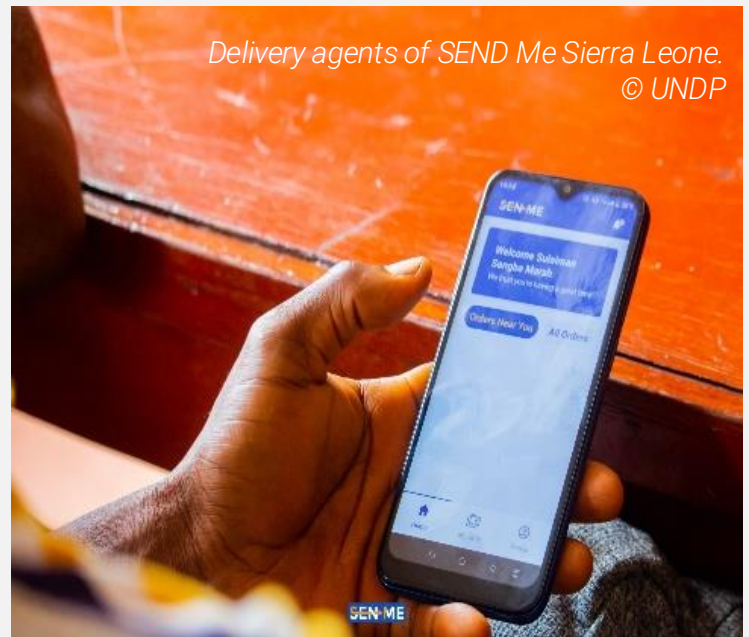
With UNDP's support, Emmanuel scaled up his business, leveraging technology to bridge the gap between local businesses and customers. The GAP provides investments, technical assistance, and mentorship to early-stage entrepreneurs, focusing on women and youth-led businesses. Since 2022, it has supported 52 businesses in Sierra Leone.

Emmanuel credits UNDP for vital support during a funding drought, helping his startup overcome logistical challenges and slim margins. He received a grant that enabled significant expansion, including procuring bikes, developing an eCommerce website and delivery app, and training staff.

He said, “through the GAP, UNDP awarded my venture a grant that enabled significant expansion. With this funding, we procured five additional bikes, developed our e-commerce website and delivery app, acquired gear for our staff, and financed the training of riders in mobile app usage and business development.”

Today, Send Me SL has emerged as a transformative force in Sierra Leone's eCommerce and delivery sector, employing 20 youths and supporting over 100 women-led businesses. With close to 5,000 users and nearly 10,000 deliveries completed, the impact continues to grow.

Through initiatives like the GAP, UNDP is helping create a more prosperous and digitally connected future for all Sierra Leoneans and Africans.



On the continental level, UNDP is supporting youth entrepreneurs and innovators through initiatives like Timbuktoo Africa. This ambitious programme aims to invest \$1 billion in youth innovation startups across Africa, with the goal of creating 1,000 startups, impacting 10 million livelihoods, and generating \$10 billion over the next decade.

Timbuktoo Africa focuses on addressing critical gaps in the African startup ecosystem by providing early-stage risk capital, mentorship, and support across various sectors.





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