



**Sierra Leone Economic
Diversification Project**

Supporting Economic Transformation

ANNUAL UPDATE



Strengthening the Policy Architecture for Tourism Transformation



MINISTRY OF FINANCE



THE WORLD BANK

"Creative thinking and innovation are key to unlocking entrepreneurial potential" - Mary Jalloh

Supporting Economic Transformation

Welcome to the SLEDP Annual Update 2024

As we continue our mission to stimulate Sierra Leone's entrepreneurship ecosystem and diversify the economy through the tourism sector, we are excited to share the latest milestones and achievements from the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP). In this edition, you will find updates on how the project has empowered startups, and SMEs, emerging business service providers and tertiary institutions, through capacity building and grant financing. We have also made significant strides in promoting financial inclusion, supporting women entrepreneurs, and enhancing the tourism sector. Join us as we highlight the transformative impact of SLEDP initiatives that are shaping the future of entrepreneurship and economic growth in Sierra Leone.

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STIMULATING GROWTH IN THE ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM: SLEDP SHINES THE SPOTLIGHT ON CREATIVE HUB AFRICA AND LIMKOKWING UNIVERSITY

In a rapidly evolving entrepreneurial landscape, the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) has been at the forefront of efforts to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity. Through a series of capacity-building initiatives and grant financing, SLEDP has empowered eight emerging Business Development Service (BDS) providers including Creative Hub Africa (CHA), E-Women, Work Ready Africa, Life by design, Aurora foundation, Bo Innovation Hub, Skool Grind, and Aide Sierra Leone, while also enhancing the entrepreneurship capabilities of five tertiary institutions, such as Limkokwing University, Milton Margai College of Science and Technology, University of Makeni, Institute of Public Administration and Management, and Eastern Technical University.

Two standout beneficiaries of this support include Creative Hub Africa, an emerging BDS provider specializing in creativity and the circular economy, and Limkokwing University, now a center for entrepreneurship and innovation

Creative Hub Africa: Fostering Creativity and Sustainable Practices

Creative Hub Africa has emerged as a dynamic player in Sierra Leone's entrepreneurship ecosystem. As a BDS provider, it supports entrepreneurs with a focus on creativity and the circular economy, encouraging sustainable business practices, offering vital support to over 300



Isatu Harrison: CEO, CHA

businesses and providing a platform for more than 2,500 creatives. With the grant support from SLEDP, Creative Hub Africa has upgraded its physical space and established an innovation hub designed to nurture creativity, collaborative problem-solving, and sustainable development. The hub now serves as a springboard for budding entrepreneurs to access mentorship, co-working spaces, and workshops aimed at honing their business acumen. In collaboration with SLEDP, CHA has successfully trained 100 female MSMEs and continues to promote sustainable growth within Sierra Leone's creative industry.

Limkokwing University: A Hub for Entrepreneurship and Innovation

Limkokwing University, another key beneficiary of SLEDP's support, has grown to become a vibrant center for entrepreneurship and innovation. The institution has integrated entrepreneurial education into its curriculum, with a focus on equipping students with practical skills for the real world. With the help of SLEDP, Limkokwing has established its own

innovation hub, offering students access to state-of-the-art resources for startup development, mentorship, and networking opportunities. The University has become a breeding ground for future entrepreneurs who are encouraged to think innovatively and embrace challenges in the local and global economy.

Empowering the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

Both Creative Hub Africa and Limkokwing University are playing instrumental roles in hosting pitch sessions,



Fostering Entrepreneurship Mindset



Winners of the GO CIRCULAR Pitch Night Competition Hosted at Limkokwing University

hackathons, and entrepreneurial events that provide platforms for young entrepreneurs to showcase their ideas, receive feedback, and gain investment opportunities. These initiatives not only build confidence in aspiring entrepreneurs but also foster a culture of innovation and problem-solving that is essential for Sierra Leone's economic diversification.



CHA Innovation Hub Designed to Nurture Creativity



Creative Genius of the PRO BLUE Visual Art Competitions Hosted at CHA

Through hackathons, pitch nights, and ecosystem events, over 1,038 entrepreneurs, including 314 women, have benefited from SLEDP's initiatives, highlighting the project's vital role in stimulating growth and innovation across the country.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO FINANCE: A KEY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH IN SIERRA LEONE

In an effort to enhance financial inclusion and provide critical support to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) has made significant strides in improving access to finance for businesses, particularly women-owned enterprises. Recognizing the challenges faced by SMEs in securing credit especially the barriers created by traditional lending practices, SLEDP, in collaboration with the Bank of Sierra Leone (BSL), has introduced transformative measures to address these issues.

Collateral Registry: Opening New Doors for SMEs

One of the major achievements of SLEDP's intervention is the enhancement of the Collateral Registry, which historically only allowed businesses with immovable assets, such as land and buildings, to secure loans. This restriction left many SMEs, particularly those owned by women, at a disadvantage. To remedy this, SLEDP has supported the expansion of the Collateral Registry to allow the use of moveable assets, such as machinery, inventory, and vehicles as collateral. This innovation has opened new pathways for businesses that previously struggled to access credit, leading to a more inclusive financial ecosystem.

Launched in 2021, the upgraded Collateral Registry not only expands the types of assets that can be used for loans but also offers a more efficient, electronic payment system. Financial institutions and borrowers now benefit from simplified loan

agreements, with the registry offering mobile money and other electronic payment methods for ease of use. These advances have revolutionized the process, moving businesses from basic operations to larger-scale activities such as warehousing and the importation of goods.

Positive Impact on Women-Owned Businesses

The success of these interventions is evident in the numbers. To date, 2,331 businesses have accessed loans using moveable assets, with 828 of these businesses being owned by women. The total value of loans secured using these assets stands at an impressive \$37,243,000, highlighting the growing confidence in the system and the financial empowerment of previously underserved communities.



A Brighter Future for Financial Inclusion

Through these interventions, SLEDP has laid the foundation for a more robust and inclusive financial sector in Sierra Leone. By making access to finance easier and more equitable, the Project is helping to fuel economic growth, diversify the economy, and support the expansion of SMEs, which are vital to the country's development. As the system continues to evolve, these reforms promise to provide even greater opportunities for businesses to grow, creating jobs and fostering long-term economic stability.



PROMOTING SIERRA LEONE AS A TOURISM DESTINATION: THE IMPACT OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGNS ON TOURISM

In recent years, Sierra Leone has made significant strides in rebranding itself as a must-visit destination in West Africa. After years of challenges due to the civil conflict, the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak, and the global COVID-19 pandemic, the nation's tourism sector is steadily rebounding, thanks to the efforts of the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP).

The Government's Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) has prioritized tourism as a key driver for economic diversification and job creation. Central to this effort has been the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP), which supports the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs in implementing the 2021 National Tourism Marketing and Rebranding Strategy. This strategy has facilitated the development of a new brand

identity under the "Explore Freedom" logo and the recruitment of Market Destination Representatives (MDRs) in key markets such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States, and Canada.



Global Presence through International Campaigns

SLEDP has facilitated the participation of Sierra Leone's tourism officials in international tourism tradeshows and campaigns, positioning the country on the global stage.

International campaigns spearheaded by public relations and marketing firms LO-TUS and Cornersun, have increased Sierra Leone's visibility at the international level and major global tourism events, including the World Tourism Market, Sea Trades, etc.



Tourism Minister & NTB Staff Joined the Global Tourism Community at the Fitur 2024, Madrid - Spain

Meanwhile, digital marketing firm Blogilicious has played a crucial role in promoting the country's tourism offerings across digital platforms. As a result, Sierra Leone has been featured in renowned media outlets like National Geographic and the Financial Times, helping to boost international visitor numbers from 57,000 in 2020 to 92,368 in 2023, with expectations surpassing 100,000 by end of 2024.



Sierra Leone White - Sand Beaches

Domestic Tourism Initiatives

On the domestic front, SLEDP has been proactive in the rebranding of key entry points such as Lungi International Airport with the Explore Freedom logo. The establishment of a tourist office at the airport, alongside the recruitment of a local tourism consultant, has significantly improved the tourist experience upon arrival. The launch of the 'Tourism for All' campaign, under the National Tourism Sustainable Plan, has played a vital role in raising awareness of Sierra Leone's local tourism offerings.



These campaigns have reshaped public perception, with tourism now seen as a vital component of Sierra Leone's economic future. As the country continues to improve its infrastructure and implement policies like Visa on Arrival, Sierra Leone is well on its way to becoming a leading tourism destination in West Africa.

UNLOCKING BARRIERS FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESSES:

SLEDP SHEDS THE SPOTLIGHT ON ITS WOMEN GAME CHANGERS

In Sierra Leone, women make up a significant portion of the self-employed and informal sectors, yet they face numerous challenges, including low wages, limited social protection, and unstable incomes. The Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) recognizes these obstacles and has taken decisive action to empower women entrepreneurs by enhancing their technical expertise, fostering confidence, and expanding their networks. Through its programs, SLEDP is helping women break through barriers and build sustainable businesses.

In this edition, SLEDP is proud to highlight six extraordinary women who have emerged as game changers in their respective fields. These trailblazing entrepreneurs are not only driving their businesses forward but also serving as inspiring role models for others. Their stories exemplify resilience, innovation, and the power of unlocking potential. Let's meet these women and explore their journey to success.

HAJA DALANDA MASSELY: SHEA & MORE

Empowering Women and Redefining Beauty in Sierra Leone

Haja Dalanda Masselly, the visionary force behind Shea & More, a locally-made cosmetics brand is reshaping the skincare landscape in Sierra Leone. Shea & More formulates organic skin care products that epitomizes purity and quality.

Dalanda's journey with Shea & More began with a simple yet profound idea to create skincare solutions for all types of skin. Her journey took a transformative turn when she was introduced to the SLEDP support programme. Through SLEDP, Dalanda received technical assistance and financial support that equipped her with the tools needed to thrive in the competitive business landscape. Shea & More leads the way in promoting business circularity in Sierra Leone by minimizing single use plastic in product packaging. As the pioneer supplier of refillable cosmetics for hotels in the country, Shea & More sets a



new standard. Through the World Bank-administered ProBlue, Dalanda secured certification from the Bav Institute in Germany, an accredited examination laboratory for food, cosmetics, and pharmaceutical companies. Dalanda's vision extends far beyond commercial success. Through Shea & More, she seeks to empower rural women by sourcing raw materials from local communities, to foster economic independence and sustainability.

FATIMA SESAY: UNIMAX

A Testament of Women's Resilience in a Male Dominated Industry

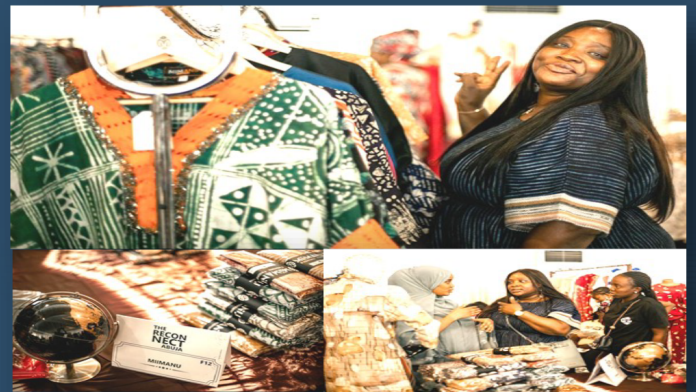
Unimax, a logistics business headquartered in Freetown, is breaking walls in a male-dominated industry under the leadership of Fatima Sesay, its founder and Managing Director. Specializing in door-to-door delivery, shipping, forwarding, clearing, and haulage, UNIMAX stands out as a testament to women's resilience. Fatima's journey has been marked by challenges typical of a woman operating in a male-dominated field. The SLEDP intervention however enabled UNIMAX to expand its services, including acquiring a cargo truck for cross-country deliveries to Liberia and procuring an additional 10 bikes for enhanced operations. UNIMAX's contributions to the economy are significant, with over 100,000 deliveries completed for various businesses, including prestigious clients like Sierra Leone Brewery. Employing over 12 staff and providing training opportunities, UNIMAX exemplifies the positive impact of women-led businesses on local communities. In years to come, UNIMAX envisions further expansion, with plans to increase its vehicle fleet and establish branches in neighbouring countries.



JULIANA SONGO: MIIMANU COUTURE

Redefining Fashion Excellence Across Borders

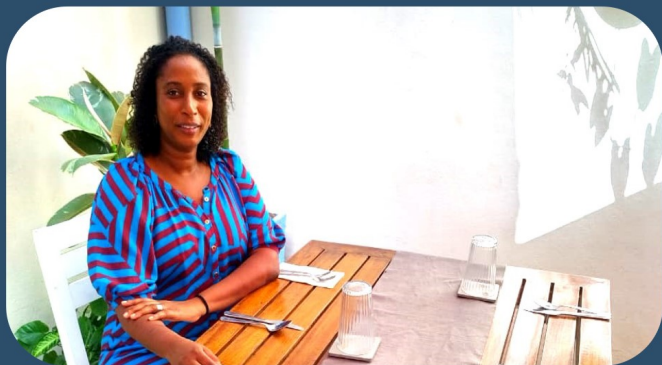
Juliana Songo, Creative Director of Miimanu Couture has masterfully crafted a fashion empire that transcends borders, blending edgy designs with timeless elegance to captivate audiences in Sierra Leone and beyond. In its formative years, Miimanu Couture was faced with the daunting task of balancing creativity with the practicalities of professional tailoring and fabric manufacturing. The turning point came when fate intervened, and Juliana learned about SLEDP from a devoted admirer of her brand.



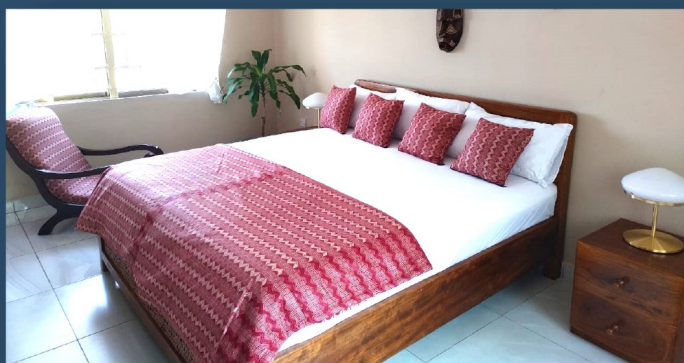
Through SLEDP, Juliana gained invaluable skills and insights that revolutionized the landscape of Miimanu Couture. From strategic business structuring to online marketing, the program equipped her with the tools needed to elevate her brand to new heights. With the recent launch of a flagship store in Nigeria, Miimanu Couture has cemented its presence on the international stage, bringing the rich tapestry of Sierra Leonean craftsmanship to new audiences. With her recent disclosure of Miimanu's 2024 global collection, Juliana remains committed to empowering women and girls through entrepreneurship and design education.

MIATA MARKE: COLE STREET GUEST HOUSE

From Modest Venture to International Recognition



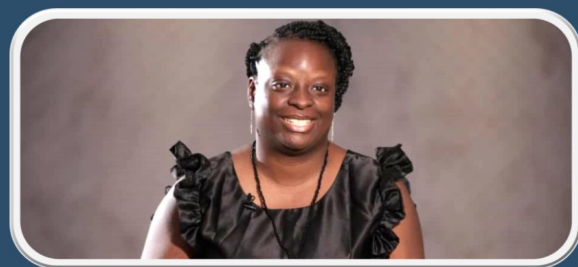
As owner and Head Chef of Cole Street Guest House, Miata Marke's journey is a testament of resilience and determination. Through perseverance and passion for excellence, her business has rewritten the narrative of hospitality. Returning to her homeland from the diaspora, she faced a myriad of logistical challenges. What began as a modest venture with just two-bedroom suites blossomed into an internationally acclaimed haven for travellers when a beacon of hope emerged through SLEDP. Miata and her team received comprehensive training through SLEDP, laying the groundwork for sustainable growth. With the aid of the grant received, Cole Street Guest House underwent a remarkable transformation, expanding its footprint with the addition of four new rooms and empowering the Murray Community with employment opportunities. The excellence of this haven of hospitality has been internationally recognised by National Geographic as one of the 21 locally-owned restaurants celebrated worldwide.



Miata's advice to fellow female entrepreneurs echoes a sentiment of solidarity and collaboration, urging women to leverage their networks and support one another in their entrepreneurial endeavors.

MARGARET KADI: PANGEA

From Navigating Obstacles to Driving Economic Prosperity



As the CEO of Pangea, a renowned bespoke furniture and home goods company, Margaret Kadi has navigated the complexities of the business landscape with resilience and hard work. For over eight years, Margaret has steered Pangea towards success, relying on her own resources to fuel the company's growth. Despite her entrepreneurial prowess, the absence of external financial support limited her ability to expand her business and reach new heights. Amidst these challenges, she was told about the SLEDP support programme. Recommended by a friend, she seized the opportunity to participate, recognizing the programme's potential to address her business's long-standing obstacles.

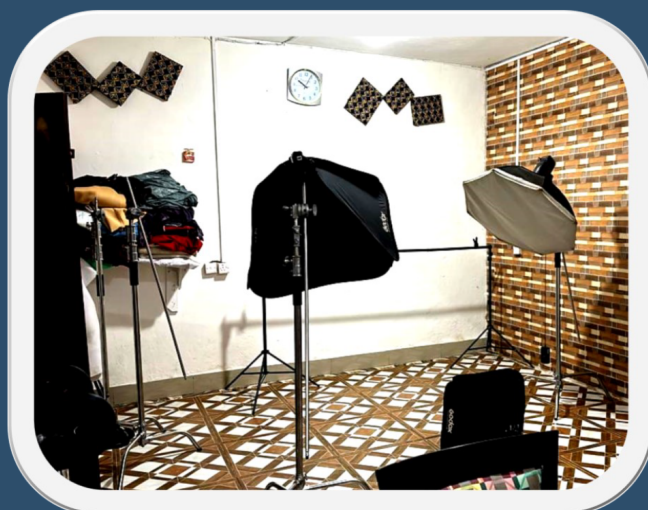


Through SLEDP, Margaret and her team received invaluable training and skills development that unlocked their new growth opportunities.

SLEDP enabled Pangea to streamline its operations and foster a culture of collaboration and empowerment. Looking ahead, Margaret is optimistic about the future of Pangea. With a skilled workforce and a streamlined business model, she is confident in her ability to scale her business and unlock new growth opportunities.

GRACE & FATMATA: GIRLS BEHIND THE LENS

Breaking Barriers, Capturing Dreams



Grace Kamanda (L) & Fatmata Kamara (R)
at the Front

Grace Kamanda and Fatmata Kamara are on a mission to redefine norms and establish themselves as pioneers of quality photography in Sierra Leone. Their journey with Girls Behind the Lens began as a testament of their unshaken passion and relentless pursuit of excellence. In a society where gender stereotypes loom large, Grace and Fatmata encountered scepticism and resistance from those who doubted their abilities.

The turning point of their business came when they stumbled upon the SLEDP programme through the social media. With the support of SLEDP, they went through a transformative journey that honed their business acumen and refined their approach to client management. Armed with newfound knowledge and resources, Girls Behind the Lens invested in state-of-the-art equipment that enabled them to capture breathtaking photos and videos that mesmerize audiences. Moreover, they have organized seminars and workshops, equipping young girls with the tools and knowledge needed to excel in the art of photography. As trailblazers in their field, Grace and Fatmata offer a timeless message of resilience and determination to women everywhere.

STRENGTHENING THE BUSINESS ENABLING ENVIRONMENT IN SIERRA LEONE

Challenges in Sierra Leone's Business Environment

Sierra Leone has faced significant hurdles in creating an efficient business environment, particularly due to the lack of regulatory clarity and outdated procedures. Issues such as the poor documentation of land records, manual storage of property maps, and lengthy processes for obtaining construction permits have made the transfer of property cumbersome. Furthermore, the absence of automated procedures has led to costly and slow business registration processes, hampering economic growth and efficiency. Although starting a business has become faster in recent years, much can still be done to streamline these procedures and support business owners, as suggested by analysis from the World Bank and neighboring countries.

The Role of SLEDP in Addressing

Business Constraints

The Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) has been instrumental in advocating for policy, administrative, and regulatory reforms to strengthen the business enabling environment. Over the past three years, SLEDP has made significant strides in improving transparency and efficiency in the interactions between government institutions and businesses.

These reforms aim to reduce red tapes, time, and costs for both the private and public sectors, creating a more favorable environment for business growth and investment.

Digital Transformation in Land and Business Registration

A major milestone achieved by SLEDP has been the upgrade of the web-based platform for the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Country Planning (MLHCP), which now includes the process for obtaining building and construction permits.

This online portal allows businesses to submit permit requests and supporting documents digitally, significantly reducing the time needed to secure these permits. The system's pilot phase is ongoing, and the necessary equipment to support it has been provided to the Ministry, ensuring a smoother and more efficient process for obtaining permits.

In parallel, SLEDP is collaborating with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to review and amend the Companies Act,





Chief Minister, Dr. David Sengeh & Lands Minister, Dr. Turad Senesie Viewing the Digital Platform in the Lands Ministry

with the goal of streamlining and automating business registration procedures. The initiative includes the establishment of a One-Stop Shop for Business Services (OSSBS), which will centralize information about business procedures and their costs, making it more accessible to entrepreneurs.

Positive Impact on Women-Owned Businesses

Given the unique challenges faced by women-owned businesses, these reforms have the potential to disproportionately benefit female entrepreneurs. By simplifying business registration and land permit processes, the initiative creates opportunities for women to enter and succeed in the formal economy. This will also enable the government to be more responsive to the specific needs of women entrepreneurs, fostering a more inclusive business environment

Fostering Public-Private Dialogue for Economic Growth

Beyond digital reforms, SLEDP has championed Public Private Dialogue (PPD) as a critical platform for improving communication between the government and the private sector.

Through the National Investment Board (NIB), SLEDP has facilitated discussions aimed at unlocking trade opportunities, particularly in the UK market. Additionally, it has supported dialogues on special economic zones and other key initiatives, helping both sectors work together to address economic challenges and opportunities.

Embedding Reforms for Long-Term Impact

SLEDP's interventions are not limited to short-term fixes. By integrating PPD into key areas such as tourism, financing, and SME support, the initiative is laying the foundation for sustainable reforms. The establishment of the SME Solution Center, the Tourism Perception Survey and Strategy, and the Borrowers and Lenders Regulation are examples of how the project is mainstreaming these dialogues and ensuring that the private sector's views are embedded in policymaking.

SIERRA LEONE'S FIGHT AGAINST PLASTIC POLLUTION: GO CIRCULAR INITIATIVE PROMOTES CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Sierra Leone is taking significant strides toward combating plastic pollution, which poses serious risks to public health, tourism, and the country's Blue Economy. With plastic waste generation estimated between 116,500 to 126,000 tons annually, much of it from Single-Use Plastic Products (SUPPs), the issue has become urgent. To address this, the Government of Sierra Leone, with support from the World Bank and PROBLUE, organized the GO CIRCULAR week from February 19-23, bringing attention to the importance of circular practices and showcasing results achieved under the PROBLUE/SLEDP/RUSLP initiative.

Raising Awareness on Plastic Waste

The GO CIRCULAR initiative brought together government officials, industry leaders, and citizens to raise awareness about plastic pollution. This week-long event aimed to foster collaboration between public and private stakeholders, and saw the launch of several key efforts.



Stakeholders at the Launch of the GO CIRCULAR Week

The Plastic Leadership Platform (PLP)

The PLP convened policy-makers, private sector actors, and financial institutions to discuss sustainable plastic management. A situational analysis of plastics in the tourism sector and a National Plastic Management Policy were developed with support from the World Bank to inform future policy actions.



World Bank Country Manager, Dr. Abdu Muwonge, on Business Circularity and Cleaner Future

Actions Toward Plastic Waste Reduction

The week kicked off with a community-driven beach clean-up event, which saw over 80 volunteers remove 664 kg of plastic waste from the coastline. Additionally, 20 hotels and restaurants received recognition for their efforts to reduce plastic waste, showcasing the growing momentum toward sustainability in the tourism sector. The event also featured the exhibition of circular businesses that promote SUPP alternatives. Recycled plastic products and innovative solutions to minimize plastic use were showcased,

along with a creative competition for poetry and visual art emphasizing the urgency of plastic waste management.



Beach Cleaning Exercise

Youth Innovation for a Circular Future

A highlight of the week was the Youth Innovation Challenge held at Limkokwing University, where students pitched innovative ideas on plastic waste management and circularity.

Winning ideas included creative ways to recycle plastic waste and repurpose old tires into designer furniture, demonstrating the innovative potential of Sierra Leone's youth in addressing environmental challenges.



Fatmata O. Kamara, Winner of the GO CIRCULAR Pitch Competition, Flanked by Mary Jalloh, SLEDP Coordinator (L) & Louise Twining-Ward, SLEDP Co-TTL (R)

A Call for a Plastic-Free Future

During the event, Hon. Nabeela Fareeda Tunis, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, called on all stakeholders to observe February 20 as Plastic-Free Day annually, as a reminder of the progress made and the work that remains in managing plastic waste.

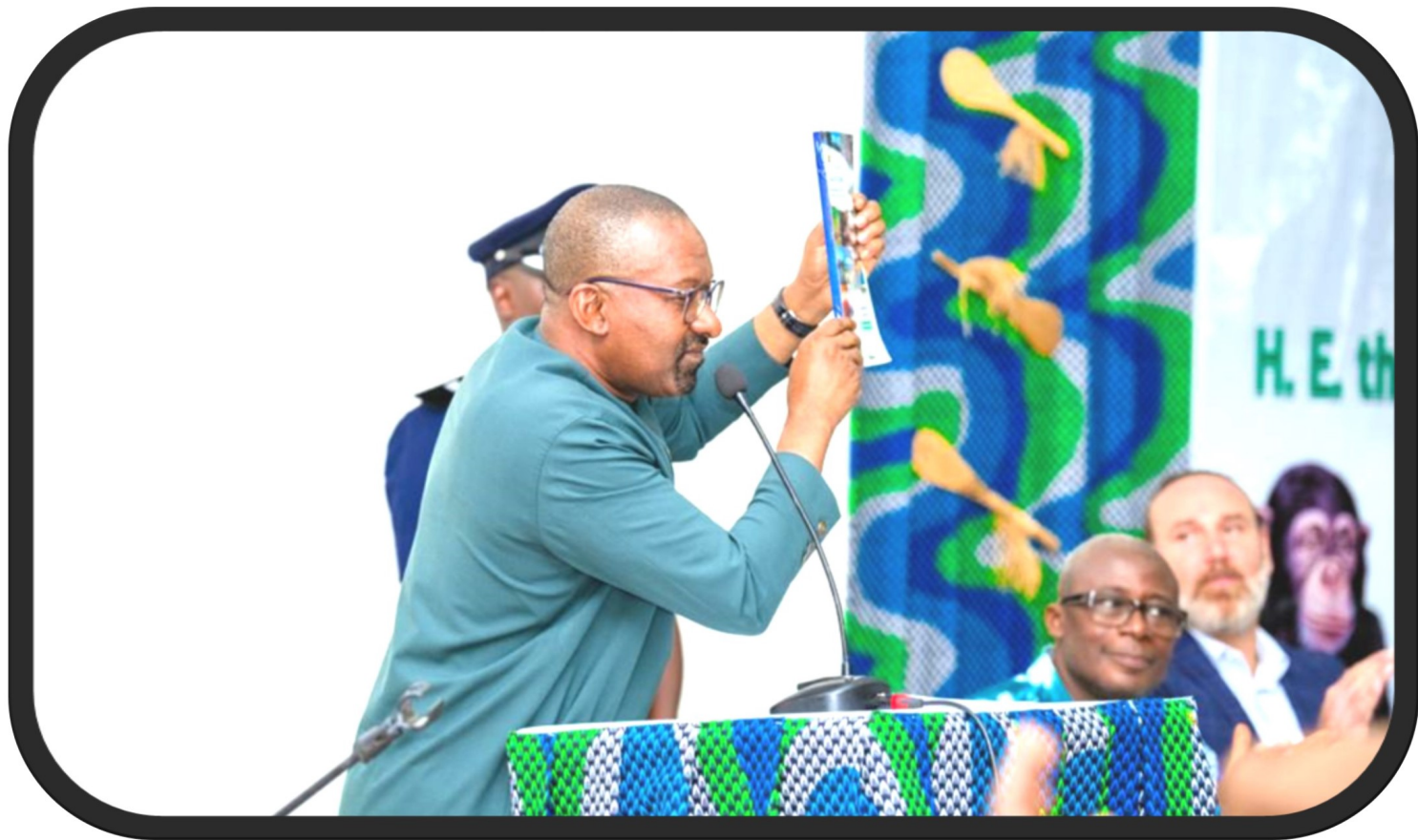


Tourism Minister, Nabeela Tunis

With the draft instructions for a Plastic Management Bill sent to the Ministry of Justice, Sierra Leone's commitment to tackling plastic pollution is evident. Effective implementation of this policy is expected to significantly reduce the environmental and economic impacts of plastic waste, particularly in sectors like tourism and the Blue Economy.

The GO CIRCULAR week marks a promising step in Sierra Leone's journey toward a sustainable, circular economy, where plastics are responsibly managed and recycled, minimizing harm to the environment.

SIERRA LEONE LAUNCHES FIRST NATIONAL STRATEGIC TOURISM PLAN



Sierra Leone Vice President, Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, Unveiling the Strategic Tourism Plan

Sierra Leone has taken a major step in advancing its tourism sector with the launch of its first National Strategic Tourism Plan. This milestone initiative, unveiled by Vice President Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh on May 2, 2024, aims to guide the country's tourism growth over the next decade. The plan, developed in partnership with Journey and Keios Consultants and supported by the World Bank's Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP), is accompanied by a five-year action plan to jumpstart progress.

Vice President Jalloh emphasized the government's commitment to sustainable tourism development through key

investments in infrastructure, such as a new airport, and policy reforms like Visa on Arrival to facilitate easier access for visitors. This strategy is part of a broader effort to diversify Sierra Leone's economy.



National Stakeholders at the Launch of the National Strategic Tourism Plan

Finance Minister Sheku Fantamandi Bangura and Tourism Minister Nabeela Tunis both highlighted the plan's potential to overcome existing challenges in the tourism sector and to drive future economic growth. World Bank Country Manager Dr. Abdu Muwonge also stressed the importance of marketing Sierra Leone's tourism potential effectively.

The launch event concluded with the formal presentation of the plan and the recognition of President Julius Maada Bio as the National Tourism Champion, acknowledging his leadership in promoting the country's tourism industry.



Minister of Finance, Dr. Sheku Fantamandi Bangura

IMPROVING SKILLS IN THE TOURISM SECTOR: A PATH TO EMPOWERMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Tourism is a key driver of economic growth, integration, and job creation, providing significant opportunities for women and youth to earn a livelihood and start businesses. However, women in tourism often face challenges such as unequal pay, limited career prospects, and lack of access to necessary skills and resources. In Sierra Leone, where women constitute over 60% of Micro Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs), these challenges are particularly evident.

Challenges Facing Women in the Tourism Sector

Despite their numerical advantage, women in Sierra Leone's tourism sector encounter barriers including low purchasing power, limited access to finance, and inadequate education and skills development. These obstacles hinder their ability to participate fully in the tourism industry and benefit from its potential.

Government's Focus on Skills Development

Recognizing these challenges, the Government of Sierra Leone has prioritized improving skills in the tourism sector as part of its economic diversification strategy. Over the last three years, the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) has made significant strides in empowering women by offering training in entrepreneurial and tourism-related skills.

Women's Entrepreneurship Empowerment and Capacity Building Skills

One key initiative under SLEDP is the Women's Entrepreneurship Empowerment and Capacity Building Skills training, led by Creative Hub Africa, formerly known as Izelia. This program trained 100 female-led tourism MSMEs in various skills, including soft skills development, budget management, ICT, and the use of digital tourism platforms. The aim was to enhance the business acumen of women entrepreneurs and improve their ability to scale their ventures.



Stakeholders & Beneficiaries of the Women Entrepreneurship and Capacity Building Skills Training in Tourism

Tourism Handicraft and Artisan Skills Development Training

Another critical aspect of skills development was the Tourism Handicraft and Artisan Skills training, spearheaded by the fashion brand Madam Yokie. Over 800 women from key tourist sites such as Leicester, Bathurst, and Banana Island were trained in Gara Tie Dying, Country Cloth Weaving, Makeup Application, Soap and Bead Making. The training not only

developed their artisanal skills but also broadened their understanding of marketing and product promotion.



Madam Wokie

Impact on the Tourism Sector

The government's commitment to empowering women through skills development has boosted the tourism sector's ability to meet the growing demand from international and domestic visitors. The skilled women entrepreneurs now offer their products and services to tourists, contributing to local economies. As tourism destinations in Bureh, Leicester Peak, and Tagugama are upgraded, these women will play a pivotal role in attracting more visitors, creating new job opportunities, and fostering economic growth.



Bureh Community Women Proudly Selling their Locally Crafted Tourism Products.



Gara Tie Dying



Beneficiaries of the Tourism Handicraft Skills Training



Bathurst Community Women

EMPOWERING SIERRA LEONE'S ENTREPRENEURS: SLEDP SHOWCASES SME GROWTH AT HISTORIC EXHIBITION DAY

On May 29, 2024, the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) held its landmark SME Exhibition Day at the Family Kingdom Resort, Freetown. The event celebrated the growth and achievements of 50 SMEs across six key sectors: Tourism, Digital Innovation, Light Manufacturing, Agriculture, Creativity, and the Circular Economy.

Over the past three years, SLEDP has supported 120 SMEs and startups through technical assistance and matching grants totaling \$3 million. More than half of these businesses are women-owned, and the strategic investments made by the grant recipients have significantly transformed their ventures.

Among the exhibitors were businesses such as Crafty Bee Fashion World, Muminie Fashion Empire, Smart Pay, Auto Smart Irrigation and Energy, Shea & More Natural Beauty Products, and Evergreen Women Agribusiness, all showcasing their innovation and growth.



Booths of Different Businesses Showcasing their Products



Smart Pay



Consumers at the Exhibition

The opening ceremony featured dignitaries from the Ministries of Finance, Tourism, and Trade, along with representatives from the World Bank, the National Tourist Board, and other key institutions. In her keynote address, Hon. Nabeela Tunis, Minister of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, emphasized the pivotal role of SMEs in Sierra Leone's sustainable development.

World Bank Representative Mehnaz Safavian highlighted the success of SLEDP's support, affirming the bank's commitment to fostering economic resilience and inclusive growth in Sierra Leone.



World Bank Rep, Mehnaz Safavian

SLEDP Coordinator Mary Jalloh showcased the project's achievements, praising the resilience and innovation of local entrepreneurs.



Mary Jalloh, Coordinator of SLEDP Speaking on the Overall Progress Report of the Project

The event also featured an interactive session addressing challenges in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and concluded with a documentary highlighting success stories.



Panelist Discussing the Entrepreneurship Ecosystem

The day-long exhibition not only demonstrated the impact of SLEDP's interventions but also provided a platform for businesses to sell their locally made products and services.



Tourism Minister, Nabeela Tunis Engaging Business Owners at the Exhibition



Ofino Naturals



Staff of SLEDP

INVESTING IN TOURISM PRODUCTS: DEFINING MOMENTS FOR SIERRA LEONE'S ICONIC TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Iconic Tourism Destinations Undergoing Transformation

Three major sites, Tacugama, Leicester Peak, and Bureh Beach, are at the forefront of this initiative, and their upgrades are central to the National Tourism Policy and the National Ecotourism Policy (2017). These areas, located in the Western Peninsula, will be transformed to meet the demands of modern tourism while preserving their natural beauty.

Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary: known globally for its conservation efforts, Tacugama is receiving significant upgrades, including a state-of-the-art innovation center, an auditorium, and a botanical garden. These additions will enhance educational tourism and further elevate Tacugama's profile.



Concept Design of the Tacugama Innovation Centre

Leicester Peak: popular spot for leisure and panoramic views of Freetown, Leicester Peak's upgrade includes the construction of three viewing decks, offering visitors breathtaking views of the city and surrounding landscape.



Leicester Peak Viewing Deck Creative Exploration

Bureh Beach: Famous for its surf-friendly waters, Bureh Beach will see the addition of a surf club, market facilities, a 400-meter boardwalk, and a 60-meter jetty. These enhancements aim to position Sierra Leone as a top surfing destination in West Africa.



World Bank Task Team Monitoring Progress on Construction Projects

Boosting Tourism and Economic Growth

These developments are poised to significantly boost tourism, create jobs, and contribute to GDP growth. This investment aligns with broader reforms in the tourism sector, including the implementation of a visa-on-arrival program and a 34% reduction in landing fees at Lungi International Airport. Together, these efforts are enhancing the country's competitiveness in the global tourism market.

A Pathway to Rebranding Sierra Leone

The upgrade of these key sites is not just about tourism infrastructure but also part of a broader rebranding strategy for Sierra Leone. By showcasing its natural beauty, wildlife, and cultural heritage, the country is reshaping its image and attracting international attention. These investments in tourism products signal a defining moment for Sierra Leone, as it seeks to transform its economy and position itself as a top travel destination in West Africa.

IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES

- Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs
- Ministry of Trade and Industry
- Bank of Sierra Leone (Collateral Registry)
- Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning
- Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC)
- Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDA)
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Justice (Office of Administrator and Registrar General (OARG))
- Ministry of Works
- Ministry of Labour and Social Security
- Freetown City Council



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MINISTRY OF TOURISM &
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PROJECT INFORMATION

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