

VOLUME 1

ISSUE 2

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THE UNIFIER MAGAZINE

PEOPLE • ISSUES • IDEAS



SIERRA LEONE

in

2024

Plus

A Look Back At

2023

2024 TRAVEL ADVENTURES IN SIERRA LEONE

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Transforming lives through education!



WELCOME TO THE

THE UNIFIER MAGAZINE

ISSUE 2



Dear Readers,

As we unveil the pages of our second issue, we embark on a captivating journey through the narratives that shape the tapestry of Sierra Leone. In this edition, we delve into the riveting tales of 2023, reflecting on the significant stories that defined the year while also peering into the hopeful horizon of 2024—a canvas yet to be painted with the stories that will unfold.

Sierra Leone in 2023: A Look Back: Join us as we rewind the clock and revisit the major stories that echoed through the hills and valleys of Sierra Leone in 2023. From economic ups and downs to political landscapes to arts and culture—these pages capture the essence of a year that left an indelible mark on the nation.

Sierra Leone in 2024: The Hope for the New Year:

As we turn the corner into a new year, we gaze forward, exploring the narratives that may shape Sierra Leone in 2024. What triumphs will we celebrate, challenges will we overcome, and what stories will define our collective journey? Join us in this journey of anticipation and aspiration.

A New Year Wish to Our Readers

To our cherished readers, may the coming year be filled with unity, progress, and the unwavering spirit of hope. As we navigate the stories of the past and dream of those yet to unfold, let the pages of The Unifier Magazine be a source of inspiration and connection.

Thank you for being a part of this journey. Here's to a year of stories that unite us all.

Warm regards,

Editor

“ I call upon every citizen, including political, social, and traditional leaders, to join me in a pledge. Let us dedicate ourselves to promoting national unity, engaging in dialogue that overcomes our differences, and building a future where every citizen feels valued and included. ”





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Dr. Richard Konteh's National Call for Peace and Unity In Sierra Leone

My Fellow Sierra Leoneans:

As we celebrate the festive season of Christmas, I send my warmest wishes to all of you. This season, symbolizing peace and goodwill, allows us to reflect on the essence of unity and peace and the remarkable diversity of people, cultures, and traditions that make up our great nation.

This Christmas, let us remember that our nation's true beauty lies in how we all come together as one. Our diverse people, cultures, languages, and traditions are like different vibrant pieces of a mosaic – distinct yet together, creating a picture of magnificent harmony. This diversity is our heritage and strength and should be celebrated, embraced, and respected.

Recently, we have witnessed the unfortunate rise of tribal and regional rhetoric, sowing seeds of division and discord among our people. We must guard ourselves against the seeds of division. Our political differences should never erode our oneness, the very fabric of our society, and cause hatred, tribalism, or regionalism. Let this Christmas bring with it a reminder of the importance of peace, love, and understanding – values essential for a united and prosperous Sierra Leone.

As we all share in the season's joy, let us also reach out to our neighbours in friendship and unity, irrespective of their background or beliefs. Let us acknowledge that each individual and family in our nation contributes to the rich mosaic of our beloved country.



I call upon every citizen, including political, social, and traditional leaders, to join me in a pledge. Let us dedicate ourselves to promoting national unity, engaging in dialogue that overcomes our differences, and building a future where every citizen feels valued and included.

As we anticipate the New Year, let us strive to create a nation where peace prevails, unity is our foundation, and the spirit of Christmas – a spirit of giving, compassion, and togetherness – guides us year-round.

Together, we can create a bright and peaceful future for everyone. May this Christmas mark a new chapter of greater unity and peace in our beloved nation, a moment of rebirth where we collectively commit to a future where "We All Nar One" is a lived reality.

I wish you a Merry Christmas and a New Year filled with hope, joy, and unity.

In Peace and Solidarity,

Long Live our nation, Sierra Leone!

Dr. Richard Konteh

2023



THE GOOD. THE BAD. THE UGLY THE YEAR IT WAS

By The Unifier Magazine

2023 was a year of complex contrasts for Sierra Leone. While glimmers of progress appeared, significant challenges remain. Let's take a nuanced look at the good, the bad, and the ugly events and reports that marked the year:

THE GOOD



Photo by Abenaa: Freetown from British Council

Population Growth: According to the latest United Nations data, Sierra Leone's population increased in 2023 to 8.8 million, with a 2.26% above-average growth rate. The median age in Sierra Leone is 18.5 years, which is disproportionately young and makes for a very young working population. The average woman gives birth to roughly 4.5 children, and this high birth rate

is the cause of the substantial growth rate in the country.

Why do we think this is a good thing for Sierra Leone?

Potential benefits:

- **Demographic dividend:** A young population can mean a larger workforce compared to the dependent population, potentially leading to economic growth and higher GDP. This "demographic dividend" can provide more resources for investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **Innovation and entrepreneurship:** Younger generations are often seen as more adaptable and open to new ideas, potentially driving innovation and entrepreneurship. This can create new businesses and job opportunities, further boosting the economy.
- **Increased social mobility:** With a larger pool of young

people, there might be greater social mobility, as young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have more opportunities to climb the social ladder through education and hard work.

- **Vibrant culture and energy:** A young population can contribute to a more vibrant and dynamic culture with a greater openness to new ideas and trends. This can enhance the nation's image and attract investment.

However, there are potential drawbacks as we are experiencing today:

- **High unemployment:** A large young population without adequate skills and education has led to high unemployment rates, creating social unrest and hindering economic growth.
- **Lack of experience and skills:** Young workers lack the experience and skills

required for certain jobs, limiting their employment opportunities and slowing economic development.

- ***Social and political instability:*** A large, unemployed, and frustrated youth population is more susceptible to radicalization and conflict, potentially destabilizing the country.



Photo by the office of the president: State House

Tripartite for National Unity: To resolve the political impasse that followed the elections held on June 24, 2023, the African Union, ECOWAS, the Commonwealth, and the Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) facilitated an Agreement for National Unity.

This new initiative allows all political parties to work together to resolve differences, build national unity, and ensure long-term peace and stability.

However, as echoed by Ambassador Bryan Hunt, the United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone, during an interview on AYV TV, "The Agreement for National Unity is

for the benefit of all Sierra Leoneans, not political parties. Using the November 26th attack to walk away from the dialogue is suspicious and alarming to nationals and international partners."

We look forward to the progress of this new mechanism to advance the aspirations of the Sierra Leonean people for democracy, health, and prosperity.



Economic Freedom Index:

Sierra Leone's economic freedom score is 50.2, making its economy the 148th freest (???) in the 2023 Index, according to the Heritage Foundation's 2023 Index of Economic Freedom. Sierra Leone scored 1.8 points lower than last year and ranked 35th out of 47 countries in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Its overall score is below the world and regional averages, one point above Liberia (35th) and 10 points below Guinea (25th).

This progress comes from the past APC government's investment in improving legal and physical infrastructure from 2007 to 2018. The foundations

of economic freedom remain beset by structural and institutional problems. The rule of law is weak, and corruption continues to deter private-sector development. Inefficient regulatory enforcement impedes expansion and diversification of the productive base.

<https://www.heritage.org/index/country/sierraleone>



Happiness In Sierra Leone?

The World Happiness Report 2023, a Sustainable Development Solutions Network publication powered by the Gallup World Poll data, ranked Sierra Leone 135th, five points up from the 2022 ranking of 140.

Does this 5-point bump mean Sierra Leoneans were happier in 2023 than in 2022? The country remains a low-income country, with over 70% of the population living below the national poverty line. The wealth gap in Sierra Leone is stark, with a small elite controlling a large portion of the nation's resources. The welfare system is unable to help its citizens feel taken care of.



Photos by drizilik.com and muzaymanentertainment.com

Thriving Music Scene:

Drizilik, Muzay Man, etc. These artists are leading figures in Sierra Leone's recent music scene, blending traditional sounds with contemporary influences like Afrobeat and hip-hop. Both artists have won international awards and recognition, performing at major festivals and collaborating with renowned musicians.

Benjamin Menelik George, aka Drizilik's new song "Finesse" is becoming a global anthem for youth empowerment, while Musa Conteh, aka Muzay Man, a Sierra Leonean International musician based in Nederland/Holland, has been adjudged the Best European dancehall artist for 2023.

Muzay Man beat stiff competition to win the prestigious award during the 2023 edition of the All Work of Life (AWOL) European Awards held in Germany.

The success of these artists puts Sierra Leone on the global music map, inspiring a new generation of musicians and creating opportunities for cultural exchange.



Photo by un.org/en/model-united-nations/security-council

UN Security Council Member:

Sierra Leone achieved a significant milestone on June 6 when it was elected to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2024 to 2025. This achievement presents a unique opportunity for Sierra Leone to contribute to global peace and security while enhancing its own standing on the world stage. It is a significant responsibility, but the potential benefits for both the international community and Sierra Leone cannot be ignored.

The Sierra Leone government should start working hard to promote peace, security and good governance within its borders.

World Bank Approves \$65 Million to Support Macroeconomic Stability and Governance:

This grant is to support the Government in addressing critical challenges related to macroeconomic stability, mining sector governance, land management practices, gender equality, and public sector accountability.



Photo by UNICEF/UNI404864

Sierra Leone Gets First Malaria Vaccine:

The Sierra Leone Ministry of Health received 550,000 doses of the new WHO-recommended malaria vaccines, the RTS, S. Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, funded the project to the tune of \$US5.5 million after its board approved 1.7M doses for Sierra Leone from 2024 to 2025. UNICEF did the procurement.

In Sierra Leone, malaria is the leading cause of morbidity, with over two million hospital visits per year, and one million of these cases are reported among children under five years. This preventable disease also accounts for 25% of all child deaths in the country.

The good news now means that Sierra Leone has the foundation to kickstart its vaccination through Gavi-supported routine immunization programmes in the first quarter of 2024.



Photo by John Wessels/AFP/Getty Image

Election Shadows: The contested 2023 election cast a long shadow, with lingering grievances and accusations of irregularities fueling political tension. The shadow it casts reflects more than just a contest for power – it encompasses simmering grievances, unaddressed irregularities, and, ultimately, concerns about the future of Sierra Leone's democracy.

The shadows of the 2023 election will continue to loom over Sierra Leone for some time. Addressing the underlying issues and pursuing meaningful reforms will be critical for ensuring a more stable and democratic future. Open dialogue, transparency, and a commitment to inclusivity are essential to heal the divisions and rebuild trust in the electoral process.



Photo by Iccoccia Getty Images

Unequal Growth: While Sierra Leone's economy shows some tiny glimmers in 2023, poverty and unemployment remain high, particularly in rural areas. This highlights the unequal distribution of the benefits of economic growth, leaving many Sierra Leoneans behind.

When a large portion of the population is excluded from the economy, the nation loses out on their potential contribution. This can stifle economic growth and limit overall prosperity. The fruits of progress needed to be shared more equitably for true national prosperity.

ECSL - Theft and Fire: Just as many Sierra Leoneans were trying to get analytic justification of the results for the June elections, in September 2023, the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) reported that 142 tablets were stolen from their Wellington office in Freetown. The Commission also reported that a fire outbreak at their sub-office in Karene District destroyed valuable electoral materials.



Photo by Bernice Bangura sierraloading.sl

A Multifaceted Talent Lost: Sierra Leone's vibrant entertainment scene dimmed considerably on February 17, 2023, with the passing of Henrietta Mbawah at the age of 34. Her untimely demise is a huge loss to the nation's artistic community, a sentiment that speaks volumes about the multifaceted talent she embodied- an award-winning actress, TV and Radio personality, youth activist, the CEO of Salone Lives Matter and a pageant producer of missmanoriver.



Susan's Bay Fires: For the second time, an inferno ravaged the Tripoli community in Susan's Bay – a slum community in the east of Freetown. As many as 5,000 people were left homeless. In an interview with Radio Democracy, some residents accused the Electricity Distribution and Supply Authority (EDSA), saying the company's high voltage supply caused the outbreak after some fluctuations.

THE UGLY



Photo by Saidu Bah/AFP/Getty Images

November 26 - Coup Attempt/ Security Breach:

The November 26th attack on military barracks in Sierra Leone sent shockwaves through the nation, shattering a perceived sense of security and highlighting deep-seated vulnerabilities. This attempted coup or security breach, though ultimately unsuccessful, cast a long shadow over the year, raising concerns about potential instability and eroding a fragile sense of peace.

The violence tragically resulted in at least 20 deaths, including soldiers and civilians, leaving deep scars on families and communities. An aggressive manhunt ensued, leading to the arrest of over 70 individuals, including prominent figures like former president Koroma's bodyguards. The ongoing investigations aim to shed light on the motives behind the attack, the extent of the network involved, and potential security breaches that facilitated it.



Photo by Iccoccia Getty Images

July 13 - Coup Attempt/ State Subversion: The Sierra Leone Police arrested nineteen (19) people for "state subversion." During an interview on Radio Democracy in Freetown on Wednesday, August 9, police spokesperson CSP Brima Kamara said the individuals arrested are being investigated for "subversion of the State." Also, at a press conference held by the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, the Inspector General of Police, William Fayia Sellu, said, "The arrests were made on intelligence that some people were planning to destabilize the State."

Although the police preferred to call the July 13 incident a "state subversion" and other crime semantics, the development was widely reported as a coup attempt.



Photo by George M. O. Williams

Corruption: A Persistent Plague

In June 2023, the UK Serious Fraud Office (SFO) charged the chief executive officer, chief financial officer and an international business consultant of London Mining Plc, an international mining company, for conspiring to make multiple corrupt payments to secure preferential treatment by the government in Sierra Leone (Serious Fraud Office 2023). Collusion has been particularly visible in the exploitation of natural resources, mainly in the diamond mining industry. A study by Transparency International also documented how collusion between business and government resulted in entire communities and hundreds of people being scammed out of their land.

MEANWHILE



Audit Report: Millions Unaccounted For

The Auditor General's report found significant financial irregularities totalling over SLE350 million within the public financial management system.

MORE OF THE UGLY



A Triple Threat: Coco Samba, Kush, and Energy Drinks' Impact on Sierra Leone's Youth

Sierra Leone faced a new set of social and health challenges – the allure of readily available substances that promise escape, energy, or both. Coco Samba, a traditional herbal drink, alongside the increasingly prevalent Kush (cannabis) and a surge in energy drink consumption, weaved a complex tapestry of consequences for the nation's young generation.

Coco Samba: Tradition with a Bittersweet Side:

Coco Samba, brewed from Baobab bark, Kola nuts, and other herbs, is woven into the fabric of Sierra Leonean culture. While lauded for its potential immune-boosting and digestive properties, concerns simmer beneath the surface. Unregulated preparation, inconsistent ingredient ratios, and a lack of scientific evidence for its purported benefits leave questions about its true impact on young consumers. The bitter taste often leads to the addition of sugar, raising concerns about potential sugar addiction and long-term health effects.



Kush: A Buzz with a Blight:

The rising tide of Kush, a potent cannabis strain, poses a more pronounced threat. Driven by curiosity, peer pressure, and the misconception of harmlessness, young Sierra Leoneans are increasingly drawn to its calming and euphoric effects. However, the consequences are stark. Impaired cognitive function, reduced motivation, and potential addiction threaten academic performance, future prospects, and overall well-being. The risk of psychosis and respiratory issues adds another layer of concern, casting a shadow on the future of young minds.



Energy Drinks: A Rush with a Crash:

Fuelled by marketing campaigns targeting young audiences, energy drinks have become a ubiquitous presence in Sierra Leone. The promise of enhanced focus and physical performance combined with their sweet, bubbly taste draws teenagers in. However, the hidden dangers lurk within. High caffeine content leads to anxiety, sleep disturbances, and even heart problems. The sugar rush followed by a crash can disrupt energy levels and contribute to unhealthy weight gain. Moreover, the normalization of energy drink consumption at a young age can pave the way for dependence on stimulants in the future.



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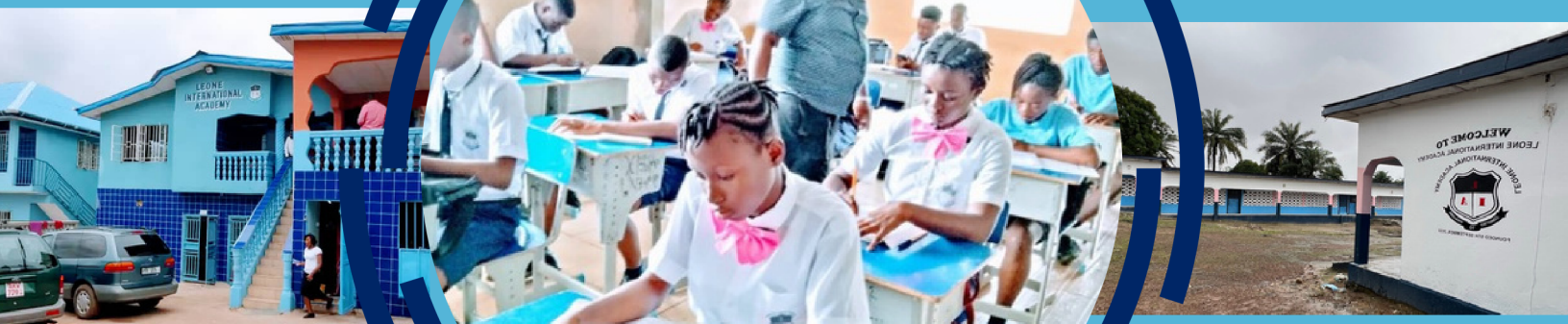
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ISSUES

CONQUERING MOUNT RESOLUTION: Confessions of a (Mostly) Recovering Resolution Renegade

By Albert Mackoty

Ah, the New Year. A time for sparkling cider, confetti showers, and... crippling anxiety about the self-improvement resolutions you've inevitably vowed to uphold. Fear not, fellow procrastinators and chronic couch potatoes, for I, a seasoned veteran of the resolution rollercoaster, am here to guide you through the treacherous terrain of personal change (or, at least, the hilarious detours along the way).

First, let's address the elephant in the room: most of us are terrible at keeping resolutions. It's like we're drawn to the siren song of self-flagellation, promising to become fitness fanatics and language gurus only to find ourselves halfway through January, still rocking the PJs and struggling to



conjugate "to be" in French (quelle horreur!).

But fear not, dear friends, for failure is not the enemy, it's the clown car we ride to the amusement park of self-discovery! Embrace the stumbles, the epic fails, the "I meant to start yesterday" moments. They're the glitter on the resolution cake, the sprinkles of chaos that make the journey worthwhile.

Here are some pro tips from my own slightly tarnished resolution journey:

Aim for the "Kinda Maybe": Forget "running a marathon" and embrace "jogging to the mailbox without wheezing." These bite-sized goals are less intimidating and more likely to stick, like a slightly stale cookie that's still strangely satisfying.

Buddy Up: Find a partner in crime, someone who will laugh at your yoga poses and share the blame for abandoned gym memberships. Misery loves company, and shared resolutions love pizza nights and Netflix marathons.

Celebrate the Weird: Who says resolutions have to be sensible? Vow to learn the kazoo, master the art of sock puppetry, or write a haiku about your pet goldfish. Embrace the quirky, the unexpected, and watch your inner child do a happy dance.

Forgive and Forget (and Repeat): Did you eat an entire bag of chips instead of kale? Did you spend all day scrolling cat videos instead of writing your novel? Don't sweat it! Tomorrow's a new day, a fresh canvas for another round of "I'm gonna do the thing this time!"

Remember, resolutions are not about perfection, they're about progress (even if that progress involves mastering the art of napping in various contortions). So, raise a glass of bubbly (or a mug of hot cocoa, no judgment), laugh at your past failures, and embrace the glorious messiness of self-improvement.

Because at the end of the day, the New Year is about more than just resolutions, it's about new beginnings, new adventures, and new opportunities to be our most delightfully, wonderfully imperfect selves. Now go forth and conquer... or at least attempt to conquer. The world (and your couch) awaits!

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2024

THE YEAR AHEAD

By The Unifier Magazine



As 2023 draws to a close, Sierra Leone stands at a crossroads. What should Sierra Leoneans at home and abroad expect in 2024? Will it be another rollercoaster? Buckle up and take a peek at what might lie ahead.



Photo by the office of the president, State House

Political Tensions

The contested 2023 election and the ongoing rift between the ruling SLPP and the opposition APC could continue to cast a shadow over the political landscape. These tensions could hinder progress and stability in 2024.

However, the establishment of the inter-party committee (Tripartite Committee) to review the June elections, if implemented genuinely and allowed to carry out its mandate

with no strings attached, could foster genuine dialogue and reconciliation between the government, opposition parties, and civil society. This is crucial to address the underlying political tensions and prevent future violence.

A complete review of the electoral system in Sierra Leone is essential to strengthen national democracy. President Julius Maada Bio should make this a top priority in 2024.



Photo by eatyourworld.com

Inflation: The Bread & Butter Issue

The year 2023 finds Sierra Leoneans grappling with a persistent foe – inflation. Cost of food increased 59% and food inflation reaching 64%. The cost of living increased exponentially.

The 2024 projections suggest inflation could stay the same or even increase and will continue to impact the lives of ordinary citizens significantly.

For Sierra Leoneans, inflation translates to a daily struggle. The price of basic necessities like bread, rice, cooking oil, and fuel will continue to skyrocket, making it difficult to make ends meet. More families will be forced to cut back on meals, healthcare, and education, sacrificing essential needs to cope with rising costs.

Unequal Burden: The burden of inflation is not evenly distributed. The poorest and most vulnerable segments of society, who already struggle with limited resources, are hit hardest. Children, the elderly, and those living in rural areas are particularly at risk of falling deeper into poverty and food insecurity.

The Ripple Effect: Inflation's impact goes beyond individual households. It hinders businesses, discourages investment, and stifles economic

growth. The government faces increased pressure to manage public finances and provide social safety nets, further straining its resources.

Inflation - The Road Ahead:

The battle against inflation is a long and complex one. It requires sustained commitment and collaboration between the government, civil society, and international actors. By prioritizing people's needs, implementing effective policies, and fostering a culture of transparency, Sierra Leone can navigate this challenging period and emerge stronger, building a more resilient and equitable future for all its citizens.



Illustration by National Revenue Authority: nra.gov.sl

The New Finance Act

In 2024, Sierra Leoneans will have a new Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT) at a rate of 3% on turnover, which is payable if greater than the calculated Corporate Income Tax (CIT). Some of the other measures of the Finance Act include:

- An increase in the stamp duty rate from 1% to 2% of

the value of a property for conveyances and other assignments of property, mortgages debentures and transfers thereof, and liquidations;

- The introduction of a new tourism levy at a rate of 2% on the sales price of accommodation, food, drinks, and other related services offered by tourism establishments.

These new taxes will have both direct and indirect implications for ordinary Sierra Leoneans, depending on economic status and employment situation:

Direct Implications:

- **Increased cost of goods and services:** Companies subject to the MAT may pass on the additional tax burden to consumers by raising prices. This could lead to a general increase in the cost of living for ordinary Sierra Leoneans, particularly those who rely on basic goods and services.
- **Reduced corporate profits:** Companies that are already struggling may find their profits further squeezed by the MAT. This could lead to reduced investment, job cuts, and lower wages for employees.
- **Potential impact on employment:** If companies are forced to cut costs due to

the MAT, this could lead to job losses in affected sectors. This could disproportionately affect low-skilled workers and those already struggling to find employment.

Indirect Implications:

- **Reduced government revenue:** If businesses are able to avoid paying the MAT by reducing their profits, this could lead to a decrease in government revenue. This could, in turn, affect government spending on essential services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure, which could ultimately have a negative impact on ordinary Sierra Leoneans.
- **Uncertainty and instability:** The introduction of the MAT may create uncertainty in the business community, which could lead to reduced investment and economic growth. This could ultimately have a negative impact on ordinary Sierra Leoneans in terms of job opportunities and overall economic well-being.



Photograph: AFP/Getty

The Precarious Dance with Climate Change

Climate change is a global challenge that casts a long shadow over Sierra Leone, threatening the fragile balance of its ecosystem and the lives of its citizens. While 2024 is just starting, the looming effects of a warming planet are already being felt, and the future holds potentially harsher realities for the nation's 8 million inhabitants.

The Present Predicament:

Extreme Weather: Erratic rainfall patterns, with more frequent and intense floods and droughts, are already impacting agriculture, leading to crop failures and food insecurity. Rising sea levels threaten coastal communities, putting homes and infrastructure at risk.

Natural Hazards: The frequency and intensity of storms and landslides are expected to increase, causing widespread damage and displacement.

Resource Scarcity: Droughts and changing weather patterns threaten water availability,

impacting sanitation, health, and livelihoods.

Biodiversity Loss: Rising temperatures and changing ecosystems threaten Sierra Leone's rich biodiversity, impacting food chains and disrupting traditional ways of life.

The 2024 Forecast:

The Food Security Squeeze: The combined impact of droughts and floods could lead to significant crop losses, pushing food prices further up and exacerbating hunger and malnutrition.

Water Woes: Droughts and saltwater intrusion could further deplete freshwater resources, leading to water scarcity in cities and towns, straining sanitation systems and posing health risks.

Health Concerns: Changing weather patterns and increased flooding can create ideal breeding grounds for mosquitoes, leading to outbreaks of malaria and other vector-borne diseases.

Displacement and Migration: Rising sea levels and extreme weather events could displace coastal communities, leading to internal migration and increased pressure on urban areas.

The Road Ahead:

The year 2024 presents a critical juncture for Sierra Leone in its fight against climate change. By acknowledging the urgency of the situation, implementing effective adaptation strategies, and fostering international collaboration, the nation can navigate the turbulent waters of a changing climate and build a more resilient and sustainable future for its citizens.



Photo by Gray Tappan USGS

The Fragile Eden: Environmental Degradation

Sierra Leone, which was once a nation renowned for its lush rainforests and vibrant coastline, faces a silent yet insidious threat – environmental degradation. Deforestation, land mismanagement, and pollution are weaving a dark tapestry of challenges, threatening the nation's precious ecosystems and the livelihoods of the citizens. As we peer into 2024, the threads of this crisis become starker, prompting a call for urgent action.

The Bleak Landscape:

Deforestation: Unbridled logging and slash-and-burn agriculture devour Sierra Leone's once-expansive forests, contributing to soil erosion, biodiversity loss, and climate change.

Land Degradation: Overgrazing, unsustainable farming practices, and soil erosion deplete valuable agricultural land, jeopardizing food security and rural livelihoods.

Plastic Pollution: Mountains of plastic waste choke waterways, contaminate ecosystems, and harm marine life, disrupting traditional fishing livelihoods and threatening coastal communities.

Waste Management: Inefficient waste disposal systems leave cities drowning in garbage, posing health risks and breeding grounds for disease.

The Tangible Consequences:

Floods and Droughts: Deforestation exacerbates flooding risks during heavy rains, while increasing desertification can lead to more frequent and severe droughts, impacting food production and water availability.

Food Insecurity: Declining soil fertility and disruptions to ecosystems threaten agricultural yields, pushing food prices up and leaving the vulnerable

population facing hunger.

Health Concerns: Air and water pollution can exacerbate respiratory illnesses and waterborne diseases, straining healthcare systems and impacting public health.

Loss of Livelihoods: Depleted fisheries, degraded farmlands, and disrupted tourism due to environmental damage can plunge communities into economic hardship.

The Path Forward:

Combating environmental degradation demands a multi-pronged approach including, promoting agroforestry, soil conservation techniques, and responsible grazing practices to protect land and boost agricultural productivity. Implementing stricter logging regulations, supporting reforestation efforts, and empowering communities to manage forests sustainably are crucial. Investing in proper waste collection systems, promoting recycling and composting, and raising awareness about responsible waste disposal are essential. Educating citizens about the importance of environmental protection and equipping them with the tools to adapt to a changing environment is key.

2024 is poised to be a pivotal year for Sierra Leone. The choices we will make and how we tackle the challenges ahead will determine the country's trajectory in the years to come. Let us foster national unity, promote inclusive development, and address critical issues like poverty, healthcare, and education, so we can turn these challenges into opportunities for growth and progress. Our collective resilience and resourcefulness will undoubtedly play a vital role in shaping the nation's future.



Photo by Tommy Trenchard for NPR



Photograph: the office of the president, State House

More Airport Charges: Tourism on death row

The Ministry of Transport and Aviation, on December 28, 2023, disclosed an agreement with FIA Ltd. (formerly Summa Airport (SL) Ltd.) for the Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) arrangement at Freetown International Airport.

The new agreement includes a comprehensive revision of airport charges, set to be enforced from March 1, 2024, and extending beyond. The altered fee structure encompasses adjustments in key areas with a significant impact on tourism and on ordinary Sierra Leoneans:

- **Increased travel costs for tourists:** Higher passenger service charges, airport development charges, and the potential introduction of new fees like security or processing fees could make

Sierra Leone a more expensive travel destination, discouraging tourism and impacting the sector's contribution to the economy and employment.

- **Cost-of-living increase for Sierra Leoneans:** Frequent flyers, business travellers, and those with family abroad will bear the brunt of the increased passenger service charge. Even though phased, the additional airport development charge will indirectly impact the cost of goods and services as airlines factor it into their pricing.
- **Uncertainty for airlines:** The significant increase in landing charges, particularly for heavier aircraft, could deter some airlines from flying to Sierra Leone, reducing connectivity and

potentially hindering economic growth.

- **Limited access to travel:** The increased travel costs will make air travel less affordable for ordinary Sierra Leoneans, limiting their access to travel opportunities for business, education, or personal reasons.



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GRAB YOUR PASSPORT:

2024 Travel Adventures in Sierra Leone

By The Unifier Magazine

Forget the Maldives, ditch Dubai – 2024 is the year to set your sights on a hidden gem, a land where vibrant culture dances with breathtaking landscapes and the rhythm of life beats to a different drum. Welcome to Sierra Leone, folks, the ultimate destination for the adventurous soul seeking an escape from the ordinary.

So, ditch the spreadsheets and pack your dancing shoes (and maybe some mosquito repellent, just in case) because Sierra Leone is ready to whisk you away on an unforgettable journey. Here's a taste of what awaits you:

THE BEACH BUMS

Freetown: Dive headfirst into the pulsating energy of the capital city - Freetown, where pristine beaches like Lumley sandwiched between bustling streets offer a taste of both city and surf. Soak up the sun, dig your toes into the sand, and listen to the hypnotic beat of the djembe drums as the sun dips below the horizon.



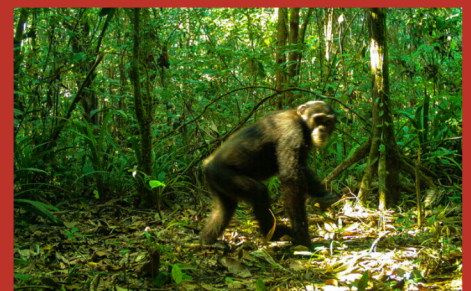
Photo by Visit Sierra Leone

Banana Islands: Escape the mainland for a Robinson Crusoe-esque experience on these idyllic islands. Picture swaying palm trees, turquoise waters begging for a dip, and the gentle whisper of the ocean lulling you to sleep. Just remember, your biggest worry here will be choosing between snorkelling with turtles or sipping fresh coconut juice.



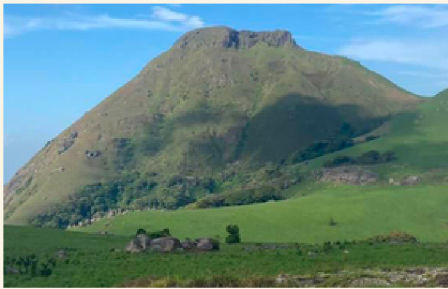
ADVENTURE JUNKIES

Go Ape in the Gola Rainforest: Trek through the lush canopy of this ancient rainforest, home to chimpanzees, elephants, and a symphony of exotic birds. Climb rickety bridges, swing on Tarzan vines (metaphorically, of course), and witness the raw beauty of nature that makes you feel like you've stepped back in time.



Climb Mount Bintumani:

Conquer the highest peak in West Africa and earn bragging rights (and some killer Instagram pics) along the way. Trek through misty valleys, encounter friendly villagers standing on top of the world (well, at least of Sierra Leone), and soak in the panoramic views that stretch as far as the eye can see.



CULTURE CONNOISSEURS

Bunce Island: Step into a living history book on this former slave trading post, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Explore the chilling ruins, hear the stories whispered by the stones, and learn about a complex chapter in Sierra Leone's past.



Makeni Craft Market: Get lost in a vibrant kaleidoscope of colors, textures, and smells in this bustling marketplace. Haggle for handwoven textiles, intricately carved wooden masks, and one-of-a-kind souvenirs that tell the story of Sierra Leone's rich artistic traditions.



THE FOODIES

Street Food Safari: Forget fancy Michelin-starred restaurants, the real culinary adventure awaits in the backstreets and bustling markets. Sample spicy pepper soup, savour savoury plantains, and indulge in the sweet, sticky goodness of puff-puff donuts – all while soaking up the local atmosphere.



Catch of the Day: From succulent barbecued fish fresh off the boat to fiery stews simmering over open flames, Sierra Leone's coastal cuisine is a feast for the senses. Find a local spot on the beach, grab a plastic chair, and prepare for an explosion of flavours that will tantalize your taste buds.



So, there you have it, folks. Forget the cookie-cutter tourist traps, Sierra Leone is a land where adventure awaits around every corner. Come for the beaches, stay for the culture, and leave with a heart full of memories and a smile that refuses to fade. Just remember, in Sierra Leone, the only itinerary you need is the one your soul writes along the way.

Now, pack your bags, grab your sense of humor, and get ready for a 2024 travel adventure that will leave you breathless, inspired, and maybe a little bit sunburnt (but in the best way possible). Sierra Leone awaits!

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RELAX REFRESH REPEAT



NOTEWORTHY★

CANSERRA: CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE

Transforming lives through education!

By Albert Mackoty

Photography by Canserra



The newly constructed CanSerra Vocational Institute in Waterloo, Liberian Camp, Kissi Town, Sierra Leone.

Amidst the vibrant tapestry of Sierra Leone, where verdant hills meet the ocean's embrace and where the echoes of a turbulent past linger, a quiet revolution is taking root. CanSerra, a grassroots organization fueled by the unwavering belief in the transformative power of education, is rewriting the narrative for countless children marginalized by poverty and circumstance. This is not a story

of grand pronouncements or sweeping reforms but one of unwavering dedication whispered dreams taking flight, and seeds of hope blossoming in the most unexpected places.

CanSerra's journey began not in grand halls but in the humble heart of Bassie Kargbo, a young Sierra Leonean man who fled Sierra Leone during the brutal civil war in the 90s and resettled in Canada as a refugee.

Fueled by a fierce instinct and unwavering determination, Bassie gathered a group of like-minded individuals, united by a simple yet profound mission: to bring education to where it is needed most.



Bassie Kargbo founder of Canserra



Their first steps were tentative: a small school was established in Kissi Town, a community grappling with poverty and limited access to basic necessities. But within those mud-brick walls, something extraordinary began to bloom. Children, once denied the privilege of learning, found themselves immersed in the magic of alphabets and numbers, their eyes sparkling with the joy of discovery. The sound of laughter and the hum of eager voices pierced through the silence of disadvantage, a testament to the transformative power of a single classroom.

CanSerra's impact, however, is not confined to brick-and-mortar structures. Recognizing the diverse needs of marginalized communities, they have woven a tapestry of educational initiatives in Mabureh and Kalangba villages.



A newly built vocational institute (CanSerra Vocational Institute) has sprouted in Waterloo, equipping young men and women with skills to build a better future. The school feeding program and mobile libraries, packed with books like precious treasures, roll into communities, igniting a thirst for knowledge in young minds. Each initiative, meticulously tailored to the community's specific needs, becomes a stepping stone, a bridge across the chasm of inequality.

The stories that emerge from CanSerra's work are testaments to the power of human connection. Fatmata, a young girl once ostracized for her learning disability, now finds her voice in the classroom, her eyes shining with newfound confidence. Unisa, a former child labourer, now wields a welding torch, his calloused



hands crafting a future of self-reliance. These are not just individual triumphs but collective victories; each life transformed a testament to the boundless potential that lies within every child, waiting to be nurtured.

CanSerra's journey is not without its challenges. Funding gaps and logistical hurdles are constant companions, but they are met with unwavering resolve and a resourcefulness that knows no bounds. Every donated dollar, every volunteer hour, is a testament to the unwavering commitment to the cause.

As the sun dips below the horizon, casting long shadows across the newly built classrooms, one can almost hear the whispers of the future. It speaks of doctors and engineers, entrepreneurs and artists, all nurtured by the seeds of hope that CanSerra has sown.

In the tapestry of Sierra Leone's story, CanSerra is not just a thread, but a vibrant pattern, woven with the hopes and dreams of a marginalized generation. It is a reminder that even in the face of adversity, the power of education can illuminate the path forward, transforming lives and nurturing a future where every child, regardless of their background, can write their own chapter of success.

Help CanSerra to empower more people to overcome poverty!

Visit CanSerra's website to learn more about their mission and how you can get involved:
www.canserra.org



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