



**WILL MINISTER SANDY  
REMAIN  
UNTOUCHABLE?**



**THE ALUSINE KANNEH  
CONTROVERSY  
AND LEIJDEKKERS' SHADOW**



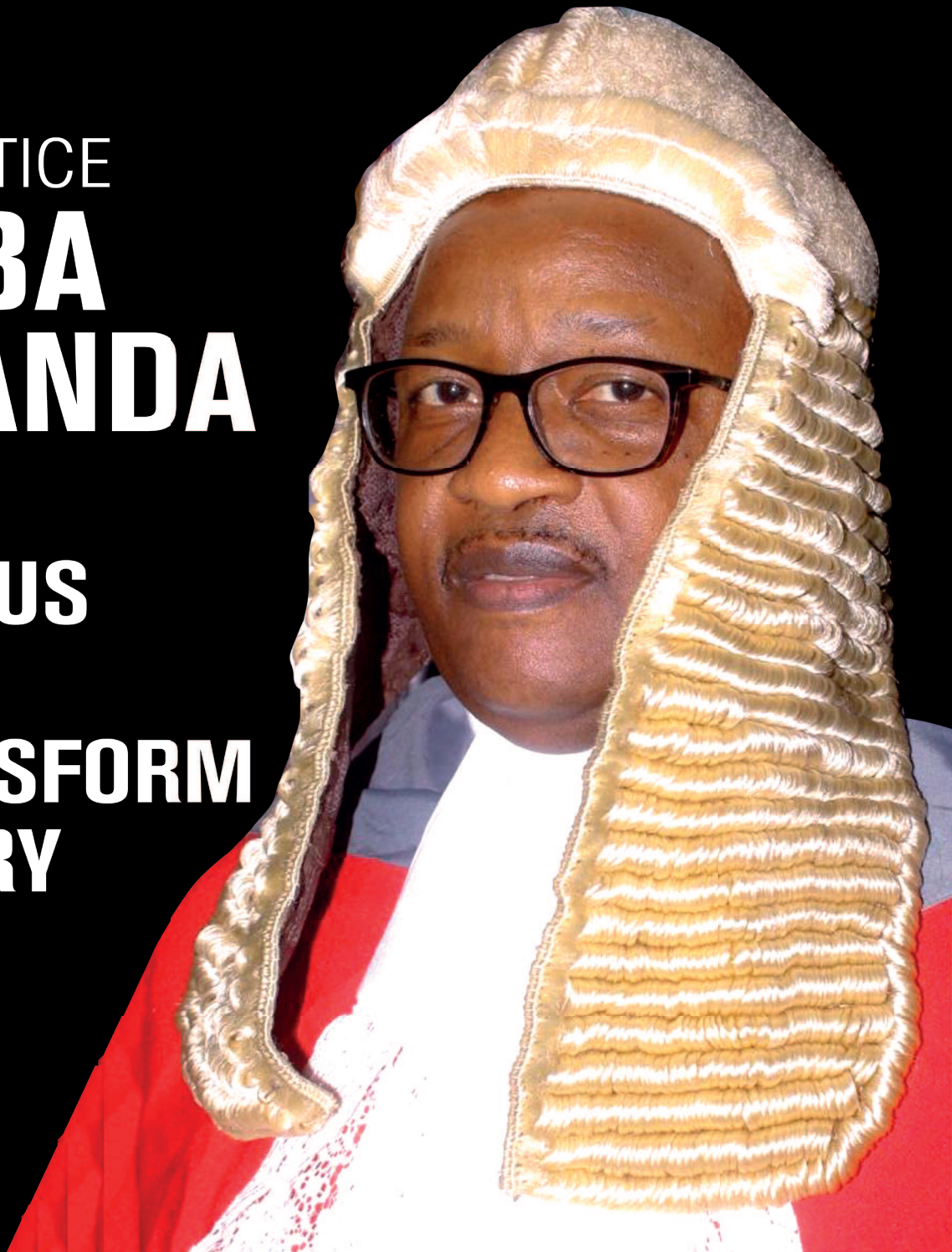
**A BEACON OF SERVICE  
THE LEGACY OF PROFESSOR  
DR. ALUSINE JALLOH**

# SiERRAEYE

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CHIEF JUSTICE  
**KOMBA  
KAMANDA**  
UNVEILS  
AMBITIOUS  
VISION  
TO TRANSFORM  
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# A Lens on Justice, Resilience and Revelation



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Welcome to the April edition of Sierra Eye, where we examine Sierra Leone's current challenges and possibilities. This isn't a soft story of beaches or small victories—it's a hard look at a nation grappling with its past, present, and future. Our cover story, an exclusive interview with Chief Justice Komba Kamanda, leads the way. He aims to rebuild a judiciary that's lost public trust, offering a bold plan to make justice real. But justice—hard to find, often disputed, and sometimes hidden—runs through every article in this issue.

Vickie Remoe tackles Afrobeats, arguing it's not just Nigeria's domain. She highlights Sierra Leone's Krio Fusion as a global player, showing culture belongs to us all. Then there's Victor Onie Williams' unsolved death—a young man gone, his mother's calls for answers ignored by a faltering system. These aren't just news items; they reflect a country questioning its identity and direction.

Our satirical guide to spotting Sierra Leone's "psychos" offers a laugh, pointing at polished figures hiding ambition behind smiles. It ties into the serious allegations against Dr. Dennis Sandy—forgery claims met with government silence, challenging Sierra Leone's stance on sexual violence. Can we push for justice abroad while tripping up at home? It's a question that hangs over us.

The kush crisis shows a generation in peril—a national emergency declared but struggling, with police action outpacing care. Compare that to cricket, a sport pushing forward despite neglect. Francis Trevor Samura, Lansana Lamin, and Fatmata Parkinson share tales of success against the odds, much like Professor Dr. Alusine Jalloh's work at St. Edward's

Secondary School, where he's rebuilding more than just buildings.

But there's trouble too. Moiyattu Banya-Keister exposes a mental health crisis among youth, ignored by those in charge. The narco-scandal of Johannes "Bolle Jos" Leijdekkers—a drug lord living openly here—raises alarms, with cocaine in embassy cars and kush tearing through streets. Why didn't our journalists break this? Fear, payoffs, and weak resources let foreign media take the lead. "The Death of Shame" digs deeper—students cheat and leaders dodge blame, showing a society where accountability's fading.

Hope isn't lost. Bimbola Carrol envisions a tourism boom beyond beaches, tapping into heritage and nature. Nyamacoro Sarata Silla suggests practical fixes to cool a overheating Freetown Peninsula. Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie sees the diaspora stepping up as aid shrinks, investing in schools, hospitals, and tech. Yet the legal field strains under too many new barristers—can it cope?

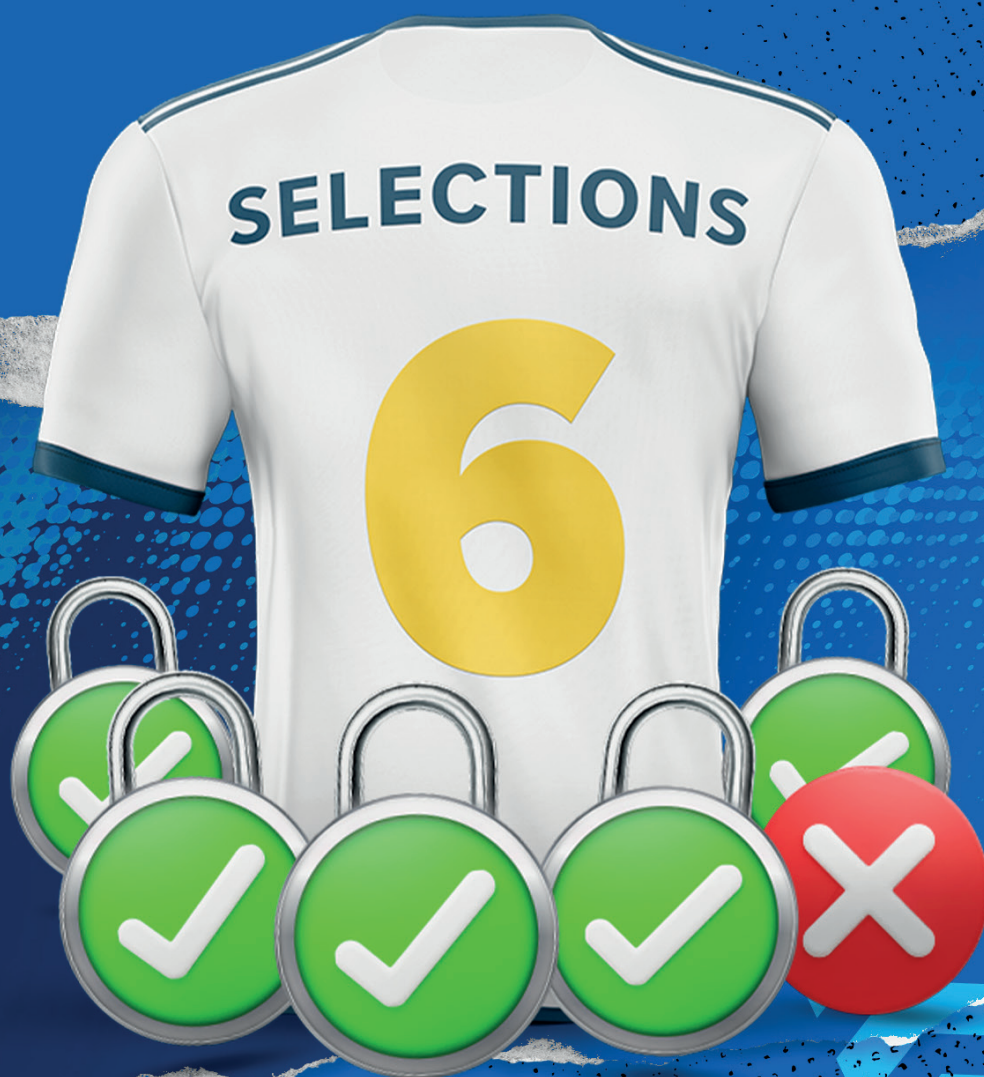
This Sierra Eye edition isn't a casual read. It's a challenge to face our problems and strengths. From the Chief Justice's plans to streets lost to kush, from cricket's fight to corruption's grip, these stories push us to think and act. Sierra Leone's at a turning point—marked by hardship but full of potential. Open this issue. The truth is here, along with a chance to shape what's next.



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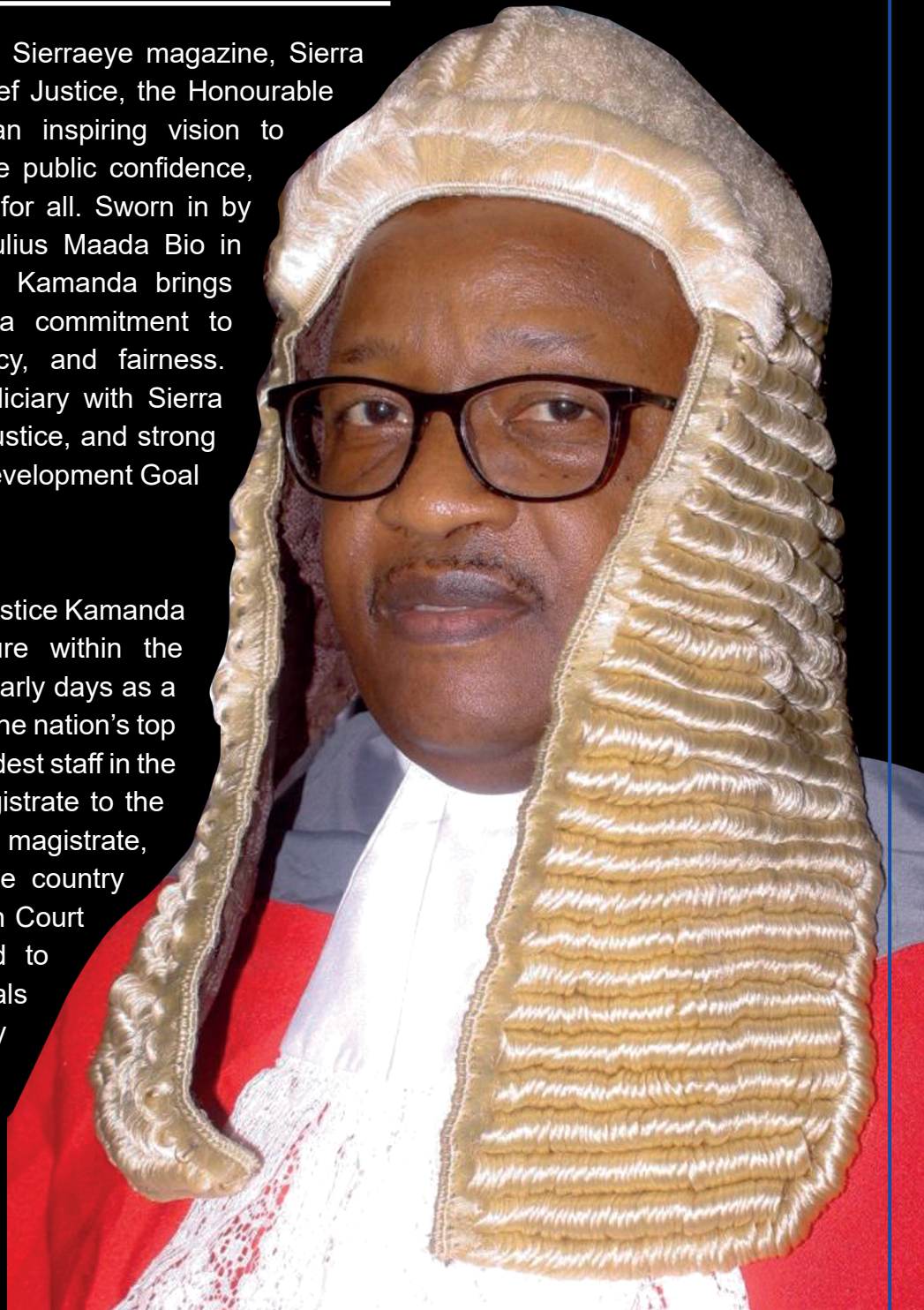
# Chief Justice KOMBA KAMANDA Unveils Ambitious Vision to Transform Judiciary

In an exclusive interview with Sierraeye magazine, Sierra Leone's newly appointed Chief Justice, the Honourable Komba Kamanda, shared an inspiring vision to revitalise the judiciary, restore public confidence, and enhance access to justice for all. Sworn in by His Excellency President Dr Julius Maada Bio in December 2024, Chief Justice Kamanda brings a wealth of experience and a commitment to judicial independence, efficiency, and fairness. His plans seek to align the judiciary with Sierra Leone's aspirations for peace, justice, and strong institutions under Sustainable Development Goal 16.

## A Journey of Dedication

Reflecting on his career, Chief Justice Kamanda highlighted his extensive tenure within the judiciary, which spans from his early days as a magistrate to his current role as the nation's top judicial officer. "I am one of the oldest staff in the Judiciary, beginning from a magistrate to the top job," he said proudly. "As a magistrate, I served in various parts of the country before being promoted to a High Court judge, and my good work led to my appointment as an Appeals Court judge, and based on my outstanding performance, the President deemed it fit for me to serve as the first gentleman in the Judiciary."

His passion for law, which he described as a driving





force from the outset, has been complemented by an impressive academic and professional record, including an LLM with distinction in Corporate Governance from Salford University, Manchester, and numerous certifications in advocacy, case management, and arbitration.

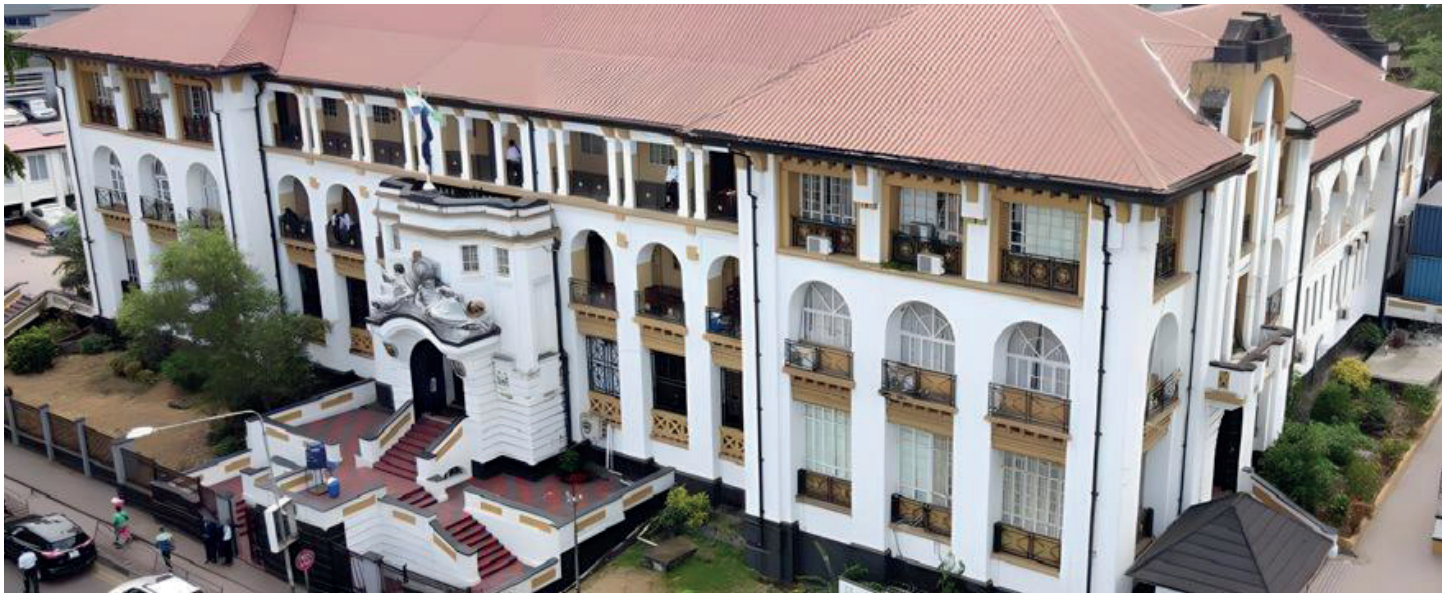
### **Restoring Confidence and Enhancing Access to Justice**

Chief Justice Kamanda's appointment comes at a pivotal moment, with the judiciary facing

behind bars during trials."

To tackle delays and prison congestion, he plans to appoint more judges and enhance bail and sentencing regulations. "More judges will be appointed to avoid delays which result in prison congestion," he affirmed. "Besides, bail and sentencing regulations will be enhanced, bearing in mind situations in which accused persons spend several years in prison and are later not found guilty of the offence charged."

As Chairman of the Judicial and Legal Service Commission, he is committed to ensuring that judicial appointments, promotions, and disciplinary actions are merit-based and transparent. "I will ensure that judges and magistrates are appointed and promoted based on qualification, experience, good track record, and commitment to work," he stated, adding that the Commission will rigorously enforce the judiciary's Code of Conduct to uphold ethical standards.



significant challenges, including public perceptions of leadership instability and limited access to justice. He is determined to address these head-on. "It is quite true that I am appointed in a critical moment as the Judiciary is plagued by leadership challenge," he acknowledged. "The primary one is about restoring confidence in the Judiciary, and my immediate priorities are to increase access to justice and to ensure that accused persons enjoy the right to bail to avoid prolonged stay

### **Championing Judicial Independence**

A cornerstone of Chief Justice Kamanda's vision is safeguarding judicial independence, ensuring that the judiciary operates free from political or executive interference. "Judicial independence is my vision so that judges and magistrates can perform their functions without political interference, fear or favour," he declared. "Under my leadership, no room will be created for any executive official to interfere with the court's work."

### **Modernisation and Digitisation**

Chief Justice Kamanda is also a strong advocate for modernising the judiciary, with plans to fully digitise case management systems and expand e-justice initiatives. "I am committed to the digitisation and modernisation of case management so that the judiciary could be in tune with the times," he said enthusiastically. "Currently, the judiciary operates a case management App funded by the UNDP, so that the courts' work could be expedited, and there is



a virtual court system in which witnesses outside the country can testify in proceedings.”

Recognising the inefficiencies of manual filing systems in some courts, he pledged to eradicate outdated practices. “Yes, we still have the paper system in some courts, but we would see how we can eradicate it in totality,” he promised. These efforts align with the Justice Sector Reform Strategy 2024-2030, which emphasises judicial transformation through technology.

### **Empowering Marginalised Communities**

Improving access to justice, particularly for marginalised and remote communities, is another key priority. “I accept that there is a challenge for access to justice, particularly for those in remote communities, since the courts are not everywhere,” Chief Justice Kamanda noted. “That notwithstanding, the indigent/poor should enjoy the right to bring actions to the courts, and to realise this right,

magistrate and High Courts have been established in several parts of the country.”

He also outlined plans to strengthen local courts, which play a vital role in dispute resolution for many Sierra Leoneans. “Plans are underway to strengthen the administration of local courts so that people in the least stratum of society enjoy unfettered access to justice,” he said, referencing the integration of local courts into the judiciary under the 2011 Local Courts Act.

### **Advancing Gender Equality and Protecting Vulnerable Groups**

Chief Justice Kamanda is deeply committed to dismantling systemic

barriers that hinder women and children from accessing justice. “I always project the rights of women and children within the law, and generally, the judiciary upholds the rights of women and children by dismantling barriers that hinder their access to justice,” he explained.

Highlighting a significant achievement, he added, “One such strategy is the creation of sexual offences courts and the appointment of special judges to speedily and fairly look into offences against women and children. Since I hold the view that sexual offences courts should not only exist in Freetown but be cascaded to the provinces, recently, a sexual offences court was established in Sierra Leone’s second capital, Bo.”

### **Tackling Delays and Ensuring Transparency**

Addressing concerns about case backlogs, Chief Justice Kamanda clarified that the judiciary is managing ongoing cases efficiently despite being



constrained by a limited number of judges. “We have no case backlog but ongoing cases, although we are constrained in the number of judges as we have 33 on the bench working hard to ensure that all matters are fairly and speedily heard,” he said. To expedite proceedings, he has introduced innovative measures, such as deploying judges to the provinces to deliver timely rulings and judgments.

Transparency and accountability are also high on his agenda. “We do tracking on social media platforms to assess public perception about the judiciary, and the main objective is to increase public confidence in the courts,” he revealed. “As earlier mentioned, we operate virtual courts with proceedings shown on screens so that the public can see first-hand what is going on in the courts.”

### **Securing Financial Independence**

Recognising the judiciary’s reliance on limited resources, Chief Justice Kamanda is exploring ways to secure financial independence while maintaining neutrality. “Government is the biggest funder of the judiciary, and we are trying to have a sub-treasury which we can independently operate to keep the courts safe,” he explained. “We can also turn to Development Partners for funding, but not corporate entities or business institutions, so that we cannot compromise the cardinal judicial principle of neutrality in the dispensation of justice.”

### **Uniting the Judiciary and Enhancing Welfare**

Chief Justice Kamanda is also focused on fostering unity and inclusivity within the judiciary to strengthen its institutional cohesion. “In order to unite the Judiciary, I have formed various committees including every Judge to make sure that we are all part of the administration and no one is left behind,” he explained. This collaborative approach ensures equitable distribution of responsibilities, as he noted, “Also, every Judge can attest to the fact now that files are distributed equitably.” To further enhance welfare and institutional dialogue, he has introduced regular judicial meetings. “Judges’ meetings are now held regularly for us all to address the issues affecting us as an institution and our welfare,” he added, underscoring his commitment to a united and motivated judiciary.

### **Restoring Public Confidence**

To bolster public trust, Chief Justice Kamanda has taken decisive steps to address litigants’ concerns and tackle allegations of misconduct. “In order to win public confidence, I have appointed Supervising Judges to help me address the numerous complaints from litigants,” he said. “This has greatly helped me to address those complaints and instil public confidence in the Judiciary.”

Additionally, he has established robust mechanisms to combat malpractice. “Another step I took is to form two investigation

committees to investigate allegations of grave malpractice and corruption, abuse of office within the Judiciary,” he revealed. “These investigations are aimed at cleaning the image of the Judiciary and restoring public confidence.”

### **His Legacy**

Chief Justice Kamanda’s vision extends beyond immediate reforms to a lasting legacy of a fair, efficient, and independent judiciary. “I want to leave behind a judiciary that will expeditiously deal with cases, a judiciary that will continue to subject itself to the constitution and other laws of the state, a judiciary that will continue to fairly treat matters without any form of attachment,” he declared.

In a heartfelt message to the public, Chief Justice Kamanda urged Sierra Leoneans to trust in the judiciary’s ability to deliver justice. “We call on the public to continue to repose confidence in the judiciary for a peaceful and prosperous Sierra Leone,” he said.

With his experience, vision, and dedication, Chief Justice Komba Kamanda is poised to lead Sierra Leone’s judiciary into a new era of excellence. As President Bio affirmed during the swearing-in ceremony, “The judiciary is crucial in all that we do,” and under Chief Justice Kamanda’s leadership, it is set to become an even stronger pillar of democracy, ensuring justice, fairness, and equality for all.



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# SIERRA LEONE'S DESCENT INTO A NARCO-NIGHTMARE



**T**he rain hammers down on Freetown's tin roofs as I stand near the waterfront, where whispers of a mystery boat linger in the humid air. Locals say it washed up weeks ago, laden with drugs, though the government denies it. No one trusts the official line—not after what's unfolded here lately. A nation still stitching itself back together from war and Ebola now faces a new wound: the creeping threat of becoming a narco-state. From cocaine-stuffed embassy cars to a Dutch drug lord sipping drinks with the elite, Sierra Leone's drug

scandals are piling up, and the stakes couldn't be higher.

The latest shock came when Guinean police stopped a Sierra Leonean embassy vehicle in Conakry. Inside: seven suitcases bulging with what's believed to be cocaine, plus £1,600 in cash. Foreign Minister Alhaji Musa Timothy Kabba confirmed the bust, recalling Ambassador Alimamy Bangura for questioning—though he wasn't in the car and hasn't been charged. The diplomatic plates were supposed to signal immunity, not infamy. "It's a betrayal of trust," a West African diplomat told me, speaking

anonymously to avoid reprisal. Sierra Leone's reputation, already fragile, took another hit, and its ties with Guinea frayed.

This wasn't an isolated slip. Rewind to 2008 - an unmarked plane touched down at Lungi International Airport with over 700 kilograms of cocaine onboard. Cartel operatives were nabbed and shipped to the United States, but the breach exposed a glaring truth—Sierra Leone's borders are porous, its airspace a smuggler's playground. Now, fast-forward to Johannes "Bolle Jos" Leijdekkers, a Dutch fugitive sentenced to 24 years for trafficking seven tonnes of



cocaine. He's been hiding here for at least two years, spotted at elite gatherings, even brushing shoulders with President Julius Maada Bio's family. His presence is a neon sign - international drug lords see Sierra Leone as a safe haven.

## Kush – Another Plague

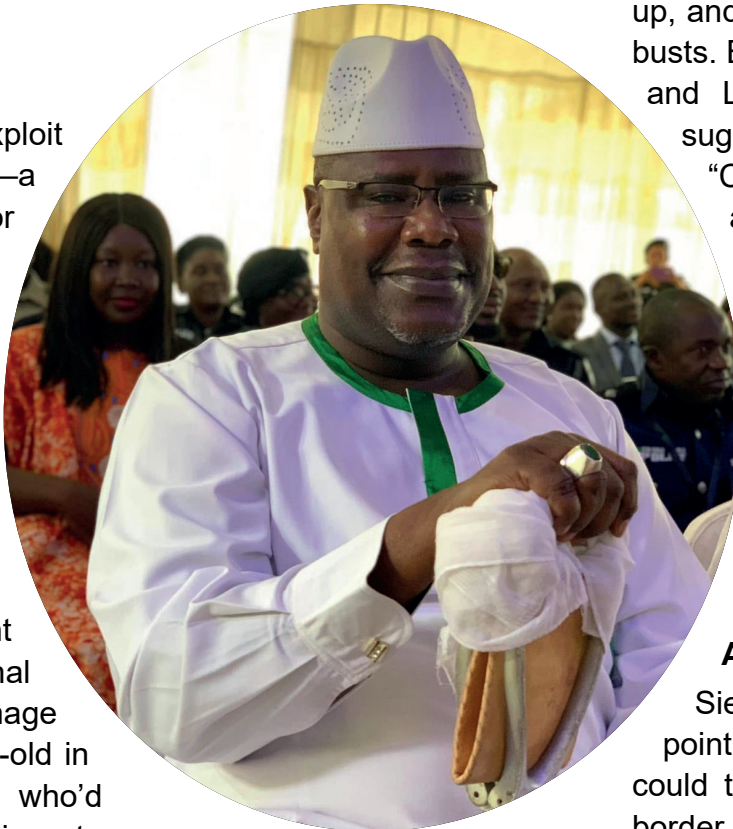
While global cartels exploit the country's geography—a coastal perch perfect for shuttling South American cocaine to Europe—Sierra Leone's streets are drowning in a scourge - kush. This synthetic drug, a cheap cocktail of cannabinoids and chemicals, has hooked a generation. In April 2024, President Bio called it a national emergency, but the damage rolls on. I met a 19-year-old in Kroo Bay, eyes hollow, who'd lost his job and his siblings to kush's pull. "It's everywhere," he muttered. Hospitals and mental health wards are swamped; rehab centres are a pipe dream for most.

The spillover is rattling the region. Gambia's drug agency blames Sierra Leonean traffickers for a kush surge that's landing users in psych wards. Guinea-Bissau reports the same strain flooding its markets. "We're fighting a ghost," Bakary Gassama, head of Gambia's drug enforcement noted. Sierra Leone, it seems, isn't just a transit point—it's a source, exporting chaos to its neighbours.

## Youth on the Edge

At the heart of this mess is Sierra Leone's youth. With a

median age of 19, the country is one of the world's youngest—yet 70% of its young people lack jobs. In Freetown's slums, where education is a luxury and poverty a birthright, the drug



trade whispers opportunity. "It's quick cash," a 22-year-old dealer admitted, showing me a wad of leones earned peddling kush. For a generation with little else, it's a lifeline—until it's a noose. Addiction is shredding families and overwhelming a healthcare system still limping from past crises.

West Africa's no stranger to this game. Guinea-Bissau, dubbed the continent's first narco-state, saw its ex-navy chief convicted in the U.S. in 2019 for cocaine smuggling. Liberia nabbed 100 kilograms of the stuff in pig feet last year. The region's a conveyor belt for drugs heading north, and Sierra Leone's weak enforcement—lax borders,

underpaid officials—makes it a golden link.

## A Government Outmatched

The Bio administration insists it's fighting back. After the kush declaration, task forces sprang up, and police flaunt occasional busts. But the embassy scandal and Leijdekkers' cushy exile suggest a deeper rot. "Corruption's the grease," a local journalist told me, requesting anonymity for safety. Diplomatic privilege shouldn't mean impunity, yet here we are. The boat rumours? Officially, there's "no evidence." Unofficially, no one's buying it.

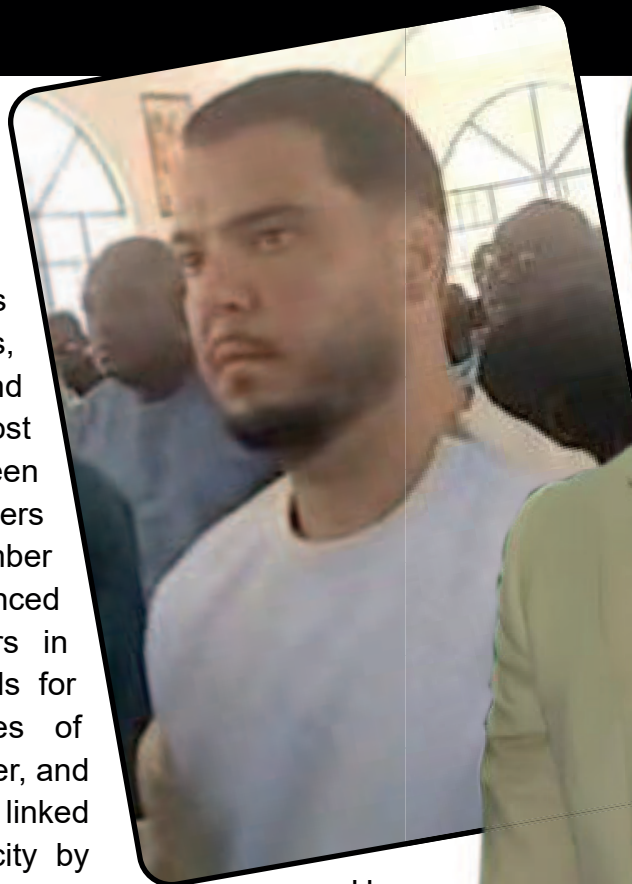
## A Way Out?

Sierra Leone's at a tipping point. The government could tighten its grip—rigorous border checks by land, sea, and air; prosecutions that don't spare the powerful; education campaigns to warn kids off kush before it's too late. Jobs could pull youth from the trade's orbit—vocational training, real work, a shred of hope. Regional teamwork, sharing intel with Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, might choke the networks. But it's a tall order for a country where resources are scarce and trust scarcer.

Back at the waterfront, the rain slows, and the boat talk fades into the night. Sierra Leone's been a survivor—war, disease, disaster. Now, the world's watching to see if it can outlast this narco-siege. Its youth, its honour, its future hang in the balance. The clock's ticking.

# THE ALUSINE KANNEH CONTROVERSY AND LEIJDEKKERS' SHADOW

**S**ierra Leone has faced international scrutiny following revelations that Johannes “Bolle Jos” Leijdekkers, a Dutch drug lord and one of Europe’s most wanted criminals, has been operating within its borders since at least December 2022. Leijdekkers, sentenced in absentia to 24 years in prison in the Netherlands for smuggling seven tonnes of cocaine, ordering a murder, and armed robbery, has been linked to allegations of complicity by Sierra Leonean officials. At the centre of the controversy is Alusine Kanneh, the former Chief Immigration Officer, sacked by President Julius Maada Bio on March 7, 2025, hours after a video surfaced showing him accepting a birthday gift from Leijdekkers at LOR restaurant in Freetown. The footage, published by Dutch investigative outlet Follow the Money and newspaper Algemeen Dagblad, also featured Andrew Jaiah Kaikai, head of the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency, who was not dismissed. State



House issued a brief statement announcing Kanneh’s dismissal but provided no reason.

## Leijdekkers’ Operations and Local Ties

Leijdekkers’ presence in Sierra Leone was first confirmed in January 2025, when a video showed him attending a New Year’s Day church

service alongside President Bio’s





family, including his daughter, Agnes Bio, and in close proximity to high-ranking officials, including Kanneh. Further footage from January 2023 captured Kanneh with Leijdekkers—then using the alias “Omar Sheriff”—during an altercation at Freetown’s Scarlet nightclub. Kanneh stated he was attempting to break up a fight and denied knowledge of Leijdekkers’ criminal background. However, as Chief Immigration Officer, a role with significant control over border entry and exit protocols, Kanneh’s association with Leijdekkers has fuelled allegations of complicity in the drug lord’s alleged smuggling operations.

Sources have reported that Leijdekkers has been escorted around Freetown in convoys of luxury SUVs, accompanied by armed bodyguards from the Operational Support Division (OSD), an elite paramilitary police unit. Such protection

requires approval from senior officers, suggesting a broader network of complicity involving local officials. Additionally, Leijdekkers has been romantically linked to Agnes Bio, a diplomat at Sierra Leone’s permanent mission to the United Nations. Photographs from social events, including a November 2023 engagement party featuring African music stars Tiwa Savage and Ayra Starr, have raised concerns about her diplomatic immunity potentially shielding Leijdekkers from law enforcement.

## Kanneh’s Unexplained Wealth

Reports by Africa Confidential have disclosed that Kanneh purchased three properties in the United States—in Delaware and Pennsylvania—between November 2022 and July 2024, for a total of £1.5 million. These transactions, documented through public records, have drawn scrutiny given Kanneh’s

civil service salary. The timing of the purchases, coinciding with Leijdekkers’ arrival in Sierra Leone, has led to speculation that Kanneh may have profited from his alleged ties to the fugitive. Kanneh’s media handlers have stated that he amassed his wealth as a businessman and politician before his appointment as Chief Immigration Officer, citing ventures in Norway spanning solar lights, mining, and other enterprises over 15 years, as well as his tenure as a Member of Parliament from 2012 to 2023, during which he served as Deputy Chief Whip and Chairman of the Committee on Internal Affairs from 2018 to 2023. However, Kanneh has not provided evidence to substantiate these claims.

## Systemic Vulnerabilities

The Leijdekkers case has highlighted significant vulnerabilities in Sierra Leone’s immigration and law enforcement





systems, which have been exploited by a high-profile fugitive. Allegations suggest that a range of “respectable” individuals—businesspeople, lawyers, accountants, estate agents, and journalists—have facilitated Leijdekkers’ activities, possibly for financial gain. This scandal follows previous drug-related incidents in Sierra Leone, including a 2008 unauthorised plane landing at Lungi International Airport carrying 700 kilograms of cocaine and a 2024 seizure of cocaine in a Sierra Leonean embassy vehicle in Guinea, underscoring the country’s role as a transit hub in West Africa’s cocaine corridor from South America to Europe.

## Government Response and Accountability

President Bio has publicly reaffirmed Sierra Leone’s commitment to combating

transnational crime, but his administration’s response to the Leijdekkers scandal has been limited. The dismissal of Kanneh on March 7, 2025, following the LOR restaurant video, contrasts with the lack of action against Kaikai, the drugs agency head, who was also present in the footage. The absence of an extradition treaty between Sierra Leone and the Netherlands has complicated efforts to bring Leijdekkers to justice, though negotiations are reportedly ongoing, with Bio’s government proposing a swap for a Sierra Leonean dissident held in the Netherlands.

## Calls for Reform

The revelations have prompted widespread demands for accountability, with Kanneh’s alleged involvement and unexplained wealth symbolising broader corruption issues that have enabled transnational

crime to flourish in Sierra Leone. Days before his dismissal, Kanneh launched a “Go-for-Gold” scheme to fast-track citizenship for investors paying £108,000, a policy now tainted by the scandal. Analysts have called for systemic reforms, including independent investigations into implicated officials, audits of border control mechanisms, and stricter anti-corruption measures to prevent future exploitation of Sierra Leone’s institutions.

The Leijdekkers scandal has exposed deep-rooted corruption and complicity, placing Sierra Leone at a critical juncture. Without concrete actions to address these issues, the country risks further damage to its international reputation and institutional integrity, potentially cementing its status as a haven for transnational criminals.



# Why?

## Sierra Leonean Journalists Didn't Break the Leijdekkers Story



**F**or at least two years, one of Europe's most wanted criminals, Dutch drug lord Johannes "Bolle Jos" Leijdekkers, lived openly in Sierra Leone, rubbing shoulders with the country's elite, attending high-profile events, and even appearing in videos with the presidential family. Yet, it was not Sierra Leonean journalists who exposed his presence. Instead, it took international outlets like Reuters and Africa Confidential to break the story, leaving many to wonder: why did local media fail to uncover one of the most explosive scandals in recent memory?

The answer lies in a combination of fear, complicity, and a lack of investigative resources - a trifecta that has allowed powerful figures like Leijdekkers to operate with impunity in Sierra Leone.

### The Intimidation Factor

Leijdekkers was no ordinary fugitive. Described by sources as "more powerful than the president," he moved around

Freetown with an entourage of armed guards, allegedly including police and military personnel. His presence was intimidating, and his security detail was known to enforce a strict no-tolerance policy for anyone who might pose a threat—real or perceived.

One incident at the Meat Factory, a popular restaurant in Freetown, illustrates the climate of fear surrounding Leijdekkers. A driver who had gone to collect food for his boss answered a phone call while waiting. Within moments, he was surrounded by six armed soldiers who ordered him to hang up. When he explained that it was his boss calling, they insisted he ignore the call. Inside the restaurant, Leijdekkers was dining undisturbed. Such stories were not uncommon. At his Tokeh beach residence, locals were reportedly barred from walking along the beachfront, a clear sign of his influence and the lengths to which his security team would go to protect him.

For journalists, the risks were even greater. Leijdekkers'

alleged ties to high-ranking officials, including the presidential family, meant that investigating him could have dire consequences. Many reporters feared retaliation, not just from Leijdekkers' network but also from state security forces. The incident at Scarlet nightclub in early 2023, where Leijdekkers' bodyguard shot and injured a Lebanese businessman during a scuffle, served as a stark reminder of the dangers of crossing him.

### Journalists in the Paybooks?

Not all journalists were deterred by fear alone. Some, according to sources, were allegedly on Leijdekkers' payroll. The Dutch drug lord's vast wealth and network of local accomplices extended to the media, where certain reporters and editors were reportedly bribed to keep his activities out of the headlines. This complicity created a culture of silence, ensuring that Leijdekkers' presence remained an open secret among Freetown's elite but never made it to print.

The involvement of high-profile figures, including President Julius Maada Bio's daughter, Agnes Bio, further complicated matters. Agnes, who was romantically linked to Leijdekkers, holds a diplomatic position at Sierra Leone's permanent mission to the United Nations. Her immunity and connections made her untouchable, and by extension, Leijdekkers benefited from a protective shield that discouraged scrutiny.

## A Lack of Investigative Resources

Even for those journalists willing to take the risk, investigating a figure like Leijdekkers required resources that many Sierra Leonean media outlets simply do not have. Investigative journalism is expensive and time-consuming, requiring access to databases, forensic tools, and legal support—luxuries that are often out of reach for underfunded newsrooms.

In contrast, international

Confidential have the resources and expertise to conduct in-depth investigations. They also operate with a degree of independence and protection that local journalists lack. For example, Reuters used facial recognition technology to verify footage of Leijdekkers attending a New Year's Day church service with the presidential family—a level of technical capability that is rare in Sierra Leone's media landscape.

## A Culture of Silence

The Leijdekkers scandal has exposed a broader culture of silence in Sierra Leone, where powerful individuals and criminal networks operate with little fear of exposure. This culture is perpetuated by a combination of fear, complicity, and a lack of resources, creating an environment where investigative journalism is stifled.

For many Sierra Leonean journalists, the risks of exposing figures like Leijdekkers far outweigh the potential rewards.

The threat of violence, loss of livelihood, or even death is a constant reality. Until these challenges are addressed, it is likely that future scandals of this magnitude will continue to be uncovered by foreign media rather than local reporters.

The failure of Sierra Leonean journalists to break the Leijdekkers story is a damning indictment of the state of the country's media. It highlights the need for greater investment in investigative journalism, stronger legal protections for reporters, and a concerted effort to combat corruption and intimidation.

Sierra Leone's media landscape must evolve if it is to hold the powerful accountable and fulfil its role as a watchdog of democracy. Until then, the country will remain reliant on international outlets to uncover the truths that local journalists are too afraid—or too compromised—to tell.





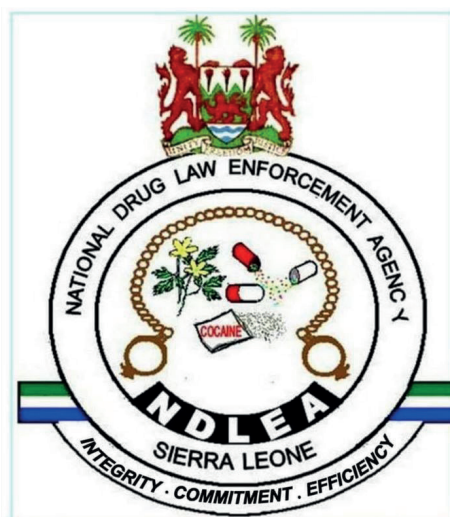


# KUSH CRISIS

## ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY

In April 2024, President Julius Maada Bio declared a national emergency on substance abuse in Sierra Leone, aiming to address the escalating crisis of kush, a deadly synthetic drug. Nearly a year on, this article critically evaluates the effectiveness of the emergency measures, highlighting their limitations, particularly the reliance on law enforcement over human rights-based approaches, and the absence of harm reduction strategies. Drawing on official data, expert analysis, and recent reports, including from the Clingendael Institute and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, this assessment underscores

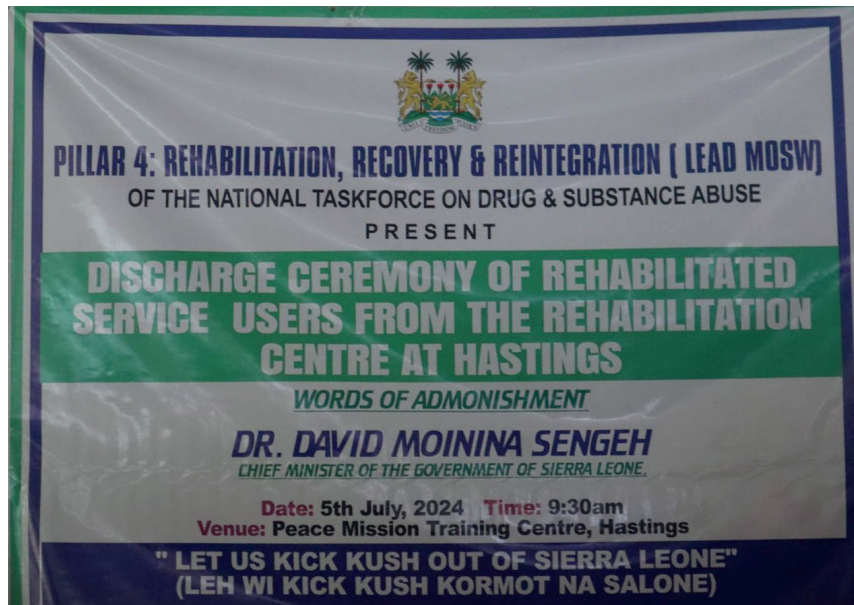
the urgent need for a paradigm shift in Sierra Leone's response to the crisis.



### The Kush Epidemic - Scale and Impact

Kush, a synthetic drug comprising nitazenes (opioids up to 25 times stronger

than fentanyl) and synthetic cannabinoids, has wreaked havoc in Sierra Leone since its emergence in the late 2010s. Its affordability—often costing as little as 20 pence per dose—has fuelled widespread use, particularly among unemployed youth. The consequences are severe, with hundreds of deaths, a surge in mental health disorders, and significant strain on the country's healthcare system. Between 2020 and 2023, the Sierra Leone Psychiatric Hospital recorded a 4,000% increase in kush-related admissions, reaching 1,865 cases. Physical effects include sores, swollen limbs, organ failure, and a pale, sickly appearance, while



social impacts are visible in the abandoned “kush corpses” littering Freetown’s streets, often buried in mass graves, such as at King Tom.

The crisis extends beyond urban centres, affecting provincial communities and threatening Sierra Leone’s demographic future. Myths about kush’s composition, including the use of human bones, have been debunked by chemical testing, which confirms the presence of nitazenes and synthetic cannabinoids. However, the desecration of cemeteries for bone extraction highlights the desperation surrounding the drug’s production and use. The crisis is not unique to Sierra Leone, with similar patterns observed in Liberia, Guinea, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal, pointing to a regional synthetic drug epidemic.

## A Law Enforcement Focus

The government’s response to the kush crisis, initiated through the April 2024 emergency

declaration, has prioritised law enforcement over public health or human rights approaches. President Bio described kush as an “existential threat” and established a National Task Force on Drugs and Substance Abuse, focusing primarily on enforcement measures. Police and military patrols were intensified, targeting users, dealers, and production networks, while cemetery security was strengthened to prevent grave robberies. Numerous arrests and prosecutions have followed, with correctional centres now housing a significant population of kush-related inmates.



Official statements, such as those from Judiciary Spokesman Moses Kamara, claim that prosecutions have reduced kush use. Similarly, the Sierra Leone Police’s Community Relations Department, led by Deputy Head Superintendent Samuel Saio Conteh, has highlighted public education campaigns in schools and crime-prone areas, asserting that these have deterred youth from drug use. Community-led actions, such as shaving the heads of suspected users, were briefly employed but discontinued due to human rights concerns.

## Limitations of the Law Enforcement Approach

The heavy reliance on law enforcement has significant shortcomings. Firstly, it fails to address the root causes of drug use, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, which drive youth to kush. Secondly, the approach has exacerbated human rights violations, with arrests, prosecutions, and incarceration stigmatising and criminalising users rather than supporting their recovery. The increase



in kush-related inmates has overcrowded correctional facilities, further straining resources without addressing addiction as a health issue.

Moreover, enforcement has had limited impact on the drug's supply. The Clingendael Institute report highlights the decentralised nature of kush production, which has shifted from imports to local synthesis, making the drug more accessible and affordable. The international supply chain, involving precursor chemicals from China, the Netherlands,

and the UK, transported via maritime routes and postal services, remains largely intact due to Sierra Leone's porous borders and inadequate regional cooperation. Calls to enhance border security have not been adequately addressed, allowing smuggling to persist.

## The Absence of Harm Reduction

The emergency response promised a robust public health component, including the establishment of treatment centres in every district.

However, progress has been negligible, with only a handful of facilities operational nearly a year later. The National Rehabilitation Centre in Freetown, the country's only public drug treatment facility, is overwhelmed, unable to meet demand. Crucially, harm reduction strategies, such as the distribution of naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses, have not been introduced, leaving preventable deaths unchecked. The lack of trained healthcare workers and the stigma surrounding addiction further



hinder access to care.

The failure to adopt a human rights-based approach, which prioritises treatment, harm reduction, and decriminalisation over punishment, has compounded the crisis. International best practices, as outlined in the UN's harm reduction framework, advocate for measures such as needle exchange programmes, opioid substitution therapy, and community-based rehabilitation. These have proven effective in reducing drug-related harm in other contexts, yet Sierra Leone's response remains

rooted in a punitive model, neglecting the health and dignity of users.

## Corruption and Structural Challenges

The effectiveness of the emergency measures is further undermined by systemic issues, including corruption within law enforcement and allegations of political protection for key players in the kush trade. While high-level political ties remain unproven, reports of major distributors with familial connections to politicians highlight the need for greater

transparency and accountability. These challenges erode public trust and hinder coordinated action against the drug's supply chain.

## Regional and Global Dimensions

The kush crisis is a regional and global issue, requiring coordinated action beyond Sierra Leone's borders. The drug's consistent chemical composition across West Africa, as confirmed by testing in Freetown and Bissau, points to a shared supply chain, with ingredients originating from

international sources. The failure to engage regional partners, such as ECOWAS, or to secure commitments from source countries to scrutinise exports, has allowed the crisis to escalate. The absence of updated drug laws targeting synthetic substances further limits the government's ability to respond effectively.

## Recommendations for a Human Rights-Based Approach

To address the kush crisis effectively, Sierra Leone must shift from a law enforcement-centric model to a human rights-based, harm reduction-focused approach. We need to prioritise the distribution of naloxone, establish needle exchange programmes, and introduce opioid substitution therapy to reduce overdose deaths and drug-related harm. These measures should be supported by training healthcare workers and reducing stigma through public education.

In addition, we must accelerate the establishment of treatment centres in every district, ensuring they are adequately staffed and

resourced. Community-based rehabilitation programmes should be prioritised to reach rural areas and support reintegration and reform drug laws to decriminalise personal use, redirecting resources from incarceration to treatment and prevention. This approach would reduce stigma, encourage users to seek help, and alleviate pressure on correctional facilities.

Government must invest in social and economic programmes to tackle poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities, which drive drug use. Youth employment schemes, vocational training, and mental health support are essential components of prevention and collaborate with ECOWAS and international partners to disrupt supply chains, enhance border security, and update drug laws to target synthetic substances.

## A Missed Opportunity

Nearly a year after the national emergency declaration, Sierra Leone's response to the kush crisis has achieved limited results, constrained by its overreliance on law

enforcement, failure to introduce harm reduction, and neglect of human rights principles. While enforcement measures have disrupted some aspects of the drug trade, they have not addressed the underlying drivers of use or the health needs of addicts, allowing the crisis to persist. The absence of treatment infrastructure, harm reduction strategies, and regional cooperation, combined with systemic challenges such as corruption, has undermined the emergency's potential impact.

The kush epidemic remains a profound threat to Sierra Leone's youth and future, with the risk of new synthetic drugs exacerbating the crisis. To move forward, the government must adopt a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that prioritises health, dignity, and human rights over punishment. Without such a shift, the national emergency risks being remembered not as a turning point, but as a missed opportunity to save lives and build a healthier, more resilient society.







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# SIERRA LEONE'S ANTI-CORRUPTION WATCHDOG TURNS POLITICAL STEPPING STONE

In a modest office overlooking Freetown's bustling streets, I met a civil servant who had spent years dodging bribes and battling petty graft. "We thought the ACC would save us," he said, his voice heavy with disillusionment, referring to Sierra Leone's Anti-Corruption Commission. Established in 2008 to root out the corruption strangling this West African nation, the ACC was meant to be

a beacon of independence—a body free from the political machinations that have long plagued governance here. But a troubling pattern has emerged: its last three commissioners have their eyes on the presidency, threatening to turn a public shield into a personal ladder.

The ACC's mandate, etched in the Anti-Corruption Act of 2008, is unambiguous. It must

act "independently, impartially, fairly, and in the public interest," immune to any person's sway. Early leaders like Val Collier, Henry Joko-Smart, and Abdul Tejan-Cole stuck to the script, building the commission's bones despite thin budgets and political headwinds. Their tenures weren't perfect, but they stayed clear of the ballot box. Then came Joseph Kamara, Ady Macauley, and Francis Ben



Kaifala—each a commissioner who's since traded anticorruption robes for campaign trails or whispered ambitions.

Kamara, who ran the ACC from 2010 to 2016, is now a presidential hopeful for the opposition All People's Congress (APC). Macauley, his successor, has thrown his hat in the same ring. Kaifala, the current chief, is widely tipped as a future contender for the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), a potential heir to President Julius Maada Bio. Their political flirtations don't just raise eyebrows—they cast a long shadow over every case the ACC has touched. "Were they chasing corruption or votes?" the civil servant asked me, echoing a question gnawing at Sierra Leoneans.

## A Mandate Under Siege

Corruption isn't abstract here. It's the leaked funds that leave roads unpaved, the kickbacks that starve schools. The ACC was built to fight that, armed with legal teeth to investigate and prosecute. Section 9 of the 2008 Act is its backbone - no one—not even the president—should steer its course. Yet, when commissioners eye State House, the impartiality crumbles. Did they spare allies during their tenure? Target rivals? The public can't know for sure, but the suspicion festers.

Take Kamara's era - high-profile probes made headlines, but whispers of selective enforcement trailed him. Macauley touted convictions,

yet critics pointed to gaps where APC big fish dodged scrutiny. He preferred minnows. Kaifala's reign has won praise—Bio's SLPP credits him with cleaning house—but detractors see a loyalist grooming his résumé. "It's not about proof," a lawyer told me, asking anonymity to speak freely. "It's the perception. People think the ACC's a political toy now."

## The Cost of Ambition

In a country where trust in institutions is already threadbare—decades of war and mismanagement saw to that—this shift is a gut punch. Corruption chokes Sierra Leone's promise, siphoning off aid and stunting growth; the ACC's job was to stop the bleeding. But when its leaders pivot to politics, the mission blurs.

"It's a stepping stone," said a market trader in Freetown. "They fight corruption until it's their turn to run." Her cynicism reflects a broader fear: the commission's becoming a partisan battlefield, not a public servant.

The fallout's practical, too. Qualified crusaders

might shy away, wary of a post now laced with political baggage. And as the ACC's credibility wanes, so does its clout—politicians grow bolder, knowing the watchdog's bark may lack bite.

## A Fix Within Reach?

There's a way back, if Sierra Leone acts fast. The 2008 Act could bar commissioners from running for office for, say, five years post-tenure—a cooling-off period to sever ambition from duty. Appointments need a shake-up, too. Now, the president picks the commissioner, with Parliament's nod—a setup ripe for influence. Open it up: let civil society and independents weigh in, diluting partisan pull. And oversight? Regular audits and an external review panel could keep the ACC honest.





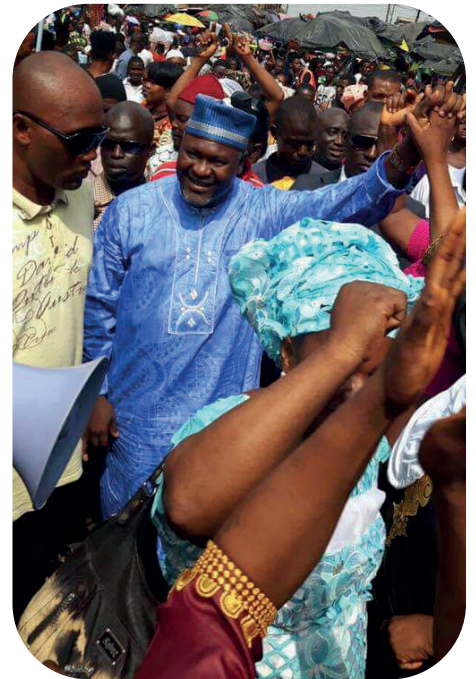


President Bio's government bristles at the critique, insisting Kaifala's tenure proves the commission's vigour. Opposition voices counter that it's all optics—corruption's too entrenched to focus only on the opposition. Both miss the point - the ACC's power lies in its independence, not its headlines. Lose that, and the rest unravels.

### A Nation Watching

Back in that Freetown office, the civil servant leaned forward,

his frustration spilling out. "We need someone who'll stay the course," he said. He's right. Sierra Leone's battle against corruption isn't a springboard—it's a lifeline. The ACC's slide into politics isn't just a betrayal of its charter; it's a gamble with a country's future. Reform it, or watch it fade into irrelevance. The choice is Sierra Leone's to make.





# WILL MINISTER SANDY REMAIN UNTOUCHABLE?

Sierra Leone has positioned itself as a global leader in the fight against sexual violence, particularly against women and children, through bold legislative reforms, international advocacy, and high-profile campaigns. From the First Lady's "Hands Off Our Girls" initiative launched in December 2018 to the unanimous adoption of a UN General Assembly Resolution on Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence in September 2022 under President Julius Maada Bio's leadership, the government has worked tirelessly to project an image of moral authority on the global stage. However, recent allegations against Dr. Denis Moinina Sandy,



the current Minister of Works and Infrastructure and former Minister of Lands, Housing, and the Environment, threaten to undermine these hard-won gains. The government's silence on these allegations raises serious questions about its commitment to justice and accountability at home.

## A Web of Legal Allegations

Dr. Denis Moinina Sandy is now at the center of a legal storm. The most recent allegations, detailed in court documents filed by the law firm Betts & Berewa Solicitors, accuse Dr. Sandy of colluding to forge divorce proceedings against his wife, Mary Kai Sandy (née Koroma). According to an Originating Notice of Motion filed in the High Court of Sierra Leone, the law firm is seeking to have a purported Decree Absolute, dated 27th November 2024, declared null and void ab initio. The decree, registered at the office of the Administrator and Registrar General, is alleged to have been fraudulently obtained, with Betts & Berewa's name misused as backing in the registration process without their knowledge or consent.

The court documents reveal a disturbing sequence of events.



**Elvis Kargbo**  
Betts and Berewa

Betts & Berewa, a firm with over 40 years of experience representing international organizations, government institutions, and private entities, claims it was never retained by Dr. Sandy to prosecute his divorce proceedings. The misuse of their name, the firm argues, has tarnished its reputation, created false impressions about its practice, and strained relationships with clients, colleagues, and the judiciary. The firm is seeking reputational damages in the sum of NLE 2,500,000.00 (Two Million Five Hundred Thousand New Leones) and other relief as the court deems fit.

Further complicating the matter, a letter dated 23rd January 2025 from the law firm Michael & Michael, acting on behalf of Mrs. Mary Kai Sandy, raises additional concerns about the integrity of the judicial process. The letter, addressed to the

Master and Registrar of the High Court, alleges that the decree absolute was obtained through “irregular and potentially criminal and corrupt means.” According to the letter, Mrs. Sandy, who was in the United States at the time, was never personally served with the petition, as required by Rule 8(1) of the Matrimonial Causes Rules, Cap 7. Moreover, a search of the court registry’s cause book revealed no record of the proceedings, and Honourable Justice Ganda, named in the decree as the presiding judge, has denied any knowledge of the matter.

The allegations of forgery, impersonation, and fraudulent manipulation of court processes are currently under investigation by the judiciary. If proven, these actions would not only constitute serious legal and ethical breaches but also raise profound questions about the abuse of power by a senior government official.

### **A Stepdaughter’s Cry for Justice**

Adding a deeply personal dimension to the legal saga, a video posted by Amira Koroma, Dr. Sandy’s stepdaughter, has brought additional allegations against the minister into the public domain. While the specific details of her claims remain unverified, the public nature of her accusations demands immediate attention, particularly given the government’s stated commitment to protecting women and girls from abuse and ensuring access to justice. The silence from State House on this



matter is deafening, especially in light of the government’s international advocacy.

### **The Government’s Silence**

Sierra Leone’s government has made significant strides in addressing sexual violence, earning global recognition for its efforts. In February 2019, the government declared a state of national emergency in response to escalating instances of rape and sexual violence. In September 2019, amendments to the Sexual Offences Act introduced life imprisonment and harsher sentences for perpetrators. In November 2022, Sierra Leone, under the

leadership of First Lady Fatima Maada Bio, sponsored a UN General Assembly resolution establishing 18th November as a day to spotlight the sexual exploitation and abuse of children. Most recently, in September 2024, reports highlighted that President Bio’s efforts ensured that 1.3 billion survivors worldwide gained access to justice through the UN General Assembly Resolution on Access to Justice for Survivors of Sexual Violence.

Against this backdrop, the government’s failure to address the allegations against Dr. Sandy is both alarming and deeply concerning. By remaining silent, the government risks sending a message that those in positions of power are above scrutiny, a stance that is utterly incompatible with the principles it champions on the global stage. Is the government willing to jeopardize its hard-won reputation for the sake of shielding one minister?

Sierra Leone stands at a crossroads. The government’s response to the allegations against Dr. Denis Moinina Sandy will determine whether it remains true to its stated values of justice, accountability, and protection for the vulnerable, or whether it succumbs to the temptation to shield one of its own. The stakes are high, not just for the individuals involved, but for the nation’s moral authority and global reputation. It is time for the government to act decisively, ensuring that justice is not only promised on the international stage but delivered at home.



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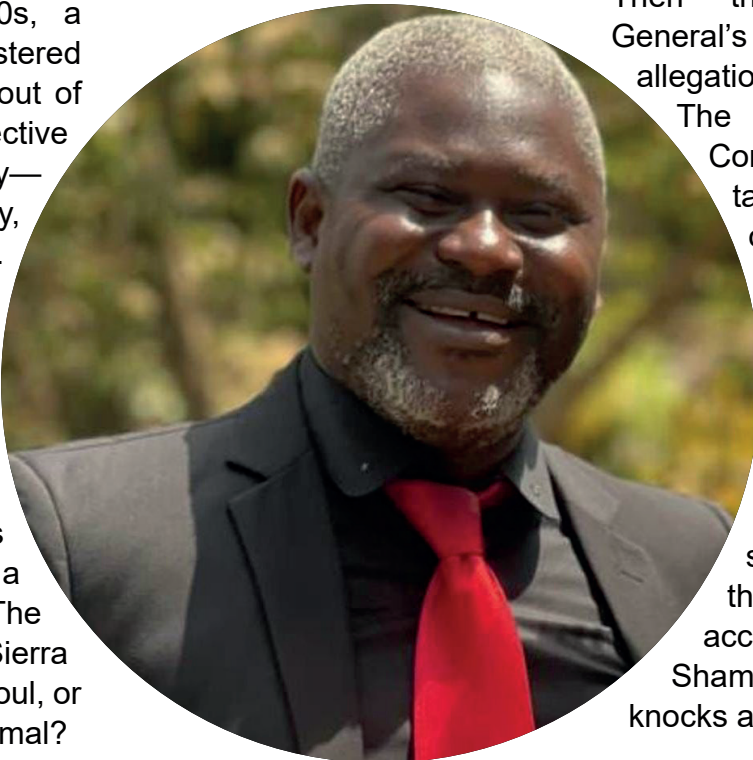
# The Death of Shame

**T**here was a time when shame held sway in Sierra Leone, a silent sentinel guarding the boundaries of right and wrong. In the 1960s and 1970s, a pregnant girl might be cloistered away until childbirth, not out of cruelty, but from a collective instinct to shield dignity—hers and society's. Today, that instinct lies in tatters. From lecture halls to the corridors of power, shame has vanished, supplanted by a brazenness that shrugs at consequences. A string of scandals—each more audacious than the last—lays bare a nation in moral freefall. The question looms: can Sierra Leone reclaim its ethical soul, or is this decline our new normal?

## A Litany of Shamelessness

Consider Joseph Abass Sannoh, a student expelled from the Institute of Public Administration and Management (IPAM) at the University of Sierra Leone for spying during an exam. Rather than bow his head, Sannoh cried foul, casting himself as a victim of his own notoriety. His trail of alleged misconduct—

from Njala University to Fourah Bay College—suggests a pattern, yet remorse remains absent. Academic integrity, once a bedrock of learning, now



wobbles as students like Sannoh flout rules without a blush.

The judiciary, too, bears the stain. Picture a judge, robed in authority, handing down a verdict only to saunter to the victor's shop demanding a cut of the spoils. This isn't hearsay—it's a snapshot of corruption so blatant it defies belief. Where

shame once restrained such acts, personal gain now reigns, hollowing out a system meant to uphold justice.

Then there's the Auditor General's office, rocked by allegations of fake receipts.

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), tasked with rooting out graft, offered a tepid response—administrative wrist-slaps instead of prosecutions—prompting whispers of bias. The government's silence only deepens the rot, signaling that accountability is optional. Shame, it seems, no longer knocks at these doors.

The Minister of Works, Dennis Moinina Sandy, stands accused by his stepdaughter, Amira Koroma, of misconduct grave enough to test the state's vaunted stance against sexual violence. Yet the cabinet's mute response mocks that pledge. Retaining him risks not just domestic credibility but Sierra Leone's global image. Here, the absence of shame isn't merely



personal—it's institutional.

Political nomadism offers another exhibit - Honourable Mohamed Bangura, flitting from PMDC to UDM, APC to PDP, embodies a politics of convenience over conviction. His latest leap, announced with scant apology, mirrors a wider trend where ambition trumps principle. Voters watch, disillusioned, as integrity bends to opportunism.

Finally, the Clerk of Parliament, Umar Paran Tarawallie, emerges from an ACC probe with his wife taking the fall—admitting fault while he pleads ignorance. Referred for “administrative action,” he sidesteps true reckoning. Leadership falters when those at the helm dodge shame's glare, leaving underlings to shoulder the blame.

## A Culture Adrift

These aren't mere anecdotes; they're symptoms of a deeper malaise. Shame once wove Sierra Leone's social fabric, a thread that bound communities to honour and accountability. Its death has unleashed a free-

for-all where wrongdoers strut unbowed. In academia, students cheat without contrition. In governance, officials pilfer with impunity. In politics, loyalty shifts like sand. The contrast with yesteryear—when propriety mattered—couldn't be starker.

This erosion isn't accidental. It stems from frayed institutions and a society too weary, or perhaps too cynical, to demand better. The ACC's hesitance, the judiciary's venality, the government's inertia—they signal a system that no longer polices itself. Where shame once stepped in, apathy now lingers. The cost is steep - trust erodes, governance weakens, and the young inherit a world where ethics are negotiable.

## A Road to Redemption

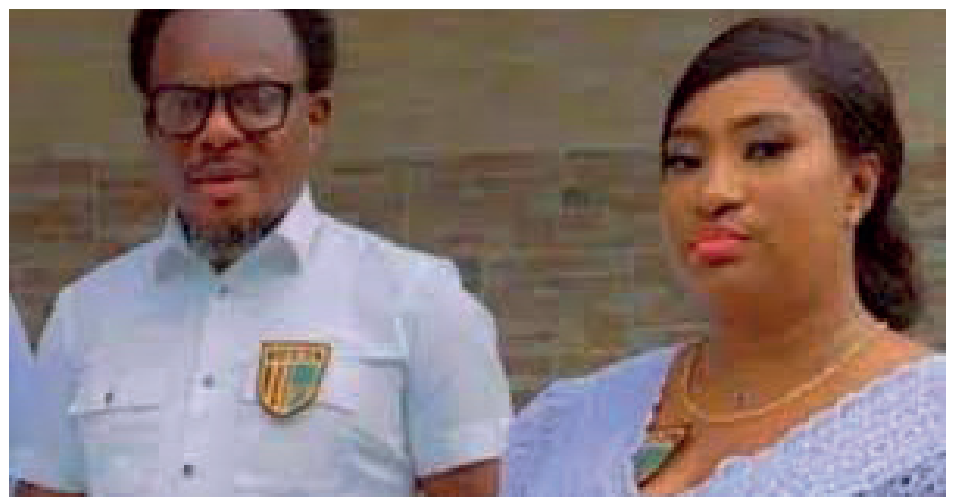
Sierra Leone stands at a precipice, but the fall isn't inevitable. Reclaiming shame—recasting it as a virtue, not a relic—demands action. Start with leadership: ethical exemplars in office, not placeholders who duck scrutiny. Strengthen the ACC's spine—



let it bite, not bark. In schools, root out dishonesty with rigour, not rhetoric. Courts must purge their ranks of profiteers, restoring faith in justice.

This isn't about nostalgia; it's about survival. A society without shame is a house without walls—exposed, unstable, doomed to collapse. The scandals of Sannoh, Sandy, Bangura, and Tarawallie aren't just personal failings; they're warnings. Sierra Leone can heed them, forging a culture that prizes integrity over expedience, or ignore them, sliding further into moral dusk.

The choice is ours, but the clock ticks. Shame may be dead—buried by indifference—but it needn't stay that way.



# FROM AID DEPENDENCE TO DIASPORA POWER: SIERRA LEONE'S PATH FORWARD

## Aid Cuts: A Crisis or Opportunity?

International development and aid flows are in unprecedented turmoil. The US Trump administration issued a stop-work order on USAID's \$23 billion annual budget, immediately impacting critical programs across Africa. In Sierra Leone, HIV clinics now face medication shortages, risking lives and increased infections. Meanwhile, European donors are retreating—the Netherlands cutting €2.4 billion and the UK slashing aid from 0.5% to 0.3% of GNI, eliminating £6.1 billion. For Sierra Leone, where USAID's \$1.2 billion

in assistance between 2010-2025 represented 12-15% of total international aid, the impact will be profound.

## Sierra Leone's Secret Weapon

While aid dwindles, Sierra Leone has an ace up its sleeve: its global diaspora. Across Africa, approximately 160 million Africans live abroad, sending back a staggering \$100 billion annually. In Sierra Leone specifically, remittances contributed 6.8% of GDP in 2023—making diaspora money more impactful than many realize. While foreign aid accounted for 11% of Gross National Income in 2022, remittances at 5.8% of GDP went directly into households

and businesses, providing immediate economic support.

## Diaspora Entrepreneurs Transform Communities

The real power lies beyond remittances in direct diaspora investment. In education, Muckson Sesay, a Sierra Leonean based in Canada, founded Central University Sierra Leone at Mile 91 in 2014. With over 1,500 students today, its presence is transforming the region, now expanding into student housing development.

Nearby, his sister Dr. Linda Muckson Sesay built the Community Health Foundation, a private hospital providing affordable healthcare that's gained such reputation that







patients travel from Freetown and neighboring countries for treatment.

In agriculture and tech, London-based Naomi Sesay is creating a sustainable smart city in Matamp with innovation and agricultural hubs, already producing nutritious red rice for restaurant supply chains. Meanwhile, Colin Ogoo's Christex Foundation at Fourah Bay College provides free blockchain training to position Sierra Leone as a digital leader in the global revolution.

## Unleashing Diaspora Investment Potential

Several promising avenues could dramatically increase diaspora economic engagement. With Sierra Leone's growing tech sector, diaspora angel investor networks could fund high-potential startups. The government's planned Startup Act through the Ministry of Communication, Technology, and Innovation would provide essential fiscal incentives.

Not all diaspora members are entrepreneurs, but many would subscribe to well-designed diaspora bonds investing in

attractive projects with good returns—a strategy successfully employed by Nigeria. This requires leadership from the Ministry of Finance and Bank of Sierra Leone. WIDU. africa matches European-based African diaspora remittances to support job-creating investments, while an initiative between AFFORD (UK) and ICMPD (Brussels) has already facilitated 10 successful campaigns raising over €200,000 for SMEs in West Africa since 2023.

## Overcoming Barriers to Investment

Despite their enthusiasm, diaspora entrepreneurs face unique challenges including unfamiliarity with local business practices, limited access to information networks, and lack of local credit history. Banks could innovate solutions, following examples from Zenith Bank (Nigeria), NCBA (Kenya), and Vista Bank (France) that offer portable credit histories and foreign currency lending.

## The Path Forward

As Winston Churchill said:

“Never let a good crisis go to waste.” With strategic governance reforms ensuring scarce resources are properly utilized, Sierra Leone can emerge from these aid cuts stronger and with greater citizen participation in directing development. Realizing this potential requires coordinated effort from government ministries, the Bank of Sierra Leone, the private sector, and organized diaspora commerce chambers.

The polycrisis of aid cuts may ultimately prove the catalyst that transforms Sierra Leone's economy through the power of its global diaspora—a price worth paying for the economic autonomy that follows.



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The author writes in his personal capacity.

# TRUMP'S AID CUTS ARE A WAKE-UP CALL FOR AFRICA - AND THAT'S A GOOD THING

**T**he Trump administration has just announced the cancellation of a \$17 million USAID-sponsored project that was supposed to provide tax policy advice to Liberia. The news was broken by none other than tech billionaire Elon Musk, who took to his platform X (formerly Twitter) to gloat:

"Among many other things, @DOGE today canceled a \$17M project to provide tax policy advice to Liberia," Musk wrote. "Why would anyone think that this is a good use of YOUR tax money?"

Predictably, reactions have been split. Some see this as yet another example of Trump's disregard for Africa, a move that will leave struggling economies even worse off. But let's be honest—was this project really about helping Liberia? Or was it just another case of Western aid that benefits the donors far more than the recipients?

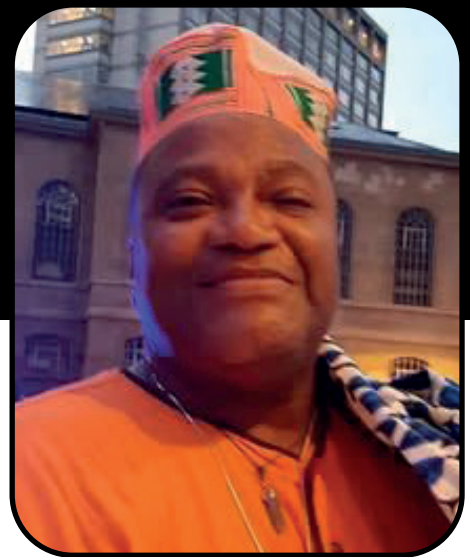
Rather than fear this shift, African nations should embrace it. The

era of dependency on Western aid—so often a tool for influence and control rather than genuine development—must end. This is a golden opportunity for African countries to take control of their economic future, demand more for their resources, and forge new, fairer partnerships across the globe.

## The Problem with Western Aid

For decades, Africa has been flooded with aid money, much of it dressed up as "technical assistance." But where does that money really go? More often than not, it stays in the donor country, paying for expensive consultants, administrative overhead, and foreign experts who fly in, write up reports, and leave without creating any real change.

Take the now-canceled Liberia project, for example. A \$17 million budget sounds like a lot, but how much of that would have actually ended up in Liberia's economy? If history is any guide, a big chunk would have been spent on U.S.-based



**HASSAN AROUNI**  
AUTHOR

consultants and salaries rather than investing in homegrown expertise.

Even worse, these aid programs often push policies that benefit Western investors more than African economies. Tax policy advice from USAID? That sounds an awful lot like shaping Liberia's tax system to attract foreign corporations—often at the expense of local businesses and long-term national revenue.

## The Shift Has Already Begun

Luckily, some African nations are already leading the way in demanding fairer deals. Take Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. For years, multinational chocolate companies dictated the price of cocoa, keeping African farmers at the bottom of the supply chain. But in 2019, these two West African giants teamed up, forcing global buyers to pay



a premium for their cocoa. They put their foot down: No more cheap raw materials.

Or look at Niger, which has been renegotiating its uranium deals with France. For decades, France relied on cheap uranium from its former colony to power its nuclear plants, while Niger saw little benefit. Now, Niger's government is demanding fairer compensation, shaking up long-standing economic ties.

Mali, too, is pushing back. It recently went after a major foreign gold mining company, claiming it owes billions in unpaid taxes. These are moves that would have been unthinkable a

decade ago—but they signal a

## Diversifying Partnerships

## Africa's

This shift away from dependency on Western aid doesn't mean Africa has to go it alone. The world is changing, and new alliances are forming.

The BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) are offering alternative investment and trade partnerships that don't come with the same political strings as Western aid.

China's Belt and Road Initiative has already built major infrastructure across Africa, from highways to ports. While not without its challenges,

Predictably, reactions have been split. Some see this as yet another example of Trump's disregard for Africa, a move that will leave struggling economies even worse off. But let's be honest—was this project really about helping Liberia? Or was it just another case of Western aid that benefits the donors far more than the recipients?

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growing confidence among African nations that it's time to take what's rightfully theirs.



it presents another option for development funding.

The Middle East and Latin America are increasingly engaging with Africa in trade and investment, providing new markets and opportunities.

By diversifying its partners, Africa can negotiate better terms, play countries against each other for the best deal, and ensure that development is driven by African priorities—not foreign interests.

### Tapping into Africa's Own Talent

Perhaps the biggest shift needs to happen at home. Africa is not short on expertise. Across the continent and in its vast diaspora,

there are brilliant economists, engineers, and business leaders who understand local challenges far better than any foreign consultant ever could.

Liberia, for example, has plenty of tax experts who could design a tax policy that serves the country's needs—not just those of foreign investors. Why outsource critical decisions to people with no long-term stake in Liberia's success?

Instead of waiting for Western aid, African governments should invest in their own talent, strengthen local institutions, and take full ownership of their economic policies.

### The End of Aid Dependency

Trump's decision to cut this USAID project isn't a tragedy—it's a wake-up call. Western aid has long been a crutch, and in many cases, a tool of economic control. Now, Africa has a chance to break free.

By demanding more for its resources, forging new partnerships, and investing in its own people, the continent can take its rightful place in the global economy—not as a perpetual recipient of handouts, but as a powerhouse in its own right.

The time for dependency is over. The time for African economic independence is now.







# From Scarcity to Surplus

## The Legal Boom and its Fallout

In Sierra Leone, the legal profession is undergoing a seismic shift. Once a field marked by scarcity, it now grapples with an unprecedented surge in the number of lawyers called to the Bar. From a modest 22 in 1990, when the Sierra Leone Law School first opened its doors, the tally soared to 350 in 2024 alone. Over the past three years, no fewer than 200 new lawyers have joined the ranks annually, with the figure climbing by 100 each year. This dramatic rise has sparked a pressing question: is the legal profession equipped to absorb this influx?

The answer, increasingly, appears to be no. What was once a noble calling risks being overwhelmed by its own growth, straining resources, diluting standards, and threatening the prestige that has long defined it.

### A Profession in Expansion

The roots of this proliferation lie in a confluence of structural and societal shifts. Historically, the University of Sierra Leone held a monopoly on legal education, its LLB programme was the sole gateway to the Bar. But in recent years, institutions such as the University of Makeni, Njala University, and IMATT College have launched law faculties, swelling the pipeline of aspiring barristers. The Sierra Leone Law School, tasked with training these graduates, has seen admissions balloon—from calling an average of 50 students annually in its early days to 350 today.

This expansion reflects a broader democratisation of education, but it's not the only driver. The allure of financial reward plays a significant role. Tales of prosperous lawyers handling high-stakes cases—be it land disputes or corporate contracts—fuel perceptions

of law as a golden ticket to wealth. While such rewards exist for some, they are far from universal, varying wildly with experience and specialisation.

Then there's the prestige. Lawyers in Sierra Leone command respect as guardians of justice and architects of policy, their status cemented by a legacy of advocacy in a nation scarred by civil war and rebuilt through legal reforms. For many, the title "barrister" is as much a social aspiration as a professional one.

### The Cost of Growth

Yet this rapid rise comes at a steep price. Take pupillage, the mandatory 12-to-18-month apprenticeship required under the Legal Practitioners Act of 2000 and its amendments. Designed to ground new lawyers in courtroom procedure, it's a cornerstone of professional competence. But with pupil

masters—senior barristers of at least 10 years' standing—capped at five trainees each, the system is buckling. Even if every eligible senior lawyer took on the maximum, hundreds of new barristers would be left without mentors.

The fallout is stark. Interviews with young lawyers reveal a troubling trend: some secure signatures from pupil masters to meet formal requirements without ever serving under them. Law firms, stretched thin, lack the capacity to absorb the deluge, leaving novices to navigate practice without guidance. The result? A decline in the quality of legal services, as ill-prepared practitioners take on cases beyond their depth, tarnishing the profession's reputation.

Unemployment compounds the crisis. Freetown, the epicentre of legal practice, hosts a market too small to sustain its growing cohort of lawyers. Many drift into dormancy or vie for non-legal jobs, their training languishing unused. Meanwhile, the General Legal Council struggles

to regulate this expanding flock. Ethical lapses—corruption, client exploitation, frivolous lawsuits—proliferate as desperate lawyers scramble for scraps. Just weeks ago, the Council issued a stern warning against newly called lawyers making unauthorised bail applications, a sign of the disciplinary strain.

The judiciary, too, groans under the pressure. More lawyers mean more litigation, clogging an already overburdened system. In Freetown's magistrate courts, chaos reigns - crowded dockets, frequent adjournments, and delayed justice have become the norm. For a profession once dubbed "noble," the influx risks eroding both its standards and its stature.

### What way forward

Sierra Leone's legal establishment is not without options. The General Legal Council could tighten admission standards, ensuring only the most capable enter the Bar, while aligning law school curricula with market needs—think practical skills and ethics over rote theory. Specialisation offers another

lifeline: certification in fields like technology law or human rights could ease the glut in general practice and meet emerging demands.

Ethical oversight must also sharpen. Regular assessments of practitioners, paired with swift action against misconduct, could restore trust. On the judicial front, expanding court infrastructure—especially in provincial areas—would alleviate urban congestion and expedite trials. Issuing jurisdiction-specific practising certificates might nudge lawyers beyond Freetown, balancing the load.

The stakes are high. Sierra Leone's legal profession stands at a crossroads, its noble legacy hanging in the balance. Without bold reform, the surge in lawyers could drown a system still finding its footing after decades of recovery. But with strategic action, this growth could instead fortify justice, turning a challenge into a chance to build a more robust, equitable legal order. The choice lies with those who wield the gavel—and those who train the hands that hold it.





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# A BEACON OF SERVICE

## The Legacy of Professor Dr. Alusine Jalloh

In the heart of Kingtom, St. Edward's Secondary School stands as a testament to resilience, transformation, and hope—a transformation fueled by the tireless efforts of one of its most dedicated alumni, Professor Dr. Alusine Jalloh. A historian, educator, philanthropist, and visionary, Dr. Jalloh has not only reshaped the physical and academic landscape of his beloved alma mater but has also inspired countless others to give back to their communities. His story is one of inspiration, personal sacrifice, and an unyielding commitment to education as a cornerstone of societal development.

### A Divine Calling to Give Back

Dr. Jalloh's journey of giving back to St. Edward's Secondary School is rooted in a deep sense of gratitude and divine purpose. As he shared in an interview with Sierraeye, "It is a divine inspiration which has motivated

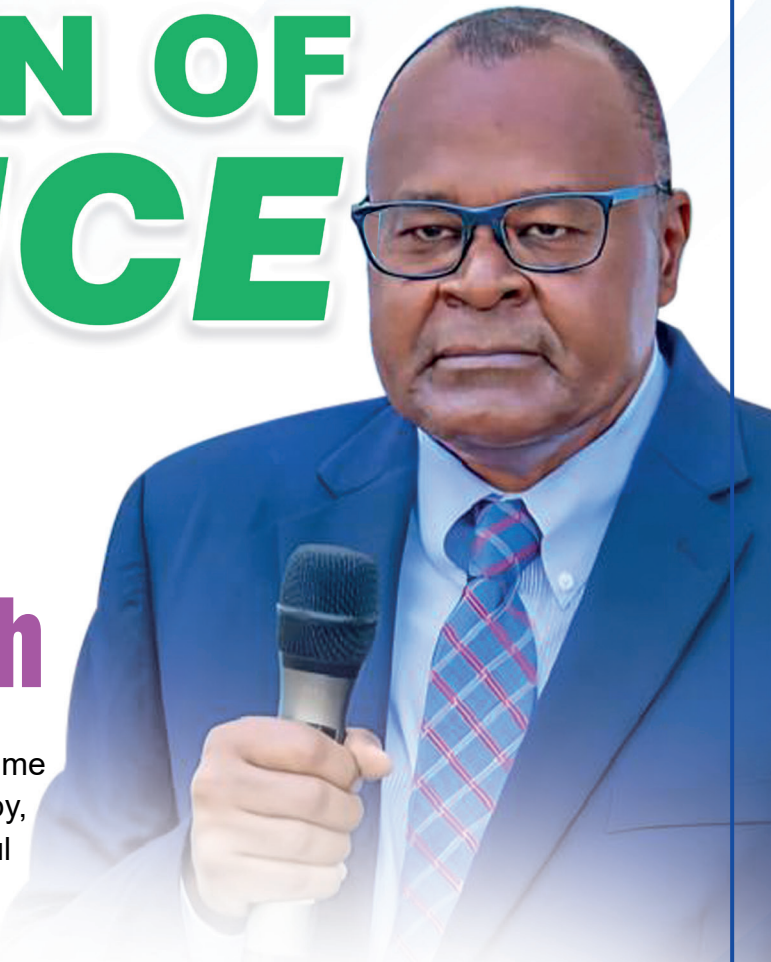
and sustained me in my philanthropy, and I am grateful to God for giving me an opportunity to give back to my alma matre." This spiritual foundation has guided his efforts, transforming challenges into opportunities to uplift his community.

His connection to St. Edward's is personal and profound, shaped by formative experiences during his time as a student. One pivotal moment came in 1981, when, as a young treasurer for the Sierra Leone United Nations Students Association (SLUNSA), he spearheaded fundraising efforts to attend a UN conference on energy in New York City. Reflecting on this experience, Dr. Jalloh recalled, "I was one of three students who attended the conference after sparing my effort for my alma mater in raising funds from the Lebanese community, the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board

(SLPMB) among others. When I came back to Sierra Leone, St. Edward's community rewarded me with an appointment of Senior Prefect in 1982, and such appointment inspires me to do most of the things I am doing now for the school." This early leadership role not only honed his organizational skills but also instilled a lifelong commitment to service, a value deeply embedded in his family's tradition of philanthropy. As he noted, "My family has a tradition of giving back (philanthropy), and I personally believe that helping people realize their dreams brings untold blessings to someone."

### Transforming St. Edward's

Dr. Jalloh's contributions to St. Edward's Secondary School are vast and multifaceted,







addressing both immediate needs and long-term goals. Recognizing the dire financial situation of many teachers, particularly those not on the government payroll, he initiated a financial support program. "I took up such venture after realising that most of the teachers were not on government payroll, and offered them monthly stipends," he explained. "We selected ten (10) teachers, 5 from JSS (Junior Secondary School) and 5 from SSS (Senior Secondary School) cadres. In all, I gave them Le20m and each got Le2m and a bag of rice." This act of generosity not only alleviated economic hardship but also boosted morale, ensuring that teachers could continue their critical work of educating the next generation.

Beyond financial support, Dr. Jalloh tackled the school's academic challenges head-on. Concerned about the

poor performance of students in public examinations, he launched a tutorial initiative with the help of lecturers from Fourah Bay College. "My tutorial initiative for St. Edward's Secondary School came after I learned that the school was not doing well in public exams," he shared. "Therefore, I paid some lecturers at Fourah Bay College to offer some tutorials to St. Edward's students on Saturdays and also provided free lunch. The initiative was a big help as most students had been doing well in public exams such as BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination) and WASSCE (West African Senior School Certificate Examination). Between 2023 and 2024, St. Edward's came second nationally as many students got university requirements." This remarkable achievement underscores the transformative power of targeted interventions in education.

Infrastructure rehabilitation has also been a cornerstone of Dr. Jalloh's efforts. When he returned to St. Edward's, he found the school in a state of disrepair, with dilapidated buildings, broken toilets, and a vulnerable perimeter that earned it the unfortunate label of a "rebel school." Determined to change this narrative, he spearheaded several projects, including the resurfacing of the school's driveway, the construction of a secure wall and gate, and the renovation of the school hall. "Apart from providing financial assistance to teachers of St. Edward's, I also implemented several rehabilitation projects of which I was the supervisor," he said. "Before the projects, the school was completely dilapidated and the toilet messed up, but my team and I did the work by erecting the wall and installing the gate and also sparing Le50m to resurface the drive after contracting Gento

Group of Companies.” These improvements not only enhanced the learning environment but also restored pride and trust in the institution, as evidenced by increased enrollment. “Rebranding the school is one major achievement recorded,” Dr. Jalloh proudly stated. “After erecting the wall and installing the gate, the school’s caretaker confirms that more parents are now ready to enrol their kids at

St. Edward’s since the school is no more a ‘rebel school.’”

## Inspiring Excellence and Service

Dr. Jalloh’s contributions extend far beyond financial and infrastructural support. He has actively engaged with students and staff, fostering a culture of academic excellence and service. Through motivational talks, he shares his personal

journey, emphasizing the broader purpose of education. “Beyond financial support, I have also offered motivational talks to inspire them attain academic excellence and also be mindful of the notion of education and service to humanity,” he explained. “I also explained to them about my journey in life and to also know that education is not about making money but giving back.” These interactions



have inspired students to see education as a tool for societal upliftment, echoing Dr. Jalloh’s belief that “education is a foundation that is critical for society’s development, but it is not only about the acquisition of certificates or self-achievement but giving back and supporting others.”

## Overcoming Challenges, Embracing Rewards

Dr. Jalloh’s path has not been without obstacles. Resistance from some alumni and differing

visions for the school’s future posed significant challenges. “My focus is to help the school, but others including old Edwardians have an agenda that is not helpful to the school,” he lamented. “Named after the King of England, Edward The Confessor, St. Edward’s was set up by the Holy Ghost Reverend Fathers, a branch of the Roman Catholic Church, and their vision for the school was academic excellence and spiritual growth, and that was what I tried to actualise but

others had different motives.” Despite these difficulties, Dr. Jalloh drew strength from his faith and family. “Almighty God is my source of inspiration and sustainer as there are times when I wanted to quit, but my family would advise me not to do so,” he said.

The rewards of his efforts, however, have been profound. For Dr. Jalloh, the joy of seeing tangible improvements and the gratitude of those he has helped is unparalleled. “The most rewarding aspect of my



philanthropy is, it makes me feel good by putting smiles on people's faces, and I am also convinced that you help yourself when you help others," he reflected. The rebranding of St. Edward's, the academic success of its students, and the renewed trust of parents are all milestones he holds dear.

## A Vision for Education and Legacy

Dr. Jalloh's work at St. Edward's is part of a broader vision for education in Sierra Leone, one that emphasizes values such as honesty, integrity, and compassion. "My vision for education hinges on going back to the old values of honesty, integrity and compassion," he asserted. He sees education as a collective enterprise, not

just for intellectuals or the elite, but for all Sierra Leoneans. This vision extends to his work with other institutions, such as Fourah Bay College (FBC), where he has been instrumental in establishing programs like the Social Work Department and advocating for its transformation into a world-class research and teaching institution.

His commitment to education is also evident in his efforts to engage the Sierra Leonean diaspora. "As mentioned earlier, the essence of education is to help others realize their potentials and achieve their dreams, and the diaspora community have an important role to play in the project of giving back," he emphasized. His own return to Sierra Leone after a successful career in the

United States, where he served as a Professor of History and Founding Director of the Africa Program at the University of Texas at Arlington, exemplifies this call to action.

Dr. Jalloh's legacy is one of service, love, and inspiration. When asked how he wishes to be remembered by future generations of Edwardians, he replied, "I would like future generations of Edwardians to see me as one that loves the school. An Edwardian that loves his school, loves the best for his school, and inspire others to do the best for the school." His message to fellow alumni is equally compelling: "It makes me feel good when I give back, and I hope they would also feel good and be better recognized when they help and support





others achieve their academic goals.”

Professor Dr. Alusine Jalloh’s story is a powerful reminder of the impact one individual can have when guided by faith, purpose, and a commitment to others. His work at St. Edward’s Secondary School and beyond serves as a beacon for alumni, students, and communities worldwide. To current students, he offers this advice: “My advice to St. Edward’s students is to fulfil their God-given potentials with the help of the school and should look back and give back to the school.” His life embodies the principle that true success

lies not in personal gain, but in the legacy of service we leave behind—a legacy that, in Dr. Jalloh’s words, ensures “our legacy can be better than our inheritance.”

Dr. Jalloh’s vision and actions challenge us all to honor the past, celebrate the present, and work tirelessly to build a brighter future through education and community involvement. His story is not just one of philanthropy, but of love—a love for his alma mater, his country, and the transformative power of education.





# THE SILENT EPIDEMIC RAVAGING SIERRA LEONE'S YOUTH



**Moiyattu Banya-Keister**

is a social impact leader, a social worker and mental health researcher.



In a cramped office in the capital, I sit with a 17-year-old girl whose eyes dart nervously as she speaks. She tells me of sleepless nights, of a weight she can't name pressing on her chest, a legacy of a childhood shadowed by Sierra Leone's brutal civil war and the Ebola outbreak that followed. After 12 years as a social impact leader here, and currently mental health researcher, I've heard versions of her story countless times. But the numbers tell a starker truth: 98% of Sierra Leoneans lack access to mental health care, according to the

World Health Organisation. For the nation's youth—over a third of its 8 million people—this gap is a crisis hiding in plain sight.

Sierra Leone is no stranger to trauma. A decade-long conflict that ended in 2002 left scars on its people and its systems, compounded by Ebola's devastation in 2014 and recurring natural disasters. Economic hardship grinds on, with over half the population living on less than £1 a day. Yet, amid these visible burdens, the mental toll on adolescents and young adults has gone largely

unnoticed—until now. As a trained social impact leader, I've spent years advocating for the wellbeing of girls and women. What I've found is a generation buckling under pressures the country is ill-equipped to address.

## A System Overwhelmed

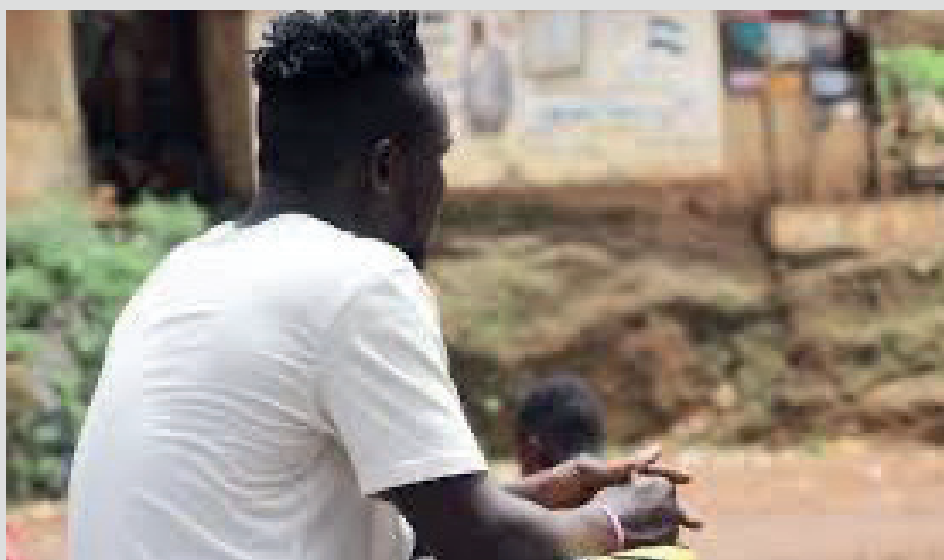
At the Sierra Leone Psychiatric Teaching Hospital, Dr. Elizabeth Allieu runs the country's only adolescent mental health unit. It's a beacon of progress, supported by groups like Partners in Health, but it's an outpatient facility with limited beds and a trickle of age-appropriate medications. "We're doing what we can," Dr. Allieu told me, her voice steady but weary. "But the need outstrips us every day." With just 2% of the population able to access mental health services, young people are left to navigate their struggles alone—struggles sharpened by a new menace: Kush.

## The Kush Scourge

Over the past three years, this cheap, synthetic drug has flooded Sierra Leone's streets, hooking adolescents with its promise of escape. Made from a mix of cannabis and chemicals, Kush has triggered a wave of addiction, displacement, and death. In Freetown's slums, I met a 20-year-old man, gaunt and shivering, who said he'd lost his family to the drug's grip. President Julius Maada Bio has declared it a national emergency, rallying government agencies and NGOs to fight back. Yet, rehabilitation remains patchy, and prevention lags. The toll on youth mental health is incalculable.

### Violence's Lasting Echoes

For young women, the risks compound. An estimated 62% of Sierra Leonean women aged 15 to 49 have faced gender-based violence, a statistic borne out in the stories I've collected: rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage. The mental fallout—anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder—festers without treatment. “Pain is invisible, and you can't heal what you don't see,” a survivor told me, her voice breaking. Girl-centered, trauma-informed care is desperately needed, but resources are thin.



### A Policy Frozen in Time

The nation's mental health policy, last updated in 2012, gathers dust. There's no dedicated budget, though the Ministry of Health has trained nurses with help from international partners and stationed them in hospitals. It's a start, but sustainability is a mirage without funding. “We're running on fumes,” a health official admitted off the record. For a country where youth are the majority, this stasis is a betrayal of their future.

### Searching for Solutions

There's a path forward, if Sierra Leone can muster the will. The intergenerational trauma of war and the grinding stress of unemployment—over 60% of youth lack jobs—demand collective healing. Community-based initiatives could ease the strain, training laypeople to offer basic support in a “task-shifting”

model that's worked elsewhere. Faith leaders, often the first port of call for the distressed, could be equipped with mental health training, bridging cultural gaps. A revised policy, backed by real money, is non-negotiable. So is tackling Kush with robust rehab programmes and building services that reflect Sierra Leone's unique needs.

In Freetown, the girl I spoke with still haunts me. She's one of millions whose minds are at stake. Sierra Leone has rebuilt from ashes before—its people are resilient. But resilience alone won't save this generation. Policymakers, peering from their offices, must see what I see: a crisis that, left unchecked, will shape the nation's tomorrow. The question is whether they'll act before the silence breaks them.





# THE PHARMACEUTICAL SECTOR LAID BARE

In Sierra Leone, a pill can be a lifeline—or a death sentence. With a population of 8.3 million, the country teeters on the edge of a pharmaceutical abyss, its health system crippled by dependency, dysfunction, and a regulatory free-for-all that leaves citizens vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic ripped the veil off this shocking reality, exposing a nation with no local drug manufacturing, a Pharmacy Board drowning in corruption, and streets awash with peddled poison. This is not just a crisis—it's a betrayal of trust, and SierraEye is here to tell the unvarnished truth.

## A Nation at the Mercy of Imports

Picture this - a global pandemic hits, borders close, flights grind to a halt. For most countries, this is a logistical headache. For Sierra Leone, it's a death knell. As Conteh et al. reveal in their 2022 study, Sierra Leone has zero pharmaceutical manufacturing companies.

None. Every tablet, every syringe, every vaccine dose comes from abroad. When COVID-19 struck, import restrictions triggered "severe drug shortages and medicine insecurity," leaving hospitals and pharmacies



empty-handed. The Ebola outbreak a decade earlier had already sounded the alarm—yet nothing changed. A single manufacturing company once existed here, but it shuttered over 20 years ago, and no roadmap exists to revive it. Compare that to Nigeria's 165 manufacturers or even Zimbabwe's eight, and the scale of Sierra Leone's vulnerability becomes stark.

This dependency isn't just a supply issue—it's a gateway to disaster. Substandard and falsified medicines flood the

market, exploiting a nation with no means to produce its own. The authors warn that excessive reliance on imports "provides an opportunity for falsified and substandard medicines to enter the legitimate supply chain." And enter they do—often with deadly consequences.

## A Pharmacy Board in Shambles

If the lack of manufacturing is the wound, the Pharmacy Board of Sierra Leone (PBSL) is the infection. Once a bastion of order under a competent former Registrar, it's now a crumbling relic, gutted by political meddling and incompetence. Insiders paint a grim picture: a current Registrar, appointed not for skill but for loyalty, compromises on "situations that need stringent actions." Staff who dare to enforce the rules—per their sworn oaths—are demoted or sidelined. When importers are caught with substandard drugs, a phone call from a political heavyweight ensures

the evidence vanishes. "The whole pharmaceutical sector is a mess," the commentary declares, "they talk endlessly about the challenges but never resort to solutions."

The numbers tell a damning story.



With too few pharmacists for 8 million people, most work in cushy roles at PBSL, NGOs, or hospitals, not in community pharmacies. Those who do often “rent” their licenses for exorbitant fees—sometimes a year’s salary upfront—while rarely setting foot on the premises. Proprietors, desperate to keep shops running, exploit this laxity, leaving pharmacies staffed by unqualified technicians or even nurses, despite regulations forbidding it. Only 2% of pharmacies have a professional in a white coat; some attendants are shirtless, handing out antibiotics like candy. Prescription? Optional. Oversight? Nonexistent.

### Lawlessness on Every Corner

The Pharmacy Drugs Act of 2001 is clear: no drug advertising, no prescription sales by non-pharmacies, no doctors running their own drugstores. Yet, reality mocks the law. Drug peddlers roam streets and buses with loudspeakers, hawking expired and substandard wares—often supplied by importers with PBSL’s tacit approval. Patent stores sprout like weeds, secretly selling prescription drugs and undercutting legitimate pharmacies forced to pay high rents and license fees. Doctors at private clinics



flout Section 18, stocking pharmacies illegally, while nurses in government hospitals hoard drugs in toilets, extorting poor patients seeking free care.

PBSL’s own rules—pharmacies shouldn’t cluster—lie in tatters. Streets are lined with competing shops, thanks to political overrides of staff objections. Conflicts of interest fester: PBSL employees own pharmacies, inspecting themselves with a wink and a nod. The kush crisis spirals, yet the Board and Pharmaceutical Society sit dormant, targeting thriving pharmacies instead of tackling the chaos. “Everyone is allowed to do what they feel like doing,” the commentary fumes, and the Pharmacy Drugs Act might as well be confetti.

### The Human Cost

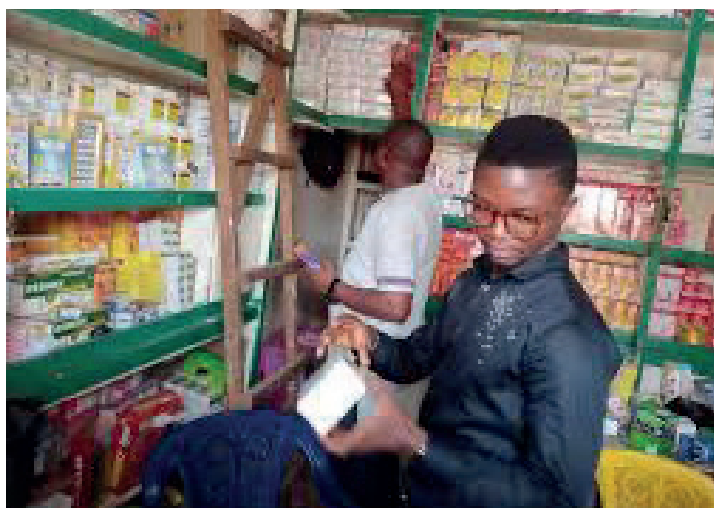
This isn’t abstract. It’s personal. Every fake pill swallowed, every antibiotic misused, every peddler’s shout risks lives. The

poor, women, and children bear the brunt, as the World Health Organization notes half of Africa’s population lacks regular medicine access. Sierra Leone’s failures

amplify this tragedy. Ebola and COVID-19 were wake-up calls, but the snooze button’s been hit too long.

There is a lifeline - tax breaks for importers to build local factories, sub-factories from Nigeria or Ghana, land grants, and purchase agreements with the National Medicines Supply Agency. But without dismantling the PBSL’s rot, these are pipe dreams. The regulatory overview touts a “comprehensive” drug approval process and Good Manufacturing Practices—on paper. In practice, resource shortages, corruption, and ignorance strangle enforcement. Ghana and Nigeria show what’s possible with stricter licensing and WHO collaboration. Sierra Leone must follow, training nurses for pharmacies, jailing peddlers, and purging political cronies from the PBSL.

Sierra Leoneans deserve better. A functional pharmaceutical sector isn’t a luxury—it’s a right. We crave a profession respected, not ridiculed; rules upheld, not broken by the rulemakers. The government must act—build factories, clean house at PBSL, enforce the law. Citizens must demand it. Walk into a pharmacy today and ask: is this pill real? The answer shouldn’t be a gamble. The shocking reality is out—now, let’s shock the system into change.





WELCOME TO

# SIERRA LEONE

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ATLANTIC  
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Freetown Sierra Leone





By Nyamacoro Sarata Silla

# As Global Warming Scorches the Freetown Peninsula, Low-Cost Solutions Offer Hope

**T**he numbers are in, and they are searing. The World Meteorological Organisation, alongside NASA, the UK Met Office, and others, crowned 2024 the hottest year on record—1.55°C above pre-industrial levels, according to January 2025 reports. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration concurs, noting that the planet's warmest years since 1850 have all crammed into the last decade. Here in Freetown, the heat is no abstract statistic. Sierra Leone's Meteorological Agency charts a relentless climb: average annual highs leapt from 29°C in 2021 to 32°C in 2024. For a city

perched on a peninsula already battered by nature's whims, this escalation is a clarion call.

I felt the urgency firsthand earlier this month at the African Urban Heat Summit, convened in Freetown on 6 February. Amid discussions of "heat plans" and climate resilience, a sobering reality emerged: grand initiatives, however well-intentioned, often falter for lack of funds. Sierra Leone's government struggles to keep pace with crises—health, housing, sanitation—leaving little room for costly climate fixes. Yet as a resident, I refuse to resign myself to helplessness. Extreme heat may be global, but

its remedies can be local, lean, and within our grasp. Here's how we might shield ourselves without breaking the bank.

## Halting the Axe and Flame

Deforestation is torching Freetown's natural defences. As Mohamed Ismail Kamara wrote in the Sierra Leone Telegraph last March, the city's sprawl and hunger for resources have razed forests at an alarming clip, shredding ecosystems that once tempered heat and harboured biodiversity. Citizens clear land for homes, lighting fires that choke the air and strip shade. The fix? Enforce existing laws—ruthlessly. Designate protected



zones and deploy police and community workers, already on the payroll, to patrol them. No new bureaucracy needed; just will. A greener Freetown could cool us, if only we'd let the trees stand.

## Taming the Filth

Then there's the muck. Freetown's streets and gutters brim with waste, a cesspit born of poor sanitation that amplifies heat's sting. The World Bank's Water Blog in 2021 warned that filthy conditions worsen climate impacts, and the numbers here are grim: only 17% of Sierra Leoneans have basic

simple, affordable structures. On-the-spot fines for littering or public relief could fund daily clean-ups of gutters and roads. Businesses, especially in central and outer districts, could pitch in, incentivised by tax breaks or public praise. Markets, too, need order: relocate roadside vendors—exposed all day to blazing rays—into shaded, designated zones. Education must hum alongside, a steady drumbeat of awareness. Small steps, consistently taken, could scrub the city cooler.

dry season. When temperatures soar, that water could flush filth, hydrate households, and douse the heat radiating from concrete. It's a habit we can start now, house by house, no grand budget required.

These ideas aren't flashy. They don't demand millions or foreign aid. They lean on what we have: laws already written, workers already hired, rain already falling. The Heat Plan from the summit is a fine blueprint, but while we wait for its funding, we can act. Clean a gutter today, fine a polluter tomorrow, plant a tree next week.

Consistency,  
not cash,  
is the



sanitation, per a 2021 Joint Monitoring Programme report—26% in urban areas, a measly 10% in rural ones. Toilets are scarce; open defecation is routine. This isn't just a hygiene crisis—it's a heat trap, as clogged drains and reeking piles bake under the sun.

The remedy starts with enforcement, again. Sanitation officers must scour hotspots, pinpointing where facilities are absent, and build basic toilets—

## Harvesting the Rains

Sierra Leone is drenched in paradox: one of the world's wettest nations, yet parched when heat peaks. The United Nations ranks us third globally for annual rainfall, behind only Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Those torrents, if captured, could be our salvation. Harvesting rainwater—via barrels, tanks, or even makeshift basins—costs little and pays dividends in the

Global warming may be a juggernaut, but Freetown needn't be its victim. The peninsula's people have weathered worse—war, floods, Ebola—with ingenuity and grit. Heat is our latest foe, and these low-cost shields can blunt its edge. Enforcement and education, wielded daily, could cool our city just enough to endure. We don't need a miracle. We need resolve.

backbone.





# Beyond the Beaches

## Bimbola Carrol's

### Vision for Sierra Leone's

### Tourism Renaissance

In the early 2000s, as Sierra Leone emerged from a devastating civil war, the country was often defined by its struggles. For Bimbola Carrol, however, the narrative needed to change. Inspired by a deep love for his homeland, he founded Visit Sierra Leone (VSL), a company dedicated to showcasing the nation's beauty, culture, and hospitality.

"There was a post-war industry where many were financially benefiting from the horror stories," Carrol recalls. "I saw

an opportunity to highlight the positive aspects of Sierra Leone—its stunning landscapes, rich heritage, and warm people. My vision was to create a trusted platform that would make it easy for travelers to explore the country while contributing to its economic recovery through tourism."

Today, as the founder and CEO of VSL, Carrol has become a leading voice in Sierra Leone's tourism sector. In an exclusive







interview with Sierraeve, he shared his insights on the industry's evolution, the challenges it faces, and his hopes for the future.

### A Sector Transformed

Since VSL's inception, Sierra Leone's tourism sector has undergone significant changes. "When I started, there was

little organized tourism infrastructure," Carrol explains. "Visitors were mostly NGOs, diaspora Sierra Leoneans, or business travelers."

Today, the landscape is different. Boutique hotels, improved roads, and a growing array of adventure experiences cater to a diverse range of travelers.

Events like the Makeni Marathon, the Budapest-Bamako Rally, and the Tour de Lunsar have drawn international attention, while cruise ship arrivals and music festivals have boosted visitor numbers.

"There is now a collective push—both from the private sector and the government—to position Sierra Leone as a viable tourism destination," Carrol says. Initiatives like the World Bank's Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project have further strengthened the sector, bringing tangible benefits.

### Changing Misconceptions

One of Carrol's primary goals has been to challenge misconceptions about Sierra Leone. "Many international travelers believe the country is unsafe, that infrastructure is too poor for tourism, and that there's little to see beyond the beaches," he says. "While we do







have challenges, Sierra Leone is a peaceful country with some of the most welcoming people you will ever meet.”

Through VSL, Carrol works to change these narratives by promoting authentic experiences and highlighting the country’s diverse attractions. From the pristine beaches of the Freetown Peninsula to the lush Gola Rainforest and the historic Bunce Island, Sierra Leone offers a wealth of experiences for adventurous travelers.

### Breaking Stereotypes

Despite these strides, international misconceptions persist. “People still think Sierra Leone is unsafe, that infrastructure is too poor, and that there’s little to see beyond its beaches,” Carrol said. “But those who visit are often surprised by how peaceful and welcoming it is.”

Sierra Leone’s tourism offerings extend far beyond its pristine coastline. The government’s recent initiative inviting members of the African diaspora—who can trace their lineage to the country through DNA testing—has reignited interest in its cultural heritage. Tourists are now venturing beyond the capital to Tiwai Island, Loma Mountains, Gola Rainforest, and Kabala, while heritage sites such as Bunce Island and Banana

Island remain popular.

Experiential travel is also on the rise. “Visitors don’t just want to see a place; they want to engage with it,” Carrol explained. “Cooking classes in local cuisine, cultural immersions, and eco-tours are becoming highly sought after.”

### The Economic Potential of Tourism

Tourism holds immense potential for Sierra Leone’s economy, Carrol emphasizes. “It can create jobs, support local businesses, and generate foreign exchange,” he says. However, the sector remains underdeveloped compared to its potential.

VSL plays a key role in bridging this gap. “We promote Sierra Leone both internationally and domestically,” Carrol explains. “We believe we must be our own best ambassadors. Our core ethos is to provide seamless and exciting travel experiences while supporting initiatives that enhance the sector.”

### Popular Experiences and Emerging Trends

While Sierra Leone’s beaches remain a major draw, Carrol notes a growing interest in eco-tourism, adventure travel, and cultural heritage. “The government’s initiative to encourage diaspora visitors who have proven their Sierra Leonean lineage through DNA testing has been widely embraced,” he says.

Destinations like Tiwai Island, the Loma Mountains, and Kabala are gaining popularity, while sites such as the Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary and Banana Island continue to attract visitors. Experiential travel, where tourists engage





with local communities through activities like cooking classes, is also on the rise.

## Balancing Growth and Conservation

Sustainable tourism is a priority for Carrol and VSL. “We support eco-lodges, low-impact tours, and community-led conservation efforts,” he says. In places like the Gola Rainforest and Lake Sonfon, tourism can provide an alternative to environmentally destructive industries by creating jobs in guiding, hospitality, and conservation.

However, Carrol warns that without concerted national efforts to boost tourism numbers, these locations may struggle to attract visitors, leaving local communities with few alternatives but to engage in unsustainable practices.

## Challenges and Opportunities

Infrastructure remains a significant barrier to tourism development. “Investments in roads, airfields, and boat transportation are crucial,” Carrol says. He also calls for better coordination between the government and private sector to create a unified strategy for growth.

“Public-private partnerships are essential,” he adds. “The government must be intentional about transforming tourism into a major revenue earner. This includes increasing budgetary support for the Ministry of Tourism and related agencies.”

## Lessons from Neighbours

Sierra Leone can learn from countries like Ghana and Senegal, Carrol believes. “Ghana’s Year of Return and



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Senegal’s cultural festivals show the power of consistent marketing and political support,” he says. “We need to create signature tourism events and strengthen our brand identity.”

Improving international air access is another priority. “It’s

**Sierra Leone can learn from countries like Ghana and Senegal, Carrol believes. “Ghana’s Year of Return and Senegal’s cultural festivals show the power of consistent marketing and political support,” he says. “We need to create signature tourism events and strengthen our brand identity.” The AfriCaribbean Festival in December 2024 was a good start.**

still very expensive to fly to Sierra Leone,” Carrol notes. “We need to be competitive—

price competitive—to attract repeat visitors and families.”

## A Dream for the Future

Looking ahead, Carrol’s vision is clear. “I want Sierra Leone to be recognized as a top travel destination in Africa—one that attracts adventurers, eco-tourists, history enthusiasts, and business travelers alike,” he says. “For VSL, I want us to continue being at the forefront of this transformation, offering world-class services while staying true to our mission of responsible tourism.”

If Sierra Leone can overcome its challenges and harness its full tourism potential, it may yet shed its war-scarred past and emerge as one of Africa’s most compelling travel destinations. Through his work, Bimbola Carrol is not just changing the narrative about Sierra Leone—he is helping to shape its future.





**VICKIE REMOE**  
AUTHOR

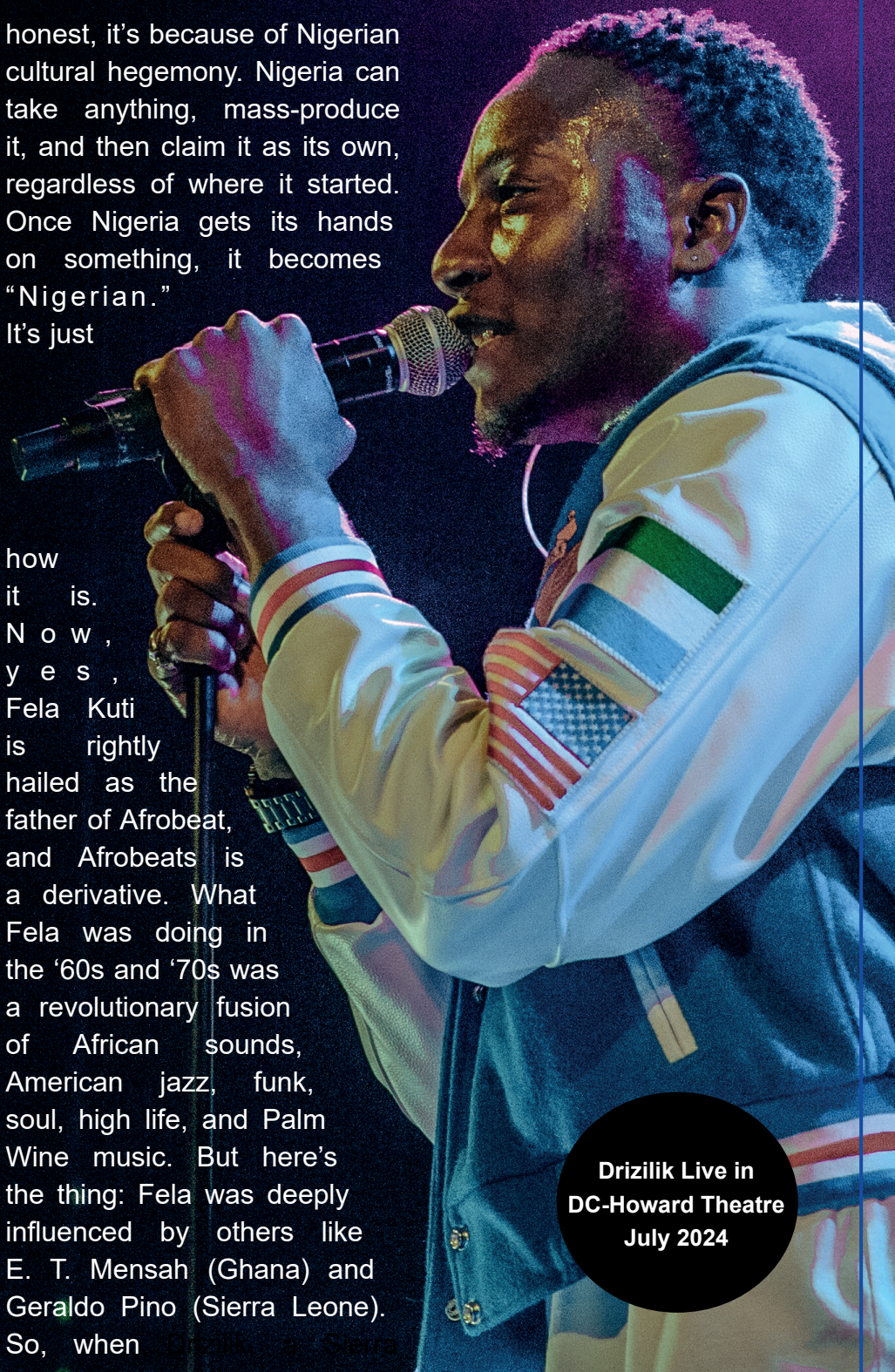
# THE TRUTH ABOUT AFROBEATS : IT'S NOT NIGERIAN

“We know Afrobeats from Ghana and Nigeria, so what is different about yours from Sierra Leone?” This question was asked to Drizilik in a recent interview with an urban radio station in Amsterdam, and his response was simple. “Sierra Leonean Afrobeats is a mix of contemporary African music and Sierra Leonean traditional sounds: bubu, gumbay, and milo jazz. But the language, Krio, makes Sierra Leonean Afrobeats different.”

I started working with Drizilik in 2022. I came in as his publicist, green as can be, with zero experience in the entertainment industry. But we are pushing his music to the Sierra Leonean diaspora and far beyond. He's making killer Afrobeats, no doubt about it. But there's a catch, a big one. If you're not Nigerian, Ghanaian, South African, or based in the UK or the US, and you're trying to break into Afrobeats? The doors are practically sealed shut. You just don't get the same attention, the same access. Why? Because Nigerians have been centered, almost exclusively, in the Afrobeats narrative. And let's be

honest, it's because of Nigerian cultural hegemony. Nigeria can take anything, mass-produce it, and then claim it as its own, regardless of where it started. Once Nigeria gets its hands on something, it becomes “Nigerian.” It's just

how it is. Now, yes, Fela Kuti is rightly hailed as the father of Afrobeat, and Afrobeats is a derivative. What Fela was doing in the '60s and '70s was a revolutionary fusion of African sounds, American jazz, funk, soul, high life, and Palm Wine music. But here's the thing: Fela was deeply influenced by others like E. T. Mensah (Ghana) and Geraldo Pino (Sierra Leone). So, when



Drizilik Live in  
DC-Howard Theatre  
July 2024



Leonean Afrobeats artist, is on a radio station talking about his music, and he's asked to justify its existence? That right there highlights the struggle that so many face.

Sierra Leone is a small country. Small does not necessarily mean powerless, poor, or fringe. But in arts and entertainment, modern-day Sierra Leone is on the fringe of the global movement around contemporary African music or Afrobeats.

## Breaking Through: How Sierra Leonean Artists Can Find A Seat At The Table

To break through internationally, Sierra Leonean artists face a choice. One option is to create music that mimics Nigerian sounds and language, hoping to be mistaken for Nigerian artists and gain that audience. Many local artists are doing this now, believing that "authentic" Afrobeats must be in pidgin English. They're using the language of Nigerian artists, hoping it will help them cross over. But in doing so, they're falling into a trap – a narrow view of what Afrobeats is.

Yes, Nigerian and Ghanaian artists have dominated the scene, but Afrobeats is, at its heart, the music of the entire West African region and the global black diaspora. It's Palm Wine music, African drumming, rhythms, the language of the streets, the beats, the stories. If you've traveled across West Africa, especially the English-speaking parts, and listened to the music over the past decades,



you know it all shares the same roots, musically and culturally. West Africa is a melting pot. Afrobeats is the music of the region. So, Sierra Leoneans don't need to sound Nigerian to make Afrobeats. They can use their language and sounds and blend them with what's current. But here's another idea – let's give contemporary Sierra Leonean music its name and brand. Let's call it "Krio Fusion."

Then, when someone asks what makes our music different, we can say, "It's Krio Fusion, Afrobeats from Sierra Leone." Without a strong brand, it will be tough to export our music. We won't be able to change the narrative that Afrobeats is only Nigerian because the biggest artists and industry players are saying it is. Even Nigerian artists believe they own it and that they invented it. But that's just not



true.

### **Afrobeats is a West African phenomenon.**

Afrobeats, let's be clear, is a West African phenomenon. Remember Bunny Mack's 'Let Me Love You?', the global smash hit from 1981? When that track blew up in London, Paris, New York, Lagos, and Accra, it wasn't labeled 'Nigerian' or 'Ghanaian.' It was just African music, pure pop, and guess what? He was Sierra Leonean. Two big Nigerian artists, Wale and Flavour, have since done covers. It tells us Sierra Leonean musicians have what it takes; they just need to stand firm in their identity. Artists don't need to chase the latest Nigerian slang or morph into something they're not. Sierra Leone's language is your superpower. Krio? It's cool enough. It's deep enough. It's expressive enough to do exactly what pidgin, Yoruba, and Igbo are doing for Afrobeats. Don't let anyone gaslight you into thinking Krio is 'hard to understand.' Anyone who speaks pidgin can

pick up Krio, just like anyone who speaks Krio gets pidgin. It's connected! If we want Sierra Leonean music to travel and hit those global stages, we must own 'Krio Fusion.' It's simple: Afrobeats in Krio. And Krio is our umbrella, but it's also Temne, Mende, and all of it. Artists like Incredible JJ singing in Krio and Mende? That's Sierra Leonean Afrobeats. April doing the same in Temne and Krio? That's it. These are the artists who are going to break through and put Sierra Leone on the global music map. And the good news? Afrobeats isn't going anywhere. It's here, it's strong, it's growing. But the longer countries like Sierra Leone take to get their artists out there, the longer this 'Afrobeats is Nigerian' narrative sticks. Sierra Leone's population is eight million, Nigeria's 227 million, and the streaming numbers will always be skewed.

But music is universal. Language isn't a real barrier. The Krio Fusion coming out of Sierra Leone is as good as

any. There's a music revival in Freetown—artists are embracing their language and identity and making killer music. Drizilik, Nashito Kulala, Incredible JJ, DJ Rampage, Samza, Krack Twist, Bakitenno, and Mello Seven are the producers and musicians leading the charge. All that's needed is for one of them to break through and hit those global platforms, and the world will finally wake up to the talent in Sierra Leone. Drizilik is right there, on the edge. He just needs that capital to push him over.

### **What's Holding Us Back? Discovery and Dollars**

Misinterpretations of streaming numbers often lead to assumptions about the quality of Sierra Leonean music. People look at Sierra Leone's streaming numbers, or lack thereof, and jump to conclusions. 'Oh, Sierra Leonean music isn't blowing up on Spotify? Must not be good enough.' WRONG! The music? It's fire! The problem isn't the quality; it's the cash. Again, Let



Drizilik  
live at The  
Clapham  
Grand London  
Nov2024





me say LOUD and CLEAR: IT'S ABOUT THE CAPITAL.

**The audience needs purchasing power, and the music needs investment.**

The most popular music streaming platforms in Sierra Leone are Audiomack and Boomplay. Both platforms have a free model, allowing you to stream offline. They're the most accessible. But the global music industry doesn't care about your Audiomack streams; Spotify and Apple Music count. There's only one problem: financial inclusion. Most Sierra Leoneans are unbanked; they stream music, but if you have to pay to stream, they can't. Only 12% of the population can access a bank account; another 11% have mobile money. Last time I checked, you couldn't MOMO a Spotify sub. On the other hand, to compete with Nigeria's afrobeats hegemony, the continent's biggest economy, you need to spend money.

An artist can have the most incredible song in the world, but that's not enough in today's music biz. It doesn't magically

climb to number one just because it's good. You must put money into the machine. Artists need to be on those killer podcasts; those talk shows that matter. They need those afrobeats playlists that boost discovery. And you NEED to be playing at the right festivals to connect with the global black diaspora. It's all connected.

Therefore, the argument that Sierra Leonean music is not "good enough" is inaccurate. It's not that Krio Fusion doesn't have exporters or that the music isn't export-ready. It's that it doesn't have the investment! Look at 'Nack.' That song was HUGE. It wasn't just luck. Sure, timing, genre, producer, artist with a TikTok following – all of that played a part. But you know what else? Sho Cole from Cribs International put in the WORK and the MONEY. He invested. He made the song in Lagos and then put it in play there. In Nigeria, there are established pathways for good music to find its audience. But without that capital, 'Nack' would've stayed right here, unheard by the world. So, when we talk

about exporting Sierra Leonean music, let's be honest: the answer is clear.

First, Sierra Leoneans must internalize this: Sierra Leonean pop music is GOOD. It doesn't need a Nigerian feature to validate it, and it doesn't need to fake a Nigerian accent. It's got its own identity, and that identity is Krio Fusion. What makes Krio Fusion unique? It's the language of our ancestors, the language of resistance, of free people who came back to build a nation.

The bottom line? Krio Fusion needs investment and capital. We need to put our money where our mouth is to compete on the global stage and take our rightful place in the Afrobeats pantheon.

**ARE YOU READY NOW? OK, LET'S GO!**

#### **About the Author:**

**Vickie Remoe** is a business, entertainment, and travel writer. She is also a communications, digital marketing, and content strategist who helps brands connect with Africans at home and in the diaspora.



# Mystery Still Surrounds the *Death* of Victor Onie Williams

One hundred days have passed since the tragic and mysterious death of Victor Effion Johannes Onie-Williams, a beloved son, friend, and rising star in Sierra Leone's fashion and entertainment industries. Yet, the circumstances surrounding his death remain shrouded in uncertainty, leaving his grieving family, particularly his mother, Mrs. Ebidu Onie-Williams, in a state of anguish and frustration. As questions linger and justice remains elusive, the case has sparked public outcry and raised serious concerns about the integrity of Sierra Leone's justice system.

For lawyer U'mah Bangura, a close friend of Onie, the pain of his loss is immeasurable. In a heartfelt tribute, she wrote, "Victor Effion Johannes Onie-Williams was a star whose light shone brightly in every room he entered. At just 30 years old, he had already touched countless lives, leaving an indelible mark on everyone fortunate enough to know him. A young man of immense promise, his journey

was one of constant reinvention and growth... Onie, our ever-smiling, joyful, and handsome friend, your light will never fade. You will forever hold a special place in our hearts. Though we wish we had more time with you, we are grateful for the gift of your presence in our lives. Forever young, Effion."

## A City Mourns a Bright Light

The Mayor of Freetown, Her Worship Yvonne Aki-Sawyer, paid tribute to Onie during a civic laying-out ceremony at the Freetown City Council Building, describing him as a beacon of light and goodness. "Late Victor Onie Williams was an example of a good son with a short but well-lived life. His death I cannot comprehend. He is gone from our hands but with us in love and in spirit. To the family, I want





you to know that Onie is gone but never forgotten. May mother earth be gentle with his soul and may life perpetual shine upon him. Amen!" Onie's death has left a void in the hearts of many, but for his family, the unresolved questions surrounding his passing intensify their grief.

## A Troubled Investigation

Mrs. Mrs Ebidu Onie Williams has expressed deep dissatisfaction with the handling of her son's case by the Sierra Leone Police and the justice system. According to her, the decision to grant bail to Richie Obama, a popular comedian, and others allegedly involved, on the grounds of insufficient evidence, is a travesty of justice. She outlined several concerns, insisting there is clear evidence that her son was at Richie Obama's home before being rushed to Rokupa Government Hospital, yet this has not been acted upon. The postmortem, which reportedly showed signs of strangulation and blunt force trauma, should, in her view, have been sufficient to warrant prosecution.

Mrs. Onie-Williams' frustration stems from what she perceives as a miscarriage of justice. According to her, there is compelling evidence that should have led to a prosecution,

including the fact that her son was at Richie Obama's residence before being rushed to Rokupa Government Hospital, and the postmortem results, which reportedly indicated strangulation and blunt force trauma. She also revealed that her husband



observed fingernail marks on Onie's neck when the body was taken to Dr. Owizz for the postmortem examination.

Further compounding the family's frustration, the investigation has been marred by inefficiencies and a lack of transparency. The family submitted Onie's phone to the Cyber Unit of the Criminal Investigations Department

(CID), but the unit was unable to access the information. It was only through the family's efforts, with the help of their lawyers, that the phone's contents were retrieved, transferred to a USB stick, and submitted to the police. Despite this, the police still claimed there was insufficient evidence.

Mrs. Onie-Williams revealed that the police promised to continue the investigation after Richie Obama and others were released on bail but have failed to provide any updates. The police reportedly sought legal advice from the Law Officer's Department on whether to prosecute the case, but the family has not been informed of the outcome. Adding to their distress, the family's attempts to meet with the Head of CID to understand the claim of insufficient evidence were thwarted when the official was unavailable, despite the family spending an entire day at CID. The very next day, the accused were granted bail.

## Richie Obama's Statement

Richie Obama, a well-known comedian and one of the individuals initially implicated in the case, has publicly denied any wrongdoing. In a statement titled "In Honour of Brother Onie, Setting the Records Straight to the Best of My Knowledge,"





he provided his account of the events:

"The loss of my dear friend, Victor Onie Williams, is a heartbreaking tragedy that has deeply affected me and many others who loved him... On the day of the incident, I was not at home. I got to know that the late Victor had passed by to pay me a visit. I wasn't at home as I was away for work. My neighbor called to inform me that Onie, a dear friend, had collapsed outside my house while waiting outside my home... My house was locked at the time, and Onie did not enter it at any point... Upon receiving this distressing news, I immediately headed to Rokupa Government Hospital, where I was also told that he was rushed to. When I arrived, I was informed that Onie had been brought in deceased and that his body was already in the mortuary... In light of public interest, I fully support the conduct of an autopsy to

determine the cause of Onie's death, and I urge that the findings be made public. I also welcome any thorough investigation into the matter to uncover the truth and ensure clarity for everyone affected. I am committed to cooperating fully with any inquiries to vindicate myself and provide closure to Onie's

family and loved ones."

### A Call for Justice

The inconsistencies in the investigation, the lack of transparency, and the failure to prosecute have left Onie's family and supporters questioning whether justice will ever be

s e r v e d .

Mrs. Onie-Williams' lawyer, Mr. Yillah, has promised to provide further details on the steps the family has taken and their plans moving forward, though the road ahead remains uncertain.

Inspector Today of

the Homicide Unit at CID, who initially began the investigation, referred inquiries to the current Line Manager overseeing the case. However, attempts to reach the Line Manager have so far been unsuccessful.

As the nation mourns the loss of a young man described by many as a "shining star," the unresolved questions surrounding Victor Onie Williams' death serve as a stark reminder of the challenges faced by families seeking justice in Sierra Leone. For Mrs. Onie-Williams, the fight is not just for her son, but for every mother who has lost a child and been left with only memories and pain.

The mystery surrounding Victor Onie Williams' death remains unresolved, but his mother's cry for justice echoes loudly across the nation, demanding answers, accountability, and closure.





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# CRICKET

## *A Game of Triumph and Neglect*



**C**ricket in Sierra Leone, a sport with a rich colonial history dating back to the 19th century, continues to languish in the shadows of football, despite notable international successes and a growing talent pool. While the country pours significant resources into football with limited global impact, cricket struggles for recognition, funding, and infrastructure. In a series of exclusive interviews, Sierraeye speaks to Francis Trevor Samura, Chairman of the Sierra Leone Cricket Board, and the captains of the male and female national teams, Lansana Lamin and Fatmata Parkinson, to explore the triumphs, challenges, and aspirations of cricket in the country.

### **A History of Resilience Amid Neglect**

Cricket's roots in Sierra Leone trace back to the British colonial era, with the first recorded match in 1887 and international fixtures against Gambia in the

1930s. Despite its longevity, the sport has faced significant setbacks, including the Civil War in the 1990s, which saw the country's main cricket ground, Kingtom Oval, repurposed as a refugee camp. Since becoming an affiliate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 2002 and an associate member in 2017, Sierra Leone has made strides, earning full Twenty20 International (T20I) status in 2019. Yet, as Francis Trevor Samura laments, recognition remains elusive.

"In spite of its long history, cricket's recognition is still at an all-time low owing to funding constraints," Samura explains.

"Apart from little help from other institutions, government appears to be the lone sponsor of the game, and we get funds only after five years. In 2018 and 2023, we got funds from the government, and we

are also looking for the same this year since the Sierra Leone cricket team has to participate in nine international tournaments. However, we are not getting anything from corporate institutions or companies."

This stark contrast with football, which enjoys significant financial support despite limited international success, underscores the neglect of cricket.

"Currently, we have US\$78,000 provided by the government in 2023, and it is the only



amount in the coffers at the moment,” Samura reveals. “Sometimes we get meagre funding from corporate entities such as Access Bank and PKF. Also, we receive funds from the ICC based on the team’s domestic performance in governance, development of the game, cricket facilities, and high performance in T20 Internationals by the male and female teams.”

### On-Field Successes Amid Off-Field Struggles

Despite the financial constraints, Sierra Leone’s cricket teams

“Recently, in July 2024, the Under-19 cricket team brought home a runners-up trophy and individual accolades during a cricket match in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.”

For Lansana Lamin, captain of the men’s national team, these achievements are a testament to the team’s resilience. “The team’s biggest achievements are the trophies we have won at international matches, apart from the Rwanda trophy, as well as individual accolades,” Lamin says proudly. Reflecting on a personal highlight, he adds, “My memorable moment was in 2016

teams in the region as we have won trophies and sometimes occupy high ranks at the end of the game,” she says. A standout moment for her came in September 2023 during an ICC qualifying match against Botswana. “At that time, the Sierra Leone cricket team was at the semi-final stage to qualify for Division-1,” she recalls. Though the team narrowly missed out, the experience underscored their potential.

### The Funding Disparity

The disparity in funding between cricket and football is a sore point for all three interviewees.

“Funding remains a major challenge for cricket while football receives significant financial support despite limited success,” Samura observes. “We are adversely affected as funds for the development of the game are used to support the national representatives’ side, a factor that has considerably undermined cricket’s

growth in Sierra Leone.”

Lamin echoes this sentiment, arguing that cricket’s potential is being stifled. “At the moment, cricket is still in low key since we do not have the much-desired funding as compared to other countries in West Africa,” he says. “No, cricket is yet to receive the recognition and investment it deserves, although we are doing well compared to other sports in the country.”



have achieved remarkable milestones. The men’s team secured a historic win in their first T20I match against Nigeria in 2021, while the women’s team has consistently performed well in regional competitions. “Sierra Leone has performed well internationally amid financial constraints as the team wins trophies and sometimes finishes second and third positions in ICC competitions,” Samura notes.

when the Sierra Leone cricket team defeated Rwanda, thus qualifying for the ICC Division-1 league, and it was during that time that I won the title of ‘Best Batsman’ of the tournament.”

Fatmata Parkinson, captain of the women’s team, shares a similar sense of pride but also frustration. “Sierra Leone’s female cricket team is extremely doing well compared to other





For Parkinson, the lack of support is particularly disheartening for female cricketers. “For us, it is the saddest part as football attracts more funds and support than cricket,” she laments. “But I believe that we are representing the country better than footballers, and we will do more if we get support equal to football.”

### **Infrastructure Woes and Grassroots Efforts**

One of the most significant barriers to cricket’s growth is the lack of adequate infrastructure. “Cricket in Sierra Leone is still on the fringes owing to insufficient facilities and funding as we do not have proper cricket fields, and we cannot hold domestic competitions across the country,” Samura explains.

Lamin highlights how this affects performance, particularly when competing against better-resourced teams. “Currently, Sierra Leone’s cricket infrastructure does not suit the

comfort cricketers deserve while playing the game,” he says. “It is not easy at times to face big teams like Nigeria and Ghana at international competitions in light of the financial support they receive from their governments.”

Parkinson adds that the absence of standard training fields poses a unique challenge for female cricketers. “Challenges are many, but the biggest is the lack of a standard cricket field to train,” she says. “Most times, we train on ordinary playgrounds, and it greatly affects us, especially when we go outside of Sierra Leone to play with other cricket teams from other countries. Sierra Leonean female cricketers often fall on the playgrounds because they are not used to training on standard fields.”

Despite these challenges, the Cricket Board is making concerted efforts to promote the sport at the grassroots level. “For the past 50 years, Cricket Board Sierra Leone has been

financing and promoting school cricket by conducting coaching clinics, school cricket festivals, training of P.H.E. (Physical Health Education) teachers in entry-level programmes, and the basics of cricket,” Samura says. “Also, we construct cricket facilities in schools, supply cricket equipment, and organise inter-secondary school cricket competitions.”

Lamin underscores the importance of these initiatives in talent development. “Club and school cricket play an important role in identifying talents for the national team,” he notes. “Recently, we organised cricket competitions for several schools at King Tom community and other communities, in which we earmark talents for development. Prince of Wales, for instance, did extremely well during the competition.”

### **Empowering Women in Cricket**

Globally, women’s cricket

is experiencing a surge in popularity, and Sierra Leone is keen to keep pace. "To improve female cricket in Sierra Leone, we have trained over 80 female school teachers," Samura reveals. "Again, any domestic cricket competition organised for males, including senior and junior youth cricket teams, we also do the same for women and girls. As a way of advancing women and girls' empowerment in the cricket world, we also train and develop female umpires, field event managers, female cricket administrators, and coaches."

However, Parkinson believes more needs to be done to support female cricketers. "Support and encouragement for female cricketers is low as they have no tool kits to play the game," she says. "At this stage, we expect that each female cricketer carries their bags with everything in it, the same as female players from other countries." She advocates for significant changes, including "a standard cricket field where we can practise without fear of injury, enough tool kits, and above all, female cricketers should have a weekly wage so that more women and girls would be attracted to the game."

### **A Vision for the Future**

The Cricket Board has ambitious plans to address the infrastructure deficit. "One of our main projects is the construction of state-of-the-art cricket training and playing facilities at Sussex, Freetown Peninsula,

and the land is provided by the government," Samura says. "We are also embarking on a massive infrastructural development project at Fourah Bay College, which will give us two standard cricket playing grounds. We have also provided 30 outdoor practising nets and a 10-lane indoor training facility, and that is not the end, as there are plans to construct cricket development hubs for the Northwest and Northeast regions as well as the Eastern region, particularly K-School."

For Lamin, the dream is to see cricket elevated to the same level as football. "With sufficient funds from the government and corporate entities, I believe that cricket will be a top sport, in that it will fly the country's flag high at international competitions," he says. His personal goals reflect this ambition: "My personal goals are to put up more commitment towards cricket, train, and inspire others to do the same for the development of cricket in the country."

Parkinson shares a similar vision, both for herself and the sport. "My personal goals are to train hard and bring more trophies and accolades to my country," she says. "I also have a goal of setting up my own team in the near future when I retire from active cricketing." To young girls aspiring to follow in her footsteps, she offers this advice: "I would advise them to see a fortune in cricket and embrace the game since it has a lot of opportunities and potential for women and girls out there."

### **A Pitch for Investment**

Samura believes that cricket's global appeal makes it a worthy investment. "In pitching cricket as a sport to potential investors or the government, I would strongly argue that cricket has the potential to attract millions of fans all over the world, since globally, it is the second most popular sport," he asserts. "I believe that if the challenges confronting cricket are overcome and the game expanded countrywide, it will create a lot of jobs for the youth in Sierra Leone, equip the kids with life skills, discourage the youth from anti-social behaviour, generate revenue for the government, and immensely contribute to Sierra Leone's economy."

The voices of Samura, Lamin, and Parkinson paint a picture of a sport brimming with potential but held back by systemic neglect. As Sierra Leone continues to celebrate its cricketing achievements—such as the men's team's highest T20I total of 189/2 against Ivory Coast in November 2024 and the women's team's strong regional performances—it is clear that with the right support, cricket could become a cornerstone of the country's sporting identity.

The question remains: will the government, corporate entities, and the public rally behind cricket to give it the recognition and investment it deserves, or will it remain a neglected gem in Sierra Leone's sporting landscape?





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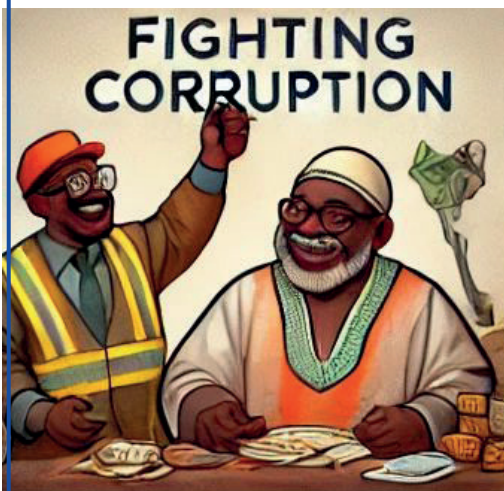
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# HOW TO SPOT THE PSYCHOS IN SIERRA LEONE

(No, Not the Ones at Kissy Dock Yard)





**L**isten up, citizens the real psychos aren't the ones Dr. Jalloh has locked up at Kissy Dock Yard, screaming about invisible UFOs or trying to marry a palm tree. No, no, no. The real psychos are the ones wearing pressed suits, flashing million-leone smiles, and posting selfies on social media captioned, "Humbled to serve." These are the sneaky psychos—the ones who look like normal people but secretly think "empathy" is the name of a new cryptocurrency.

Here at SierraEye, we've compiled a foolproof guide to spotting these charming, guilt-free weirdos before they charm you into voting for them—or worse, selling you a timeshare in a swamp.

## Step 1: Check Their Selfie-to-Service Ratio

If someone's social media is 90% selfies in front of potholes they didn't fix, schools they didn't build, and hospitals they didn't fund, congratulations—you've found a psycho! Bonus points if the caption says something like, "Another day of tireless service to MY people," while the background shows a child selling groundnuts to survive.

Normal people feel guilt when they see suffering. Psychos see suffering and think, "Wow, this is a great backdrop for my next profile picture."

## Step 2: Listen for the Humblebrag Alarm

Psychos love to tell you how brilliant they are—without you asking. If a public official says, "I'm proud to announce that under my genius leadership,

**Psychos have the empathy of a rock—and not even a nice, smooth river rock, but one of those jagged ones that ruin your shoe. For example, if a public official stands on an international stage and says, "Sierra Leone is now a global leader in free quality education!" while millions of kids are out of school, selling tissues or begging, you've got yourself a psycho.**

corruption has been reduced by 1000%," but you still can't get a government document without slipping a "small thank you" under the table, you might be dealing with a psycho.

### Their favorite phrases include:

- "I'm just a humble servant... who deserves a statue."
- "My unmatched intellect has solved all our problems."
- "Look at how much I've done for you ungrateful peasants!"

Normal people admit mistakes. Psychos admit mistakes... by blaming the weather, their staff,

or "haters."

## Step 3: Watch for the Empathy Black Hole

Psychos have the empathy of a rock—and not even a nice, smooth river rock, but one of those jagged ones that ruin your shoe. For example, if a public official stands on an international stage and says, "Sierra Leone is now a global leader in free quality education!" while millions of kids are out of school, selling tissues or begging, you've got yourself a psycho.

Or take the ones who say, "Youth employment is at an all-time high!" while the only "employment" the youth have is selling kush or scrolling TikTok for 12 hours a day because there's no electricity to charge their dreams.

Normal people see suffering and want to help. Psychos see suffering and think, "How can I spin this into a speech about my greatness?"

## Step 4: Look for the Charm Offensive

Psychos are charming. Too charming. If someone's smile makes you want to hand over your life savings, your car, and your grandmother's secret jollof recipe, run. That's not charisma—that's a psycho on the prowl.

These charmers will tell you they're fighting corruption with the ferocity of a lion, while

secretly building a mansion that looks suspiciously like it was funded by “consulting fees.” They’ll tell you the rule of law is sacred, while their cousin’s uncle’s dog somehow gets away with parking a stolen bulldozer in the middle of Lumley Beach.

## Step 5: Test Their Shame-o-Meter

Normal people feel shame when they fail. Psychos fail, shrug, and throw a party to celebrate their “resilience.” If a public official brags about “transforming healthcare” while you’re still boiling rainwater to avoid cholera, and they do it with a straight face, you’ve got a psycho on your hands.

Try this test: Ask them a hard question, like, “Why don’t we

have electricity 24/7?” If they respond with, “Ah, my friend, you see, the global economic climate is challenging, but rest assured, I am working tirelessly,” instead of, “Wow, yeah, we messed up,” you’re dealing with a psycho.

## How to Protect Yourself from Psychos in Power

Experts (and by experts, we mean random people we found on the internet) suggest using “psychometric tests” to weed out psychos before they get into government. But let’s be real—Sierra Leone isn’t ready for that level of science. For now, just use our handy checklist:

- Do they care more about their image than your actual life? Psycho.

- Do they lie with the confidence of a Nollywood actor? Psycho.

- Do they self-congratulate more than a toddler who just tied their shoelaces? Psycho.

Until we figure out how to keep these charmers out of public office, your best bet is to laugh at their speeches, screenshot their lies, and remind yourself: the real psychos aren’t at Kissy Dock Yard—they’re on your TV screen, smiling like they’ve already won.

### Disclaimer:

This article is satire and not intended to diagnose anyone with an actual personality disorder. If you think you’ve spotted a real psycho, please consult Dr. Jalloh.





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