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Former President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, has departed Sierra Leone to lead the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) observation mission in the presidential election in Nigeria scheduled to take place on 25 February, this year.

In the letter from the ECOWAS Chairperson, Dr. Umar Allieu Tuoray, the Sub-Regional body is counting on President Koroma's leadership experience and deep understanding of the political and electoral dynamics in Africa.

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LOCAL NEWS

SLAJ President calls for media empowerment for effective elections reporting

By Alhaji Haruna Sani

President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, has during the launch of a project titled: "Ensuring Locally-Led Elections are Credible and Transparent (ELECT) in Sierra Leone" called for media empowerment for effective election reporting.

President Nasralla noted that in today's world, media plays a huge role in elections as it is the primary source of information for voters and can shape public opinion.

"Media can influence the outcome of an election by providing information about the candidates and their policies, as well as by providing a platform for candidates to express their views," he established, maintaining that the media can also set the agenda for the elections by ensuring that the politicians discuss issues that are close to the heart of the electorates.

The SLAJ President argued that, however, the media can also be used to spread hate and false information and manipulate public opinion to the wrong end.

He pointed out that the media has always been a partner but somehow efforts by media practitioners have largely gone unnoticed, in the sense that most people and organizations/institutions as well, only see the media as a tool for information dissemination.

"But we believe that the media is a partner and key player in elections and beyond," he underscored, stressing that it cannot be an afterthought.

He said looking at the media currently, support seems to be coming closer to the elections but issues around covering elections need to be sustainable over the years, maintaining that in the pre-elections, elections, and post-elections more support should be given to the media and added that there should be continuous engagement and sustained support.

The President of SLAJ pointed out that in the 2018 elections, the media played a critical role to ensuring peaceful and credible elections.

Ahmed Sahid Nasralla pointed out that currently, albeit somehow late, they are trying to position the media for the upcoming elections in a way that they are seen as a reliable partner and key player in the entire process, and not as a tool for information dissemination only.

"We are working with partners to conduct training for media practitioners across the country in a number of areas including elections reporting, conflict-sensitive and gender-sensitive reporting, and adherence to the IMC Code of Practice and the SLAJ Code of Ethics; especially for community radio stations," he disclosed.

He also mentioned how they are also working with partners to ensure the integrity of the information landscape so that citizens get access to credible, reliable and timely information on the elections to help them make informed decisions.

"Hence, we will be engaged in countering disinformation and hate speech around the elections through pre-bunking, fact-checking and debunking," he stressed,also stating how they are working with the security sector to ensure the media support them to provide security for every Sierra Leonean and they also help the media to provide information to the public in a safe and conducive environment.

He said in addition, like they successfully did with the presidential debate in the 2018 elections, the media also want to continue to promote a culture of dialogue and tolerance through political debates.

The SLAJ President said in that regard, SLAJ is leading a consortium of 11 organizations drawn from CSOs, EMBs, women groups, disability and youth under the National Political Debates Committee (NPDC) platform to organize another presidential debate for the elections.

He maintained that if the resources are available in time, the media also wants to do lower level political debates to ensure that the elections are based on ideas and not on tribe or region or other divisive considerations.

Nasralla said it is no gainsaying that to do all of that, the media needs resources and unless the media gets those resources in a timely manner, the Media will only be employing the fire brigade approach, which is trying to put out the fire after it has started spreading when they could have prevented it by acting proactively.

President of SLAJ informed that Sierra Leone has had four democratic elections since the end of the war, two using Proportional Representation; the other two including the most recent (2018) the first past the post/single member constituency system was used.

He said in this year's elections, it is going to be different because the country is going to use a different system altogether - a combination of PR systems.

He asked the following questions: What system are we using for the Presidential elections? What system are we using for Local Government elections? What specific system are we using for Parliamentary and Councillors elections? What are the thresholds for election to Council and Parliament?

How can independent candidates compete in these elections?

The SLAJ President said the forthcoming election is not the same as the country had in 1996 and 2002, which he said was only for Parliament, and that in 1996 it was the national block and 2002 District Block PR system.

In his view, this year the elections are more complicated.

He maintained that in order for the elections to be successful, the public needs to understand the mechanics of how they are going to be run stating that if the public doesn't understand the methodology being used, the potential for confusion, misunderstanding or even conflict becomes very significant.

President Nasralla making his statement at the ECSL hall

"The key role of the media in a democratic society is to provide information and education to the public," he said adding how it is, therefore, very important that the media in Sierra Leone is empowered to be able to perform that role.

He said as of now, the media is not in a position to provide accurate information and education for the public because media practitioners themselves do not have a clear understanding of the different systems that will be used in the elections, particularly as it relates to the District Block PR system.

Nasralla said by now the media should be engaged in massive voter education and sensitization saying the media itself needs to be educated before they can educate the public, but stressed that the resources are not available.

He said there is a need to invest in community radio stations because they play a pivotal role in ensuring the participation of the bulk of the rural population in the elections.

"Community radio stations are hugely challenged; from ineffective governance and management structures to lack of resources," he said stressing that Community radio stations only attract non-professionals as volunteers, and they lack the requisite knowledge and training to able to run such important platforms.

He said the only way out for them is training, training, training.

"In the last elections we did a lot of training for journalists across the country and we were able to largely minimize the potential for community radio stations to be used as platforms to fuel conflict," he said stressing that most of those who benefitted from such training have moved on to better jobs.

The President of SLAJ stated that they have repeatedly called on the Government and the International Community who care about peace and national cohesion to invest in information and communication infrastructure.

"Our rural people need to have access to timely and reliable information on the activities of their central and local Governments," he stressed.

Nasralla pointed out that Freedom of expression is fundamental in a democracy not only for the media but equally so for the voters and the politicians.

He said a huge task for this particular election is how we police the space to free it from hate speech, tribalism, toxic, divisive, and inflammatory statements.

"Therefore, as we call for responsible free speech, whether during debates or political activities/meetings, we equally call for cooperation and collaboration among the elections' stakeholders," he appealed adding that we must call out political leaders to be able to talk to their supporters to be law abiding and peaceful at all times.

He also suggested that they must call on politicians to stop sponsoring musicians to sing hate, division and use vulgarity but that they should be using musicians to sensitize and educate people about the elections.

"The entertainment industry, which also falls under the media in a sense, also has a huge role to play," he stated.

According to the SLAJ President, studies have shown that countries that have come out of war and are trying to forge ahead a decade or two after, can easily slip back to conflict if those conditions that led to the war are not properly addressed.

He said, therefore, all need to collectively build that trust with one another and with the people.

"We need to cooperate and collaborate and we need to dialogue and share credible information," he affirmed maintaining that SLAJ is committed to working with all partners to ensure we have credible, transparent, fair, and peaceful elections.

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LOCAL NEWS

NP (SL) Limited remains an embodiment of inspiration for aspiring entrepreneurs and investors

Uncontestably, NP Sierra Leone Limited is currently one of the most reliable sources of inspiration for intending entrepreneurs or investors aspiring to establish business entities that they wish to see grow exponentially and become a towering entity.

There are many valuable lessons that could be derived from the Company in order to realize a very successfully independent business entity. To start with, the success story of the NP (SL) Ltd could inspire new entrepreneurs and definitely serve as a roadmap to navigate the business landscape in order to actualize business dreams into tangible realities independently.

The Company was founded way back in 1977 when British Petroleum acquired the shares of AGIP and operated until June 1984 and the then Government of Sierra Leone acquired 60% shares from British Petroleum Sierra Leone Limited. Towards the end of 1984, British Petroleum Sierra Leone Ltd. divested its remaining 40% equity to the Precious Mineral and Mining Company. In 1996, the company was privatized in which Government sold 55% of its 60% equity to Leone Oil with the remaining 5% to its staff. In February 2011, in efforts to rejuvenate and reinvigorate the Company, Sierra Leone National Company was rebranded and therefore changed its name to NP (SL) Limited. Ever since, the Company has been a privately owned indigenous business entity; no government, past or present has hands or influence over its operations.

NP (SL) Ltd ensures that lucrative business initiatives are well implemented to the letter leading to the realization of fruitful outputs. With up to 133 regional dealer distribution outlets, the Company operates on a firm drive anchored on result oriented initiatives intended to achieve positive business outcomes.

Also, with the devoted objective of providing optimum satisfaction, the Company's belief is centered on excellent service delivery geared towards accomplishing customer satisfaction through customer care, and from all indications, NP (SL) Ltd has incredibly excelled in this drive. Management teams have exhibited this so well to an extent that the Company has succeeded in broadening its customer base. As far as NP (SL) Ltd is concerned, the interest of customers is absolutely paramount.

In due regard, Management and Stakeholders have made prudent efforts like, introducing Ultra-modern calibrated pumping machines capable of dispensing the right quantity of fuel that a buyer requests while displaying the price, also the NP Smart Card which allows cashless fuel purchase with ease avoiding the hassle of having to rush to the bank to withdraw money for fuel purchase purposes, and then the NP Gas which comes in different cylinder sizes with comfort, environmentally friendly and in very affordable prices.

Encompassed with all these attractive offers and more and championed solely by exclusively 100% Sierra Leoneans, NP (SL) Ltd has secured its enviable position in the Oil industry in Sierra Leone and also in the sub-region by not only ensuring endless supply of petroleum products, but also providing valuable lessons that are worth emulating by aspiring entrepreneurs and potential investors

Former President Koroma leads ECOWAS EOM to Nigeria

From Cover

Former President Koroma acknowledges the enormity of the task and the significance of the Nigerian elections on the rest of West Africa.

"The 2023 elections in Nigeria are of great significance for the peace, security, and democratic growth of West Africa and the entire continent," he said.

Former President Ernest Bai Koroma is expected to return to Sierra Leone on March 1st, 2023.

Since 2019, President Koroma has successfully led six African Union and ECOWAS elections observation missions to Zambia Kenya, Namibia, The Gambia, Togo, and Benin. In addition to leading the ECOWAS observer mission, the Sierra Leonean statesman will, after polling day, shift to 'preventive diplomacy' efforts to facilitate a smooth and peaceful transition.

With a population of over 213 million people, Nigeria is Africa's most populated country with the potential to be a major player in the global economy.

General elections slated to take place on February 25, 2023, are critical to the peace and stability of the West African Sub-Region where democracy is in decline and where at least five military coups have taken place.

About 94 million people have registered to vote in over 146,000 polling stations across 491 constituencies in Nigeria. The sheer numbers of the voting population represent a logistical nightmare and will pose a huge challenge to anyone involved with those elections.

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Sexual Penetration: Stepfather gets 15 years imprisonment

By Ibrahim Kabba Turay

Justice Mamie at the Sexual Model Offences Court No.7 in Freetown has sentenced Philip Mamie to 15 years imprisonment after he was found guilty of sexual penetration offenses.

According to the judge, the state alleged that the accused,Philip Mamie on the 6th August, 2019, in Freetown in the Western Area of the Republic of Sierra Leone, engaged in an act of sexual penetration with a child.

Upon arraignment, the accused pleaded not guilty to the offense. The State in proving its case against the accused person, called in four witnesses.

The victim testified that the accused is her stepfather and that on the date in question, her mother went out to buy goods and that she was with the accused at home, the accused used that opportunity and lured her into his room, removed her pant and forcefully inserted his penis into her mouth and into her vagina.

The victim said that the accused also penetrated her when her mother was asleep and did so severally even in a chair in their house, adding that blood was oozing from her vagina and she felt pain all over her body.

The judge also stated that the victim in her testimony said she felt pain when the accused penetrated her, and that the accused would tell her to wash herself up whenever he does the act.

He said the mother of the victim confronted the accused person about the allegation but that the accused denied.

Investigating officer testified that the matter was reported at the approved police station where the accused used threatening and abusive languages at the victim's mother and the victim.

He said with such remarks made, action was taken to protect the victim, and the victim was in care at the Don Bosco home.

The investigating officer informed the court that the accused tried to escape in the Holden facility at the approved police station and that due to that action he was transferred to the Criminal Investigations Department headquarters in Freetown for investigations.

In her testimony ,Doctor Olabisi Cladius Cole said the victim had a ruptured hymen with breaks at 2'0clock and 9'0clock, offensive water, vaginal discharge and redness, adding that the victim developed an infection due to the forced penetration.

Additional witness was called and testified that the accused threatened to kill the victim.

He said the accused relied on his statement made to the police when he was put to an election.

He said the accused was found guilty by the judge.

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LOCAL NEWS

APC running mate: Chericoco emerges popular choice

The race for the All People's Congress APC running mate to the presidential front runner, Dr Samura Mathew Wilson Kamara is nothing to be worried about. The would-be standard bearer has already spotted his choice of deputy president.

As a strong and political entity with sound records of transformative governance over the years and in the recent past, the APC is fully equipped with the requisite human resources capacity for whichever job, especially the running mate placement. And the party has already earmarked its most qualified candidate, with vast administration and leadership experience to fill the vacant seat and deliver very well on the job, under the professional supervision of Dr Samura Kamara as president in the next few months.

So, questions and concerns about who comes after the indefatigable Dr Samura Kamara as his running mate is certainly the man himself, Hon Chernor Ramadan Maju Bah, the most competent APC politician well familiar with state governance leadership amongst the rest of mankind. He has served in several leadership capacities with proven records as a clean slate. He has suffered with and for the APC. And don't even ask if it is not Chericoco who else? For it is certainly going to be him by the grace of the Almighty Allah/God. As a strong Muslim, he is well positioned to serve the APC as its running mate to the Christian presidential candidacy of Dr Samura Kamara.

Hon Bah is the APC Leader in the House of Parliament and Leader of the Opposition in the House. He is a devoted Muslim with hundreds of Christian friends which adds to what it takes him to serve in the Vice Presidency position to Dr Samura Kamara in June polls. He brought along with him massive endorsements of APC parliamentarians of Dr Samura Kamara, not to talk of delegates from other constituencies of the party.

Popularly known as Chericoco, Hon

Bah has proven his leadership competence with impressive records spanning from the rime his served as a Deputy Speaker of the House of Parliament, coupled with his three terms effective roles to constituents in Freetown and beyond. He is known everywhere in the country for his humility and interacts with people at all levels compared to his rival vice president Dr Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, a mere surrogate to co-resident Fatima Bio and State House Chief Minister, Jacob Jusu Saffa. Hon Bah's modesty as a servant leader continues to mobilize massive support for the APC and Dr Samura Kamara. That is also waiting be fully demonstrated soonest at the polls June.

Chericoco does not discriminate amongst people based on tribe, region, political and religious believes, not because he schooled at the Roman Catholic Mission's Saint Edwards Secondary in Freetown, but his tolerant continues to earn him both Christian and Muslim friends including his very Fullah community heavyweights across Sierra Leone and beyond.

Hon Bah, a popular grassroots leader with large following served as the running mate to APC 2018 party flag bearer Dr Samura Kamara, for which he also proved well with massive support and votes for APC, though the outcome of that polls was not in favour of the APC.

Since then, as the leader of the Opposition and that of the APC in the House, Hon Bah has always consolidate his firm hold on the party's stance in coming through dozens of political struggles in the hands of the SLPP and Bio's five years dictatorial rule. He moves along with the support of his MPs in whatever they have been doing has always been in the best interests of the party. Thus, APC MPs have unanimously endorsed Hon Chericoco for the vice-presidential candidacy with believe that he is the only competent politician that can be best placed for such job.

In Freetown, across the western region and beyond Chericoco is certainly a household name, well known among all and sundry for his down to earth social and philanthropic moves in touching lives of individuals and communities. Communities in the far north, east south and in the west area rural and urban are among geopolitical spaces where Hon Bah always command large support bases for the APC and have proved to the party that he is indeed the people's choice of leader Sierra Leoneans are yearning for to work with Dr Samura Kamara as his vice president come June and thereafter.

With all these leadership values and human touch values in his personality, if it is not Chericco for the APC running mate to Dr Samura Kamara, who else has the APC party got to fill that space? Hon Chericoco is therefore the people's choice for the job awaiting.

50-year-old jailed 15 years for abusing 9-year-old child

By Ibrahim Kabba Turay

50-year-old Hassan Conteh, a businessman, was convicted and sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment at the Freetown Correctional Centre for sexually penetrating a 9-year-old pupil.

The convict was standing trial in the High Court presided by Justice Momoh Jah Stevens (JA) on a one count charge of sexual penetration of a child contrary to Section 19 of the Sexual Offences Act of 2012.

The State Prosecutors, Jane B. Kamara and M.P. Sesay, had alleged that the accused on 11th December, 2021, in the Western Area in Freetown, sexually penetrated the victim who was below the age of 18th years to wit 9 years, contrary to the laws of Sierra Leone.

In his judgment, Justice Stevens said the accused was standing trial before his court on one count charge of sexual penetration.

He said it was the burden of the prosecution to prove its case beyond all reasonable doubt, noting that the prosecution must prove four elements beyond all reasonable doubt.

He reiterated that the prosecution must prove that indeed the accused engaged in an act of sexual penetration with a child, and that it must also prove that at the time of the offence the victim was under the age of 18 years.

He further that the prosecution must also prove that the accused had the intention at the time of the incident, and that he must have engaged in an unlawful act with a child to wit sexual penetration.

He said the prosecution called four witnesses to present his case, noting that the victim said on the 11 December, she went to the accused's residence to help him fetch water.

She said the accused told her that the containers were filled and that on her way back home he forcefully grabbed her and took her inside his house and penetrated her by using his finger and later instructed her to go home.

She said during the process she felt pain and that it was her sister who noticed the odd way she was walking and raised alarm.

He said the victim was taking to the police station where statement was taken from her.

The medical report which was tendered in court, indicated that the hymen around the victim's virgina was ruptured and that such rupture could be caused by sexual penetration or bike riding

He said Doctor Cole further told the court that she could not tell as to when the victim's hymen was ruptured.

Justice Stevens said having examined the evidence, he established that all that the accused told the police was nothing, but a lie to cover-up his bad deed.

He said the prosecution had proved its case behind all reasonable doubt against the accused.

Sentencing the convict, Justice Stevens said the convict took advantage of the kindness of the victim by helping him to fetch water, adding that the convict took advantage of the vulnerability of the victim and used it to abuse her.

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LOCAL NEWS

World Bank's Executive Director for Sierra Leone Meets Minister of Finance

Dr Floribert Ngaruko, a Burundi national, who serves as the Executive Director for 22 African countries, including Sierra Leone, is in Freetown to consult with the Government on Sierra Leone's development agenda, including key priorities and challenges.

In a courtesy meeting with the Minister of Finance on Monday, 20th February 2023, at his George Street office, the Executive Director highlighted issues around Macroeconomic Outlook, Poverty and Food Security, Structural reform priorities and status, Debt Sustainability, Private Sector Development and Overall Portfolio Performance as areas of interest during his stay in Sierra Leone.

In his statement, the Minister of Finance, Sheku Ahmed Fantamadi Bangura, welcomed the ED to Sierra Leone. He stated that 2022 was a challenging year for not only Sierra Leone but also Sub-Sahara Countries and the rest of the world.

The Minister further stated that global economic uncertainties, spillovers from the Russia-Ukraine war, supply chain disruptions, and a sharp rise in the prices of food and fuel adversely affected domestic economic performance, saying economic growth projected at 2.1 per cent in 2023 and inflation to a moderate 24% in 2023 and 18% in 2024.

The Minister intimated to his guest that domestic revenue is projected to increase from 13.2% in 2022 to 20% in the next five years, mainly reflecting gains from implementing the Medium-Term Revenue Mobilisation strategy.

Despite all of the challenges highlighted by the Minister, he informed the ED that the government is committed to implementing Human Capital Development Programmes by allocating 22% of the budget to education, improving the quality of health and sanitation and strengthening health systems, expanding social safety net programmes for the poor and vulnerable groups, support to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises through the MUNAFA Funds and efforts to improve on food security.

Minister of Finance Sheku Bangura also mentioned key reforms in Mining, Lands, Gender, Education and Financial sectors under the Structural Reforms priorities with the Bank.

Dr. Floribert Ngaruko, the Executive Director, thanked the Minister for the warm welcome and reception. He also thanked the Minister for the update, stating that the next DPO will focus on private sector development, sustainability and resilience.

Dr. Floribert Ngaruko stated that they want the next set of DOP reforms to be packaged, targeting the private sector. He admonishes the government to improve the project disbursement rate and the country's CPIA rating to attract more funding.

Deputy Minister of Finance, Bockarie Kalokoh, highlighted reforms in the financial sector leveraging on ICT, the migration of the IFMIS system and the Implementation of the Treasury Single Account.

The Financial Secretary Sahr Lahai Jusu spoke about efforts by the government to increase domestic revenue mobilisation and improve expenditure management and control. He also cited the government's statutory priority and how the depreciation of the Leones against the US Dollar has impacted expenditure,

The World Bank portfolio in Sierra Leone contains 23 current operations with a total amount of US$1,135,194,000.

The Executive Director will meet senior government officials and the private sector and visit some World Bank Funded project sites before departing on Thursday, 23rd February 2023.

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NEWS AROUND AFRICA COMPILED BY GABRIEL BENJAMIN

Tech Skeptical of New Paid Subscription Meta, Struggles to Convince

Facebook, Messenger and Instagram applications displayed on an iPhone - Copyright © africanews Jenny Kane/Copyright 2019 The AP

Mocked, accused of copying Twitter, or of having been launched in a hurry: the new paid subscription service announced by Meta for Facebook and Instagram is arousing rather lukewarm reactions from experts and Internet users.

Called Meta Verified, this new service offers subscribers the benefit of a blue verification badge, direct access to the company's customer service, greater visibility, and additional protection against data theft. 'identify.

For several Wall Street analysts, this subscription will not be able to generate short-term revenues equivalent to the colossal sums drawn from advertising revenues.

"We don't expect the new account verification service to exceed 1-2% of total revenue over the next 18 months," predicts CFRA's Angelo Zino.

Mr. Zino, however, insists on the need for Meta to diversify its sources of income at a time when inflation is weighing on advertisers' expenses and when Mark Zuckerberg's group faces fierce competition in the online advertising market.

Before Meta, Twitter has already launched its paid verification offer, which gives access to its famous blue tick, but also to better post promotion, fewer ads, and the possibility of posting longer tweets.

This service, which had a chaotic start, has been one of Elon Musk's top strategic priorities since his $44 billion takeover of the Twitter network.

Several Internet users have also suspected Mark Zuckerberg of plagiarizing the multi-billionaire boss of Tesla by hastily launching Meta Verified. "Inevitable," Musk replied to a tweet making the accusation.

For Dan Ives of Wedbush Securities, launching a paid subscription is a "risky" bet for Meta.

"There could be a backlash from consumers who will never want to pay a dime for Facebook or Instagram and this move could push them out ," he said.

Especially since the price could be prohibitive for some: 11.99 dollars per month for the web offer and 14.99 dollars via devices equipped with the operating system of Apple or Google, which take a commission on the purchases made in their app stores.

"For most Meta users, whether on Facebook or Instagram, this new offering is likely to be met with a shrug of indifference," anticipates Susannah Streeter of Hargreaves Lansdown.

The analyst, however, thinks that small businesses and high-profile individuals may be tempted to pay to protect themselves from hacks or to gain more visibility. There was also a lot of reaction to making increased protection against identity theft a charge.

oung demonstrators protest cost of living in Nairobi

A group of Kenyan protestors led by comedian Eric Omondi blocked Nairobi's Parliament Road on Tuesday (Feb. 21).

They protested against the high cost of living.

Chanting slogans they held placards written 'high cost of electricity and cooking oil' among other things.

According to local media, the demonstrators demanded an audience with the National Assembly Speaker. Indeed, they reportedly alleged that the Assembly conned the nation by legislating and passing a bill which resulted in higher levels of taxation.

However, the group was not granted an audience.

Police lobbed teargas to disperse the shirtless protesters.

Some demonstrators including Omondi were reportedly arrested.

The attempted forceful entry was prompted by the failure of the speaker to grant the group audience from within the precincts of Parliament.

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, the inflation rate stood at 8.9% in January.

Late last year, the board of the International Monetary Fund, approved a disbursement of over 400 Million $ to Kenya.

Central African Republic: the invisible scale of intra-family sexual violence

A 35-year-old mother of seven, a victim of sexual violence, sits on a chair in Bangui on ... - Copyright © africanews BARBARA DEBOUT/AFP or licensors

His features betray his youth, his gestures, and his anxiety. Camille's deep gaze stares at her fingers constantly tweaking the hem of her dress.At the end of September, a few weeks before her return to fourth grade, her cousin raped her.

In the Central African Republic, the second least developed country in the world according to the UN and in the grip of a civil war since 2013, sexual violence against women, children, and even men "is constantly increasing", according to the international NGO Doctors.

While many are the victims of rebels, soldiers, or other security forces, MSF estimates that half know their attackers. But the repression of sexual crimes is a social taboo and comes up against the inertia of justice.

Out of sight, in a discreet alley in the capital Bangui, the Tongolo center ("Star" in the Sango language), created and managed by MSF since 2017, welcomes and takes care of victims.

For the past six years, some 80 people have worked in this establishment, which offers free medical and psychological care and other consultations. Tongolo also seeks accommodation solutions, and reintegration assistance and offers a legal follow-up to complaints.

In the green setting of the site, Camille* tries to put words to her trauma. "I was in a room with my brothers and sisters (...) My cousin came in and asked everyone to leave," she says lip service.

"Once the door closed, he clapped his hand over my mouth," she says, imitating the gesture, adding, in a barely audible voice: "I wanted to shout to stir up the whole neighborhood, but he m 'prevented'.

The Tongolo project, led by Thomas Gaudriot, identified more than 3,420 victims of sexual violence between January and November 2022. Of which "50% were attacked by a member of their entourage", notes Mr. Gaudriot, specifying that in this half, "more than a quarter are minors and 10% are men".

But "this is only the tip of the iceberg", fears the head of the center, faced with the difficulty of collecting precise and complete data across the country.

Walled in silence and terrified at the idea of being rejected or punished by those close to her, Camille will be raped again by her cousin. "Then I realized that if I didn't talk, he would continue," she says.

The cousin's parents hold her responsible for the aggression in a society that perceives rape victims as "guilty and dishonored", Camille regrets. "My aunt scolded me and forced me to take a pregnancy test. I was pregnant," she says.

A few days later, she goes to the center to have an abortion. "The medical staff understood that it was not my fault and the midwife who welcomed me did me a lot of good, I was able to confide in myself. Without her, I might not have never told anyone", explains Camille.

In most cases "the victim does not come to say what she has suffered but to have an abortion (...) she is always held responsible by one or more members of her family or neighborhood", deplores Sylvie Gonekra, a midwife in Tongolo for six years.

If the scourge of sexual violence is not directly linked to the civil war, which has decreased in intensity for four years, "the conflict has increased the precariousness which favors, among other things, these crimes", estimates Thomas Gaudriot.

But "very often rape becomes an indecent assault judged in corrections", regrets Magalie Besse, director of the Francophone Institute for Justice and Democracy Louis Joinet (IFJD), denouncing a "patriarchal approach to justice".

However, "the Central African penal code has a classic definition of rape (sexual penetration without consent, editor's note) but for many actors in the penal chain, if the victim is over 15 years old and was not a virgin at the time of the events, it was not violated," explains the head of this NGO specializing in justice and reconciliation processes in countries in civil war or recovering from it.

Moreover, "the magistrates are very flexible with the accused, they will easily grant provisional release or decide on extenuating circumstances", she continues.

"Even the files of victims showing clear signs of sexual assault come to nothing, the perpetrator is much better protected than the victim, which dissuades him from filing a complaint", assures AFP a Central African lawyer undercover. of anonymity.

*Name has been changed.

Botswana denounces rise in rhino poaching

Botswana's Tourism minister, Philda Kereng, revealed on Monday that there has been a sharp rise in the poaching of rhinos.

The announcement takes place after the introduction in South Africa of tough measures against poachers.

Neighbouring South Africa, a traditional rhino poaching hotspot, has seen a steady decline in the number of animals killed in recent years due to increased patrolling of national parks, forcing poachers to look elsewhere for horn.

According to the minister the rise in poaching is due to "increased demand for rhino horn on the international market", mainly in Asia.

In Asia, rhino horns are used in traditional medicine for their supposed therapeutic effects.

According to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Botswana has a total of 285 white rhinos and 23 black rhinos left.

Three UN peacekeepers killed in Mali blast

Spanish U.N. peacekeepers patrol the streets near the site of an explosion that targeted... - Copyright © africanews MOHAMMED ZAATARI/AP2007

Three UN peacekeepers were killed on Tuesday when their convoy struck a roadside bomb in jihadist-torn central Mali, the mission said, in a fresh blow to the long-running operation.

"A MINUSMA Force convoy hit an Improvised Explosive Device #IED today," it said in a tweet that gave a preliminary toll of three dead and five seriously injured.

With more than 13,500 military personnel and police, Mali it is one of the biggest but also dangerous UN peacekeeping missions, suffering a high toll especially to IEDs.

In January, UN chief Antonio Guterres said in a report that 165 peacekeepers had died and 687 were wounded in hostile acts since July 2013.

The force recorded 548 IED attacks up to the date of the report, claiming 103 lives and 638 wounded among MINUSMA personnel.

Insecurity

Anger within the Malian military at the government's failure to roll back the insurgency led to a coup against the elected president, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, in August 2020.

The junta wove closer ties with the Kremlin, bringing in Russian paramilitaries and equipment, as relations with France, the country's traditional ally, spiralled downwards.

France in 2022 withdrew its last troops from Mali deployed under its long-running Barkhane anti-jihadist force in the Sahel.

The junta in Bamako routinely claims that it is gaining the upper hand against the jihadists since it has pivoted to Russia.

On Monday, it protested after the head of the European Council, Charles Michel, last week said that the Malian state was "collapsing" and that the jihadists were gaining ground.

The jihadist insurgency began alongside a revolt by ethnic Tuaregs demanding self-rule in the north of the country in 2012.

France sent in troops to beat back the rebellion, but the jihadists regrouped and expanded into the centre of the country in 2015.

From there, they carried out bloody incursions into neighboring Niger and Burkina Faso.

Mali: junta denounces Charles Michel's comments on the collapse of the state

The President of the European Council Charles Michel at the Elysee Palace in Paris, - Copyright © africanews Ian Langsdon/AP

The military-dominated Malian government has strongly protested against comments by European Council President Charles Michel who recently said the Malian state is in the process of collapsing after the breakdown of the military alliance with European countries against jihadists.

The Malian Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported Monday evening in a statement posted on social networks that it had summoned the chargé d'affaires of the European Union delegation to Mali Pascal Perennec.

The ministry said it had notified him of the "strong protests" of Mali to the "unfriendly, erroneous and aggressive comments" of Charles Michel. The Malian ministry believes that these statements are part of a "disinformation campaign" underway against Mali.

The ministry does not specify which statements are targeted. But two diplomats said on condition of anonymity that he was referring to an interview given last week by the President of the European Council to TV5 Monde.

"The transitional authorities in Mali, which came out of a coup d'état, have decided to break to a large extent with traditional partners, and particularly with European partners, and the consequence is a state that is collapsing, with terrorists occupying more and more space in the region," Michel said.

The junta, which seized power by force in 2020 and consolidated its grip with a second putsch in 2021, has ended anti-jihadist military cooperation with France and its European partners and turned militarily and politically to Russia.

Mr. Michel's words contradict the junta's repeated assurances that the authorities have turned the tide against jihadists since pivoting to Russia.

Michel's words "omit the tangible progress made by the Malian armed forces on the ground," the Foreign Ministry said.

Credit: Africanews with AFP

PRESS RELEASE

Sierra Rutile pays Le15.9BN Surface Rent

Sierra Rutile Limited (SRL) paid surface rent worth Le 15,992,492 (USD 817,955) to landowners in the five mining chiefdoms the company operates.

The surface rent payment at the Imperi Chiefdom Resource Center, for Imperi, Lower Banta, Upper Banta and Jong chiefdoms, took place on 16 February 2023, and continued to Sembehun, Bagruwa Chiefdom on 17 February, 2023.

As set out in the Mines and Minerals Act of 2009, the yearly payment was made in percentages to landowners, chiefdom administration, district councils, constituency development fund and Paramount Chiefs. Fifty percent of this year's total payment was given to landowners and the remaining fifty percent apportioned as follows: District Council 15%, Constituency Development Fund 10%, Chiefdom Administration Fund 10% and Paramount Chiefs 15%.

At the surface rent payment ceremony, SRL's Chief Operating Officer, Eben Lombard underscored that the company is committed to making the payment of the annual surface rent on time and continuous support to the community as a whole. He said ***"We have made a steady improvement in production. We thank all of you for your contribution to the sustainability of this operation. We are partners in this business therefore, we should continue to maintain a relationship that will bring mutual benefits."*** He also urged stakeholders to promote peace within the operational areas and said that the success of SRL was hugely dependent on peace within its mining communities.

In his statement, the Community Relations and Social Development Manager, Osman Lahai noted that payment of surface rent was a statutory requirement. He referred to SRL's operations as "transparent", and that his department will always ensure that information on SRL's disbursement of public funds will be made accessible to interested members of the public. He urged landowners and chiefdom stakeholders to support the company's operation and encouraged them to s use the company's grievance mechanisms to resolve complaints related to its operations

The Representative of the National Minerals Agency (NMA), Christian Williams expressed appreciation to SRL for ensuring that prompt payment of the surface rent was done. He advised landowners to desist from planting permanent crops on surface rent lands to attract compensation. He noted that opportunistic farming has affected the company's operations, as the company had incurred huge costs over the years. He informed stakeholders that NMA was putting mechanisms to stem illegal farming on surface rent land.

The Provincial Secretary- South, Moses Gbetu expressed gratitude to SRL and the Paramount Chiefs for their efforts in maintaining a collaborative relationship. He cautioned landowners to support the company's operations. He called on landowners to use the surface rent funds wisely. He said *"I am encouraging you all to manage this surface rent for the betterment of your children by implementing viable programs that will benefit your generations."*

The Paramount Chief of Upper Banta Chiefdom, P.C Tommy Mualele Jombla VIII said that the event was a demonstration that SRL was operating in line with mining policies. While cautioning landowners to use the money wisely, he encouraged family-heads to fairly share the money amongst family members who were legitimately entitled to the rent. He praised SRL for the implementation of numerous community investment projects.

Press Release

Sierra Rutile Disbursed its 2022/2023 Scholarship Funds

One hundred and forty-nine pupils (149) in the five mining chiefdoms covering Sierra Rutile Limited's (SRL) operational areas, have received first and second tranche payments of the company's Educational Scholarship Support Programme for the 2022/2023 academic year.

The payments of Four Hundred and Fifty Three Million Leones (Le453,000M) were distributed to parents/carers of beneficiary pupils/students at a ceremony held at the SRL Foundation Resource Center.

In his remarks during the scholarship awarding ceremony, SRL's Community Relations and Social Development Manager, Osman Lahai encouraged parents of beneficiaries to work in the interest of promoting educational advancement in mining communities. He said that SRL supports education because it is one of the key pillars for national development. He explained that in the interest of maintaining standards in the award of the scholarships, SRL had designed a policy as a guide, and has a Standing Committee, which is charged with the responsibility of ensuring a fair and a transparent award of the scholarships to deserving students.

Osman Lahai said *"The process of selecting applicants is very much transparent and based on merit. We have checks and balances in place to select and monitor the beneficiaries for good results. I am therefore encouraging those who have benefitted to continue to study hard as any drop in performance will lead to loss of the scholarship support".*

The Chairman for the Education Committee at the Bonthe District Council, Joseph Sivalie emphasized the importance of education, and SRL's priority to ensure that it provides the opportunity in the area of education in the five mining chiefdoms. He said that the scholarship scheme was in line with the government's agenda in the area of education, and thanked SRL for giving its fullest support to education in the Bonthe and Moyamba districts. He particularly thanked the SRL Community Relations and Social Development Department for ensuring that the standards of the scholarship were maintained and for giving committee members the independence to run the scholarship scheme he referred to as, *"the best I have seen so far"*.

The Chiefdom Speaker of Imperi Chiefdom, Chief Thomas Foday, reinforced the importance of education in mining communities and lauded the SRL Scholarship opportunity. He said that the scheme had benefitted a lot of indigenes of the mining chiefdoms, and as well contributed to the outstanding performance of most of its beneficiaries. He urged parents of beneficiaries to use the money for its intended purpose.

CRSD Manager, Community stakeholders, parents and beneficiaries during payment of scholarship funds for 2022/2023 academic year.

The Chairman of the Community Development Committee, Pastor Francis Rogers, expressed appreciation to SRL for taking the bold venture to initiate the scholarship programme. He mentioned that those who had benefitted should make very good use of the opportunity as, he said *"it is a unique opportunity for you to prove to all of us that indeed the effort of SRL is not going in vain."* He also encouraged parents/carers to use the opportunity to empower their children in the area of education. He said he appreciated the company for its yearly support with scholarships despite the challenging business environment.

About the SRL Scholarship Programme

Since the scholarship started in 2018, the ceremony marked the fourth academic year the scheme has been in operation. The award is given to pupils who achieve results in the top 10% of the National Primary School Examination (NPSE), the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) respectively. One of the key criteria of the scholarship is that applicants must be indigenes of communities where SRL operates.

Successful NPSE and BECE students each receives an annual educational and financial support of Le5,000 while those in the WASSCE category receive an annual educational funding of Le10,000 each.

For queries, please contact media@sierra-rutile.com
Corporate Affairs, Sierra Rutile Limited; 110 Wilkinson Road, Freetown

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GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE
Integrated Health Projects Administration Unit - IHPAU
Ministry Of Health And Sanitation, 2
3 Cantonment Road, Off King Harman Road, Freetown

Invitation for Bids (IFBs)

Bidding Document for the Procurement of Various Goods

Subject of Procurement:	Non-Financial Incentives ; Laptop Computers ; X-Ray Machine Batteries; and Misc. Health facility Supplies
Procurement Ref. No.:	CHW/PR/GF/NCB/24/01/2023; MOHS/PR/GF/NCB/05/01/2023; NLTP/PR/GF/NCB/23/01/2023; NMCP/PR/GF/NCB/11/01/2023;
Procurement Method:	International Competitive Bidding
Date of Issue:	9th February 2023
Date of Closure:	22nd March 2023

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation through the Government of Sierra Leone has received funding from the Global Fund and intends to use part of the proceeds to finance the contracts for the Supply and delivery of Non-Financial Incentives, X-Ray Machine Batteries and Misc. Health facility Supplies to the Directorate of Primary Health Care (DPHC), National Malaria Control Programme and National Leprosy and Tuberculosis Control Programme for which this invitation for bid (IFB) is issued.

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation of the Republic of Sierra Leone through its sub-structure – the Integrated Health Projects Administration Units (IHPAU) now invites sealed tenders from eligible Bidders or their authorized representatives for the supply of the under-listed goods, packaged into Lots. Bidders who wish to bid, shall have the option of submitting a bid on any or all lots.

A brief description of the items as follows:

Lots	Description	Quantity	Bid Security Amount (NLE)
1	Supply and delivery of high -quality rain gears, rain boots, torch lights, backpacks, T -shirts, medicine doxes and ID Cards.	Assorted	287,100.00
2	Supply and delivery of plastic cups, plastic spoons, crushers and plastic buckets.	Assorted	29,928.00
3	Supply, delivery and installation of X -Ray Machine batteries.	20	9,500.00
4	Supply and delivery of Original Laptop Computers and Backpacks.	68	121,992.00

Tendering will be conducted through the **International Competitive Tendering** procedures as specified in the National Public Procurement Act, 2016 of Sierra Leone and is open to all Tenderers from eligible source countries.

Interested eligible tenderers may obtain further information from the Procurement Department of IHPAU/MOHS through **bomassaquio@mohsihpau.gov.sl** and copy the Team Lead **aujalloh@mohsihpau.gov.sl,** or in person from 09.00hours to 12.00hours and 13.00hours to 17.00 hours' local time each working day. The period allowed for requesting bid clarification is fourteen days (14) prior to the deadline for submission of bids.

A complete set of tender documents may be purchased by interested Tenderers on submission of a written application to the **Team Lead/ Funds Management Specialist, Integrated Health Projects Administration Unit, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 23 Cantonment Road, Off King-Harman Road, Freetown** and upon payment of a non-refundable fee of five hundred New Leones (NLe500.00) only.

The method of payment will be by direct deposit to the Single Treasury Account at the Bank of Sierra Leone:

Account Name: NPPA Revenue from sales of Bidding Documents
Account Number: 0111003981
BBAN: 000001011100398165

Alternatively, the potential bidders will also have the option to pay for the bidding document in any of the Transit Accounts at the following Commercial Banks:

Bank Name: Union Trust Bank
Account Name: Revenue from sale of Bidding Sub Treasury
Account No: 210113253-01
BBAN No: 00-4001113253120144

Bank Name: Sierra Leone Commercial Bank
Account name: Revenue from sale of Bidding Sub Treasury
Account No: 003001081791112183

Bank Name: Rokel Commercial Bank
Account Name: Revenue from sale of Bidding Sub Treasury
Account No: 02-011012428
BBAN No: 00200100210124286

The Procurement Unit will hold a pre-bid meeting on Wednesday 8th March 2023, 10:00am at the IHPAU conference room, ground floor, 23 cantonment road, off King Harman Road and/or through videoconferencing via Zoom, which shall be open to prospective bidders.

Sealed tenders must be clearly marked on the outer envelope, indicative of the lot or lots that the tenderer is interested in and delivered in the tender box on the ground floor of the address above on or **before 12:00 noon on the 22nd March 2023.** All tenders must be accompanied by the credentials detailed hereunder:

- **A Business registration certificate;**
- **Bid Security issued by a reputable commercial bank in Sierra Leone;**
- **A valid tax clearance certificate;**
- **A valid NASSIT clearance certificate;**
- **A signed Integrity Pact;**
- **A signed and duly stamped bid form;**
- **Delivery schedule and brand names of supplies; and,**
- **Certificates for similar contracts performed.**

Tenders will be opened in the presence of the tenderers' representatives, who choose to attend at the **Conference Room of the Integrated Health Projects Administration Unit, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, 23 Cantonment Road, Off KingHarman Road, Freetown** on 22nd March 2023 at **12:00 Noon** (Local time).

Electronic tenders will not be permitted. Late tenders will be rejected and returned unopened to bidders.

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ELECTORAL COMMISSION FOR SIERRA LEONE
O. A. U. Drive, Tower Hill
Freetown- Sierra Leone

National Public Procurement Authority

Invitation for Bids

Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone

Procurement of Vehicle Rental Services
Procurement Number: ECSL/OPS/ICB/NCS/2023/0014

Date of First Issue: 21st February 2023

The Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone has received funds from the Government of Sierra Leone *(GOSL)* for the procurement of Vehicle Rental Services for the distribution of voter registration card countrywide and now invites sealed bids from eligible bidders for the

Lot No.	Description of Service	Location	Quantity	Bid Security SLE	Duration of Service
1.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Kailahun District	29	20,000	14 days
2.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Kenema District	43	30,000	14 days
3.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Kono District	27	18,000	14 days
4.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Bombali District	24	16,000	14 days
5.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Falaba District	18	12,000	14 days
6.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Koinadugu District	18	12,000	14 days
7.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Tonkolili District	29	20,000	14 days
8.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Kambia District	23	16,000	14 days
9.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Karene District	21	14,000	14 days
10.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Port Loko District	31	21,000	14 days
11.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Bo District	42	29,000	14 days
12.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Bonthe District	15	10,000	14 days
13.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Moyamba District	22	15,000	14 days
14.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Pujehun District	23	16,000	14 days
15.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Western Rural	27	18,000	14 days
16.	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Western Urban	48	33,000	14 days
17.	Provision of Box truck (completely covered and secured, with auxiliary capability	Countrywide	14	60,000	4 days
	Provision of four wheel drive vehicles (Jeep Vehicle (4X4) with air conditioner facility)	Countrywide	264		4 days

Bidders can bid for one or more lots, but they will only be contracted for no more than two lots. However, in the event that a bidder wins more than two lots, the lots with the higher price will be awarded to the bidder; if the lots are of the same value, any one of the lots will be awarded to the bidder by the Commission without referring to the bidder.

Interested bidders may obtain further information and inspect the bid document at the procurement department, Electoral Commission Office, OAU Drive, Tower Hill, Freetown, between 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Bidding documents may be purchased upon payment of a non-refundable fee of **One Thousand New Leones only (SLE 1, 000)**.

Payment for the bid document must be made into the bank accounts listed below, and the payment slip must be presented at the ECSL Procurement Department for collection of the bid document.

- Bank Name: Bank of Sierra Leone
  Account Name: NPPA-Revenue from sale of Bidding Documents
  Account Number: 0111003981
  BBAN: 000001011100398165

Below are details of Transit Accounts at the following Commercial Banks:

- Bank Name: Union Trust Bank
  Account Name: NPPA-Revenue from sale of Bidding Documents
  Account Number: 210113253-01
  BBAN: 004001113253120144

- Bank Name: Sierra Leone Commercial Bank
  Account Name: NPPA-Revenue from sale of Bidding Documents
  Account Number: 003001081791112183

- Bank Name: Rokel Commercial Bank
  Account Name: NPPA- Revenue from sale of Bidding Documents
  Account Number: 02-011012428
  BBAN: 002001002101242863

Bids must be delivered to the address below on or before **2nd March 2023**. All bids must be accompanied by:

- A valid Business registration certificate
- Bid Security in the amount specified above in the form of a Bank Guarantee from a reputable Commercial Bank
- A valid tax clearance certificate
- A valid NASSIT clearance certificate
- A signed Integrity Pact [*see attached*]
- A Signed and Stamped Bid Form
- Compliance with Payment Terms
- Evidence of undertaken similar assignment, including reference letters/contract documents.

Bids will be opened on **2nd March 2023 at 12:00 Noon**, in the presence of the bidders' designated representatives at the address below. Late bids will be rejected and returned unopened to bidders.

For any further clarification, please contact the address below.

The Conference Room
Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone;
OAU Drive, Tower Hill;
Freetown;

THE WORLD BANK

CALL FOR APPLICATION

A CALL FOR APPLICATION FOR THE ACCELERATION OF 20 SMES

UNDER THE SIERRA LEONE ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION PROJECT

Direct Support to SMEs

The Government of Sierra Leone and the World Bank are implementing the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP). The Project Development Objective (PDO) is to increase investment and growth of small and medium enterprises in non-mining productive sectors. The project will do so by strengthening the business enabling environment, facilitating strategic public investments to improve competitiveness and investments, supporting SMEs and entrepreneurs, and building the capacity of public institutions and private sector operators.

Component 2 of the Project aims to facilitate SME growth and stimulate entrepreneurship in high-growth productive sectors by addressing critical firm-level and sector-level constraints including (i) low access to information (ii) poor last-mile infrastructure (ii) limited access to finance, (iii) weak capacity to scale businesses. Specific activities in this component to address these challenges include public goods investment, SME acceleration, and early-stage financing. In line with its PDO, the Project recognized that business incubation and acceleration programs are critical services needed in supporting the growth process of start-ups and SMEs and studies show that the survival rate for incubated companies is higher than that of other companies. Incubation and acceleration of business have proven to maximise the innovation potential of SMEs and help them build the needed connections and collaborations to thrive.

In this context, the Project together with SMEDA are starting their support to improving the SME ecosystem and support business resilience in Sierra Leone by launching this call for application through Creative Hub Africa for SMEs in the Creative industries and Circular Economy (including waste management and Green Industries) sectors to be accelerated in the programme

A total of 20 SMEs in the sectors highlighted earlier are to be supported through the program across the country. Women owned and managed businesses are particularly encouraged to apply.

Aim of the Calls for Application

The aim of this call for application is to help develop the capacities of selected SMEs with technical expertise and grant financing that supports their growth, expansion and ability to create jobs that contribute to the Project's development objectives. It will also focus on building resilience of companies to overcome economic challenges

The program will be implemented in two -phases:

A first phase (8 months) will focus on, business diagnosis, formalization, business model development, customer traction and investment readiness through BDS training, coaching, mentoring, peer learning, networking, and linkage building.

A second phase (6 months) of matching-grant competition, award, and implementation (with a phased, performance based, disbursement)

Who can apply and Eligibility Criteria

This call for proposals is open to Sierra Leoneans businesses in the **Creative industries and Circular Economy Sectors (including waste management and Green Industries)**

To be eligible potentials SMEs and Start-Ups shall meet the following criteria:

Individuals with established businesses that include companies recently established (less than 2 years old).

In the case of SMEs, in addition to (ii) above, they must also fall within the definition of an SME according to the SMEDA Act 2016, where:

'Small enterprise' relates to enterprises with an annual turnover of less than 20,000 USD (equivalent in leones/USD rate).

'Medium enterprise' relates to enterprises with an annual turnover between 20,000 USD and not more than 100,000 USD (equivalent in leones at the prevailing Leone/ USD rate). In certain cases, where SLEDP will see the viable growth and private sector co-investment potential. Upon approval of the SLEDP Advisory committee, SMEs having a turnover of up to 500,000 USD (equivalent in leones at the prevailing Leone/ USD rate) will be considered for support under this project.

They should be registered in Sierra Leone with no judicial outstanding issues and financially sound (must be met after the technical assistance activities by Start-Up or SME)

Start-ups with a proven business idea with potential growth and value addition, creating jobs and making a profit.

The key selection criteria for SMEs include:

(a) SMEs' current operational, financial, and market positions.

(b) Potential demand for their products, considering pre-identified priority market segments;

(c) Market competitiveness based on differentiation, cost, and/or focus;

(d) Viability of technical interventions for advancing the growth of the business; and

(e) the financial and technical viability of the business.

The exact criteria to select participating SMEs will be based on verifiable market opportunity, successful track record, growth potential, entrepreneurial potential assessment scores, and personal interviews.

Exclusions

Technical Assistance and the Matching Grant will not extend grants in support of activities that support the production of the following:

Production of Alcoholic beverages

Weapons

Tobacco

Gambling

All World Bank funded projects.

HOW TO APPLY

Instructions on how to apply for the business support program for small and medium enterprises:

Interested applicants should submit a complete Google Forms application online at the Creative Hub Africa website, https://creativehubafrica.com/

Download the application from the https://creativehubafrica.com/ website, complete and email Mycreativehubafrica@gmail.com with a subject Business Support Application for SMEs

Applicants can also drop off the hard copies at our office at 41A/B Freetown Lumley Road, Opposite the Police Station. Freetown Sierra Leone.

The completed form must be submitted by the deadline published. Please submit the application as early as possible to allow us time to assist with any technical issues. We will not accept partially filled-in application forms.

If you have trouble accessing or using the form, please email us at Mycreativehubafrica@gmail.com or call +232 90 075 312

Deadline for submission of application: 3rd March 2023

How we will assess your application - Selection Criteria

Response to a written questionnaire designed to assess entrepreneurial traits and business potential.

Assessment of the potential demand for their products, taking into account different market segments, and alignment of the firm's market segment with the overall cohort.

Market competitiveness based on differentiation, cost, and/or focus.

Identification of concrete operational, financial, or technical growth bottlenecks and the possibility of viable interventions for solving them.

Strength of the financial and technical business plans presented.

Potential 'spill over' effects into other sectors, such as fishing or agro-business, or improving living conditions for local communities.

Inclusivity for women and consideration of special needs for people with disabilities

Incorporation or adaptation of climate-smart solutions, or climate-resilience in design and/or operations.

NOTE:

Service Provider together with the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency and Project Coordinating Unit will undertake a visit to 100% of all applicants that meet the minimum requirement to verify application information.

Women owned and managed businesses are particularly encouraged to apply.

Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project
Supporting Economic Transformation

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SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES DEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF SIERRA LEONE

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Friday 10/02 & Saturday 11/02 Set 18059

(*) All bets subject to Mercury International rules. In case of discrepancy terminal data prevails. Canceled fixtures pay 1:1. Bets placed after kickoff are void. Single bets permitted.

Fix No.	Sales Close	Competition	Home Team			Away Team	1 / 1 (1)	1 / X (2)	1 / 2 (3)	X / 1 (4)	X / X (5)	X / 2 (6)	2 / 1 (7)	2 / X (8)	2 / 2 (9)
1	2/10/2023 14:55	Romania	UNIVERSITATEA CLUJ	14 v 16		MIOVENI	2.95	16.00	60.00	4.30	4.10	8.20	35.00	17.00	7.20
2	2/10/2023 15:55	Croatia	DINAMO ZAGREB	1 v 5		ISTRA 1961	1.72	24.00	99.00	3.60	7.40	19.00	25.00	24.00	16.00
3	2/10/2023 15:55	Cyprus	AEK LARNACA	1 v 14		AKRITAS CHLORAKAS	1.58	30.00	99.00	3.40	8.40	26.00	27.00	30.00	22.00
4	2/10/2023 16:55	Poland	FKS STAL MIELEC	8 v 1		RAKOW CZESTOCHOWA	10.00	19.00	25.00	13.00	5.80	3.95	70.00	18.00	2.11
5	2/10/2023 16:55	Serbia	CUKARICKI BELGRADE	4 v 8		RADNICKI 1923	2.17	19.00	80.00	3.75	5.40	12.00	27.00	20.00	11.00
6	2/10/2023 17:25	Bundesliga 2	ARMINIA BIELEFELD	13 v 12		HANSA ROSTOCK	3.45	14.00	35.00	5.20	4.80	6.80	29.00	14.00	5.00
7	2/10/2023 17:25	Bundesliga 2	KARLSRUHER	14 v 10		GREUTHER FURTH	3.85	14.00	30.00	5.80	5.00	6.20	30.00	14.00	4.30
8	2/10/2023 17:55	Romania	FC RAPID	3 v 10		U CRAIOVA 1948	2.95	15.00	50.00	4.50	4.30	8.40	30.00	16.00	7.00
9	2/10/2023 17:55	Portugal 2	TORREENSE	13 v 1		MOREIRENSE	5.20	15.00	30.00	6.80	4.50	5.00	40.00	15.00	3.45
10	2/10/2023 17:55	Cyprus	OMONIA NICOSIA	6 v 4		ARIS LIMASSOL	3.60	14.00	35.00	5.40	4.80	6.40	30.00	14.00	4.70
11	2/10/2023 18:25	Switzerland 2	XAMAX	10 v 3		LAUSANNE	4.80	14.00	25.00	7.40	5.60	5.40	30.00	14.00	3.15
12	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland	AZ ALKMAAR	2 v 14		EXCELSIOR	1.60	27.00	99.00	3.90	10.00	25.00	24.00	26.00	18.00
13	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	DEN BOSCH	17 v 16		JONG AJAX	4.20	13.00	24.00	7.20	6.00	6.00	28.00	13.00	3.35
14	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	FC EINDHOVEN	4 v 3		ALMERE CITY	3.70	14.00	35.00	5.60	4.90	6.40	29.00	14.00	4.50
15	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	HELMOND	18 v 9		RODA	5.00	14.00	29.00	7.00	4.80	5.20	35.00	14.00	3.40
16	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	MAASTRICHT	7 v 19		TOP OSS	2.80	13.00	35.00	5.00	5.60	8.40	24.00	14.00	5.80
17	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	BREDA	11 v 14		GRAAFSCHAP	4.30	14.00	28.00	6.40	5.20	5.80	30.00	14.00	3.70
18	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	ZWOLLE	1 v 8		JONG AZ ALKMAAR	1.61	25.00	99.00	3.75	9.60	22.00	22.00	24.00	16.00
19	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	VENLO	6 v 2		HERACLES	5.60	14.00	24.00	8.20	5.80	4.90	35.00	14.00	2.80
20	2/10/2023 18:55	Holland 2	WILLEM II	5 v 15		DORDRECHT	1.86	21.00	90.00	3.70	6.60	16.00	25.00	22.00	13.00
21	2/10/2023 18:55	Belgium	LEUVEN	11 v 9		CERCLE BRUGGE	3.65	13.00	30.00	5.80	5.20	6.60	28.00	13.00	4.40
22	2/10/2023 18:55	Hungary	MEZOKOVESD ZSORY	9 v 8		MOL FEHERVAR	4.10	13.00	29.00	6.40	5.00	6.00	30.00	13.00	3.90
23	2/10/2023 19:10	Switzerland 2	AARAU	5 v 2		YVERDON-SPORT	2.95	14.00	30.00	5.40	6.20	7.60	23.00	14.00	4.90
24	2/10/2023 19:25	Poland	LECHIA GDANSK	12 v 4		WIDZEW LODZ	4.10	14.00	35.00	6.00	4.60	6.00	30.00	14.00	4.20
25	2/10/2023 19:25	Poland 2	WISLA KRAKOW	10 v 14		CWKS RESOVIA	2.35	14.00	45.00	4.10	5.00	8.80	22.00	15.00	6.80
26	2/10/2023 19:25	Bundesliga	SCHALKE 04	18 v 7		WOLFSBURG	6.00	15.00	26.00	8.20	5.60	5.00	40.00	15.00	2.95
27	2/10/2023 19:25	Austria	STURM GRAZ	2 v 4		RAPID WIEN	2.70	14.00	40.00	4.70	5.40	8.80	25.00	15.00	6.40
28	2/10/2023 19:25	Serie B	GENOA	2 v 6		PALERMO	2.46	16.00	60.00	4.10	4.80	10.00	29.00	18.00	8.80
29	2/10/2023 19:40	Northern Ireland	LARNE	2 v 8		GLENAVON	1.69	24.00	99.00	3.60	8.00	20.00	24.00	24.00	16.00
30	2/10/2023 19:40	Belgium	CLUB BRUGGE	4 v 2		SAINT-GILLOISE	3.60	14.00	35.00	5.60	4.90	6.60	29.00	14.00	4.60
31	2/10/2023 19:40	Belgium	EUPEN	14 v 12		KV MECHELEN	4.10	13.00	28.00	6.20	5.20	6.00	30.00	13.00	3.85
32	2/10/2023 19:40	Serie A	AC MILAN	6 v 7		TORINO	2.70	16.00	60.00	4.50	4.90	9.60	29.00	17.00	7.80
33	2/10/2023 19:40	Scotland FA Cup	HAMILTON	0 v 0		HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN	11.00	20.00	25.00	13.00	6.20	3.85	70.00	19.00	2.05
34	2/10/2023 19:40	Ireland Supercup	DERRY CITY	0 v 0		SHAMROCK ROVERS	3.45	13.00	30.00	5.00	4.40	5.80	28.00	13.00	4.30
35	2/10/2023 19:55	France League 1	NICE	8 v 18		AC AJACCIO	2.33	20.00	90.00	3.85	5.00	12.00	30.00	21.00	11.00
36	2/10/2023 19:55	Northern Ireland	NEWRY CITY AFC	10 v 9		CARRICK RANGERS	3.85	13.00	28.00	6.20	5.60	6.20	28.00	13.00	3.90
37	2/10/2023 19:55	Championship	BIRMINGHAM	18 v 6		WEST BROM	6.00	16.00	30.00	7.40	4.70	4.90	45.00	16.00	3.30
38	2/10/2023 19:55	La Liga	CADIZ CF	18 v 11		GIRONA	4.80	15.00	35.00	6.40	4.50	5.60	40.00	15.00	4.00
39	2/10/2023 19:55	Segunda	GRANADA CF	5 v 9		TENERIFE	3.30	16.00	50.00	4.60	3.95	7.20	35.00	16.00	6.20
40	2/10/2023 20:10	Portugal	VIZELA	10 v 8		CHAVES	2.65	15.00	45.00	4.60	5.20	9.00	26.00	15.00	6.80

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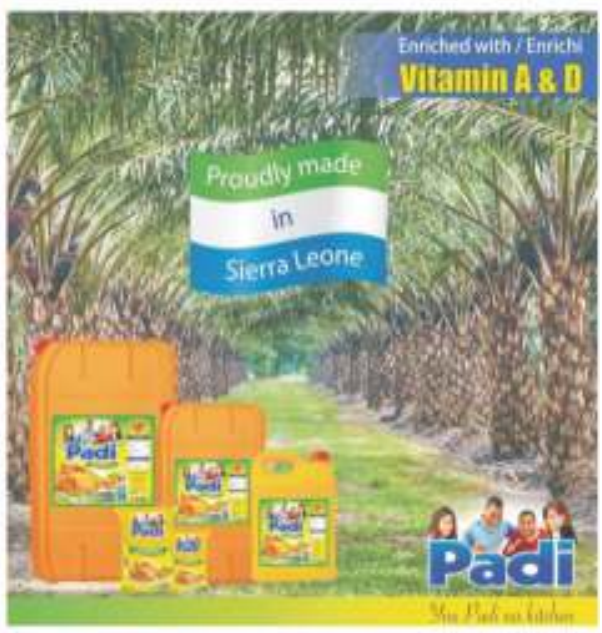
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CONCORD TIMES
SPORTS

Sierra Leone Commercial Bank set for Golf, Tennis, Squash tourney

As part of its 50-year celebrations, Sierra Leone Commercial Bank Limited in collaboration with the Freetown Golf Club has launched its Golf, Tennis, and Squash tournament at the Freetown Golf Club, Lumley in Freetown.

The three sporting activities are part of their 50 years celebration and support the Freetown Golf Club as part of the Bank's Corporate Social Responsibility.

President of the Freetown Golf Club Gibril Sankoh congratulates SLCB for a milestone and thanked them for their support towards sports for under privilege kids who he said are the future and it is a wise move to catch them young.

"This is not the first time SLCB is supporting Freetown Golf Club this venue is called Freetown Golf Club not because we only play Golf but for over 120 years ago it has been and continues to be a country club which offers Tennis and Squash court as well as a gym which is open to all. We are encouraging everybody to come and enjoyed the game as the benefits are enormous with networking," he said.

President of the National Olympic Committee of Sierra Leone (NOC-SLE) Prince Vandy Sualley applauded SLCB for taking sports as part of their activities and golf which is also part of the Olympic family.

He said the NOC-SLE are happy that the current leadership of the Freetown Golf Club has been proactive adding that he is already having preliminary discussions as to how they can bring golf experts to impart knowledge to the young kids.

Dr. Kenneth Brima, Executive Director, of the National Sports Authority, joined in congratulating SLCB and further registering the NSA's commitments to supporting golf in the country.

President of the Sierra Leone Tennis Association Kelvin Kellie stated that 50 years is not 50 days but steadily existing and contributing to the economy of this country and sports.

He said: "Sports is not about age it's good for your fitness, mental health, and agility and you can play with friends and clubs so I am opening this platform for SLCB and all as tennis is a game that should be embraced and proud of.

Deputy Managing Director Sierra Leone Commercial Bank, Festus Sowa while launching the tournament said they are delighted to have three in one competition at the Freetown Golf Club.

He further made commitments that SLCB are ready to make the tournament an annual event and encouraged the participants to play hard and fear as well as have fun.

Wrestling: American based duo reassure to represent Salone

Sierra Leonean American-based duo Sahid Kargbo and Ibrahim Bunduka have both reassured Sierra Leoneans and the country's Wrestling Association that they will be representing the green, white and blue colours of Sierra Leone in forthcoming international wrestling competitions including qualifiers for the Paris 2024 Olympics Games.

Sahid Kargbo who is currently on a short visit in Freetown said they are now committed and fully ready to represent the African nation.

"I Am ready this time, and I am giving my words," Kargbo who in April 2017 earlier stated they were ready to pull on the three colours of Sierra Leone but did not work as planned citing job and a few other reasons prevented him that time.

"I am okay now, especially with my work and very stable and by God's grace I will be out there representing Sierra Leone for real and would be going for medals in all competitions, this is the same for Ibrahim Bunduka," he said.

The pair who are based in the United States of America have competed for their University; George Mason University before and would have first represented the West African nation at the 2017 World Championship in Paris, France and the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia.

Prince Vandy Sualley, President of the Sierra Leone Wrestling Association who also doubles as the President of the National Olympics Committee said it is welcome news for the country and the locally based wrestlers.

He said: "I am so excited because the two wrestlers will finally be able to repaint the country and can also increase our chances of having qualified athletes for the upcoming Olympics Games," he said adding that this will hopefully help boost our chances of winning medals, especially gold at the World Championship and other subsequent competitions.

In a related development, the wrestler also donated wrestling shoes, and other materials for local athletes and promise more similar donations.

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