

## Newsletter 2 - 2024

# Conservation Society of Sierra Leone

*Connecting people to nature.*



Dear valued reader,

In this issue, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone promotes livelihood activities in Big wata community to encourage the community to move away from the Western Area Peninsular Rainforest National Park.

We also closely collaborate with regional partners, the civil society network on coastal and marine protection in West Africa.

Also, World Migratory Bird Day was celebrated in Koinadugu district with our young generation who will be our future leaders and World Environment Day also known as National Tree planting Day was celebrated among others.

Together, through conservation we can have a safe and healthy environment.

Wishing you a happy reading.

Best

Charles Showers, President of CSSL



# Big Water Community gears up to benefit from a CAFOD Supported Conservation Livelihood Project



by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

“...if we continue to destroy this forest through stone mining, logging, slash-and-burn farming and many other practices, disasters such as flooding, water shortage and disease outbreak will befall us in the very near future...” The Headwoman of Big Water community, Mrs. Memunatu Banya, made this statement during the project inception meeting organised by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) on April 17, 2024.

The Western Area Peninsula National Park (WAPNP) currently faces numerous threats caused by unsustainable human practices such as sand and stone extraction, deforestation, unplanned urbanization, land grabbing and reclamation, poor waste management, illegal logging for charcoal, mining, farming and hunting. These induced pressures have led to massive loss of biodiversity and habitat for many threatened species. The threats also have adverse impacts on the health and well-being of the people living in nearby communities which are mostly pigeon-holed settlements that often experience flooding, coastal erosion, and mudslides resulting in significant loss of lives, livelihoods and property, among others.

To attempt to address the aforementioned issues, CSSL received funding support from the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) to implement a pilot project entitled, “Integrated Conservation Livelihood Project” at the Big Water community, along the WAPNP.

In order to kick-start the implementation, CSSL conducted a project inception meeting for stakeholders at the Big Water community on the aforementioned date. In attendance, were community leaders including the Headwoman, youth leader, religious leaders, representatives of existing livelihood groups in the community, and a representative from CAFOD.

Addressing the assembly, the Project Manager, Aruna Koroma, took participants through the overall objective and key activities of the project. He said, the seven-month project would contribute to reducing coastal community vulnerability to climate change shocks, and improve the well-being of Big Water and neighbouring forest-edge and coastal communities. Aruna furthered that, the project specifically planned to conserve and restore threatened ecosystems in the Western Area Peninsula, whilst facilitating alternative livelihood options that would ensure the protection of that portion of the national park.

The village Headwoman, Mrs. Banya, welcomed CSSL and CAFOD on behalf of her community, and pledged their full support towards the implementation of the project. She however entreated her community folks to desist from the illegal practices of destroying the forest. "...we have all paid deaf ears to all the pieces of advice and warnings given to us by experts. Please, let's start to put things in place as a community to avert any such calamities by keeping the forest intact for ourselves and future generations," the Headwoman appealed to her community.

She appealed to CSSL for more sustained environmental education and alternative livelihood support interventions. She added that, as community people, they sometimes forget about the negative consequences of forest degradation and only concentrate on practices that hurt the environment, all in the name of fending for themselves. May other community members including the youth leader, also expressed similar sentiment and even requested CSSL to advocate to the government for a clear demarcation of the protected area from their community land. He said this would help them to have peace of mind and undertake their farming activities without fear of being arrested by the Forest Guards or other security forces.

The representative from CAFOD, Sahr Edison Borbor, explained about the Safety, Access, Dignified and Inclusion (SADI) and Safe Guiding policies of his organisation, and how they all apply to the project implementing partner, CSSL. He emphasised that, the details of these policies were geared towards securing the integrity of their partner organisation. He emphasised that the policies particularly seek the safety, respectability and well-being of project communities from exploitation, abuse, and associated issues during implementation. Edison encouraged participants to strictly abide by the policies for the benefit of all parties involved, noting that CAFOD will hold partners accountable if they are found to have flouted the SADI and Safeguarding policies.

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*by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya*



Firewood from the protected area by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

# Regional Civil Society Network on Coastal and Marine Protection in West Africa

CSSL's communication manager elected as Secretary General



**Congratulations to our Communications Manager, Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya, who was elected to the position of Secretary General for the Civil Society Network on Coastal and Marine Protection in West Africa in April 2024 at the AGM in Guinea-Bissau.**

It was the first AGM since the initiation of the formation of the network through a declaration made in March 2022 in Saly - Senegal courtesy of The Regional Partnership for the Conservation of the Coastal and Marine Zone (PRCM). The network will be coordinating the activities of environmental CSOs in the region relative to the protection of the coastal and marine environments. Specifically, it will lead in soliciting technical and funding support from strategic partners and donors, and providing capacity development initiatives for member CSOs to enable them deliver on their respective mandates to protect the environment.

In his position as Secretary General, Abdul will be supporting the President of the network, who sits in Guinea - Conakry, in providing the required administrative and technical support in the operations of the network.

Congratulations to us all!! We are looking forward to a fruitful collaboration with all environmental CSOs in Sierra Leone and West Africa generally, as we strive towards protecting our marine environment from all forms of pollution and other illegal activities, including mangrove degradation. Together, we can do this!

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*I want to thank CSSL for the opportunity accorded me to represent the organisation at that level. I'm excited to take up this additional role of Secretary General for the Civil Society Network on Coastal and Marine Protection in West Africa. Even though the challenges are huge but together, I'm sure we can overcome them.*

*Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya, CSSL communication manager*

*by Kathrin Prinzing*

# Common Birds of Sierra Leone

## Indigenous Language Guide



**The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) celebrates this year's Independence Day with the publication of our new bird guide: "Common birds of Sierra Leone - an indigenous language guide". The guide book presents most common birds of our beautiful country with their names in three of our local languages. In this way we want to celebrate Sierra Leone, its rich culture and its amazing nature.**

Sierra Leone is a country where you can hardly move one meter without hearing or seeing one of the more than 600 bird species of the country. Of course, all birds - which are known to science - have their scientific names, most of them also have an English name. But how do people of Sierra Leone call their birds in their own languages? The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) supported by African Bird Club (ABC) started a journey through the country to find answers to this question. The outcome is an indigenous language guide which portrays the 60 most common birds of Sierra Leone in three of the nation's most common languages- Temne, Mende and Krio.

Over several weeks of travel and over 350 interviews with community members of different language groups later, the manuscript for the indigenous language guide on the common birds of Sierra Leone was ready to be developed. It still was a long way to go as photos of all birds had to be collected and the design had to be adjusted. Upon completion, this bird book is an exciting read for everyone.

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*When we started the project last year none of us really knew what to expect. The team knew a few indigenous names of some birds, but 60? Even for us as bird experts that was a task we assumed to be very ambitious. We set out determined however and visited several communities across the different regions of the country to get to know what indigenous called the 60 birds we had already identified to be amongst the most common across the country.*



Andrea Haffner, former CSSL's project manager and author of the book

The book is perfectly designed for beginners of bird watching. The introduction explains most important things about bird watching, the habitats of birds and how to use the guide. All birds are presented with big colourful pictures and are well described. Most of the birds can be seen everywhere in the country and are definitely not strangers. There are also some very special birds in feature too.

One aim of the book is to create more interest in birds and bird protection in Sierra Leone. As stated in the beginning, Sierra Leone is a country where birds can be seen and/or heard everywhere you turn. Wouldn't it be great to know the name of these birds? The Conservation of Sierra Leone intends to raise awareness for birds and their habitats through this guidebook.

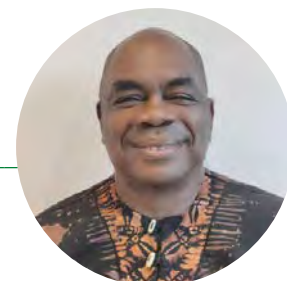
*"The way to experience birds and to learn their names and behaviour, is through a bird club. We have several bird clubs in the country. If you are interested in birds and happy to share your passion with others – contact us and become a member of one of CSSL 's bird clubs" invites Momoh Bai-Sesay – the African Bird Club Representative in Sierra Leone. "We are open to beginners and experts to join us in learning more about our birds.*



Momoh Bai-Sesay, author of the book

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*Our main idea and hope regarding this book is that it is widely used throughout the country. It should be suitable for pupils in our school nature clubs, for community members in different parts of the country and for every person who wants to start to learn the names of the birds you can see every day around you.*



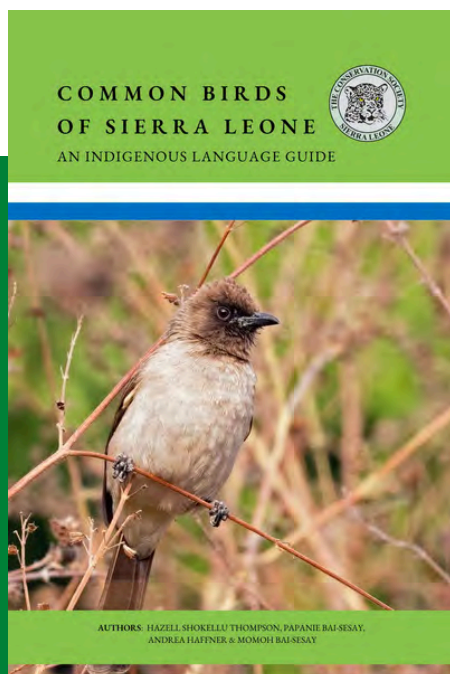
Dr. Hazell Thompson, author of the book

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**Three species of birds which were common in Sierra Leone before, are now endangered or can only be seen in some parts of the country. As these birds are of a high interest for conservation and biodiversity, we decided to include them in the book. These are the Hooded Vulture and the Timneh Parrot, which are both critically endangered species as well as the White-necked Picathartes, which can only be seen in the forests.**



Papanie Bai-Sesay, CSSL 's Senior Biodiversity and Project Manager and author of the book



by Kathrin Prinzing

## Common birds of Sierra Leone - an indigenous languages guide

Published in 2024 by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone  
154 pages, 60 common birds, lot's of information about habitats and bird watching in general.

### Get your copy now

at CSSL's office (86 Main Road, Congo Town, Freetown / price 300NLe) or order via email: [info@cs-sl.org](mailto:info@cs-sl.org)

# World Migratory Bird Day 2024

## Kabala community engagements



by Alhaji O. Kamara

“What are we going to do this year for World Migratory Bird Day?”, was what school children at Kondembaia were asking when the team of the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) visited their school in April this year. Every year, the celebration of World Migratory Bird Day (WMBD) is one of the highlights for the CSSL School Nature Clubs (SNCs) and their schools in Diang Chiefdom, Koinadugu district.

On 11th May, 2024, the CSSL – Bread for the World (BftW) project team in Kabala celebrated World Migratory Bird Day in Kondembaia Town. The celebration featured SNC members, community members, stakeholders, the media and heads of schools and nature club Teacher Coordinators. It was a day full of activities, joy and awareness raising all around this year’s theme: “Protect Insects, Protect Birds”.

The celebration started with a bird watching exercise organized for over 150 SNCs pupils drawn from the project communities around Lake Sonfon. The project Field Technician, Fasalie Conteh, provided the pupils with a bird book manual and binoculars to enable them to clearly sight and identify different birds during the excursion. The pupils spotted some Great Blue Turacos, Emerald Sterlings, Common Yellowthroat and many more bird species.

This exercise helped the SNC pupils and teachers to broaden their knowledge about the birds in their own environment and the conservation of migratory birds, and the importance of insects to birds’ survival.



*Being one of the participants in this year’s World Migratory Bird Day celebration, I am so delighted to have sighted beautiful birds and also learned their names through the bird book manual. I will continue to serve as one of the School Nature Club Ambassadors to cascade the messages learned from this celebration to my community.*



Finah Koroma, School Nature Club Pupil,  
Kondembaia Secondary School

After the football match, CSSL transitioned the event into a seminar at the Kondembaia Community Centre to continue to raise awareness and educate participants on the key messages promoted in the annual theme.

Alhaji Osman Kamara, BftW project Communication and Advocacy Officer, highlighted the need for the conservation and protection of migratory birds and their habitats. He continued to raise awareness about the threats faced by migratory birds, their ecological importance, and encouraged all present to mobilise efforts to ensure the protection of these important birds.

The Project Manager, Papanie Bai-Sesay, reflected the minds of participants through this year's theme. He explained the intricate relationship between insects and birds, as insects play a critical role in the life of birds and their habitats. Migratory birds feed on insects. Insects are an essential source of energy to migratory birds. Bai-Sesay encouraged all to start practicing healthy environmental and conservation actions to help protect insects and birds in the environment.

The celebration was climaxed by a thrilling cultural dancing competition among SNC pupils. Cultural dance is one of the means CSSL uses to sensitize the public, and a unique approach to pass on environmental messages to community members. SNC pupils are the ambassadors that cascade messages to their various communities.



“This year’s celebration was really a special one. Everyone celebrated with full heart and enthusiasm. I cannot even say which part of the day was the best – but of course, for me to see the boys and girls with the binoculars is always special. To see their excitement when they spot a beautiful bird and show it to their colleagues. This is what CSSL’s work is about: connecting people to nature. I am sure today we connected our communities and schools to nature. This will help us in our future efforts to protect Lake Sonfon and its unique environment.”

*by Alhaji Osman Kamara, Kathrin Prinzing*





# Climate Change in a Nutshell:

## Understanding Climate Change Impacts on Plantain Island, Yawri Bay, Sierra Leone



by Schwarbu Eastwood

Climate change is the greatest challenge of our time and future generations, and poses a threat to ecosystems worldwide. Its consequences are devastating for human populations and ecosystems everywhere, but especially in coastal communities. Yawri Bay in Sierra Leone is such a coastal region. The people in these communities are the ones least responsible for climate change but are among those most affected by it. One of those communities is Plantain Island. The island is a disturbing example of the challenges faced by coastal inhabitants in the course of climate change.

Yawri Bay is located on the Atlantic Coast of Sierra Leone, just south of the peninsula, on which the country's capital is located. Shenge, a significant fishing town in Moyamba district, south of the country, is the headquarter town of Kagoboro chiefdom. A few kilometres off the coast of Shenge is an island, which is known for its rich history of fishing and being an important slave trading post in the 17th and 18th centuries: Plantain Island. Compared to other islands along the coast, it is a rather small island. Because of the lack of data on the region the exact size and number of inhabitants can only be assumed.

As already mentioned, the small island is in great danger. According to the community members, thousands of square meters of the island have already been lost due to coastal erosion and rising sea levels over the last decades (thousands of square meters might not exactly mean thousand of square meters but a very huge area). The island used to be a tranquil and thriving community with its inhabitants relying on fishing, agriculture, wood production and small-scale trade. The inhabitants of the island were able to build permanent structures and had a reliable income. Fast forward to 2024, the reality is frightening: Due to climate change, people already started to migrate to communities on land, and the houses that once characterised the landscape, have now been washed away. Newly built structures are not meant to be permanent, as the community members are aware of the fate of their island.

When asked about his dreams, one of the inhabitants of the island answered: "I just want to stay here and have a family on this island. My family always lived here, and I want my kids and grandkids to live here."

What may seem to be a reasonable dream will not become reality. There is no available scientific data, but it is estimated that the island will disappear into the sea in the next 25 to 30 years. The people living in the community are not able to undertake any kind of agricultural activities anymore, as there is simply not enough space on the island today and temperatures are rising rapidly. They are now solely relying on artisanal fishing.

Plantain Island is not the only community facing those challenges in Sierra Leone. The entire coast is in danger. That is why the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) is very active in their efforts to fight climate change in the West African country. One of the project sites of CSSL is the Yawri Bay. The “Yawri Bay-Team” of CSSL is working closely with a handful of communities to provide alternative livelihoods and preserve the mangroves in the region. The environmental organisation is providing resources, expertise, and advocacy to empower the people and communities of Yawri Bay and to protect its valuable ecosystems. One of the most important mitigation measures is to protect and restore the mangroves around the delta, as they provide immense protection against coastal erosion, preserve ecosystems, and store close to four times the amount of carbon compared to other rain forest trees.

Unfortunately, this will not save the island from sinking – but it will bring great support to other communities along the coast. To prevent the disaster that is going to happen to the island off the coast of Shenge, such mitigation measures needed to have taken place decades ago...

In conclusion, the case of Plantain Island showcases the consequences of climate change and human activity and actions. Furthermore, it demonstrates the asymmetries of power between the global north and the global south: the people of Plantain Island are not responsible for their homes being destroyed, and yet, they are the ones having to leave everything behind. It is a reminder that there is an urgent need to address these challenges and protect coastal communities worldwide. The ecosystems, the people and their history are worth to be protected – and everyone has the right to at least have a chance to achieve their dreams.

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*by Luc Ben Bessel*



# “Our Lake. Our Future.”

## School Nature Club Pupils reinforce conservation messages through drama



by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

Lake Sonfon is one of the mountainous lakes in West Africa. It is situated in Diang chiefdom, Koinadugu district, north-east of Sierra Leone. It is a Key Biodiversity Area (KBA) intended to be designated as a protected area in Sierra Leone because of its rich biodiversity and wildlife. The Emerald Sterling is an endemic bird species found in three West African states; Guinea, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone, Lake Sonfon hosts the largest population of this bird.

The lake has huge deposit of gold and therefore, attracts lots of artisanal and industrial mining activities. Industrial mining done by mining companies seriously encroaches the buffer zone which causes disturbance to wildlife and also results in environmental and human health hazards. This is especially so when the lake, which drains to the Pampana River, contains fresh water and is regarded as a major water source for domestic and other uses by many surrounding communities.

### Promoting environmental education through community sensitization

Community roadshow is one among the key strategies of engagement and sensitization that the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) has been using over the years to raise awareness about environmental issues in communities around Lake Sonfon. On 20th May 2024, CSSL engaged stakeholders and school nature club (SNC) pupils in a community roadshow at Kondembaia, headquarter town of Diang chiefdom. The purpose of the roadshow was to continue raising public awareness through SNCs about environmental hazards that accompany all forms of mining currently taking place in and around the lake. The campaign started with a match-past of school pupils and stakeholders across the centre of the village and ended at the compound of the Paramount Chief who delivered the keynote address and formally opened the event.

Addressing the school pupils, teachers and other key stakeholders, the Paramount Chief, Sheku Magba III Koroma of Diang chieftdom, declared that, "Education is better than mining", and urged the pupils to take education seriously. "Most of your parents didn't go to school, and have been mining for the longest of time but are still in poverty....", he continued. He extended special thanks to the CSSL team for being in close engagement with his people over the years through campaigns and sensitization about the negative impact of mining. He expressed hope that such engagement would help to change their mindset and behaviours to ensure a healthy environment.

The CSSL-BftW Project Manager, Papanie Bai-Sesay, welcomed participants, and informed all that the roadshow was organized to pass on environmental education messages to the communities. He highlighted some of the effects of mining on the lives of the community people around Lake Sonfon and Pampana River.



by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

Mariama Kargbo, CSSL's Environmental Education Officer, said her role is to work with school nature clubs in various schools across the country, and involving school pupils is a strategic sensitization approach that the organization uses to help transform school pupils into nature ambassadors. She added that, it would help them grow up with such knowledge and ability to raise awareness in their various communities about the dangers of mining and deforestation, and the relevance of keeping the environment protected and healthy.

A major component of the roadshow was the performance of a drama skit titled; "Our lake, our future" by the SNCs pupils. They demonstrated in their roles key messages clearly depicting the ways mining investors entered in Diang chieftdom to mine in and around the lake, and how the it is being destroyed through their mining activities, causing shortage of potable water and various other attendant consequences.

The drama was followed by discussion that was moderated by the CSSL Communication Manager, Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya. He allowed school pupils and community stakeholders to express their thoughts about the content of the drama. Yerie S. Mansaray a female school pupil of the Kondembaia Secondary School expressed in a radio interview (Radio Bintumani 93.7 FM) that, "... mining is not a good practice. Let our chieftdom authorities set up byelaws to help protect Lake Sonfon from mining as this causes deforestation and shortage of water in our communities".



by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya



by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

# World Environment Day 2024

CSSL and other Conservation Actors Call for Urgent Action on Land Reservation and Climate Resilience

**Finding cross-sectional solutions to land degradation in Sierra Leone**

**5th June 2024  
CCSL Conference Hall  
Freetown**



“Those who should be protecting the forest are the ones encroaching and selling land now. Yes, we’ll continue campaigning, but we are just going around in the same circle. It’s manifesting on us; we’re in June, but there is no rain. These are all signs that show that we have to do more to protect our forests and our lives...” This was a lamentation of one of the participants at a day-long Roundtable Conference organised by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) on World Environment Day at the Council of Churches Conference Room in Freetown.

This year’s World Environment Day campaign focused on land restoration, desertification and drought resilience under the slogan: “Our land. Our future”. The Roundtable Discussion, was therefore, an opportunity to bring out the key issues and to generate practical solutions to help reverse the current environmental trends in Sierra Leone and the global community. The conference brought together various organizations and government stakeholders including the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Ministry of Lands, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Health, Save the Children, Namati, Green Scenery, and the media among a host of others, to address pressing environmental issues affecting Sierra Leone and the global community.

Edward Sesay, Head of Programmes at CSSL, who moderated the engagement, underscored the imperative of environmental protection and the implementation of sustainable practices to mitigate the impact of climate change. He emphasized the importance of community-based initiatives in fostering environmental stewardship and securing a sustainable future for all. He reminded actors to recognize their collective responsibility in safeguarding the environment and mitigating the adverse effects of environmental degradation. Edward further highlighted the prevailing realities facing Sierra Leone, including the indiscriminate and unregulated deforestation, dwindling forest cover, and unpredictable weather patterns worsened by daily human activities.



by Kathrin Prinzing

Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya, the Communication Manager of CSSL, emphasized the urgency of addressing the adverse impacts of environmental degradation on weather patterns and rainfall distribution. He cited examples of coastal communities that are currently facing some of the most serious impacts of climate change, including Yaliboya and Plantain Island to further illustrate the tangible consequences of ecological imbalances. He disclosed the fast pace in which these communities are submerging into the sea due to coastal erosion and rising sea levels over the last decades.

Regarding the legal frameworks governing environmental protection, representatives from NAMATI, Green Scenery and Culture Radio, among others, reiterated the relevance of enforcing existing laws without bias to curb the current spate of land encroachment, especially in and around protected areas. These sentiments were re-echoed by various other participants throughout the deliberations. "...government institutions are fond of undermining the operations of each other due to overlapping mandates and ineffective collaboration. These are some of the factors seriously responsible for environmental degradation", the representative from Namati asserts.



by Kathrin Prinzing

Yayah Kamara Keh, Assistant Director of Lands, Housing and Country Planning, delved into the critical issue of deforestation as a primary threat to Sierra Leone's lands, advocating for collaborative efforts with the Ministry of Environment to initiate tree planting initiatives across the country. He stressed the collective responsibility of all citizens to engage in conservation efforts and protect the environment for sustainable development and resilience against climate change-induced challenges.

At the end of the engagement, actors called for government to urgently review the current overlapping mandates in most ministries, departments and agencies, and ensure a sense of collaboration among state institutions within the environment sector. The actors also called on the government to address the issue of mining in protected areas and national reserves. "These are protected areas, and must be respected as such by all and sundry", Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya emphasises.

The call to action was resoundingly made by all present, underscoring the urgent and dire need for increased collaboration and cooperation among state and non-state actors to conserve and protect the country's natural resources for the survival of current and future generations.

by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

John D. Brima from the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change highlighted the shared responsibility of all actors in protecting the environment and advocated for responsible land-use practices to mitigate deforestation in Sierra Leone. He encouraged all present to continue campaigning against indiscriminate tree felling for minor construction purposes. Brima also emphasized the crucial role of sustainable farming practices in maintaining ecological balance and food security.



by Abdul Kaprr Dumbuya

# „We want a new boundary demarcation”

## Big Water community calls for help on land issue



by Kathrin Prinzing

Mid of May this year, a team from the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) went to Big Water community at the Western Area Peninsula to meet with the headwoman, youth leader and some other community members who are involved in the organisation's ongoing project at the aforementioned community. Our goal was to monitor and document the progress of the livelihood project. We were very happy to hear that the pig families are growing and that some of the goats which CSSL provided are pregnant.

CSSL's activities in Big Water aim to raise awareness about the importance of protecting the forest and to support the community with alternative livelihoods to keep them away from destroying the forest. As always, CSSL asked for news and challenges in the community. The headwoman seemed to have been waiting for the opportunity to address the most burning issue: the government came to inform the community that they are planning to sell a huge amount of land at Big Water, which is government owned land in the opinion of the government, to a foreign company to construct houses – a so-called “Smart City”.

The community members are aware of the importance of protecting the green belt and the forest for the sake of their own community. The newly elected headwoman is very supportive of all conservation actions happening in the village.

“ We want a new boundary demarcation and a clear definition of the green belt. At the moment, there is no safety plan for the community. Community members have been living here for many years; others have started to build houses; and now, the government is coming to reclaim that very same land. They say it is government's land. Without a clear and official new demarcation, we the community are vulnerable and helpless when government officials come.



Memunatu Banyu, headwoman, Big Water

The community members are aware of the importance of protecting the green belt and the forest for the sake of their own community. The newly elected headwoman is very supportive of all conservation actions happening in the village. But she also has to represent the needs of the community members. The protection of the forest is important, but people also need houses. That is why, she asks for a new demarcation of the National Park and the green belt. With a new demarcation, the community would exactly know which land they can use for construction and / or farming, and which parts have to be protected. The old demarcation is not reflected in reality. A new demarcation could help to set up a new agreement between government and communities and ensure the conservation of the National Park in the future. Most important would be that, communities and government bodies respect this new demarcation on the same level and everybody can fully trust the agreement.

“The youth are trying to stop the illicit activities of deforestation and burning close to the forest. We have cleaned the whole place; and we are ready to take responsibility. But how can we maintain our environment if government is coming to claim the land. How can we motivate the community to protect the forest when government is coming to encroach and cut the trees? It is a very difficult situation.” said Obai Sessay, the Youth leader. Another community member added: “It is not only about the forest, it is also about the community itself. People who have saved their money to build their houses have to accept that these houses will be destroyed just to make space for a company that wants to build houses again. We don't understand these plans.

We hope that with a new demarcation and a clear orientation about where to build houses and where not to, the community can find peace and look into the future with hope and confidence.”

We as Conservation Society of Sierra Leone are very alarmed. If this is not a rumour but a real plan of the government, it could have severe consequences for the National Park. If people will be chased away from their land, they will try to find new land to rebuild their houses. The only way for them would be to enter the forest further. We continue to ring the alarm bell for government and community leaders to sit together and find a solution for this burning issue. Big investment contracts in communities should not be signed without community consultation and without an Environmental Impact Assessment as by the law of Sierra Leone.

The team from CSSL left Big Water on that day with mixed feelings. On one hand, they were very content to see the wonderful development of the alternative livelihood projects; all the little pigs which were running around in the community. On the other hand, the news about the land issue is very alarming. Will all the efforts invested so far go for nothing? We still have hope that a solution will be found for a sustainable and hopeful future of the Big Water community.

Let's protect this forest together – communities, government and all other stakeholders.

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by Kathrin Prinzing





# Guinean Forests of West Africa

## Ecosystem profile update for biodiversity hotspot launched



Across the globe, biodiversity is in peril with species facing extinction more than any other time in history. Biodiversity hotspots are the world's most species-rich and threatened regions. There are 36 hotspots around the world, including the Guinean Forests of West Africa which covers about 621,705 square kilometers spanning 11 countries.

The hotspot is home to a wide array of biodiversity including 9000 species of plants, including 1800 endemics, 416 mammal, 917 bird, 107 reptile and 269 amphibian species. In addition, the hotspot supports the livelihoods of millions of people in the region. However, the hotspot's biodiversity is under threat due to land clearance for agriculture, over-hunting and mining as well as climate change. In the face of these threats, communities, civil society organizations and governments across the region are making efforts to stem the loss of habitats and species.

### Support from the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund

Since 2001, the [Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund \(CEPF\)](#), has been active in the Guinean Forests of West Africa, initially with an investment of US\$8.3 million from 2001- 2012, followed up by a US\$ 10 million investment from 2016-2022. The most recent investment program, from 2016 to 2022, was based on an ecosystem profile that

included an extensive analysis of key biodiversity areas (KBAs). The investment ended in 2022 with a detailed [assessment of results](#) and a [Long-Term Vision](#), which together provide guidance on future investments.

### The Ecosystem Profile

From 2025 - 2029 CEPF plans a new grant-making program for the Guinea Forests of West Africa hotspot, with a total fund of between US\$4 million and US\$9 million, running from at least January 2025 to December 2029.

CEPF's support starts with a design process, resulting in an ecosystem profile. The profile provides a snapshot of the conservation priorities in the hotspot, and the capacity of civil society to address these priorities. Beginning June 2024, BirdLife International will lead on the process of updating the ecosystem profile for the Guinea forests of West Africa (produced in 2015 in [English](#) and [French](#)). The update will consist of a range of stakeholder consultations and inputs from experts and aims at producing a new investment strategy (strategic directions and investment priorities) which will be the basis for grant-making in the region.

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*CEPF's vision is that civil society organisations across the region have the capacity and resources to lead effective conservation action, in the long-term. The ecosystem profile document will describe how CEPF support can help achieve that vision, and guide the CEPF grant-making program from 2025-2029. The process of updating the ecosystem profile is an opportunity for all stakeholders – governments, donors and research institutions, as well as NGOs – to contribute information and ideas on how the CEPF can contribute to that vision.*

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**Pete Wood**

Team Leader for the Ecosystem profile

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*Updating the Ecosystem profile, led by BirdLife and its partners, will be crucial for guiding conservation efforts in the Guinean Forests of the West Africa biodiversity hotspot. With increasing threats to biodiversity, a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders will be essential to address conservation challenges. Existing and new BirdLife partners, along with other identified civil society organizations, will benefit from CEPF grants and coaching sessions to enhance their organisational and programme implementation capabilities.*

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**Tharcisse Ukizintambara**

Interim Head of BirdLife Office, Dakar & Partnership and Capacity Development Coordinator

Guinea Forests of West Africa biodiversity hotspot includes parts of the following countries: Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea (Bioko and Annobón ), and São Tomé and Príncipe.

The Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) is a joint initiative of l'Agence Française de Développement, Conservation International, the European Union, Fondation Hans Wilsdorf, the Global Environment Facility, the Government of Japan and the World Bank. CEPF is a global programme that provides grants to civil society to safeguard the world's biodiversity hotspots.

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[www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org)*

# WABiLED: support for forest edged communities

## Women's Empowerment through Climate Smart Agriculture



**The outcomes of CSSL's WABiLED project activities show how climate change resilience and women's empowerment can work hand in hand for the best of the community.**

Climate resilience and women's empowerment are two of the most important entry points to reach the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For too long these two topics have been handled on their own, forgetting how close they are related. More climate resilient communities go along with gender equality and women's empowerment. The USAID funded WABiLED project, being implemented by the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) in the eastern province of the country, showcases the interrelation of the two topics and how it can help an entire community when they are taught together.

After a two-hour drive through lush forests and amazing landscapes in Nomo chiefdom, 50km south of Kenema, the small town of Faama is located. Faama is one of the forest-edged communities in the project area. CSSL has been engaging the community members before the WABiLED Project, with trainings in community forest management, land use mapping as well as reforestation activities. "Our main focus in these communities is community forest management, land use mapping and planning; and habitat restoration, ensuring sustainable utilization of the limited natural resource and help reduce deforestation of the existing forest," explains Moses Lusenie, Smart Officer of CSSL.

"The interesting thing about our engagements here is that we can see some differences in the farming methods, the knowledge regarding climate change and climate resilience and conservation. We can also see some differences in how the community members work together and involve each other in their daily activities."

As always, CSSL works towards gender equality. Sustainable development in communities will not be successful if women are not involved. When asked about the biggest changes that happened already in the community since CSSL started its work there, the answers from community members were amazing. Mammie Jane, the Chiefdom Women's Leader remembers: "When I reflect five years back, we believed that only men could do plantations. Women were involved in few aspects of up-land-rice and swamp farming, but no mixed cropping plantations including cocoa, pineapple, groundnut, oil palms and others. In most of the project meetings, CSSL sensitises us that upland-rice farming is one of the most causes of deforestation influencing Climate Change. But most importantly, in most of their meetings, it was clear, they tell us that there should be at least more women in the project related groups or committees."

“ We women got the same sensitisations and trainings as the men in the committees. Me, I started with pineapple and banana farming. I also have cashew trees now. Before now, the men did not consult us when they travelled to Kenema to sell our farm products. We couldn't negotiate any price; we had to accept whatever they gave us. But now, they consult us. We learned about prices per kg, for example, cocoa, how farm products are sold and other market related knowledge. The position of women in the community is improving a lot. Before, we didn't have anything to say; but now, we are consulted to negotiate and advice

Mammie Jane, the Chieftom Women's Leader



Mammie Jane's speech tells you that she is confident and that, she knows some of her rights. The men at the meeting only smiled and nodded. It seems like they are accepting the gender equality. Abubakar Mansaray, the Youth Chairman confirmed what Mammie Jane said. Before now, he was also involved in cutting new forest every year for upland-rice farming only. He was one of those going to Kenema on motorbikes to sell their farm produce. He says, "...we didn't consult with our women in all of that. It is however changing a lot since then. We all see the benefit for our family and the community. Not only with the mixed-crop farming methods on the farmlands immediately around the community, but also the women's involvement in decision-making and farming." Today, Mansaray is one of those who try to persuade others to minimise deforestation for upland-rice farming and adopt climate smart agricultural practices for the protection of the forest landscape and the community.

CSSL has been working with communities in the region but started full engagement with the five target communities and inhabitants in Nomo chieftom during the PAPFor Project leading to the current WABiLED Project. It was a long way to go. "When we have finally signed the MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the communities of Nono chieftom, an important milestone was reached", explains Patrick Dauda, Land-use Planning and Community Forest Pilot Lead for the CSSL-WABiLED project. We have been working with the communities in Nono chieftom since then, but there was a deep-rooted challenge (misconception) that their community forest might be taken away from them

" which led to extreme resistance to work with CSSL and Gola Rainforest Conservation (GRC)." This was resolved through series of engagements and by the MOUs signed by communities "Me, I have been one of the main champions to advocate against cooperating with Gola and partners. I have to admit. We thought that we would not be allowed to enter our forest anymore. Today, I am in the Forest Management Committee, and one of those who advocate strongest to work with CSSL and protect our community forest. I understand now how important the forest is to us, and the benefits we get when we protect the forest, which is why we are minimizing deforestation for upland-rice farming to adopt climate smart agricultural methods", admits Mammie Jane.

"From my point of view as the Town Chief, I am very happy and proud to see some of the developments of the last years. Since we accepted CSSL and Gola to work with us, the situation of the entire community is improving, especially for the women. Before now, the women were doing upland rice farming while the men owned the plantations with more cash crops. They did not involve us, and they did not support us. Now things have changed. Women are involved in the decision-making processes. Women, together with their men, have plantations. Women sell their products for themselves and contribute to supporting their family. That makes us very proud and happy. It makes us stronger and more resilient. Now that the community works together through the forest management group and others, we are stronger as a community. Another important thing is that we never knew how big our forest was until recently. Through the Community Forest Mapping, Resource Mapping and the mapping of the degraded areas for restoration, we know all of that now. It is important for us to better plan our land-use patterns. I am very grateful to CSSL for this project, and I hope that we can continue together. I am happy that, as a Town Chief, I can hand over a healthier community to our children." Jenneh Hassan, Town Chief, Faama community.

As this is the planting season, the restoration of the mapped degraded lands is next on the agenda of the project. The community - women and men - are ready to participate in the restoration activities and go forward with CSSL and protect the community forest for future generations. Let's give them the support they need to go ahead and continue the way towards a sustainable and equal society.

# News from CSSL office

## Renew your membership for 2024/2025!

Dear members and friends, thank you for your continued support over the last year(s). For those who have not yet renewed their membership and for all of you who want to become a new member of the CSSL family:

**Now is the time! Sign up for your membership 2024/2025.**

More information on our website: <https://cs-sl.org/membership/>

## Charles Shower`s Grim Discovery

The only Picathartes (White-Necked Rockfowl) nest remaining at this once thriving and only colony with four nests, when it was discovered in the early 90s, in the rainforest close to the main Guma Reservoir.

A nest comprises a pair of birds. So, initially, there were four pairs of Picathartes gymnocephalus happily breeding on this massive rock. When I visited the site, this April, to my greatest surprise, only one cracked nest remains. These beautiful but strange and vulnerable birds are used as indicators of an undisturbed rainforest. There were 24 colonies in the Western Area Peninsular Rainforest National Park. Only God knows how many are still thriving, especially when this one at Guma is also not doing well.

Massive and uncontrolled encroachment into the National Park has left me asking whether we have fines for such despicable acts. This God given rainforest provides fresh water for inhabitants in Freetown and beyond and that is one of the reasons why it was designated as a National Park in 2012.



## CSSL wins 1st Annual Sierra Leone Corporate Excellence Awards

On the 26th April, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) was one of the NGOs selected by the Editorial Team of the African CEO Excellence Magazine to receive the award for its commitment to excellence in the non-profit sector and for promoting and helping realize sustainable human development (SDGs) in Sierra Leone.

Our Head of Programs, Edward Sesay, together with our HR&Admin, Margaret Ngaujah, proudly received the award.

Let`s continue all with full commitment for sustainable development and environmental protection!

# CSSL THANKS ALL MEMBERS AND PARTNERS!



by Kathrin Prinzing



## Contact us

Email: [info@cs-sl.org](mailto:info@cs-sl.org)  
Phone: 075 078 832  
Whatsapp: 076 325732

## Visit us

Office: 86A Main Road, Congo Town, Freetown, Sierra Leone  
Web: <https://cs-sl.org>  
Facebook: <https://facebook.com/conservationsl>