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From the President of CSSL Board

Dear valued readers,

As we continue to face the challenges of climate change, CSSL has been engaging indigenes of our Marine Protected Areas in mangrove reforestation exercises in areas that once had huge stocks of mangrove. Furthermore, we also strongly support the new Minister of Environment and Climate Change regarding the protection of the Western Area Peninsula National Park and Lake Sonfon as well.

Our model National Park, the Gola Rainforest Company Limited by Guarantee, gets new funding from WABILED, while the rapidly deforested Kambui Hills Forest Reserve is thoroughly demarcated involving locals and the National Protected Area Authority in the process.

Therefore, we would like to continue to thank our donors, supporters and members for their relentless strides in supporting our efforts to contributing to save mother nature through biodiversity conservation and environmental protection.

Happy reading

Charles Showers
President of CSSL





How to replant a Mangrove Forest: CSSL publishes Mangrove Restoration Case Study

Mangrove forests are key players to mitigate climate change consequences, protect coastal communities and prevent erosion and flooding. One of the strengths of mangrove is the huge amount of carbon they can store, thus the increased importance for their restoration and protection.

With support from the PAPBio project through Wetlands International, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) recently engaged communities around Yawri Bay to protect and restore four hectares of their degraded mangrove forests. CSSL is not alone in this fight as there are many other active players in mangrove restoration.

Knowledge sharing among actors is therefore key, to improve outcomes and to support each other with lessons learned and best practices. The processes involved, outcomes and lessons learned from the activity were catalogued and published as a case study to open the floor for other organisations and government institutions to learn from in our quest to protect and restore our degraded mangrove areas across the country.

CSSL's case study and guide for wetland restoration at Yawri Bay explains the steps for a successful restoration, tips on how to select species of propagules and recommendations for further action. This document is meant to make it easier to plan and organize future mangrove restoration activities as well as develop a national mangrove restoration guide.

How to replant a mangrove forest

A case study and guidance for wetland restoration at Yawri Bay

September 2023



This restoration activity was not the first to be conducted by CSSL, and of course, will not be the last. The Society therefore, has a good experience in this exercise and is pleased to share with others. During a meeting of the Ramsar Site Committee, the feedback from participants made it clear that a national mangrove restoration guide will be very helpful for mangrove restoration for the country. For now, there is no document available with advice, lessons learned and best practices for Sierra Leone.

“We can all see and feel the consequences of the loss of our mangrove forests. But we did not fully understand the interrelations between the mangroves, the fishes, the soil degradation and our livelihoods. Thanks to CSSL, we know now what we have to do to improve our living conditions again. We know now that protection and restoration of mangroves is one important part of it.”

Restoration Committee Member

To read and download the case study visit our website:
<https://cs-sl.org/cssl-mangrove-restoration-case-study/>



Gola Transboundary Stakeholders Sign MoU to Strengthen Protection of the Landscape

“Be it resolved, the Transboundary Technical Sub-committee agrees to collaborate with the EU-PAPFor and USAID-WABiLED funded projects for the purpose of establishing joint transboundary patrols and developing a harmonized approach for land-use for the Greater Gola Landscape consistent with the attached action plans...,” the MoU states.

The Government of Sierra Leone, through the National Protected Area Authority (NAAA) and Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), successfully organised a two-day Transboundary Technical Sub-committee meeting at Sierra Bay Hotel in Freetown on 16th and 17th August, 2023. The meeting, which was supported by the USAID-WABiLED and EU-PAPFor funded projects, aimed at developing sustainable solutions to the perennial protection challenges plaguing the Transboundary Gola Landscape.

Participants were drawn from relevant institutions in Sierra Leone, Liberia and the UK, including the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, NAAA, Forestry Development Authority (FDA), West Africa Biodiversity and Low Emissions Development (WABiLED), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the EU delegation in Sierra Leone, the Mano River Union (MRU), BirdLife International, Greater Gola Landscape community leaders, Gola Rainforest Conservation Limited by Guarantee (GRC-LG), the Society for the Conservation of Nature in Liberia (SCNL), and the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), among others.

Key among the issues discussed included the overall objectives and purpose of the Transboundary Sub-committee, building on the Peace Accord Agreement between the two countries, reviewing the implementation

status of the action plans developed in the first Technical Sub-Committee meeting in Liberia, law enforcement and implementation strategies that should support transboundary patrols, participatory land-use planning and mapping, and planning for policy action within the Gola Landscape. Furthermore, community integration and participation in law enforcement initiatives, and the need for more public education and awareness regarding the importance of transboundary cooperation were also very prominent throughout the discussions.

The stakeholders emphasized the need to consider the peace facet of the Agreement and leveraging on existing structures like the MRU to enhance transboundary-related activities, especially for facilitating joint border patrols.



CSSL Supports Minister of Environment to End Deforestation at the WAPNP

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) welcomes and supports the initiative of the new Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Mr Jiwoh Abdulai, to stop deforestation at the Western Area Peninsula National Park (WAPNP). CSSL and many other CSOs and concerned citizens have been raising serious concerns over the rapid spate of deforestation on the hills of the Western Area over a long period now. Up to date, attempts from government to stop this trend have not been strong enough, and failed due to financial gaps and/or weak commitment from all key stakeholders involved. From the Society's perspective, this is not only an issue for the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, but also for several others including the Ministers of Lands, Housing and Country Planning, Mining and Mineral Resources, Water Resources and Sanitation, and Health among others.

Like other like-minded environmental organisations, CSSL welcomes the attempt of the new Minister of Environment and Climate Change to continue with the job of his predecessor in raising awareness regarding the importance of our fresh water sources and taking the matter seriously. After his visit to the Guma Dam, the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Mr Jiwoh Abdulai said, "...the situation poses an existential threat..." and promised to escalate the matter to the Office of the Chief Minister. CSSL welcomes the initiative to also involve the other ministries mentioned above.

The WAPNP can only be saved when all ministries involved work hand in hand, when communities start to become ambassadors for nature, and when people stop buying land for construction or other business purposes in the buffer zone or even inside the national park.

What has to be done to save the Western Area Peninsula Forest?

CSSL, among other engagements, currently works with the community at Big Water to find alternatives of deforestation with them, educates our next generation through school nature clubs and is part of the Water Fund – Sierra Leone. The latter works with 14 communities around the peninsula to raise awareness about the importance of the forest, teach communities about reforestation and monitoring of planted trees and help communities in identifying demarcated points of the protected area for a sustainable protection of the forest.

“The plain reality is that, this development of deforestation for charcoal production, mining, farming and other activities will lead to a devastating future for all inhabitants of the Western Area Peninsula is known for a long time now. Even though we are in the rains now, we should not forget that the surface of Guma Dam, the most important fresh water source for the peninsula, is decreasing year by year.”

Read the whole article online:
<https://cs-sl.org/cssl-supports-minister-ending-deforestation-at-wapnp/>

Dr. Sheku Kamara, E.D. CSSL



Western Area Peninsula Forest

Our green lung and water catchment

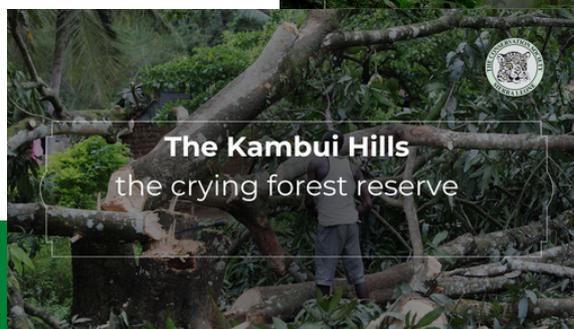
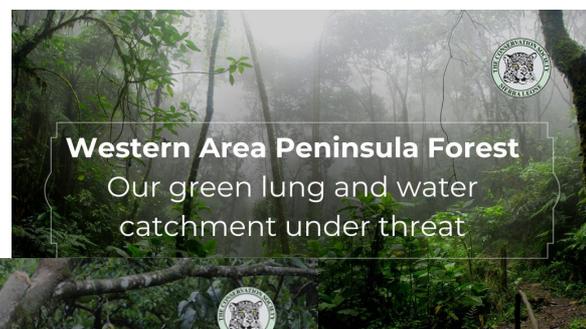
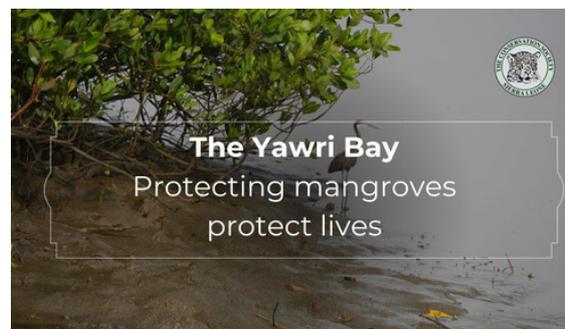
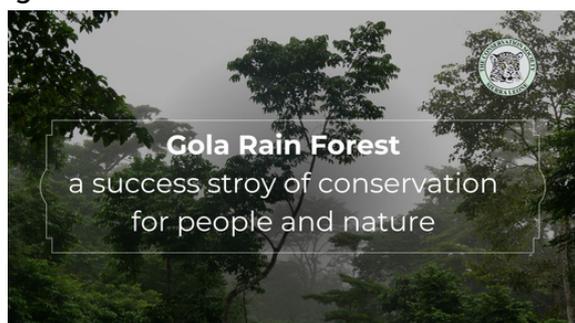
CSSL Increases Public Awareness about National Protected Sites and Reserves through Video Documentary Series: “We for Nature, Nature for Us”

Sierra Leone is rich in biodiversity, and home to some of the world’s endangered and endemic species including the West African Chimpanzee, Pigmy Hippo, the White-necked Picathartes, Emerald Starling, sea turtles and many other animals and plants which are not easily found in other parts of the world.

The environment hosting these species is however under tremendous pressure, resulting in gradual decrease in their population. Deforestation in both the marine and terrestrial environments are on the increase and the consequences are dire, including unsustainable livelihood, climate change and environmental destruction, among others.

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) is collaborating with local and national structures in different parts of the country to protect the environment for the safety and wellbeing of people and nature. In furtherance of this work, the Communication, Environmental Education and Advocacy Department of CSSL recently crisscrossed the country and documented the critical issues plaguing the protection of some of the important protected sites and reserves in Sierra Leone. In addition to the challenges, the documentary series entitled, “We for Nature, Nature for Us” also present the unique ecosystems of Sierra Leone, and some of the practical solutions that the Society and partners are currently working on to ensure environmental protection and wellbeing of people and nature.

The series, which can now be accessed on the CSSL website and YouTube channel, feature the Western Area Peninsula National Park, Yawri Bay, Gola Rainforest National Park and Kambui Hills Forest Reserve. Work is currently in progress to complete the ones on Outamba-Kilimi National Park and Lake Sonfon.



Watch all videos online:
<https://cs-sl.org/videos>

text: Abdul K. Dumbuya



The Groundnuts are Growing! Successful Livelihood Support at Big Water

Wonderful news from Big Water community! The alternative livelihoods which the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) designed together with the community are showing great development.

CSSL has been working with the Big Water community at the Western Area Peninsula for several years now. Our aim is to support the community in the wise and sustainable use of the forest which is close to their community. As many community members depend on selling firewood and charcoal burning to make their living, CSSL engaged women's groups, youth groups and other members within the community and developed alternative livelihood interventions.

CSSL especially focuses on the most vulnerable members of the community. With the women of Big Water being identified as one of these groups, a special program was designed for them that included animal husbandry and groundnut cultivation. On receiving the good news about how well the interventions were doing, the project team visited the community on 18th August, 2023 to celebrate the developments with them, while also encouraging them to do more in protecting that part of the national park.

"Two of the pigs are pregnant. That news is so good. We are so happy about it. It shows us that the program has a great future", Chair Lady, Women's Group, Big Water community.

"As you can see, the field is completely green, and the groundnut plants are growing well. We hope the weather will stay in our favour so that the harvest will support our community", another beneficiary expressed in delight.

In order to minimise over-dependence of communities on their surrounding forests ecosystem, CSSL provides them with alternative livelihood support to enhance their socio-economic well-being. Environmental education and advocacy, coupled with appropriate livelihood support can create the needed awareness, and provide incentives to communities in order to gradually lure them away from engaging in illegal mining and

deforestation. These illegal practices often bring them in conflict with the law as well as cause damage to the environment with consequences that come back to hunt them. Needs-based and properly structured livelihood support programme aimed at improving the income status of the direct beneficiaries and hence, reduce their over-dependence on the natural and mineral resources surrounding them are the only way to protect and conserve our forests.





EU-PAPFor Achieves Conservation Planning in Sierra Leone's Gola Forest

The Gola Rainforest, with a size of 35,000 hectares, is one of West Africa's remaining biodiversity reserves, which plays a critical role in regulating global climate and directly sustains the lives of millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa, and thousands of high conservation value species – the White-necked Picathartes, Pygmy Hippo, the Jentink's Duiker, and the Western Chimpanzee, among many others.

In Sierra Leone, the landscape spanning from Kenema to Pujehun districts is also a carbon store of global significance. However, deforestation and threats, including farming, logging, mining, and associated activities have increased remarkably in recent years.

Considering the inherent threats to this vital ecosystem, land management was a matter of urgency. In 2020, the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL), under the European Union (EU) - funded Support Programme for the Preservation of Forest Ecosystems in West Africa (PAPFor) launched the PAPFor Community Forest and Land Use Planning and Mapping Project. In collaboration with the communities,

the project aims to help the locals manage and protect the natural resources of the Gola Rainforest National Park and Tiwai Island priority conservation landscapes by establishing chiefdom/community forestry and land use planning that can be managed by the locals.

Land use planning is a systematic and iterative procedure implemented to create an enabling environment, for the sustainable development of land resources, to meet the needs and demands of inhabitants. It assesses the physical, socio-economic, institutional, and legal potential and constraints to optimal and sustainable use of land resources and empowers people to decide how to allocate those resources.

To date, the project has successfully engaged seven chiefdoms: Koya, Gaura, Barri, and Makpele, in Pujehun district, and Niawa, Nomo, and Tunkia in Kenema district for community forestry and two chiefdoms: Koya and Gaura, for land use mapping and planning. The mapping exercise covered all the communities within the seven chiefdoms classified as the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP) landscape areas.

You find more information about the PAPFor project on our website:

<https://cs-sl.org/project/papfor/>

“The completion of Land Use Planning for two chiefdoms with more than eight communities is a significant achievement for the communities and CSSL. Land Use Planning ensures careful utilization of community forestry in a sustainable manner, in which the communities can benefit from essential ecotourism services. It would also ensure the prioritized use of the land in a systematic manner and control logging, mining, and other activities that are harmful to the forest,”

Emunara Sowa, CSSL's Coordinator of the PAPFor Project.



Africa Climate Summit 2023 – Driving Green Growth and Climate Finance Solutions for Africa and the World

The first ever Africa Climate Summit ended on 6th September, 2023 with the adoption of the “Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change” and a call to action. The government of the Republic of Kenya in collaboration with the African Union (AU) invited representatives and heads of state of the whole continent to meet and commit to solutions to the climate crises in Africa. The declaration seeks to express what is needed from both, the global South, and the global North in terms of commitment, financial support, and global taxes as well as economic green growth to reach the global climate goals.

“The era of global warming has ended, the era of global boiling has arrived”, stated Antonio Guterres, Secretary General of the United Nations in July this year. It is not a secret that the African continent is a very small contributor to the global climate crises, but African countries are among those suffering most from the attendant consequences of such crises.

The summit started on Monday, 4th September with a high-level opening ceremony. In the previous days, representatives of key groups gathered to find answers to climate change and to formulate their expectations, commitments and demands. The African Youth Climate Assembly reminded the governments of the continent about their responsibilities thus: “We urge leaders to join hands with the youth. Your children are watching you today. We call upon you, leaders, to enable us and stand with us in this crucial mission. We want to go far, we need to go together, to save our continent and the planet.” The indigenous peoples of Africa demand inclusiveness in the planning process and implementation of renewable energy projects as many projects are planned on the land which they use as a platform to communicate with their ancestors in their traditional way of life. The Executive Secretary of UNFCCC, Simon Stiell, underscored the importance of green development and financial commitment to build resilient societies in Africa and throughout the whole world.

Green growth programs and climate action financing are key. The Africa Climate Summit aimed to reach goals in four core areas: Climate Action Financing, Green Growth Agenda for Africa, Climate Action and Economic Development and Global Capital Optimization.

Less talk, more action!

The time to act is now. We cannot wait any longer. The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone is calling on all African governments to come together in this time of uncertainties, to be open for the voices of the youth, the voices of indigenous people, the voices of scientists and the voice of the people of the continent. Let’s not end with commitments, let’s take real climate actions. Or as the slogan of environmental activists sounded during the summit: “Less talk, more action!”

Learn more about the ACS23 and the Nairobi Declaration:

<https://cs-sl.org/acs2023/>

<https://africacimatesummit.org/>



The Media: A Dependable Tool for Increased Knowledge on Oil and Gas Pollution on the Environment

"CSSL regards the media as a trusted tool to create public awareness to reduce the negative impacts of oil spills on the environment", Charles Showers, Hon President, CSSL's Board of Trustees.

Sierra Leone continues to face serious threats from the consequences of the activities of improperly regulated oil and gas business. Such threats relate to risks associated with human health, plants, animals and the marine environment from trawlers, jetties, seaports, and oil tankers. Pollution of oil products has tremendous impacts on marine life including species such as fish, seaweeds, coral reefs, crustaceans, etc. Limiting oxygen availability from floating oil, smearing of species by oil products could lead to changes in appearance or disfiguration, or even death. Species ingestion of oil and gas could also lead to death. Such substances are likely to be transferred to humans leading to severe health complications. Gas spills generally have the potential for gas flares, the fires which are detrimental to all forms of life in the marine environment (including coastlines) as well as terrestrial environment.

Fires will further raise the risks of disaster when they come in contact with already existing oil spills.

The country has registered a number of incidences of oil and gas pollution that led to massive loss of life and property, including the most recent explosion of a fuel tanker at a crowded area in Wellington - Freetown on 5th November, 2021, that caused hundreds of fatalities, injuries and destruction of millions of properties.

Experiences from oil producing countries have indicated that insufficient knowledge about oil spill management before exploitation and production will result in untold consequences on the marine environment and the lives of citizens, especially those around coastal communities. It is against this backdrop that the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) has been working collaboratively with coastal communities, state and non-state actors across the country to raise public awareness on the impacts of oil spills.

Cognizant of the pivotal role of the media in educating the public on crucial national issues including understanding the hazards of oil spills and associated consequences, CSSL sought support from the MAVA Foundation through PRCM and organised a sensitization engagement for media representatives drawn from across the country. The activity was held on 15th September, 2023 in Freetown, and was led by experts who took participants through the key issues, including hazards, effects, mitigation measures and early warning signs, effective communication, among others.

At the end of the engagement, media representatives registered strong commitment to support CSSL and government in disseminating simplified information through their respective daily media publications and programs to help in reducing the hazards of oil and gas pollution on the environment. "I really appreciate this knowledge from CSSL. I will engage with colleagues for us to dedicate a column on our newspapers for oil and gas issues...", promised Saidu Dumbuya, Senior Writer, Exclusive Newspaper.



CSSL starts nationwide vulture count

Interview with Dr. Hazell Shokello Thompson about the importance of the Hooded Vulture

The Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL) has started the nationwide vulture count. During the next weeks, you might see bird watchers in different parts of the country with their binoculars around dumpsites, markets and forest areas to observe and count vultures and other birds.

We asked Dr. Hazell Shokello Thompson, an experienced bird expert, why the vultures are important and what the goals of the vulture count are.

Why are vultures and the Hooded Vulture so special for conservation?

The Hooded Vultures in Sierra Leone are not just big brown birds in the sky, they play a really important role in the way our natural environment works and help prevent the spread of diseases. They clear up the remains of dead animals and rotting food very quickly from our environment by eating the carcasses and remains. When they do so, they prevent harmful bacteria and diseases from building up in the dead animals if they were left exposed for a long time. This prevents diseases like rabies from passing from dead dogs and other animals to humans and our livestock like cows, goats and sheep.

Where do you see the biggest threats to vultures in Sierra Leone?

One of the biggest threats to vultures in Sierra Leone has to be deforestation. Vultures make their nests in tall trees and use the same tree year after year. Because vultures feed off dead animal remains in our villages, towns and cities, they usually nest in trees not far from our main settlements. With the rapid cutting down of trees in many of our cities and our forests, for example in the Western Area Peninsula Forest near Freetown and the Kambui Hills near Kenema, I am sure deforestation is a huge threat to our vultures. In other parts of West Africa, vultures are captured for the use of their parts in traditional medicine and also for food. Casual observations suggest some of this occurs in Sierra Leone as well. The CSSL vulture count will tell us whether actions like these also big threats in Sierra Leone are.

What is your hope for the future of vultures in Sierra Leone?

Vultures are part of our national heritage as Sierra Leoneans. My hope is that we will not destroy these majestic birds that have been here before us, and which perform important services for us. I wish that they will again become as abundant in our skies as they were twenty to thirty years ago when we used their presence in the sky over certain places to indicate the locations of traditional ceremonies (e.g. "Awujoh") where large amounts of food were being prepared.

The Value of Vultures

Species
Sierra Leone is home to three vulture species: the Palm-nut Vulture, White-backed Vulture and the Hooded Vulture.
The White-backed and the Hooded Vulture are listed as critically endangered by the IUCN red list. That means these vulture species are very close to extinction in the wild.

Threats
Vulture populations have drastically declined across Africa in recent years.
In Sierra Leone this is mainly due to: urban development, agriculture and farming, poisoning, hunting and trapping, logging and wood harvesting, human intrusions in habitat.

Services
Vultures are critically important to prevent the spread of disease, regulate scavenger populations and spread nutrients across the landscape.
These services are important to keep the ecosystems stable and safeguard

Read the full interview online and download our poster about the "Value of Vultures"

<https://cs-sl.org/cssl-starts-vulture-count/>

Interview and photo: Kathrin Prinzing



The Value of Vultures

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Palm-nut Vulture
Gypohierax angolensis



White-backed Vulture
Gyps africanus



Hooded Vulture
Necrosyrtes monachus

Threats

Vulture populations have drastically declined across Africa in recent years.

In Sierra Leone this is mainly due to: urban development, agriculture and farming, poisoning, hunting and trapping, logging and wood harvesting, human intrusions in habitat.



Vulture body parts are used for traditional medicine. Actually they don't have any real medical value.

Services

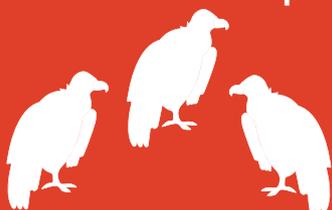
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These services are important to keep the ecosystems stable and safeguard human health and livelihoods.



Vultures dispose carcasses efficiently and fast. With their acid stomachs they can digest diseases like anthrax, rabies and tuberculosis. This helps to stop the spread of diseases.

LET'S PROTECT OUR VULTURE POPULATIONS
to protect human health, livelihoods and ecosystem services.



Healthy Vultures = Healthy Ecosystems = Healthy People

We thank all our partners for their support and help for our daily work!



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NATURE FOR US.

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