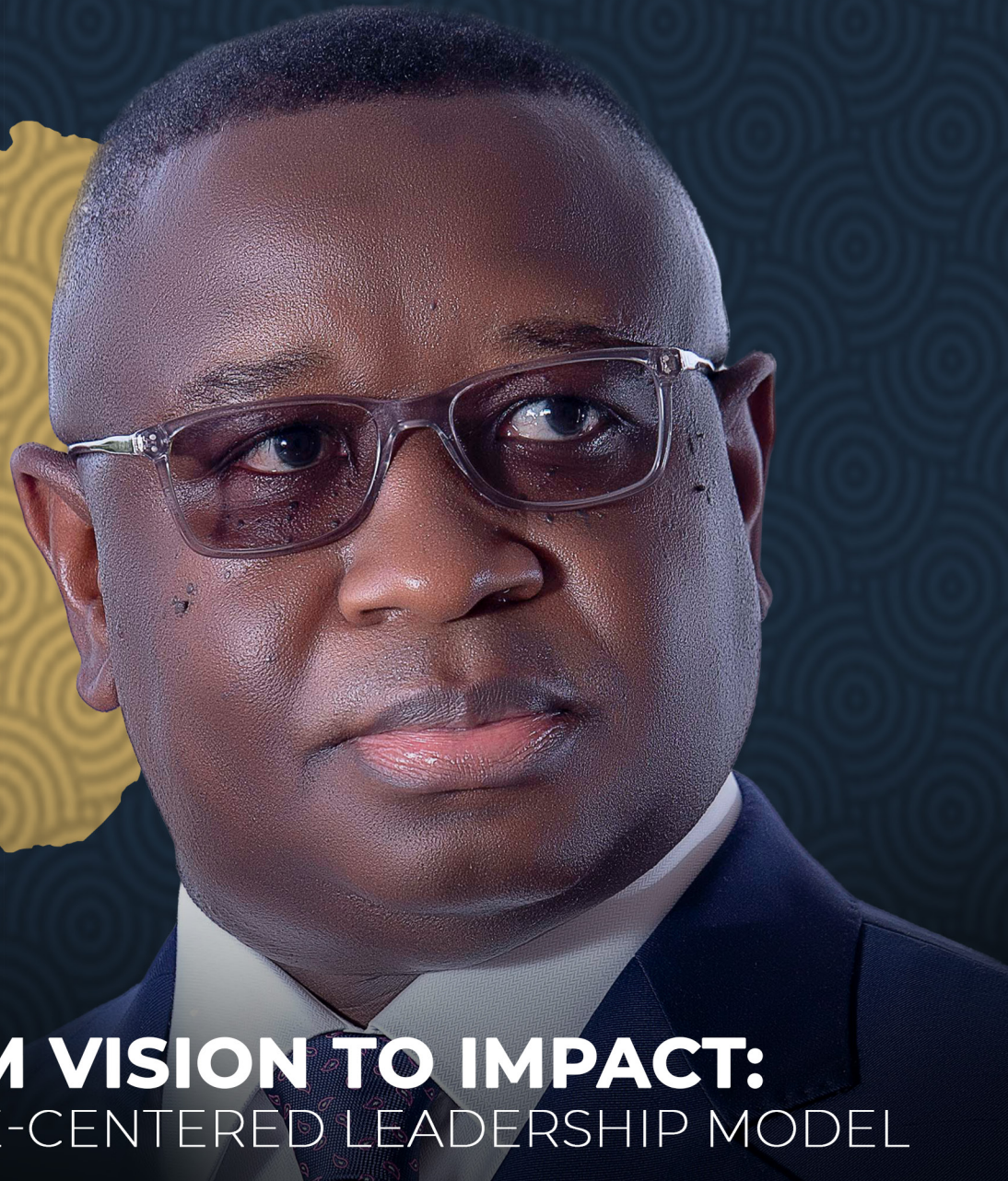




JULIUS MAADA BIO
**LEADERSHIP
COLLOQUIUM**
Final Report



FROM VISION TO IMPACT:
THE PEOPLE-CENTERED LEADERSHIP MODEL

2025 EDITION

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SIERRA LEONE



Julius Maada Bio **LEADERSHIP COLLOQUIUM** Final Report

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Executive Summary

Overview

The maiden edition of the Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium was successfully convened under the theme “From Vision to Impact: The People-Centered Leadership Model”. This landmark event brought together a distinguished gathering of thought leaders, policymakers, academics, civil society actors, the private sector, development partners, and youth representatives from across Sierra Leone and beyond.

The colloquium served as a platform for critical reflection on leadership models that drive sustainable development, enhance democratic governance, and build institutional resilience in Africa,

using Sierra Leone’s own reform experience under President Julius Maada Bio’s leadership as a key reference point.

The Colloquium was established to promote deep thinking, research-informed policy dialogue, and intergenerational exchange on leadership that is visionary, accountable, inclusive, and transformational.

This inaugural edition marked a milestone in institutionalizing a new tradition of national and continental discourse on leadership, anchored in African realities and aspirations.



“A good chief is like a forest: everyone can go there and get something”



His Excellency
Julius Maada Bio
President, Sierra Leone

Date
12th May 2025

Venue
Bintumani Conference Centre,
Freetown, Sierra Leone

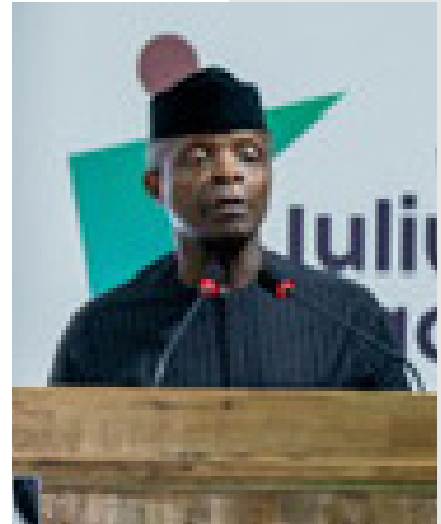
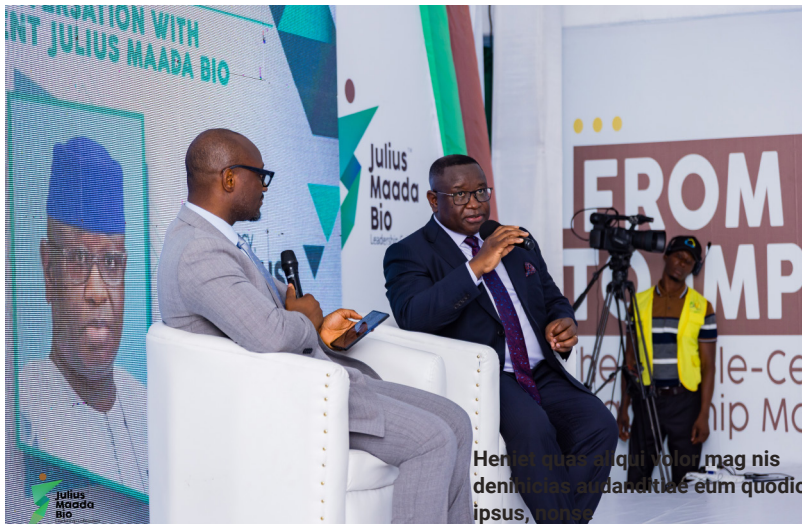
Event Name
Julius Maada Bio
Leadership Colloquium

From Insight to Impact:

Highlights from the Leadership Colloquium

The colloquium featured keynote addresses, high-level panel discussions, fireside chats, and interactive plenaries.

Executive Summary



Key highlights included:

Presidential Keynote Address:

H.E. President Julius Maada Bio delivered an inspiring keynote, reflecting on his journey from a military leader, to a democratically elected leader and the values that guide his leadership, and the lessons from Sierra Leone's recent democratic and development gains.

Panel on Leadership for National Development:

This conversation delved deeply into the crucial areas of governance, the transformation of economies, and the advancement of social initiatives. The speakers explored how effective leadership that prioritizes the needs and perspectives of individuals can drive meaningful changes in society, enhance economic growth, and foster inclusive governance practices.

Guest Speaker's Address:

The Guest Speaker for this event was the former Vice President of Nigeria, who spoke on the need for people to remain at the heart of government policies and programs, citing that the best government are the ones that draw their acceptance and legitimacy from the people

Special Moderated Session with the President:

In this no-holds-bared session with President Julius Maada Bio, the guests had a rare insight into his leadership philosophy,



Summary and Next Steps

Key Recommendations:

1. Institutionalization of the Colloquium: Establish the Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium as an annual, multi-stakeholder forum to promote leadership excellence and African solutions to development challenges.

2. Leadership Development Framework: Develop a national leadership development strategy that includes mentorship, civic education, and values-based training targeting youth and emerging leaders.

3. Research and Knowledge Hub: Establish a research centre or think tank under the Colloquium to generate policy-relevant knowledge on leadership, governance, and institutional transformation.

4. Partnerships for Impact: Strengthen collaboration with regional institutions, universities, and international development partners to amplify the Colloquium's reach and impact.

5. Monitoring and Learning: Implement a robust monitoring and learning mechanism to track the implementation of recommendations from each edition of the Colloquium and inform future agendas.

Executive Summary



Next Steps

- Launch of a Leadership Fellowship Programme in honour of President Bio's legacy to nurture ethical and visionary leaders across sectors.
- Publication of the Colloquium Proceedings and Policy Briefs to disseminate key insights and recommendations.
- Planning and resource mobilization for the second edition of the Colloquium, with a proposed focus on Gender Equity and Equality

Building Lasting Legacies:

Introduction to The Julius Maada Bio Colloquium

“

The rationale for the colloquium stemmed from the recognition that sustainable national transformation requires not only political will and policy action, but also a sustained intellectual engagement with the values, ideas, and leadership ethos that inform governance choices.

”

The Julius Maada Bio Colloquium was conceived as a high-level platform for critical reflection, strategic dialogue, and knowledge exchange on the legacy, leadership philosophy, and national development vision of His Excellency Brigadier (Retired) Dr. Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. Convened in the spirit of intellectual rigor and national introspection, the colloquium brought together a diverse cross-section of stakeholders—including academics, policymakers, development partners, youth leaders, civil society actors, and international observers—to explore the transformative leadership principles that have guided President Bio’s

tenure and to consider their long-term implications for democratic governance, inclusive development, and nation-building in Sierra Leone and beyond.

Background and Rationale

The Julius Maada Bio Colloquium was convened at a critical juncture in Sierra Leone’s democratic journey—a time marked by the urgent need to consolidate democratic gains, deepen national cohesion, and accelerate progress toward human capital development, innovation, and institutional reform. President Bio’s leadership has been defined by a deep commitment to education, good governance, and social justice—principles rooted in his personal story and tested through decades of public service, including a return to power through democratic means after initially serving as military Head of State in 1996.

The rationale for the colloquium stemmed from the recognition that sustainable national transformation requires not only political will and policy action, but also a sustained intellectual engagement with the values, ideas, and leadership ethos that inform governance choices. The colloquium thus served both as a retrospective of President Bio’s governance legacy and as a prospective space for thought leadership, policy innovation, and the articulation of pathways for future generations.





Legacy and Leadership Philosophy of President Julius Maada Bio

President Julius Maada Bio’s leadership philosophy is anchored in the belief that education is the cornerstone of sustainable development. His flagship Free Quality School Education initiative has expanded access to learning for millions of children, positioning Sierra Leone as a model for human capital investment in Africa. His tenure has also been marked by bold reforms in public financial management, the establishment of key accountability institutions, and a firm stance against corruption.

President Bio’s legacy is further shaped by his unwavering commitment to democratic principles, peacebuilding, and inclusive governance. From his pivotal role in organizing Sierra Leone’s first democratic elections in 1996 to his championing of gender equality, digital governance, and regional cooperation, he has consistently demonstrated a forward-looking vision rooted in service, patriotism, and national dignity.

The Julius Maada Bio Colloquium thus offered an opportunity not only to reflect on his contributions to Sierra Leone’s governance architecture, but also to distill the enduring lessons of his leadership—lessons that can inspire current and future leaders to build a more just, educated, and resilient society.

Introduction



Building the Future we Desire:

Strategic Pathways of the Colloquium

Vision: To shape a new generation of transformative, values-driven leaders inspired by the legacy and leadership ethos of President Julius Maada Bio—anchored in integrity, inclusive governance, innovation, and Pan-African solidarity.

Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium

Strategic Goals

1. Strengthen Democratic Governance and Leadership Capacity

Goal: Develop and sustain a pipeline of ethical, accountable, and visionary leaders across sectors who are committed to democratic governance, national unity, and public service.

Alignment:

- **National Development Plan (NDP):** Pillar 1 – Human Capital Development

- **AU Agenda 2063:** Aspiration 3 – An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law

Specific Objectives:

- Establish a leadership training and mentorship platform targeting youth, women, and emerging professionals.
- Promote civic education and democratic values at the grassroots level.
- Facilitate dialogues on governance reform, institutional resilience, and public accountability.

2. Promote Inclusive Socioeconomic Transformation

Goal: Support national and regional aspirations for inclusive economic growth through innovation, entrepreneurship, and investment in human capital.

Alignment:

- **Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2024–2030:** Pillar 2 – Diversifying the Economy

- **ECOWAS Vision 2050: Strategic Objective 3** – Inclusive and Sustainable Development

Specific Objectives:

- Convene thought leadership on economic diversification, particularly in agriculture, energy, and digital innovation.
- Support policy dialogue around youth employment, entrepreneurship, and skills development.
- Foster public-private sector collaboration on sustainable economic policies and projects.

3. Advance Peacebuilding, National Cohesion and Regional Stability

Goal: Contribute to a culture of peace, tolerance, and national healing through inclusive dialogues, research, and advocacy.

Alignment:

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Recommendations**

- **AU Silencing the Guns Initiative**
- **UN Sustainable Development Goal 16** – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

Specific Objectives:

- Host annual peace forums that bring together policymakers, traditional leaders, youth, and civil society.
- Support research and documentation of Sierra Leone’s post-conflict peacebuilding and reconciliation journey.
- Build alliances with regional peace and security institutions to promote stability and cooperation.

4. Champion Human Capital Development and Educational Reform

Goal: Strengthen the foundations for lifelong learning, research, and innovation in line with President Bio’s flagship Free Quality Education policy.

Alignment:

- **NDP Pillar 1** – Human Capital Development
- **Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016–2025**

Specific Objectives:

- Showcase best practices and lessons learned from Sierra Leone’s educational reforms.
- Partner with academic institutions and think tanks to develop leadership curricula and scholarship programs.
- Support girl-child education and inclusive learning initiatives for marginalized groups.

5. Institutionalize the Legacy and Values of Transformational Leadership

Goal: Institutionalize the Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium as a platform for legacy-building, reflection, and forward-thinking leadership in Africa.

Alignment:

- **AU Agenda 2063:** Aspiration 6 – An Africa whose development is people-driven

- **Sierra Leone’s National History and Heritage Policy**

Specific Objectives:

- Establish a permanent Colloquium Secretariat and Leadership Institute.
- Develop publications, documentaries, and digital archives that reflect President Bio’s leadership philosophy and impact.
- Build partnerships with continental and global institutions committed to leadership excellence.

Reflections on Transformative Governance:

Welcome Remarks by the Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr Juldeh Jalloh

Keynote Addresses and Presentations



“ President Bio has established a strong foundation, and as a nation, we must build upon it to ensure no Sierra Leonean is left behind ”

The Vice President of Sierra Leone, Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, gave an inspiring speech at the Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium, emphasizing the event’s theme: “From Vision to Impact: The People-Centered Leadership Model.” In his remarks, the Vice President praised President Bio for his steadfast dedication to inclusive governance and transformative leadership. He highlighted the need for continuity, commending the president’s successes in education, healthcare, and democratic strengthening. “Today, we are not merely reflecting on leadership, we are observing it in practice,” “President Bio has established a strong foundation, and as a nation, we must build upon it to ensure no Sierra Leonean is left behind,” he said.

He encouraged citizens and leaders alike to stay to the course, highlighting that the strides made under the current administration are proof of what visionary, people-first leadership can accomplish. The Vice President’s remarks received resounding applause, setting a powerful tone for the rest of the day’s discussions.

He expressed great honour at hosting Professor Osinbajo, whom he described as an esteemed guest of honour. He lauded President Bio’s unique leadership style, particularly his deep commitment to human capital development, which he said has positively impacted the lives of countless Sierra Leoneans, especially young people. “President Bio’s exemplary leadership reflects his enduring values and beliefs in investing in citizens. His legacy is one of empowerment and opportunity, especially for the many young men and women he has allowed to serve this country,” he ended.

X-Raying the Legacy of People-Centered Leadership:

An Address by the Guest Speaker Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, Former Vice President of Nigeria



His Excellency, the former Vice President of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, presented an impactful speech that addressed several crucial challenges facing Africa today. He commenced by commending Sierra Leone's Free Quality Education Program, describing it as a smart and transformative investment in the nation's future. He emphasized that the way a nation treats its most vulnerable citizens reflects its greatness.

Prof. Osinbajo also highlighted the importance of robust and effective leadership, insisting that sound policies are meaningless if

they are not executed. He gave an analogy of two African nations that aimed to establish factories to compete with inexpensive Chinese goods. After four years, one nation had successfully constructed four new factories, while the other had failed to build any. He said that true success stems from practical implementation and deliberate governance.

He cautioned against the escalating terrorism in the Sahel region, labeling it a grave threat to Africa's peace and progress. Additionally, he discussed the recent Gen Z strike in Kenya, illustrating how young people throughout Africa are voicing their opinions and deserve to be heard.

The former Vice President also mentioned Nigeria's locally-sourced school feeding initiative, which not only provides jobs for local farmers but also helps children remain in school with complimentary meals. He proposed that other African nations could benefit from this model.

He pointed out that President Bio's Free Quality Education Program, which is based on the ideas of fairness and access, is a defining feature of democratic administration. He also praised other historic initiatives implemented by the Bio government, such as the enactment of the Gender Empowerment Act and the 30% quota for women in governance, calling them "game-changing decisions that will shape the future of Sierra Leone."

He said that President Bio's government has set a powerful example of taking decisive action to invest in human capital development and reduce the gender gap in governance. "We recognize you today as a leader who leads with intention and centers national advancement on his people."

He concluded by urging African governments to exert effort in transforming third-world nations into first-world countries by generating employment, managing natural resources wisely, and prioritizing people, citing Sierra Leone as an example in this transformative drive. His address received enthusiastic applause and inspired many to take purposeful action.

Building a Nation Together:

The Role of Servant Leadership in Sierra Leone's Future

His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Dr. Julius Maada Bio, in his keynote address on the theme "From Vision to Impact" - The People-Centered Leadership Model, said that in addition to being a significant occasion, he views birthdays as holy times for introspection and rejuvenation.

Keynote Addresses and Presentations



**Keynote Address
by the President
of the Republic
of Sierra Leone,
Julius Maada Bio**

**Julius Maada Bio
Leadership Colloquium**

The President reflected on his early experiences as a young man growing up the ladder of leadership that shaped his beliefs, the clear connections between duty and hope that motivate his work, and the call to service that motivates each individual to transform their vision into impact.

He reflected on how his path to public office was shaped by the people around him, recalling his time as a young soldier during one of Sierra Leone's darkest periods. He explained that leadership often begins in crisis, but it must endure beyond it. Every negotiation, conversation,

and experience taught him the key lesson that leadership is not defined by rank or title, but by the trust and bond between those who lead and those they serve.

He shared that his first leadership lessons came from his family, particularly his late mother, who demonstrated resilience, faith, and strong values in raising the family after his father's passing. He also highlighted his late elder sister's sacrifice for his education, teaching him that leadership often starts in the quiet acts of love and sacrifice that happen within families and communities.

He emphasized that leadership is not confined to traditional positions of power but exists in everyday settings—whether in classrooms, markets, or hospitals. He paid tribute to the women of Sierra Leone, who, despite often being unrecognized, have played a pivotal role in the nation's progress. He acknowledged that leadership is shaped through trials, preparation, and innovation, and that true leadership is reflected in compassion, justice, and courage.

President Bio discussed the role of humility in leadership, recognizing that it tempers ambition and helps leaders understand their limitations. He emphasized the importance of accountability, stating that leadership is about serving the people and fulfilling the promises made to them. He reflected on his journey, noting that leadership is a form of stewardship, whether in his roles as a father, husband, soldier, teacher, businessman, or president.

He stressed that leadership begins in humble places, such as the work of nurses, miners, and mothers, who serve without the need for titles or recognition. True influence, he said, is rooted

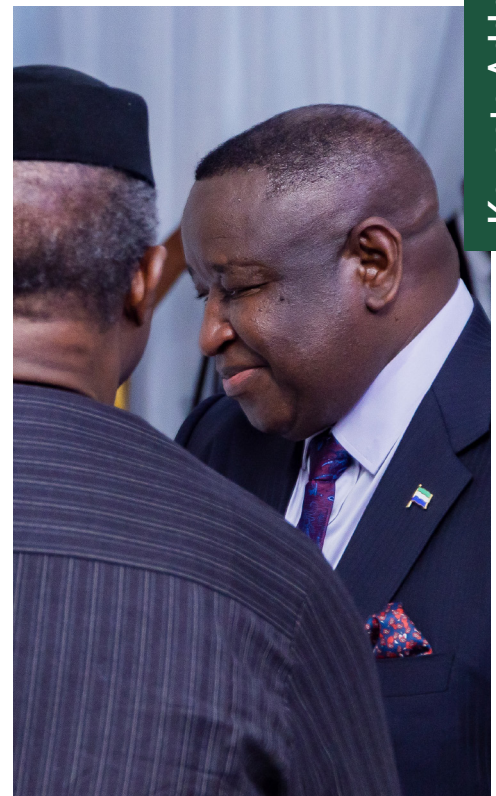
in selfless service. Education, in particular, was highlighted as a key element in empowering individuals and building a brighter future. He reflected on his administration's investments in human capital, including the introduction of free quality education and the revitalization of technical and vocational training, emphasizing that knowledge is the most powerful weapon against poverty and ignorance.

The President also expressed his belief that faith plays a central role in leadership. Quoting Professor Yemi Osinbajo's words from 2017, he shared that it is the power and wisdom of God that can change nations, not the wisdom of man. He mentioned that humility, forgiveness, and accountability are essential components of leadership, as they allow leaders to grow and serve their people more effectively.

He emphasized the importance of democracy, which he described as more than just the casting of ballots, but a system of checks and balances, freedom of expression, and an independent judiciary. He mentioned the importance of strong institutions that protect the rights and liberties of citizens and stressed that empowering women is a vital part of nation-building. He asserted that women's leadership is a right that should be affirmed, not a concession to be granted.

He ended by acknowledging the deep divisions in Sierra Leone and reflected on his own experiences, stating that true leadership requires open dialogue and the courage to reconcile differences, noting that while achieving unity is a slow and difficult process, progress has been made, and the nation has come far.

“ Every negotiation, conversation, and experience taught me the key lesson that leadership is not defined by rank or title, but by the trust and bond between those who lead and those they serve. ”



Leading with Purpose:

A panel discussion on Governance, Growth and Grassroots Development

Panel Discussions and Key Interventions

Theme:
Leadership for National Development

The dynamic panel discussion captured the theme Leadership For National Development.

Sierra Leone's Chief Minister, Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, highlighted the unwavering dedication of President Julius Maada Bio towards enhancing the educational landscape in Sierra Leone. He pointed out that during President Bio's tenure, more than 1,500 classrooms have been constructed as part of initiatives designed to fortify the Free Quality Education program. This significant investment in education aims to provide better learning facilities for students across the nation.

The Minister of Finance, Sheku Ahmed Fantamadi Bangura, outlined pivotal financial strategies designed to promote sustainability and foster growth within the nation. He emphasized the importance

of implementing people-centered development plans that not only aim for economic advancement but also prioritize the welfare and improvement of lives for the citizens of Sierra Leone.

The Chief Executive Officer for the Africa Young Voices Media Empire and Council Member for the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, Anthony Navo, expressed his enthusiasm for the industrial growth in Sierra Leone. He elaborated on the country's impressive strides toward self-sufficiency, noting that Sierra Leone is now increasingly producing goods locally, which is a marked shift from its historical dependence on imports. This progress, he attributed to the strategic policies implemented under President Bio's administration, which prioritize local production and industrialization



Shaping a Nation, Empowering a Generation:

Special Moderated Session with His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio



During a question-and-answer session with President Julius Maada Bio, he was asked about his transition from military to democratic leadership, as well as his focus on human capital development.

In response, the President shared his belief that his path was divinely guided. He humorously mentioned that had he pursued his initial ambition of becoming a reverend father, he wouldn't have been elected president, and Sierra Leone would have missed out on him as President. He explained that leadership is ingrained in his training, both in the military and at the "BO School" in Sierra Leone, which was dedicated to developing

future leaders. The President emphasized that the military instilled in him the leadership skills needed for democracy, including calmness in difficult situations, an essential trait for any leader. He expressed that while democracy was not always prevalent, he has been committed to fostering it, including ending press restrictions, abolishing the death penalty, and initiating democratic reforms.

On the topic of human capital development, the President explained that his administration has prioritized education, healthcare, and food security to ensure that Sierra Leoneans are prepared for the future. He explained that investing in people through education is the best way to develop the nation, especially in the face of rapid global changes, including the rise of AI. The President also discussed the importance of addressing food insecurity, providing access to education, and removing financial barriers, such as funding transition exams for students.

Lastly, he elaborated on his holistic approach to development, which he called the "feed the mind, feed the stomach, and feed the body" philosophy. He shared that when individuals are educated, well-fed, and healthy, they are empowered to succeed and contribute to the nation's growth. This comprehensive approach ensures that people have the tools they need to thrive, both locally and globally.

On the topic of where he sees Sierra Leone and Africa in the next ten years.

“ On the topic of human capital development, the President explained that his administration has prioritized education, healthcare, and food security to ensure that Sierra Leoneans are prepared for the future ”

He responded by expressing his vision for Sierra Leone as a nation that consolidates its position globally. He highlighted the country's ambition to diversify its economy to foster sustainable economic growth and job creation for its young population. The President acknowledged that while progress is slow, he is focused on consolidating Sierra Leone's democratic gains, promoting social cohesion, and uniting the nation.

The President pointed out that despite Sierra Leone's past, especially its 11-year civil war, the country is now more peaceful than many others, emphasizing that the global image of Sierra Leone is shifting, with the country now being recognized for achievements in education, health, anti-corruption efforts, and press freedom. He noted that Sierra Leone's impressive reduction in maternal mortality and its progress in anti-corruption were being internationally recognized, particularly by organizations like the World Health Organization (WHO).

Reflecting on the country's international standing, he mentioned Sierra Leone's success in presiding over the United Nations Security Council, a significant accomplishment that reflects the administration's efforts to improve the country's global reputation. The President also highlighted women's empowerment, noting that Sierra Leone's progress in this area is unparalleled in comparison to other countries.

The President then addressed some of his bold leadership decisions, including the abolition of the death penalty, despite opposition and the potential for criticism. He described these steps as essential for protecting human dignity and building stronger institutions. His commitment to human rights was further demonstrated by his actions in removing restrictions on press freedom and promoting reconciliation through the implementation of recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

President Bio concluded that his administration has laid a solid foundation for Sierra Leone's future. While acknowledging that the country still faces many challenges, he stressed that it is up to the next generation of leaders to build upon this foundation for which he urged Sierra Leoneans to make a wise, dispassionate decision when choosing the country's next leader, emphasizing that the choice should be made with the best interests of the people, especially those at the bottom of the social pyramid, in mind.



Photos Speak



Major Themes and Emerging Issues



Cross-Cutting Themes

1. Human Capital Development as a Cornerstone for National Transformation

Emphasis on quality education, health, and youth empowerment as long-term investments for sustainable development.

2. Leadership for Inclusive Governance

Focus on ethical, visionary, and people-centered leadership to promote national cohesion and participatory democracy.

3. Peace, Security, and Democratic Resilience

Dialogue on post-conflict peacebuilding, managing political transitions, and strengthening institutions for democratic governance.

4. Harnessing Technology and Innovation

Technology as a tool for improving governance, service delivery, and economic diversification.

5. Pan-African Solidarity and South-South Cooperation

Advocating for African solutions to African challenges and fostering regional integration and solidarity.



Innovative Ideas and Critical Debates

1. Reimagining African Leadership for the 21st Century

Debates around what constitutes transformational leadership in Africa's current geopolitical and socio-economic context.

2. Decolonizing Knowledge and Leadership Practices

Challenging Eurocentric models and proposing Afrocentric frameworks rooted in local realities, values, and wisdom.

3. Youth as Drivers of Change

Recognition of the youth demographic dividend and the need for leadership spaces, mentorship, and policy influence.

4. Climate-Smart Leadership and the Green Transition

Conversations around how leadership must respond to climate change with urgency, innovation, and justice.

5. The Role of Women in Transformational Leadership

Advocacy for gender parity in leadership and policy-making spaces; confronting structural barriers to women's advancement.



Policy and Leadership Implications

1. Leadership Development as National Policy Priority

Recommendations for leadership academies, civic education programs, and mentorship pipelines across all sectors.

2. Embedding Ethical Governance in Public Institutions

Proposals for integrity frameworks, performance accountability systems, and civic monitoring of leaders.

3. Mainstreaming Technology in Public Sector Reform

Institutional reforms to embed digital governance, e-participation, and data-driven decision-making.

4. Strategic Partnerships for Sustainable Development

Emphasis on aligning domestic development priorities with international support and investment in locally led solutions.

5. Investing in Peace Architecture and National Dialogue Mechanisms

Strengthening platforms for conflict prevention, inclusive dialogue, and national reconciliation.

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

01 People-Centred Leadership:
President Bio emphasized that effective leadership prioritizes the well-being of citizens over positional authority, advocating for governance characterized by trust, humility, and service.

02 National Unity and Social Cohesion:
A collective call was made to transcend ethnic, religious, and political divisions, fostering a unified national identity.

03 Education as a Catalyst for Development:
Reaffirming the government's dedication to free, quality education, President Bio highlighted its role in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable growth.

04 Inclusive Governance:
The colloquium underscored the importance of involving diverse stakeholders—including youth, women, and marginalized communities—in decision-making processes to ensure comprehensive national development.



Recommendations for Stakeholders

Government:

- Institutionalize people-centred leadership principles across all levels of governance.
- Enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms to build public trust.
- Invest in human capital development, focusing on education and healthcare.

Civil Society:

- Actively engage in policy dialogues to represent community interests.
- Monitor and evaluate government initiatives, providing constructive feedback.
- Promote civic education to empower citizens to participate meaningfully in governance.

Academia:

- Conduct research on effective leadership models and governance practices.
- Develop curricula that instil values of ethical leadership and civic responsibility.
- Collaborate with government and civil society to inform evidence-based policy-making.



Immediate and Long-Term Action Areas

Immediate Actions:

- Launch nationwide campaigns to promote the principles of people-centred leadership.
- Establish forums for continuous dialogue among government, civil society, and academia.
- Implement pilot projects that exemplify inclusive and empathetic governance.

Long-Term Strategies:

- Integrate people-centred leadership training into public service programs.
- Develop monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of leadership initiatives.
- Foster regional and international partnerships to share best practices and resources.



Participation and Stakeholder Engagement

Attendance Summary and Analysis: President Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium

Overview

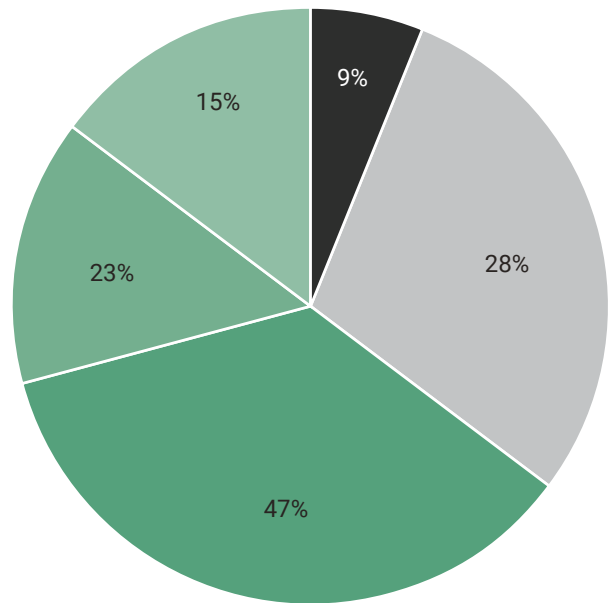
The President Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium was successfully convened on 12th May 2025 at Bintumani Conference Centre, Freetown, Sierra Leone, under the theme: From Vision to Impact: The People-Centered Leadership Model. The event brought together a cross-section of national and international stakeholders, reflecting a diverse mix of government officials, policy makers, development partners, academia, civil society, private sector representatives, youth leaders, and members of the diplomatic corps.

Key Highlights of Attendance

- **High-Level Representation:** The colloquium was graced by the presence of His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio, senior members of Cabinet, heads of diplomatic missions, and UN agency representatives.
- **Youth Engagement:** A significant portion of the audience comprised dynamic youth leaders and students, demonstrating the colloquium’s relevance to the next generation of Sierra Leone’s leadership.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** The gender balance among participants was encouraging, with 56% female participation.
- **Regional representation** was also notable, with attendees from Nigeria and Ghana.

Analysis of Attendance Impact

- **Cross-Sector Dialogue:** The broad representation facilitated meaningful cross-sector discussions, promoting synergies across governance, education, innovation, and leadership development.
- **Networking and Partnerships:** The colloquium served as a fertile ground for networking, leading to new partnerships and collaborative opportunities for national development.
- **Visibility and Engagement:** The event garnered wide media coverage and robust social media engagement, with hashtags such as #JMBLeadershipcolloquium; #Maadabiocolloquium trending during the colloquium. Estimated online reach exceeded 600,000, amplifying key messages nationwide and beyond.
- **Actionable Feedback:** Participants offered constructive feedback during plenary, which will inform future leadership initiatives and policy formulation.



Engagements

- Government Officials & Ministries
- Development Partners & Diplomats
- Academia & Researchers
- Civil Society & NGOs
- Private Sector Representatives
- Youth & Student Leaders
- Media Representatives

376 Total Number of Attendees

Media Coverage and Public Engagement

Media Coverage Overview

a. Traditional Media (TV, Radio, Print)

- National Broadcasters (e.g., SLBC, AYV, Star TV) provided live coverage of the opening and keynote sessions.
- Leading newspapers such as Awoko, Concord Times, and Standard Times published editorials and post-event analyses, focusing on the leadership style and vision of President Bio.

• Coverage emphasized:

- President Bio's commitment to human capital development.
- The significance of youth empowerment, governance, and digital innovation.
- Sierra Leone's role in shaping leadership discourse in Africa.

b. Online and Digital Media

- Online platforms like The Sierraloaded, Politico SL, and The Calabash Newspaper published real-time updates and post-event summaries.
- Articles were widely shared across digital news outlets and generated commentary around the colloquium's outcomes and key speeches.

Social Media Engagement

a. Platforms Monitored

- Twitter (X), Facebook, Instagram, YouTube,

b. Key Hashtags and Mentions

- Trending Hashtags: #JMBColloquium2025, #LeadershipMatters, #TransformAfrica, #BioLegacy
- The event trended locally on Twitter during peak sessions.

c. Influencer Engagement

- Influential voices including civil society leaders, youth advocates, and regional political analysts amplified key moments.
- Verified accounts from ECOWAS, AU Youth Envoy, and other African political thought leaders commented positively on the themes discussed.

d. Engagement Metrics

- Estimated reach: Over 2 million impressions across platforms.
- Facebook Live and YouTube streams of the keynote and panel discussions recorded high viewership

(50,000+ cumulative views) within 48 hours.

Most engaged posts featured:

- President Bio's keynote speech.
- Former Vice President Osinbajo's speech
- Special Moderated Session with President Bio
- Quotes on accountability, education, and peacebuilding.

Public Sentiment Analysis

a. Tone of Coverage

- Overwhelmingly positive sentiment highlighting the visionary leadership of President Bio.
- Emphasis on his legacy in education reform, peacebuilding, and digital governance.

Constructive criticism focused on:

- The need for follow-up mechanisms and actionable policy roadmaps.
- Calls for broader regional inclusion in future events.

b. Audience Segments

- Youth engagement was particularly strong, with many young professionals and students expressing inspiration.
- Diaspora audiences lauded the international relevance of the colloquium and called for it to be sustained

Key Highlights from Public Commentary

- "A masterclass in visionary leadership!"
- "President Bio continues to position Sierra Leone as a thought leader in Africa."
- "More colloquia like this are needed to groom future leaders."
- "What next after the talk? Let's see follow-through."

Recommendations for Future Engagements

- Broaden livestream accessibility with multilingual interpretation to attract continental audiences.
- Leverage digital town halls post-event to continue the conversation and gather actionable feedback.
- Partner with universities and youth-led platforms for localized dissemination and engagement.
- Publish a colloquium communiqué or digital report summarizing key outcomes and next steps.



Colloquium Conclusion

- The Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium debuted as a vital platform for reflective dialogue, thought leadership, and the exchange of transformative ideas.
- As participants engaged deeply on issues of governance, innovation, youth empowerment, and sustainable development, the Colloquium fostered renewed commitment to visionary and inclusive leadership in Sierra Leone and across the continent.
- The insights and recommendations generated will serve as a valuable compass for future policy direction and institutional growth.
- As the nation continues to advance on its development journey, the legacy of this Colloquium will resonate in its drive for excellence, accountability, and people-centered progress.





The Julius Maada Bio **LEADERSHIP COLLOQUIUM**

AGENDA

9:00 AM –
10:00 AM

Registration, Networking & Welcome Tea

- Arrival of Guests and Participants
- Registration and Welcome Refreshments

10:00 AM –
10:20 AM

Opening Ceremony

- National Anthem and Opening Prayer
- Welcome Remarks by
> Dr Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, the Honourable Vice President, Republic of Sierra Leone

10:20 AM –
10:30 AM

Video Documentary

Dr Julius Maada Bio – From Cradle to Greatness

10:30 AM –
10:45 AM

Speech by the Guest Speaker

His Excellency Dr Yemi Osinbajo,
Former Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

10:45 AM –
11:15 AM

Panel Session: Leadership for National Development

Moderator:

- Josephine Kamara, Director General, Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, SLBC

Panellists:

- Dr David Sengeh, Chief Minister, Republic of Sierra Leone
- Sheku Ahmed Fantamadi Bangura, Minister of Finance, Republic of Sierra Leone
- Anthony Navo Jr. Chief Executive Officer, African Young Voices (AYV) Media Group, Council Member Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce, 2018–2024

Session Focus: Governance, Economic Transformation, and Social Progress

11:15 AM –
11:25 AM

Cultural Dance & Display

11:25 AM –
11:40 AM

Fireside Chat: Education, Innovation, and the Future

Fire Side Chat with:

- Ashish Thakkar, Founder, Mara Group, and Y9

Moderator:

- Salima Monorma Bah, Minister of Communication, Technology and Innovation, Republic of Sierra Leone

Session Focus: Digital Transformation, Education, and Youth Empowerment

11:40 AM –
12:00 PM

Keynote Address

- His Excellency, Dr Julius Maada Bio,
President, Republic of Sierra Leone

12:00 PM –
12:20 PM

Special Session: A Conversation with President Julius Maada Bio

A Special Moderated Discussion/Conversation

Moderator:

- Kingsley Okeke,
Brand and Communication Strategist

Session Focus: Leadership Philosophy and Vision for Sierra Leone

12:20 PM –
1:00 PM

Closing Ceremony

> Good Will Messages

> Cutting of Cake

> Toast

- By: Dr Fatima Bio, Honourable First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone

> Vote of Thanks

By: Timothy Kabba, Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Sierra Leone

> The National Anthem

> Group Photo

1:00 PM –
1:20 PM

Lunch is served

2:00 PM –
2:30 PM

End of Programme and Departures

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

By His Excellency Dr Julius Maada Bio President of The Republic of Sierra Leone at the Inaugural Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium

MAY 12, 2025 FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

Speeches

I. OPENING REMARKS

1. Esteemed Guests, Thought Leaders, and Fellow Citizens of Sierra Leone, I welcome you to our first Leadership Colloquium with deep gratitude.

2. As we gather today to explore the principles of effective leadership and governance, I am also conscious that this date — May 12, 2025 — marks my sixty-first year of life.

3. In the relentless service of our nation, personal milestones can pass almost unnoticed.

4. However, I have come to view birthdays not just as markers of time, but as sacred moments in life's continuous journey; moments when we pause, reflect on lessons learned, and look forward to new horizons.

5. Today, I want to reflect on the formative experiences that have shaped my beliefs, the strong connections of duty and hope that motivate our work, and the call to service that encourages each of us to turn our vision into a lasting impact for the people we serve.

II. FROM SOLDIER TO STATESMAN: A JOURNEY SHAPED BY THE PEOPLE

6. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, my path to public office was fully shaped by the people.

7. As a young soldier answering the call to duty during one of the darkest chapters in our nation's history, I learned that leadership might begin in crisis, but it must endure beyond it.

8. Every negotiation with political and military leaders, and every conversation with concerned civilians, taught me one immutable truth: leadership is not conferred by rank or title, but by the bond of trust between those who lead and those they serve.

9. My encounters with farmers in the provinces, market women in Freetown's bustling stalls, and teachers in remote classrooms shaped my understanding of governance as a profound responsibility toward human dignity.

III. THE FAMILY AS THE CRADLE OF LEADERSHIP

10. However, before any uniform or office, my first lessons in leadership were learned at home.

11. The family is the foundation in which our earliest ideals are formed.

12. There is no single definition of family, nor is leadership tethered to age, gender, or social status.

13. Leadership, I discovered, is everywhere leaders choose to serve.

14. My mother, of blessed memory, was resilient, God-fearing, and unyielding in her values.

15. She steered our household through hardships after my father's early passing.

16. Through her example of honesty, hard work, and unshakeable faith, she taught me that true authority grows from sacrifice and trust.

17. My late elder sister Agnes also exemplified leadership; her sacrifice of personal comfort to ensure my education remains one of my greatest privileges.

18. From them, I learned that the foundations of leadership do not rest in public office but in the quiet acts of love and courage that uphold families and communities.

19. They taught me how leadership flourishes outside traditional corridors of power.

20. In classrooms and fields, in marketplaces and hospital wards, women across Sierra Leone have risen as architects of progress, often without recognition or reward.

21. Their resilience reminds us that nation-building demands the inclusion of women's wisdom, their visions, and their voices.

IV. LEADERSHIP AS A CRUCIBLE: TRIALS, PREPARATION, AND INNOVATION

22. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, in my sixty-one years of life, I have come to realise that leaders are not born fully developed.

23. Leaders are shaped by trials that test their resolve, by preparation that sharpens their purpose, and by innovation that expands their vision.

24. From the military barracks to the State House, I have witnessed leadership transformation through adversity, the rigours of training, the crucible of conflict, and the demands of governance.

25. At every stage, I relied on two key principles:

(1) the importance of foresight in anticipating both the immediate challenges and those that lie ahead, and (2) the courage to embrace innovation, even when it disrupts the familiar.

V. WHAT LEADERSHIP MEANS: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

26. Leadership is, among other things, the art of awakening in others the desire to serve their fellow human.

27. Leadership is a personal journey of self-discovery that finds its fullest expression in acts of compassion, justice, and courage.

28. True leadership transcends the confines of the title or station.

29. It stands as a living testament to our shared humanity, a bond of trust that unites hearts and minds in the pursuit of the common good.

30. LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I would like to dwell briefly on FOUR IMPORTANT ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP THAT I HAVE LEARNT:

I. THE FIRST IS "SERVICE WITHOUT TITLE"

31. Leadership begins in humble places: in the midnight vigil of a nurse tending the sick, in the steady hands of a miner delving into the earth's depths, in the tireless journeys of a motorcyclist linking remote villages, in the patient guidance of

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a mother who gathers her children to read beneath a fading lamp light.

32. Service without the need for a title or recognition is the truest measure of influence — quiet, steadfast, and radiant with compassion.

II. THE SECOND IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF LEADERSHIP IS “EDUCATION”

33. Education is the key that unlocks the mind’s horizon.

34. It kindles curiosity, empowers innovation, and forges the intellectual tools with which we build our collective future.

35. By nourishing the mind, we cultivate the seeds of discovery and resilience that no storm can uproot.

III. THE THIRD ELEMENTS ARE FAITH, HUMILITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY AS FOUNDATIONS OF SERVICE

36. At the heart of my philosophy lies a profound conviction: ALL THAT I AM — AND ALL THAT I ACHIEVE — IS A GIFT FROM GOD.

37. As our Distinguished Guest of Honour, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, reminded us in 2017, “There is no wisdom of man that can change men or change nations; it is the power and wisdom of God that can.”

38. Yet FAITH alone does not work miracles. It is the bedrock upon which we build our labour, the compass that guides us through moral uncertainty.

39. HUMILITY tempers our ambition, reminding us of our limitations.

40. ACCOUNTABILITY binds us to the promise that we serve not ourselves but the people who place their trust in us.

41. My daily reflection on my roles as father,

former soldier, teacher, businessperson, and now as President keeps me mindful that leadership is, above all, an act of stewardship.

IV. THE FOURTH AND FINAL LEADERSHIP ELEMENT IS TRUST AND COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL

42. Human progress is born of shared purpose.

43. Trust is the invisible fabric that knits individuals into a community, transforming different dreams into a unified vision.

44. When we place confidence in one another’s goodness and capability, we unleash a collective energy far greater than any solitary ambition.

45. In that unity of hearts and minds, a nation finds its deepest strength.

VI. BUILDING A NATION: VISION FOR SIERRA LEONE’S FUTURE

46. As the first democratically elected Head of State born after our independence, I carry the weighty responsibility of charting a course for a nation still in its adolescence.

47. Nation-building is neither abstract nor immediate; it requires the patient labour of system-builders who think beyond the five-year horizon of election cycles.

48. Our future must be anchored in core African values: reverence for the wisdom of our elders paired with the courage to innovate for tomorrow.

49. From the hands that till our fields to the miners deep underground; from teachers shaping young minds to civil servants quietly keeping our institutions functional, every Sierra Leonean contributes to our collective destiny.

VII. PEOPLE AS PILLARS

50. Leadership means service, and true service often goes unseen.

51. I recall a young female professional asking me during one of my early political campaigns whether I truly needed the presidency to make a difference in Sierra Leone.

52. That question has haunted and inspired me ever since. SERVICE REQUIRES NO TITLE.

53. Our doctors, nurses, security forces, bin collectors, motor riders, farmers, and market women are the silent heroes whose dedication sustains our daily lives.

54. They teach us that leadership is measured not by fame or authority but by the impact we have on others.

55. If we, as a nation, learn to honour every act of service, no matter how small, we lay the groundwork for enduring unity and shared purpose.

56. Service without title demands humility and compassion.

57. We must remember that the loudest voices are seldom the sole custodians of wisdom or power.

58. The quiet dedication and work of countless nameless men and women is the true engine of social cohesion and national progress.

VIII. EDUCATION: NOURISHING MINDS FOR ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

59. Education is the clearest path to empowerment.

60. Whether acquired in schools, in workshops, or in the marketplaces of life, education broadens our horizons and equips us to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

61. From my First Term's Free Quality School Education program — allocating twenty-two percent of our national budget to learning — to the revitalisation of technical and vocational training, our administration has invested in human capital development because no weapon is as potent against poverty and ignorance as knowledge.

62. A nation that feeds its people but starves its intellect betrays its own potential; we must nourish minds as purposefully as we cultivate crops.

IX. TRUST AND COLLECTIVE POTENTIAL: FORGING UNITY THROUGH DIVERSITY

63. Leadership rests upon trust both in the integrity of institutions and especially in the collective potential of our people.

64. Trust is born when citizens believe their grievances will be heard, their rights protected, and their aspirations supported.

65. Sierra Leone's past has shown us the tragic cost of silenced voices and unspoken truths.

66. Healing these divisions requires more than grand gestures; it demands robust mechanisms for dialogue, reconciliation, and justice.

67. These mechanisms persist beyond the term of any individual President.

68. Only when we build bridges of understanding across ethnic, religious, and regional lines can we claim the unity that undergirds sustainable peace.

X. ACKNOWLEDGING FAULTS: THE ROLE OF HUMILITY IN LEADERSHIP

69. Leadership, like faith, requires forgiveness: recognising missteps without allowing regret, anger, or a desire for revenge.

70. As God extends grace to us, so must we extend it to one another.

71. I engage in daily introspection: How can I be a better man, a more attentive father, a more compassionate friend, and a more servant-hearted president?

72. This humble pursuit of improvement, I believe, is a true measure of character.

XI. INCLUSIVE INSTITUTION-BUILDING AND DEMOCRATIC DEEPENING

73. Nations prosper not by the whims of rulers, but by the strength of institutions that outlast them.

74. Democracy is not merely the casting of ballots; it is a living system of checks and balances, of civic spaces where citizens speak and are heard with dignity.

75. From an independent judiciary to a credible electoral commission, from decentralisation that empowers local councils to anti-corruption bodies that hold the powerful to account, our administration has sought to fortify the frameworks that safeguard liberty.

76. We have welcomed criticism, protected freedom of expression, and broadened participation for the marginalised, knowing that the true test of leadership is the resilience of our institutions under pressure.

XII. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: UNLEASHING HALF THE NATION'S POTENTIAL

77. A country cannot flourish when half its people are constrained by outdated norms.

78. Women's leadership is not a concession to be granted — it is a right to be affirmed.

79. Through legislative reforms tackling gender-based violence, financial windows dedicated to women entrepreneurs, and

targeted scholarships for girls in STEM, we have sought to tear down barriers that have long dimmed the potential of our women.

80. When women rise, families stabilise, communities prosper, and nations advance.

81. As we forge our country's future, we must ensure that every woman stands not at the margins but at the very centre of our collective endeavour.

XIII. HEALING SCARS AND DIVISIONS

82. Sierra Leone has borne the weight of deep divisions — political, social, regional, and cultural.

83. I know that, in my own journey to this office, I have at times stumbled and offended.

84. Yet true leadership neither shrinks from error nor is shackled by it.

85. Healing starts with sincere dialogue and the bravery to reconcile, creating connections instead of walls of protection.

86. When we focus on our differences instead of building connections that go beyond them, we often pay a steep price.

87. However, achieving unity is neither quick nor easy; it requires durable and thoughtful solutions that ensure every citizen has just recourse in times of conflict.

88. Our progress is a work in motion.

89. We have come far — from colonial subjugation through civil strife to the hard-won triumphs of democracy — but miles remain before we can claim true healing as a nation.

90. We must honour those who sacrificed for our freedoms, recognise the tireless efforts of soldiers and civilians alike, and commit anew to rooting out injustice wherever it survives.

XIV. NATIONALISM AND LEGACY: CULTIVATING RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

91. True patriotism transcends flags and anthems.

92. It finds expression in every act of civic responsibility.

93. An army and police force may protect our borders, but trust in institutions and in each other strengthens our social compact.

94. I honour the veterans who sacrificed for our democracy, the civil society champions who guard its freedoms, and the everyday citizens who fulfil their duties with integrity.

95. My hope is that future generations of Sierra Leoneans continue to regard their citizenship as a solemn trust to build, to serve, and to preserve our heritage.

XV. CULTIVATING FUTURE LEADERS: MENTORSHIP AND THE LEADERSHIP AND INNOVATION PRIZE

96. I think of this Colloquium as a living laboratory for leadership.

97. My birthday wish is to celebrate, each year, the emergence of new leaders: mentors and mentees bound by shared purpose, pioneers forging uncharted paths, thinkers whose ideas will carry our nation forward.

98. Through the Julius Maada Bio Leadership and Innovation Prize, we will honour those whose service exemplifies the pillars of leadership.

99. My hope is that their examples kindle aspirations in the heart of every Sierra Leonean.

XVI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

100. DISTINGUISHED GUESTS, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I am not one for grand

celebrations of myself.

101. On this day of personal reflection, I challenge all Sierra Leoneans to embrace leadership in their respective spheres of life, whether in the household or boardroom, classroom or clinic, field or factory.

102. Let us recommit to unity forged in diversity, to institutions built on trust, and to service offered without expectation of reward.

103. May our people-centred leadership light the path toward a future radiant with promise for generations yet unborn, for a resilient nation and for our shared humanity.

104. I appreciate everyone for taking the time to celebrate with me today at the first JULIUS MAADA BIO LEADERSHIP COLLOQUIUM.

105. May God bless you all. May God bless our beloved nation, and may God bless the people of Sierra Leone.

106. I wish every Sierra Leonean born on May

12 a Happy Birthday.

107. Thank you all for your kind attention.

Keynote Address by the Guest Speaker Prof. Yemi Osinbajo, Former Vice President of Nigeria

From Vision to Impact: The People-Centred governance model. Colloquium in Honour of His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio

May 12, 2025 | Freetown, Sierra Leone

Mr. President let me begin by expressing my heartfelt congratulations to you on the occasion of your 61st Birthday. It is not often that we see a sitting president choose to mark such a personal milestone by convening a gathering like this - one focused not on celebration but conversation, and not just any conversation, but one that is vital to the future of the nation our sub region and the continent: the idea and practice of people-centred governance.

A few months ago, I had the pleasure of discussing this very subject with you while we were both attending an event in Barbados. It was clear then - and remains so now - that this is more than theory to you. It is a pathway that you are fully committed to. I also want to thank you for the honour of your invitation to me to be the keynote speaker at the first ever Julius Maada Bio Leadership Colloquium. I will be speaking briefly on the theme of the Colloquium: From Vision to impact: The People-Centred leadership model.

From Vision to impact: The People-Centred leadership model.

So, what do we mean by people-centred governance? People-centred governance is a development paradigm that places the needs and voices of the vast majority - particularly those at the bottom of the pyramid - at the heart of policymaking. The African Union's Agenda 2063 affirms this vision, calling for "development based on self-reliance and the self-determination of African people, with democratic and peoplecentred governance." It is a call to reimagine leadership - not as the power to rule, but as the duty to serve.

Why is people-centred governance not just ideal, but imperative especially in our subregion and our continent?

To answer that, we must first understand the socio economic context that we are confronted with. Across Africa, countries are striving for structural transformation while grappling with growing poverty, unemployment, and debt. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, an estimated 55 million more Africans have slipped into poverty, with 39 million falling into extreme poverty. Youth unemployment is staggering, with up to a quarter of young Africans neither in education, employment, nor training. Simultaneously, 20 of the 39 African countries eligible for concessional borrowing are at high risk of, or already in debt distress. Africa is in the throes of the worst debt crisis in 80 years. This economic distress is accompanied by an alarming surge in insecurity. The Sahel has become home to the world's fastest-growing and deadliest terrorist groups, accounting for nearly half of deaths from global terrorism. West Africa alone is reeling from waves of insurgencies, armed banditry, and kidnappings. Add to this the democratic backsliding we are witnessing - coup d'états in Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, and Niger. These reversals threaten the democratic progress we made in the early 2000s. And disturbingly, segments of society are becoming more accepting of unconstitutional changes because they feel democracy has failed to improve their lives. The reality is stark: a growing number of Africans, especially young people, feel alienated, angry, and unseen. From the #EndSARS and #EndBadGovernance protests in Nigeria to the GenZ uprising in Kenya, there is a mounting frustration with governance. Voter turnout is declining. Extremist groups exploit the despair of the jobless. And across the continent, people question whether government exists for them at all. As Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen rightly pointed out, political freedom must translate into social and economic freedoms. Elections alone do not constitute democracy. True democracy delivers dignity: food on the table, education for children, safety in our streets, and hope for the future.

The good news is that the vast majority of our people do not want military rule. In 2023, the UNDP conducted a Perception Survey of 8,000 African citizens in order to better understand how citizens felt about Military coups. A key question they asked was what was their preferred option for governance, a majority of citizens said that democracy remained their preferred style of government. In fact, only 11% of the citizens in countries that had experienced unconstitutional changes of government preferred non-democratic forms of government. So the issue is not democracy, it is how the political practitioners of democracy can ensure that the government of the people by the people for the people does not forget the aches and pains of the people.

To make people-centred governance work, we must move decisively from top-down elite-focused strategies to bottom-up, inclusive development. But the first requirement is political will. Is government at the highest level committed to governance that ensures that the bottom of the pyramid will be the first consideration in policy and planning? Indeed the distinguishing feature of states that have grown successfully and nurtured democracy is leadership that has a vision for society and that can effectively demonstrate its commitment to growth, social development and the provision of public services. So the leadership class must re-frame the national discourse and come up with a mobilising idea for society such as an ideology of democratic development. Success in this regard must be accompanied by strategic communications in order to tell the story and keep the population on side. Governments can get greater public understanding by sharing strategic intent and by showing how policies that have been adopted will help to improve livelihoods.

The second point is that budgets and fiscal policy measures must intentionally prioritise the needs of the poor and lower income segments of society. Such budgeting would prioritise mass education and generalised access to healthcare, which are key for building the human capital of economies. It should also extend to social protection and support for economic sectors like agriculture and small enterprises, which would promote direct job creation and financial inclusion for the more vulnerable sections of society. It will also include people centred Justice schemes, that make justice accessible to the poor and vulnerable. Such budgetary expenditures are not mere social costs but high-return investments in human capital and inclusive growth. An important component of people centred budgeting is providing for and implementing maximum Impact 'Pro-bottom of the Pyramid' Initiatives.

These are initiatives that channel direct benefits to the poor and vulnerable. Examples are Home Grown School Feeding Programmes, this is a farm to table programme that provides jobs from farmers to aggregators and cooks, and then free meals once a day to children in school. In Nigeria as of 2016, we were feeding 9.6 million children daily, we met nutritional needs and in some states, primary school enrolment went up by 40%. Also we implemented Conditional Cash Transfers to the most vulnerable. The Government Enterprises and Empowerment Programme GEEP, managed by the Bank of industry, was an award winning microcredit scheme covering over 2.4 million informal traders. In addition, we had the NPower programme affording employment to over 500,000 young people. Mr. President, this is similar to the Youth Empowerment Promotion and Livelihood programme Your Excellency launched in 2024 and is already benefiting hundreds of young men and women.

In Nigeria, these Social Investment Programmes were key to maintaining stability during the 2016 economic recession.

To guarantee citizen acceptance of these people centred programmes, an inclusive decision-making model must be adopted. This would involve facilitating consultation and participation of people at the constituency level in the budgeting process. This inclusive process also ensures that leaders will be held accountable for implementing their promises and how their policies impact ordinary people.

A major weakness of governance in many African states is successful implementation. No matter how well intentioned a government may be or how great a policy may be, if it fails to get done it might as well not have been started. Two African countries wanted to build Special economic zones (SEZs) to build factories for fast moving products that could be manufactured cheaper than in China. They hired the same expert, paid 2 million dollars as consultancy, they both had enough money to execute the projects and investors had committed to the projects. In 4 years, one built 6 SEZs, the other couldn't complete one! The Chinese during the COVID-19 pandemic built a 1000 bed hospital fully equipped and ready to use in 7 days flat, these guys are not spirits just serious. So governments must be intentional about implementation, we must insist on diligent planning, develop or hire and pay the best talents well. It was Lee Kwan Yew the legendary leader of Singapore who transformed the island state from third world to first world who said this about attracting the best talent to public service: "You must attract the best people. If you underpay them, you'll have corruption. If you pay peanuts, you get monkeys."

I also believe that the privilege of governance must be used to render a game changing transformative social service. In countries like Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, strong social security systems, free education (from primary to university), and universal healthcare are considered basic rights. These systems didn't emerge by accident - they were designed by leaders who believed that a nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest citizens. Leaders like Einar Gerhardsen (Norway's post-war Prime Minister) helped build the welfare state after World War II, rejecting elitism and laying the foundation for broad-based prosperity.

In 1948, the National Health Service (NHS) was created in the UK under the leadership of Clement Attlee's Labour government. Despite post-war economic problems, they pushed for healthcare to be free at the point of use, available to all regardless of income. Today, the NHS remains one of the most cherished public institutions in the UK. Your free education programme Mr. President is one such game changing

service for now and generations to come. Thousands of boys and girls who could never have afforded the cost of a good education will go to school and become the best surgeons, AI experts, software engineers and builders of world class businesses. But the greatest service governments can render is to provide good paying jobs and livelihoods for the many who come into the job market daily. The only way of doing that is by increased productivity. We must pay attention to national industrial policies that prioritise increased productivity and value addition that generates jobs. Every investment, every procurement must give a good answer to the question 'How many jobs will this create?' Increasing productivity requires consultation with the private sector. No matter how we slice it, the only guarantee of democracy is governance that addresses the needs of the majority.

As I conclude, let me say Mr. President, that your administration offers a compelling example of people-centred governance in action. At the heart of your development vision is the Free Quality School Education Programme which has provided tuition-free education to over two million children across Sierra Leone. That the initiative includes free teaching materials, school feeding, is important because this reduces inequality and increases access, especially for vulnerable and low-income families.

Complementing this is the policy of tuition-free university education for girls studying STEM disciplines, a bold and strategic move to close the gender gap and position young women at the forefront of national development. The poorest countries in the world are those who keep women, half of their population, uneducated. Also ensuring that women must have 30% of all appointive and elective positions by the Gender Equality and Empowerment Act is a crucial complement to empowering women to contribute more effectively to development and governance.

The introduction of biometric civil registration and national identity cards has helped improve access to social services and financial inclusion - especially for rural and underserved communities. Equally notable are the government's efforts to reform access to justice, especially for women and rural communities, through the expansion of legal aid, the strengthening of local courts, and progressive legislation like the Customary Land Rights Act. Taken together, these initiatives reflect a coherent and credible shift: one that places people - especially those at the margins - at the centre of governance and national development. This is as it should be. A lot has been done but I am sure Mr. President you will be the first to admit that the destination is still far and much more needs to be done. People centred governance is a continuous process of moving as many as possible from the bottom of the pyramid to better income and livelihood levels; it requires our constant vigilance

and dedication. Today, as we honour a leader who has chosen to lead with purpose and people at heart, let this colloquium serve not just as a robust policy conversation - but as a call to action. A charge to all of us - whether in government, civil society, or the private sector - to recommit to governance that delivers dignity, opportunity, and justice. That is the future our people deserve.

Finally, Mr. President, I think I should now wear my other cap that is of a Pastor and say a word of prayer for you. Let me remind your excellency that the Bible tells us that even at the age of 120 years Moses' sight was not dimmed and his natural force was not diminished, and you are only 61, so you are still a very young man, so I pray for you that even after the order of Moses as your days so shall your physical and mental strength, so shall your joy and so shall your favour with God be in Jesus' name.

Happy birthday Mr. President.

Thank you.



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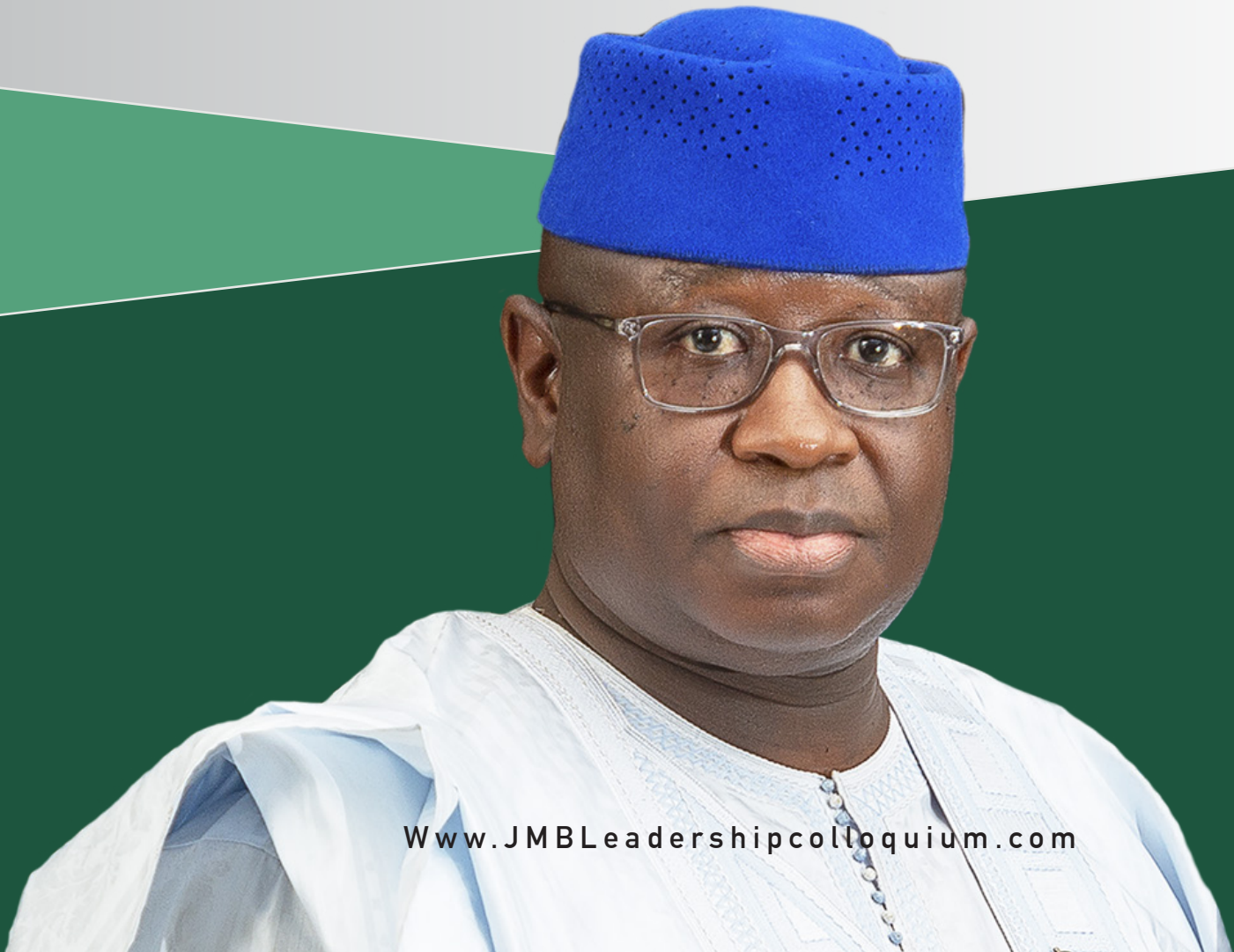




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