



POLICY BRIEF

*Campaign for Human Rights and
Development International (CHRDI)*

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN SIERRA LEONE

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone is a West African country bordered by Liberia, Guinea, and the Atlantic Ocean. It covers 72,325 square kilometers in the northern hemisphere, with diverse landscapes and rich natural resources, including minerals, farmland, and a deep harbor. Most of its 7.9 million (2020) people live in rural areas and depend on natural resources and agriculture for income.

Climate change threatens their livelihoods, food security, and the country's infrastructure, water, energy, and coast. To reduce poverty and protect the environment, the government must adopt policies and institutions promoting pro-poor growth and sustainability.

This is called poverty-environment mainstreaming, and it aims to link environmental and poverty issues in decision-making. Better environmental management can improve health, resilience, development, and opportunities for people experiencing poverty. Supporting land policies and programs is also crucial for the Campaign for Human Rights, Development International, and several SDGs (SDG1, SDG2, SDG5, SDG11, SDG13, and SDG15). However, accessing loans for agricultural activities is difficult due to various barriers, such as small loan size, high transaction cost, seasonal production, fear of borrowing, lack of collateral, and climate risks (e.g., no insurance for crop failure in Sierra Leone).

POLICY MOTIVATION

“Business as usual” is not an option to achieve environmental sustainability. The main challenge of agricultural development is to increase agriculture productivity sustainably. Farming communities, farm households, and farmers should be viewed as both producers and managers of ecosystems. The heart of effective climate policies lies in their inclusivity.

Policies must consider the viewpoints of businesses, environmental justice advocates, communities, and experts to create a comprehensive framework that addresses complex challenges. Incorporating stakeholder input from diverse sources into policy development enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of climate strategies.

The government of Sierra Leone has been working on a new climate change policy for several years. It is called the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP). If finished and approved in 2023, it will replace the old policy from five years ago.

The new policy aims to include new issues and plan for future actions to reduce greenhouse gases in the air. It also aims to deal with the adverse effects of climate change and weather changes for the next ten years.

States are the primary duty-bearers under international human rights law.

All states must protect human rights when acting against climate change and its impacts and uphold their international commitments.

Yet, at the same time, climate change presents fundamental challenges to the traditional paradigm of state-centered human rights law.

Many actors, including private entities and states, have contributed to climate change and thus bear responsibility not only for preventing and mitigating future warming but for remedying past, present, and future harm.' Further, the profound disconnect between responsibility for climate change and vulnerability to its consequences underscores the imperative of addressing extraterritorial obligations for states and private actors.

Non-discrimination, justice, participation, transparency, and accountability are essential principles that should inform climate change's entire design and implementation.

POLICY IMPACT

Sierra Leone depends on its natural resources (e.g., agriculture and livestock, energy, mining, tourism) for economic development. The economy and the population's welfare are linked to the natural environment and are, therefore, highly vulnerable to environmental degradation, climate variability, and change.

Climate change, with expected increases in temperature and changes in rainfall patterns, will lead to more frequent extreme weather events, e.g., droughts and floods, affecting food security, health, and economic development. Successful climate policy requires collaboration between the government, businesses, and environmental justice advocates.

By fostering partnerships incorporating diverse perspectives, policies can accommodate both the economic imperatives of businesses and the rights of marginalized communities.

Numerous real-world examples illustrate the potential of collaborations among the private sector, governments, and environmental justice groups.

From renewable energy projects that provide jobs in disadvantaged communities to corporate initiatives that invest in local environmental programs, these partnerships demonstrate that economic growth and environmental justice can go hand in hand.

Aligning business interests with environmental goals is not just about compliance; It is about recognizing that sustainable practices can drive innovation, enhance brand reputation, and foster long-term viability. This alignment ensures that businesses contribute positively to the ecosystems and societies, enabling their existence.

AUDIENCE

- Office of the President
- Ministry of Environment
- Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Food Security
- Ministry of Finance
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Civil Society Organizations
- UN Agencies/Development Partners
- Farmers/Private Sector
- local government authorities,
- Universities.
- Media

POLICY IMPLICATION

Due to Sierra Leone's poverty and low-income diversity, the country is vulnerable to the impact of climate change. Climate change causing precipitation and temperature changes will likely have severe implications for water resources, food security, natural resource management, human health, settlements, and infrastructure. Human rights and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing. Access to environmental protection is essential to realizing fundamental human rights, including the rights to food, health, and even life itself. So, too, a human rights framework that ensures transparency and empowers citizens to contribute to managing natural resources will help achieve environmental goals.

Work on civil and political rights is essential for sustainable management of natural resources and reduced environmental risks. Empowering local bodies is essential to increase effectiveness and stimulate the active participation of poor women and men in environmental resources and management decision-making. Local governments, community-based organizations, and national and international NGOs are possible actors to cooperate with. It may also be rewarding for civil society organizations working on land rights to link their work to its environmental benefits or climate risks, thus giving access to complementary arguments, actors, and arenas. One such argument is farmers' greater willingness and ability to invest in water conservation techniques in dryland areas if tenure is secure.

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Improving poor people's access to the labor market and decent employment requires concerted efforts by governments, civil society, trade unions, the private sector, and in cooperation with businesses. It also requires that people have suitable knowledge and capacity to match the labor market's needs. Increasing the employability of poor people, particularly women and youth, allows them to contribute to and benefit from economic growth. For example, the need for capacity building is enormous in the agriculture sector, which employs most of the population today.

Despite agricultural development being a prioritized area for the Sierra Leone Government, its productivity is declining. Striking a balance between corporate interests and environmental justice is challenging. Differences in priorities and perceived costs and benefits could lead to disagreements. For policies to be implemented effectively, it is essential to identify and tackle these difficulties directly.

Businesses can better handle the adverse effects of climate policy with risk mitigation strategies and fair allocation of resources. To close the gap between economic development and social fairness, it is essential to ensure that resources and benefits are distributed fairly.

Companies may take steps such as hiring locals in regions undertaking a lot of construction development. Additionally, they may proactively establish effective response systems for potential environmental crises.

Transparent communication and mechanisms for holding governments and corporations to their promises encouraged cooperation and shared accountability, which is crucial in building confidence among all parties involved.

The government's efforts in contributing towards climate change resulted in the production of the National Adaptation Plan of Action (NAPA) in 2007. Sierra Leone's first National Climate Change Policy (NCCP), together with a National Climate Change Action Plan, was released in 2015, followed by its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) in September 2015, and Third National Communication (NC3) was released in 2018 (Government of the Republic of Sierra Leone, 2018).

It has also completed its NAP process, which began with a NAP Framework and a NAP Communications Plan, which laid the draft's foundation. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP April 2021) is seen as key to implementing both this revised Climate Change Policy and the adaptation and mitigation components of the NDC. The draft National Adaptation Plan was validated in April 2021 to become the Sierra Leone NAP.

TIMELINES

- 2007 National Adaptation Program of Action, First National Communication to the UNFCCC.
- 2012 National Climate Change Policy Framework (NCCP), Second National Communication to the UNFCCC.
- 2013 National Development Plan – the Agenda for Prosperity (2013-2018)/Third Generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2013-2018).
- 2015 Nationally Determined Contribution, National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2018 Third National Communication to the UNFCCC.

- 2019 NAP Framework.
- 2020 NAP Communications Strategy, Fourth Generation Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper/Medium-Term Development Plan (2019-2023).
- 2021 Draft. National Adaptation Plan (NAP April 2021).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Advocate for enacting the Climate Change Bill into law: The law should include protecting the environment and human rights, sanctions for violators, and preventive measures, such as banning specific behaviors that contribute to climate change. Additionally, to create awareness among the Policymakers, Stakeholders, and the public about the Nairobi Declaration on Climate Change and integrate the fundamental principles and goals of the Nairobi Declaration into Sierra Leone's first Climate Change Act or its National Environmental Policy. Ensure that the policies reflect the country's commitment to addressing climate change, promoting sustainable development, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
2. The imposition of carbon emission tax: Carbon taxes and emission trading schemes are critical elements in climate policies and laws. A net zero target should not only be the responsibility of an environment ministry alone. Climate action should involve a whole government approach, including finance, economic planning, and the central bank.
3. Collaboration and Partnership in green investments: it is imperative to create an enabling environment for green investment by offering incentives, streamlining regulations, and promoting public-private partnerships.
4. Private Sector Involvement: the private sector should acknowledge its crucial role in shaping policies and efforts related to climate change. Human rights perspectives ought to be incorporated into their climate change policy to address the moral and ethical concerns about climate change and achieve a human rights settlement.
5. Strengthen the capacity of Climate Change institutions: Enhance the capacity of existing institutions, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Protected Areas Authority, to effectively and proactively take positive action to address climate change issues.
6. Policy Integration and Public Education and Outreach: Launch public awareness campaigns to educate the public about early warning indicators and provide information, the tools needed to deal with climate change, the impacts, and the importance of sustainable practices. Furthermore, publish a citizen's manual or handbook, which will equip citizens with the information and tools they need to deal with climate change. Education can also include integrating climate change risks into the Junior Secondary School curriculum.

7. Strengthen Data Collection and Research: invest in data collection, Research, and monitoring systems to better understand the local impacts of climate change and inform evidence-based decision-making. This includes establishing a national climate change database, conducting vulnerability assessments, and promoting research partnerships with local and international institutions.
8. Promote renewable energy and technologies: encourage the adoption of renewable energy sources and green technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance energy efficiency. Provide incentives and support for businesses and households to transition towards cleaner energy alternatives.
9. Women as stewards of natural resources/agents of change: Women in Sierra Leone play an essential role as primary caregivers and providers for their families. They are often responsible for collecting water, fuelwood, and other natural resources necessary for household needs. As climate change impacts these resources, women are at the forefront of adapting to the changing environment. Their knowledge of local ecosystems and sustainable resource management practices is invaluable in mitigating the effects of climate change. Women often serve as educators and community leaders, making them influential agents of change at the grassroots level.

PRODUCED BY:

Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRDI), Rights-based social-policy advocacy Organization. We draw attention to the responsibilities of duty-bearers to uphold human rights and seek to support rights-holders to claim their rights. CHRDI is in Special Consultative Status to the United Nations Economic and Social Council and accredited to many UN Agencies.