



**TALKING POINTS FOR HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS MAADA BIO,  
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SIERRA LEONE ON THE  
OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE SIERRA LEONE REGIONAL  
RICE VALUE CHAIN PROJECT, TORMA BUM. FRIDAY, 11TH JUNE,  
2021**

The Honourable Vice President,  
Honourable Ministers of Government,  
Honourable Members of Parliament,  
Our Development Partners and Members of the Diplomatic and Consular  
Corps,  
Representatives of The Islamic Development Bank and BADEA  
Revered Traditional Rulers,  
Our Partners in the private Sector,

Civil Society and the Press,  
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good afternoon.

1. Let me first welcome and thank our development partners, the Islamic Development Bank, and BADEA. You have been consistent partners on this journey; you have shared our views; planned with us, and today is the day for implementing those ideas we have developed together. Thank you for your presence; thank you for your support.

2. Food security is a central pillar among our human capital development priorities as a nation, if not the most critical. A well-nourished child or adult can stay healthy, live well, learn, fend for himself or herself, and live a reasonably good quality of life.

3. We came into governance to low levels of food security, even though we have vast stretches of arable land in this country, consistent rainfall and rivers, and fairly even weather conditions. The price of our staple food, rice, has not been stable and consistent on the world market. There had been no well-thought-out and sustainable investments in the agriculture sector. Food insecurity therefore persisted.

4. Instead of taking short-term populist actions and granting massive import subsidies at the detriment of the economy or pronouncing an overnight reduction in the price of a bag of rice for political propaganda purposes, we decided to think very closely about a permanent fix.

5. Because we do not produce sufficient food for our population, we have increasingly spent hundreds of millions of dollars every year to procure food from the world market. Clearly, we are left at the detriment of the world food market as a result. Besides, a huge chunk of our foreign reserves that could have been spent on education and healthcare, among other urgent priorities for a developing nation, end up being spent on importing increasingly expensive food items.

6. The situation is even more complicated when production capacity and supply chains are hit hard by shocks such as COVID-19, climate change disasters, and other economic shocks in food-exporting nations. The prices

of food change shoot upward on the world market. These price shocks are not good for food security, not good for the quality of life of our citizens, not good for our communities, and not good for the economy of the nation as a whole.

7. In our governance assessment for our 2018 Manifesto and in our Medium-Term National Development Plan, we committed to working toward increasing the domestic production of food to significantly take care of our domestic needs and to ensure that the food produced domestically was available, affordable, and nutritious.

8. We, therefore, decided on a well-thought-out, well-designed, well-implemented, and sustainable solution. We can transform our vast arable lands into massive food production centres and thus make our nation rice/food self-sufficient and also food and nutrition secure.

9. So let me once more thank the Islamic Development Bank and BADEA for examining our plan, identifying with the objectives of our commitments, and sharing our aspiration to work towards domestic food self-sufficiency. Essentially, we made a simple decision: to put whatever money we could garner where our mouths are.

10. So, I am, therefore, very delighted to be here to launch the Sierra Leone Regional Rice Value Chain Project (SL-RRVCP). As with everything we do as a Government, we have been very intentional in our planning so that when once we deliver this solution, it will be sustainable and long-lasting. Traditional subsistence farming of low-yield seeds in small plots will not lead to domestic food sufficiency. The answer is in increased mechanisation and larger acreage yields, more access to input, more advanced farming techniques, and more agriculture financing that expands private sector investments in agriculture. So, we have put a number of things in place.

11. We have made the ecosystem for farming more conducive:

- a. We have purchased 410 agricultural machinery and more than 2,000 items of relevant implements;
- b. We have set up agricultural service centres, called Machine Rings, in fourteen (14) agricultural districts in the country, and made the agricultural machinery and the implements available to the private

sector and to provide machinery services to farmers at competitive rates. Our Machine Ring system is supporting poor farmers who cannot afford machinery and chiefdom youth rice farm projects.

c. My Government has also revised the decades-old policy and practice of the public sector being responsible for procuring and distributing fertilizers and seeds to farmers. The private sector is now responsible for that.

d. In order to strengthen the participation of the private sector, Government, through the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank, has ring-fenced \$50million to support private sector investments in agriculture.

12. By increasing the domestic production of rice, we could free up foreign exchange that will support our human capital development priorities in education, health, and in other aspects of agriculture and agribusiness.

13. This project directly benefits 7,000 women and youth farmers, along with 35,000 farming families who are growing rice on 35,000 hectares of farmlands in the project locations. I am informed that the beneficiary identification and selection process was above board and merit-based.

14. We decided so because we want to make agriculture more attractive to young people and women. We have established youth farms across the country to get greater participation and buy-in from youth. Agriculture is a source of wealth-creation.

15. The Project's operation sites are in Bum Chiefdom in Bonthe district in the South; and Mambolo and Samu Chiefdoms in Kambia District. There are prospects for expanding rice-value-chain development into other parts of this very fertile country. Other regions can therefore participate in this national food security project and reap the associated socio-economic benefits.

16. Already Bum Chiefdom is involved in mechanised farming. Our Government is not the Government that grew rice in reports or on the radio. We grow rice in the fields and harvest it.

17. Added to this project that we are unveiling today as described by previous speakers, my Government launched the Rhombe rice cultivation project by Elite Agro that will put 30,000 hectares under cultivation.

18. My Government is determined to stay fully involved with this project and its goals. We will work with partners to further expand operations, irrigate and drain larger areas for cultivation, bring in more investments, and expand domestic food production in Sierra Leone.

19. With those few words, I now formally launch the Sierra Leone Regional Rice Value Chain Project.

I thank you for your kind attention.