



**REMARKS BY HIS EXCELLENCY, DR. JULIUS
MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE
PRODUCTIVE SOCIAL SAFETY NET AND
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROJECT, KAMBIA - 11
NOVEMBER 2022**

The Chief Minister,
Ministers of Government,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Development Partners and Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Our revered Paramount Chiefs, Traditional Leaders, and Local Council
leaders,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning:

1. I am delighted to be part of this event here today. I want to thank The World Bank for funding the Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment project that we will launch this morning.
2. Their support is yet another clear demonstration that our vision and aspiration for the people of Sierra Leone are fully aligned with their institution's objectives. I, therefore, thank the World Bank Country Manager, for his kind words that my Government has indeed placed "social protection and youth at the centre of national development."
3. I also thank you for the "Ep Fet Po" project that is evenly distributed among all 16 districts and currently benefiting hundreds of thousands of extremely poor beneficiaries including persons living with disabilities.
4. My Government engaged the World Bank at the end of the last Social Safety Net project cycle that is due to expire in June 2023. We made a solid case for a successor project with a broader slate of interventions. I am pleased that engagement resulted in the preparation of the Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment project.
5. I am especially pleased that this funding cycle supports what the World Bank acknowledges as "Sierra Leone's human-capital-driven model of development" through which we envision addressing vulnerability and extreme poverty, education and skills training, access to healthcare, food security, and thus achieve sustainable and inclusive long-term development.
6. For us, social safety and protection are not just footnotes to our development agenda for this nation. We have expanded access to justice,

implemented programmes to support vulnerable populations including persons living with disabilities, led both a national and global fight against sexual and gender-based violence, and currently pushing through Parliament a seminal women's empowerment and gender equality bill.

7. I urge Parliamentarians to pass that bill. There is too much riding on that bill. If we agree that women are not only under-represented in public governance, but are also the most financially insecure and vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, abject livelihoods, and food insecurity, then we must pass this bill with the urgency it deserves.

8. But all of these reforms are happening with a broader global economic downturn with limited investment financing, limited productivity, supply chain disruptions, rising prices, and more ebbs than flows in economic performance across all countries. This follows on from the devastating economic effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Clearly, these have all threatened our investments in human capital development, healthcare delivery, and food security.

9. But in spite of these constraints, part of our Quick Action Economic Recovery Plan put more money into social protection, strengthened social protection delivery systems, and increased the number of programmes to aid the extremely poor and other vulnerable groups.

10. In spite of our challenges, whilst people see the challenges of poverty, vulnerability, and unemployment, I envision opportunities in improved agricultural productivity, modernising fish and livestock production, upskilling in the tourism and hospitality sector to increase the contribution of services to GDP from 36 to 45 percent, investing in renewable energy systems, and upgrading industrial and manufacturing production outside the mining sectors.

11. The Commissioner General's comprehensive presentation gives the background, scope, beneficiaries, impact, and outlook for the various components of this "Ep Fet Po" intervention.

12. This programme, as previous speakers have indicated, is firmly grounded in our commitments to the Medium-Term National Development

Plan. It focuses on the twin objectives of improving access to social safety nets and income-generating opportunities.

13. It will scale up existing cash transfers to extremely poor households; introduce an integrated package of livelihood services for families transitioning out of poverty; provide productive public works opportunities for youth; introduce seed-funding to support entrepreneurship for educated youth in urban areas; establish a platform that connects youth with employment and training opportunities; and, continue building the capacity of implementing agencies.

14. I urge strong cross-sectoral collaboration among relevant ministries, departments, agencies, and local and city councils in implementing this Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment Project. Obviously, I expect the Anti-Corruption Commission to ensure transparency and accountability along all the stages of implementation and service delivery.

15. As I have emphasised, the project will be implemented in all sixteen districts. We have drawn from our experiences from the existing social safety net project and included an emergency cash transfer scheme to support households after disasters and a contingency emergency response fund for responding to less predictable but higher intensity disasters.

16. I want to thank our development partners also for drawing up s Social Protection Strategy and Implementation Plan. It is also possible to develop a social protection bill that not only addresses the persistent problem of vulnerability and poverty.

17. Let me conclude by thanking our development partners and heads of foreign missions for helping us meet funding gaps for social protection programmes in the country. Permit me to express my profound appreciation for the support of the World Bank, EU, UNICEF and other UN Agencies, WFP and other USAID International Non-Governmental Organizations including the FAO.

18. I also take this opportunity to recognize the efforts and commitments of NaCSA, MoYA, NaYCOM, ACC, our municipal and local authorities, cabinet ministers and members of parliament for pursuing the goals of this project.

19. As a country, I believe we can fight inequality and poverty by investing in people, pursuing policies with a heart, and generating the necessary goodwill among partners to help our most vulnerable cope with and transition out of vulnerability and poverty.

20. It is my pleasure, therefore, to formally launch the Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment project.