



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY DR.
JULIUS MAADA BIO, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC
OF SIERRA LEONE, AT THE AGRICULTURE
ROUNDTABLE EVENT HOSTED BY THE MINISTRY OF
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY**

THURSDAY, 5TH OCTOBER 2023

NEW BROOKFIELDS HOTEL

FREETOWN, SIERRA LEONE

Honourable Vice President,

Ministers of Government,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Heads of Missions and Delegations,

Our farmers and other key stakeholders in the
Agriculture sector,

Civil Society,

NGOs,

Private Sector Representatives,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

- 1.** Sierra Leone needs to feed itself and develop with pride.
- 2.** There is no reason for our nation to be a net food importer when our country is richly blessed with abundant land and water resources, ample sunshine and an accessible labour force.

- 3.** Agriculture is the main sector of our economy, accounting for an average of 51% of the GDP over the last decade and employs approximately 65% of the labour force but mainly subsistence farming.

- 4.** While our nation possesses high agricultural potential, agriculture yields and labour productivity remain extremely low – partly due to our huge infrastructure bottlenecks and financing gap.

- 5.** Interruptions in international supply chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the prevailing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, coupled with global inflation, continue to take a toll on the economy. This further heightens domestic challenges, including escalating costs of food, petroleum products, and other crucial goods.

- 6.** However, we must see opportunities in the challenges. The persistent economic headwinds and collapse of the commodity prices facing low-income countries like Sierra Leone is a challenge but a real opportunity to diversify our economies rapidly.

7. And there is no better sector to diversify into than agriculture. Accelerating investments in the agriculture sector will add greater value to the economy, expand foreign exchange earnings, significantly reduce imports, drive down inflation through higher productivity and food production, and create decent jobs, especially for the youth.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

8. Sierra Leone must learn from the Asian countries, which rapidly expanded public investments in their agricultural sectors, to achieve the green revolution.

- 9.** We must fundamentally change the way we look at agriculture. For way too long, agriculture has been treated as a development activity, a social sector. It has been treated as a sector for managing poverty. We must now view agriculture as a wealth-creating sector.
- 10.** Because over 70% of our population live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for a living, their pathway out of poverty is tied to what happens to agriculture. Making agriculture a big wealth-creating sector will unleash new economic opportunities to lift our people out of poverty.

11. In line with my Government's focus on Human Capital Development to drive sustainable development in our nation, we are prioritising investments in agriculture through the **FEED SALONE** Programme – which will receive up to 10% of our national budgetary allocation over the next five years.

12. The **FEED SALONE** Programme will ignite agricultural productivity, safeguard food security, and foster inclusive economic growth, laying the foundation for sustained prosperity.

- 13.** We have laid the building blocks for the flagship **FEED SALONE** Programme. In the last five years, our policies have laid the foundation for a deeper transformation in the sector. We provided a strategic direction in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019–2023) to set the country on the path for transformative agricultural growth.
- 14.** In our first-term mandate, our Government prioritised innovative strategies to improve agriculture and food security. We prioritised increasing productivity in the rice value chain and expanding our investment in mechanisation and agriculture financing for the private sector.

- 15.** We enacted sound public policies to stimulate sound private sector investments. The Government primarily focused on de-risking the investment space while supporting the enabling environment for private sector players to participate.
- 16.** To this end, my Government created a US\$ 10 Million agriculture facility to stimulate private sector participation in importing and distributing fertiliser, seeds production, and other agrochemicals.

17. We established mechanisation centres to put more arable land under cultivation. While principally done on a pilot basis, these policy shifts produced positive outcomes. We increased milled rice production significantly and improved our self-sufficiency from 47% in 2019 to 65% in 2022.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

18. We must now turn our rural areas from economic misery to economic prosperity zones. This requires a total transformation of the agriculture sector. At the core of this must be rapid agricultural industrialisation. We must focus not only on primary production but on developing agricultural value chains.

19. The **FEED SALONE** Programme, which encapsulates our vision for sustainable agricultural transformation, will build on these gains and scale up interventions to foster food security and sovereignty in our land.

- 20.** The **FEED SALONE** Initiative has **five specific goals**:
- i. Reduce importation** of our key staple food — including rice, onions, and poultry products;
 - ii. Boost export earnings** from our cash crops;
 - iii. Create jobs and rejuvenate the rural areas** using agriculture as the driver of new growth, jobs and wealth creation;
 - iv. Reduce hunger and malnutrition;** and
 - v. Build resilience to economic shocks.**

- 21.** Ultimately, my Government will aim to build a resilient economy from the ground up, with agriculture as the core engine of growth.

- 22.** Our vision is to take advantage of our soil wealth, grow agriculture as a business in climate-smart ways, and leverage it as a fundamental source of national prosperity. This will inspire citizens, especially the youth, to see agriculture as a profitable and sustainable business.

23. The **Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security** will lead the formulation and implementation of the **FEED SALONE** transformation agenda, with the overarching objectives to improve agricultural productivity for food security and sovereignty in Sierra Leone.

24. The newly created **Presidential Initiative on Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Food Security** will support the Ministries in these three workstreams for the coherence of policies and effective implementation coordination.

25. I will also establish a **Presidential Council on Agriculture** that I will chair. The Presidential Council will constitute Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), the Private Sector, Farmers, Academia, Research Institutions and Civil Society to oversee the successful implementation of the **FEED SALONE** Programme.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

26. Permit me to use this opportunity to convey some of my aspirations for the **FEED SALONE** Programme for your consideration during this Roundtable discussion to pinpoint actionable ways for an effective sectoral metamorphosis.

27. First, the **FEED SALONE** Programme should not just be about producing more food; we must also ensure **good nutrition**. Our people still suffer from high levels of malnutrition and stunting, and many children die every year from malnutrition, the silent killer of life.

28. Nothing breaks my heart more than a mother unable to calm her hungry baby's rumbling, hollow stomach. Poor nutrition is responsible for stunting children's growth, harming children's educational development and limiting future economic prospects. Stunted children today lead to stunted economies tomorrow.

29. Therefore, the most important infrastructure we must build is “**grey matter infrastructure,**” which powers the brain and all human capabilities. We must focus on curbing malnutrition as we scale up our school feeding programme under our Human Capital Development programmes.

30. Second, experiences from successful agricultural transformations in other countries show they were achieved through strong partnerships between the Government and the private sector. Therefore, we must be committed to strengthening the legal and regulatory frameworks to create the enabling environment

to promote private sector involvement throughout the agriculture value chains.

31. The Government will rely on the private sector to drive innovation, growth, and large-scale sustainable impact. The reality is Government resources, put together with development partners, won't be enough to address the challenges we face in the agriculture sector. Resources from the private sector will be required to achieve our goals.

32. There is also a key need for strong public-private partnerships to get younger entrepreneurs into the agricultural sector.

33. Third, the **FEED SALONE** initiative must address the specific challenges facing women farmers. They form the majority of the labour force in agriculture but lack access to land rights, finance, extension, appropriate technologies and markets. When we get the issues of women's rights in agriculture, we will finally get agriculture in Sierra Leone right.

34. Fourth, we must leverage available and new technologies to scale up and transform key value chains in the agricultural sector. We must seek to foster public-private partnerships, linking the Government, national, regional and international agricultural research centres, the private sector and farmers.

- 35. Lastly**, to succeed, we must support the farmers to adapt to climate change. Africa contributes only 2% of the global greenhouse gas emissions, but it suffers disproportionately from its impacts.
- 36.** We must re-orientate our policy reforms to target climate-resilient agricultural development and value chains and invest heavily in climate-smart agriculture mechanisation and technologies to unlock the full potential of agriculture.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

- 37.** The first key outcome of this Roundtable is to provide stakeholders with a thorough comprehension of the **FEED SALONE** Initiative,

highlighting its objectives, strategic pillars, enablers, and underlying institutional frameworks. A shared understanding ensures cohesive efforts and alignment across all involved entities.

- 38.** As you deliberate under the theme “**Partnerships for the Delivery of the FEED SALONE Agenda**”, I leave you with the quote from the late **Kofi Annan**, **"NO SINGLE INDIVIDUAL, GROUP OR GOVERNMENT CAN TAKE THIS MONUMENTAL CHALLENGE ALONE"**. We must **"HAVE THE VISION TO WORK TOGETHER"** – the Government, private sector, farmers, development partners, CSOs, NGOs, academia, research institutions, and donor agencies.

39. Effective Collaboration and Partnerships are the spirit behind my Government's **FEED SALONE** Initiative. Our objective is to work with others to ensure that we end extreme poverty, eliminate malnutrition, make Sierra Leone food self-sufficient and move our nation to the top of the agriculture value chain for what it produces.

40. We must improve agricultural productivity for food security and sovereignty as quickly as possible. Time is not on our side. Let's seize the moment to feed our people and achieve Middle-Income status by 2035.

41. I wish you all fruitful deliberations.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION.