

REPORT ON THE CONSERVATION TRUST FUND STRATEGIC PLAN: PRE AND POST LAUNCH

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Background of the strategic plan

The Conservation Trust Fund (CTF) as an institution came in to existence in 2017, with a clear mandate to mobilize resource for the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA). The NPAA on the other hand is created to provide oversight function over protected Areas and to Conserve Biodiversity and manage Wildlife.

Since the enactment of National Protected Area Authority and Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2012, there has not been any Strategic Plan. The Board of Trustees and Management of the Conservation Trust Fund in 2020, having prioritized the Strategic Plan as a key prerequisite to achieve the mandate of CTF, hired the service of an external consultant that is mandated to develop a Strategic Plan that should span from 2020 - 2024. This Strategic Plan was necessitated by the concern raised by the Board of Trustees regarding the depleting nature of the Protected Areas and the effects of deforestation and degradation on biodiversity conservation and extinction in wildlife.

Goal

The overall goal of this strategic Plan is to ensure sustainable land use practices, resilient communities and natural resources capacity especially in the Protected Areas and to provide ecosystem services in the face of emerging threats.

Objectives

The objectives for which the Strategic plan is developed are, but not limited to;

- Support long term biodiversity conservation plan and natural resource management,
- Support capacity building to meet the implementation, obligations and commitments of Multilateral Environmental Agreements of which Sierra Leone is party to,
- Provide a transparent and sustainable mechanism for generating resources and financing of forest and natural resource management, biodiversity and wildlife conservation.
- Support and strengthen capacity for policy implementation and, research and development in biodiversity conservation, and wildlife management.

Statement of The Problem

In Sierra Leone, uncontrolled use of the environment and overexploitation of the forest land had intensified in recent years. The threats this poses undoubtedly affect our ecosystem. CTF is concerned about the depleting nature of the Protected Areas and the effects of deforestation and degradation on biodiversity conservation and extinction in wildlife. The key observation identified by stakeholders, is that policies are mostly unconnected with practices and these are some of the challenges that the Strategic Plan will be addressing.

According to the country's National Development Plan, there are 48 forest reserves and conservation areas in Sierra Leone - which account for about 4 percent of the land areas. Disturbingly, most of these areas lack effective protection and management systems. Sierra Leone is endowed with natural resources such as fresh water, wetlands, wildlife, farm land forest among others, but yet the citizens continue to suffer from pervasive poverty seemingly because of poor management of its natural resources. Some of the burning issues and key challenges surrounding biodiversity conservation and wildlife management include insecurity,

social exclusion, population growth, climate change and depletion of natural resources and of course poverty.

Pre-Launch

The process of developing the Strategic Plan culminated from a rigorous consultation of various stakeholders, Ministries Department and Agencies (MDAs) and NGO's working on the environment, this was done to harness information and to lend credence to the whole process and for the final document to be encompassing and reflective of existing and emerging issues. This activity was also followed by a validation workshop which was done to gauge and for those consulted to have their ideas reflected into the final document. In developing the Strategic Plan, the Consultant designed and use the theory of change to guide its operations. These strategies are mainly built on the 4 pillars; **Governance, Resource Mobilization, Strategic Partnerships and Programme Development**

This process was followed by several presentations to Board members, management and staff of CTF in order to ensure that the spirit of the act is been followed and for them to be abreast with the details of the strategic plan as it is their baby.

Before the launch there were series of radio discussions sponsored and supported by the European Union (EU) for the general public and interested parties to be informed on the details of the strategic plan and that's also formed the bases of rolling out the strategic plan, as one of its four pillars looks at Strategic partnership for which the European Union came in handy.

The Launching

The Resource Mobilization and Conservation Department, knowing the need and urgency of the strategic plan, developed a concept note and presented it to the European Union to support the launching. The European Union being that, one of their key priority is good environmental practices and sustainable biodiversity and wild life management became interested and fully funded the strategic plan launching.

On the 18th March, 2021 the first Strategic Plan of the CTF was launched by the Honorable Vice President Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh.

During the Launch, the Executive Chairman of the CTF gave a brief background of the Conservation Trust Fund and the initiative to develop a Strategic Plan. He said the strategic plan was borne by his long desire to achieve the overarching mandate of the Trust, which is the long-term sustainable financing for biodiversity. As a developmentally oriented person he said, this can only be achieved by setting out a clear plan. He said the four Strategic Pillars which are Governance, Resource Mobilization, Strategic Partnership and Program Development will be the bases to achieve the mandate of the CTF in the next five years (2021-2025) and he said to show that, the SP is not just a document, but a plan to be implemented that is why he has gone ahead to roll out the SP by recruiting a Resource Mobilization person before the launch for him to be a part from the get go.

The Consultant gave a synopsis of how the SP was developed and that, it is a document that is well researched and with diverse stakeholders' contribution, so he is of the strong opinion that if this document is rolled out to the fullest hinging on the strategic pillars the overall objective of the CTF will be achieve and by extension Sierra Leoneans will get a fair share of their God given resources

The chairman of the occasion who also doubles as the Minister of The Environment in his opening remarks, said it is a well thought of initiative by His Excellency to establish a standalone Ministry of the Environment, this shows the president's willingness to diversify the economy and it shows His commitment to addressing the prolong environmental issues. He said as a Minister he will do everything possible to make His Excellency achieve his dream. He continued that, a ministry that is just sixteen-month old could have one of its Agency developed a SP, shows good leadership and passion he emphasized.

The UNDP Representative emphasizes the need to build a resilient Environment in the face of the numerous challenge and to have a document that clearly show the pathway to surmount these challenges is welcoming and that as partners they will always support the Government and the people of Sierra Leone to protect and make good use of their Natural Resources.

The Representative of the Mano River Union highlighted that Mano River basin host a large number of biodiversity and wild life, and that if these Resources are governed and managed well they can serve as a long-term revenue sources that will benefit her citizen and they as an institution heading the Mano River basin will ensure to provide the necessary support.

The EU Resident Representative emphasize the importance of conserving our Natural Resources stating that Sierra Leone is rich in natural resources and most of our livelihood depends on this resource and it is but fitting that this resources are utilized sustainably and to have an institution that is designated to Mobilize Resources to conserve these Natural Resources is a step in the right direction and it shows how committed the government and the people of Sierra Leone are to preserve and Conserve these Resources and that they as Development Partners will provide the Necessary support. He reiterated that, though from the data available Sierra Leone only have below 5% of its forest cover of which if actions are not taken will reduce further.

The Representative of the Ministry of Finance gave their strong commitment to continue to support the CTF and they believe if such an institution is allowed to thrive it will be a major source of government revenue so in that regard they in the Ministry will always support revenue diversification

The main highlight of the occasion was the symbolic launch of the SP by the Honorable Vice President Dr. Mohamed Juldeh Jalloh, who started off by assuring the development partners on the commitment of the president to fight environmental issues as he said this launch is a clear demonstration of that commitment. Although at the time when the president instituted the Ministry of The Environment a lot of naysayers where trumpeting that this is just a way of bloating the wage bill, but it is now clear that the president is serious about his commitment to diversify the economy and build a resilient Environment. He emphasizes that this government and president Bio at helm will do everything possible to treat environmental issues with the seriousness it deserves.

Post Launch

As a way of rolling out the strategic plan, the Trust has embarked on various activities that are in tune with the four pillars and one such activity is the strategic partnership, for which the EU and other like-minded organizations. Island Aid to name but one, have been working with the CTF to develop proposal and concepts to carry out programs and activities that are align with sustainable management of our natural resources and ensure good environmental best practices.

As a way of rolling the strategic plan, The CTF should devise a sustainable means of mobilizing resources which will enable the National Protected Area Authority to execute their mandate as stated in NPAA&CTF act of 2012. This cannot be achieved without effective and robust sensitization and education. In a bid to achieve this, the outreach unit of the CTF is to have regular Radio and television discussions to enhance visibility and for the people of Sierra Leone to understand the mandate and functioning of the institutions as fiduciary agency.