



SIERRA LEONE NEWSLETTER

Youth Edition



A SPECIAL DEDICATION TO THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ROTIMY DJOSSAYA, FOR BEING A SPECTACULAR YOUTH CHAMPION.

PLAN INTERNATIONAL SIERRA LEONE NEWSLETTER

YOUTH EDITION

WELCOME

Written by Hawa Yokie, 22, CEO and Co-founder of the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center and YAP Alumni

Welcome to the Youth Edition of Plan International Sierra Leone's Newsletter. When I think about Plan International two things stand out to me - the support that is given to young people for them to lead and thrive and the promotion of youth initiatives.

Seeing young people leading and thriving is, I believe, all thanks to the supportive environment Plan International creates that allows us to come up with initiatives and take the lead on those. These commitments to young people are not just written in Plan International's mission statement, but I can see them being lived in the office. This way, we as young people can develop personally and professionally in a way that doesn't just help one individual but our whole community.

My personal highlight of the past months was participating in the Global Girls' Summit in Nigeria. I had the chance to interact with the CEO of Plan International, Stephen Omollo. Seeing how passionate he is about supporting and promoting youth initiatives was a great experience. This really shows the kind of environment that Plan International is creating where young people are respected and taken seriously. We talked about the barriers young people are facing in political participation and how solutions can look like. One moment that stuck with me was inviting the CEO to visit my youth-led Innovation Center in Sierra Leone – which he accepted. Seeing this commitment to support the work young people are doing is something that stood out for me. You can read

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Plan International Sierra Leone
6 Cantonment Road,
Off King Harman Road
Freetown, Sierra Leone

plan-international.org/sierra-leone



Hawa Yokie, CEO and Co-founder of the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center and YAP Alumni, © Plan International Sierra Leone

more about the Global Girls' Summit on page 9.

To the young people of Sierra Leone and the region I'll say: if you have an idea work on it. Don't limit yourself to money, if you have an initiative just start it. Reach out to organisations for skills training and capacity building to develop yourself. And finally, collaboration is key – reach out to your network to support each other.

To everyone reading this, enjoy the youth edition of the Plan International Sierra Leone Newsletter. I am happy to share our highlights of the past months with you.

HAWA YOKIE

CEO & Co-founder,
Kamara Yokie Innovation
Center and Plan
International YAP Alumni

**“LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE, TAKING THEIR
ADVICE IS SOMETHING REALLY UNIQUE ABOUT
PLAN INTERNATIONAL.”**

- HAWA YOKIE



Rotimy Djossaya, Regional Executive Director for West and Central Africa, © Plan International

THANK YOU

After six years of service to Plan International, especially to the West and Central Africa region, we say goodbye to Executive Director, Rotimy Djossaya and wish him all the best for the future.

Rotimy leaves a legacy of championing youth engagement and amplifying Plan International's investments in young people. He continuously advocated removing barriers for youth groups, which are sometimes caused by Plan International's systems and procedures themselves. Thanks to him the Youth Challenge Fund came to life, supporting young people's initiatives across the region.

We want to thank Rotimy for his leadership over the past six years, for being an exceptional youth champion, and for making sure that the voices and experiences of young people continue to shape Plan International's response.



Rotimy Djossaya and the Regional Leadership Team at Plan International Sierra Leone, © Plan International Sierra Leone

“LISTENING TO, LEARNING FROM, AND INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE CAN NEVER BE OPTIONAL AS WE STRIVE TO BE LOCALLY LED, INCREASE OUR IMPACT AND STRENGTHENING OUR LEGITIMACY”.

- ROTIMY DJOSSAYA



Evariste Sindyigaya, Country Director of Plan International Sierra Leone speaking at the National Youth Summit, © Plan International Sierra Leone

OPENING STATEMENT

At Plan International Sierra Leone, we recognize that by not including the voices of young people in our planning, decision making and governance structures, we are missing a huge opportunity, not only in terms of value and legitimacy, but also in terms of learning from the unique perspective that young people can bring to our work.

As stated in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), every person under the age of 18 has the right to participate in the decision-making processes that impact them. The civic freedoms of expression, association and assembly are basic human rights, and yet young people, and young women in particular across Sierra Leone are deprived of opportunities and platforms to make their voices heard.

To help fulfil their rights, we need to create safe and enabling spaces for young people to offer inspiring and original insights on issues that matter to them. This is central to our ambition at Plan International.

The world is changing fast; through innovation, increasing mobility and informality. Never before has the world experienced such rapid and dynamic changes in technologies, economies and societies. If supported, young people are able to challenge structural barriers that restrict, hold back, and deny them their rights.

The pace in which the world changes must be matched with accelerated initiatives to ensure equal opportunities for all young people – especially women and girls. Therefore, we should embrace the energy and creativity of young people.

Enjoy reading the following pages written by and with the young people of Sierra Leone.

**“WE NEED TO
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THEM.”**

**- EVARISTE
SINDAYIGAYA**

EVARISTE SINDAYIGAYA

Country Director
Plan International
Sierra Leone

 @esindyigaya



EQUAL POWER NOW - GIRLS IN POLITICS

Blessing, 16, speaking at the well of Parliament during the Girls' Takeover, © Plan International Sierra Leone

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

“When I sat on that seat [as Speaker of Parliament] it made me realise that I’m not going to stop there (...), the possibility of me becoming the speaker, a politician or a leader of a nation is very large,” says Blessing, 16, acting as Speaker of Parliament leading the debate on the Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) Act during the Girls’ Takeover on International Day of the Girl in October 2022.

The Government of Sierra Leone passed the ground-breaking Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Act 2022 into law on the 19th of January 2023. This is a win for all women in Sierra Leone and gives hope and aspiration to future generations. The GEWE Act sets an opportunity to lastingly improve the broader socio-economic conditions for women and increase their representation in Sierra Leone. It aims to advance key priorities including reserving 30% of elective and public office positions for women, strengthening gender mainstreaming and introducing gender-responsive budgeting, and expanding access to finance.

“FOR A COUNTRY TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, WOMEN MUST BE INCLUDED IN DECISION-MAKING”

- FATMATA, 16



Well of Parliament during the Girls' Takeover on International Day of the Girl 2022, © Plan International Sierra Leone

How did we get here?

From the first presentation of the GEWE Bill in parliament by Hon. Minister of Gender and Children's Affairs, Madam Manty Tarawalli, to its passing, over a year went by filled with awareness raising and advocacy activities on national and district levels. Before the GEWE Bill became an Act, the young activists we work with and for, made their voices heard speaking up for gender equality.



Lucia speaking during the mock debate on the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Bill, © Plan International Sierra Leone

"To the members of parliament, I want [them] to have it mind that they are our representatives (...), they not only have to think of themselves but the people of Sierra Leone. They should not only think about now but think about the future." – Blessing, 16, acting as the Speaker of Parliament

Young women care about politics and deserve the space to be part of the decisions that affect their lives, they demand equal power now.

On International Day of the Girl in October 2022, Plan International took over the well of parliament with over 140 girls and boys from Plan's various youth networks. They debated on the GEWE Bill making powerful statements for it to be passed into law.



Three girls seated at the well of Parliament during the Girls' Takeover, © Plan International Sierra Leone

"As a girl, I had this idea that (...) only women [are] supporting women, but when we debated on that Bill at Parliament, I felt that in this country or anywhere in the world it should be something that is a coalition [between

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Blessing, 16, acting as Speaker of Parliament, © Plan International Sierra Leone

women and men], we come together as different genders to support each other.” – says Blessing, 16, acting as the Speaker of Parliament.



Well of Parliament during the Girls' Takeover, © Plan International Sierra Leone

This not only showed the decision makers of Sierra Leone what the young generation has to say but also gave the participants the space to advocate for the tomorrow they want to live in.

“For a country to achieve sustainable economic growth, women must be included in decision-making” – Fatmata, 16, acting as Clerk of Parliament during the takeover. Reflecting on the day she said: “It was a great experience. I believe that this will take me to another level of my life. The debate opened our eyes that women are capable of doing anything. So if we give them the opportunity to showcase their potential we will be able to develop the country as a whole.”

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



Fatmata, 16, acting as Clerk of Parliament, © Plan International Sierra Leone



DO YOU WANT TO SEE THE GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN ACTION?

Watch the video about the takeover at parliament and listen to the voices of young people advocating for their tomorrow. Click here:

[PARLIAMENT TAKEOVER](#)

[GIRLS' VOICES](#)



Group photo of some of the girl participants at the Global Girls Summit with Country Director of Nigeria, Charles Usie (left) © Plan International Nigeria

To commemorate the International Day of the Girl, each year Plan International hosts a Global Girls' Summit to promote girls and young women's voices, power, and leadership. In 2022 Nigeria hosted the summit titled 'Equal Power Now'.

The youth blog below is written by Paulina, 22, a member of the Plan International Sierra Leone Youth Advisory Panel and Intern:

Inspired by Plan's New Global Strategy and outcome of the Global Girls Summit

The different work that young people are doing in their various countries really astounds me. It's encouraging to see young people taking initiative, organising, and posing questions. This is really showing that girls are ready to demonstrate equal power now.

Plan International's Regional Director outlines the foundational elements of their mission

"I am pleased that the Global Girls' Summit and launching of our global strategy are being held in Nigeria," says Rotimy Djossaya, Regional Director of Plan International West and Central Africa

The work we do at Plan International is guided by the global strategy: [All Girls Standing Strong Creating Global Change](#). We are working towards the following three pillars:

- We must exert more influence. We truly want to move from 100 to 200 million girls worldwide, so we want to do more than we are now doing.
- To make sure that young people are at the forefront of everything, we want to develop national advisory boards, youth advisory panels, and alumni networks.
- We wish to intensify our work in gender transformational education and help young people who have creative abilities.

It was a terrific experience I had at the Global Girl's Summit, and it's encouraging to see that the global team is making every effort to achieve equal power now.



Paulina, 22, YAP member and Intern, © Plan International Sierra Leone

The theme for the summit: Equal Power Now

The current focus on equal power now is on girls in political settings. 29,000 girls and young women were interviewed by Plan International about their political participation experiences in 29 different countries. While nine out of ten girls think it is vital to participate in politics, nine out of ten girls also said there are obstacles in their way. Girl power is political, they care about politics and want to have their voices heard. However, girls and young women aren't included in decisions that affect their life on a worldwide scale. Young women and girls are underrated, marginalized, and undervalued. They are not included in choices affecting them in their homes, schools, communities, institutions, and in the corridors of power. The voices of girls and young women must be heard.

Youth Marketplace promotes learning at the Global Girls' Summit



Hawa, 22, moderating a panel session at the Global Girls' Summit, © Plan International Nigeria

In Nigeria, Hawa and I represented Sierra Leone. During the marketplace, we demonstrated the efforts our nation has made to encourage girls to participate in politics. Showcasing technology and innovation attracted a lot of interest in our booth. People were impressed to see Sierra Leonean girls engaged in technology and STEM and were interested in learning how we use this to get involved in politics.

The CEO of Plan International, Stephen Omollo, was amazed by what we presented to him "I'm thrilled to meet the Sierra Leonean team, and what you're showing us today has shown that what people have heard about Sierra Leone is real. Your actions today demonstrate excellent leadership characteristics and the fact that you are genuinely striving toward obtaining equal power. I think other nations need to do the same." It was amazing to be able to motivate the international team with the excellent work we have been doing here. It demonstrates that if more possibilities are offered to young people, we will be able to realise the global strategy - [All Girls Standing Strong Creating Global Change](#).

Holding Plan International accountable

During the Summit, various commitments were made. We, as young people will hold Plan International accountable for:

GLOBAL GIRLS' SUMMIT

"I'M THRILLED TO MEET THE SIERRA LEONEAN TEAM, YOU'RE SHOWING US TODAY THAT WHAT PEOPLE HAVE HEARD ABOUT SIERRA LEONE IS REAL."

- STEPHEN OMOLLO, CEO

GLOBAL GIRLS' SUMMIT

1) Create a Regional Youth Advisory Panel

Young people who spoke at the summit demanded that a regional youth advisory panel be established to help prepare international youth-related choices and to hold the global team accountable. The young people who made the statement that “there is nothing for us without us” want to participate in the round table where decisions are made on youth matters.



Young women taking part in group activities at the Global Girls' Summit, © Plan International Nigeria

2) Establish a Youth Advisory Panel and Girls Out Loud in every country in West and Central Africa (WACA)

Young people demand that Plan International makes informed decisions about youth issues together with youth. Every country should have its own Youth Advisory Panel as well as [Girls Out Loud](#) group which will guide decision-making and in turn assist develop the capacity of young people.



Susan from Malawi (left) and Paulina from Sierra Leone (right) speaking at the Global Girls' Summit, © Plan International Nigeria

3) Financially and technically support young people's initiatives

We urge Plan International to start seeing young people as partners and provide flexible funding for youth project implementation. It is now time for them to act on their assertion that youth are the centre of everything.

**DO YOU SPEND
HOURS SCROLLING
THROUGH TIKTOK?**

Why not follow Plan International Sierra Leone. Click on the icon below:



Conclusion

I want to express my gratitude to Plan International for giving us the chance to participate in the Global Girls' Summit in 2022. Seeing the different initiatives other nations have been doing to support young people and girls in political settings was a wonderful experience and I hope that Plan International will fulfill its commitments toward young people. We are grateful to our Country Director, Evariste Sindayigaya, who exemplifies strong leadership qualities and consistently welcomes young people into his office. Young people, we already have the capability - all we need to do is seize the chances that are being presented to us. In this way, we will be able to reach Equal Power Now.

GLOBAL GIRLS' SUMMIT

PAULINA, 22

Youth Advisory Panel member and Intern



Regional Director Rotimyo Djossaya taking part in a panel discussion at the Global Girls' Summit, © Plan International Nigeria



LEARN MORE

HAVE YOU HEARD OF GIRLS OUT LOUD?

Girls Out Loud is a safe and private online space for girls to discuss key gender issues. Girls can ask questions and discuss topics such as self-image, gender-based violence and early pregnancy.

Are you a girl or young woman living in Sierra Leone and want to join? Reach out to Paulyanna Kanu-Kobby at Plan International to find out how to join: +232-22-234-080

LAUNCHING THE FIRST YOUTH-LED INNOVATION CENTER IN AFRICA

“I want to bring young people together who have a passion for technology and innovation, [and are] looking for a community to develop their skills and become change makers.” – Hawa Yokie, CEO of the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center and Plan International YAP Alumni.

Hawa Yokie, 22 years old, who grew up in the city of Kenema in Sierra Leone, just opened the first youth-led Innovation Center in Africa. Her plans are big – seeing Sierra Leone becoming a hub for innovation where ideas come to life that change not only her country but have also the potential to reach outside of national borders.

If it were up to her parents, Hawa would be studying finance. However she has always been curious about technology and science asking questions like, what makes cars move, how do computers run and what is renewable energy. Making use of a computer lab in her high school she taught herself about different technologies that can help develop Sierra Leone. But something was missing – there was no space in Kenema to share ideas and experiences with peers, talk about her passion for robotics and science, and no role models to look up to. So Hawa took measures into her own hands, opening the first of its-kind youth-owned and youth-led Innovation Center in Africa.

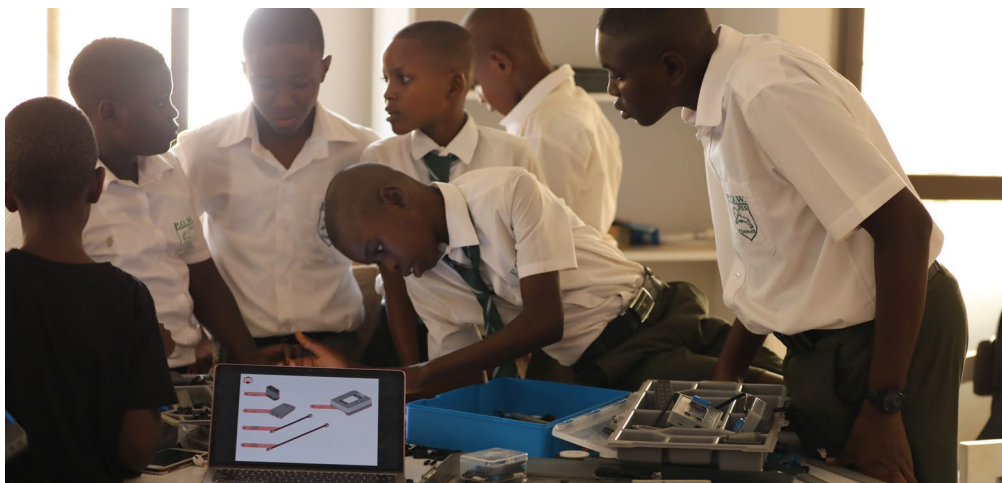
“THIS IS THE PLACE WHERE IDEAS COME TO LIFE TO CHANGE SIERRA LEONE AND AFRICA”

- HAWA YOKIE



Robotics school club building their robot at the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center, © Plan International Sierra Leone

The Kamara Yokie Innovation Center (KYIC) aims to create a safe, multi-cultural space where innovators, creative minds, and problem solvers come together to create solutions to pressing challenges affecting people. Using a human-centered, problem-solving approach, the Center uses 21st-century entrepreneurial leadership and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) education concepts to harness the untapped potentials of young people.



Robotics school club building their robot at the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center, © Plan International Sierra Leone

What is it like to be a young woman in STEM? Hawa's journey into STEM didn't come without its challenges. Finding mentorship, overcoming traditional gender stereotypes and parental expectations and a lack of skill training in school were some of the barriers she had to face. "When people see me doing solar installations and climbing on a roof, they will tell me this is something only guys can do. There is still this stereotype mindset that women cannot go into STEM," says Hawa. After convincing her parents of her passion for technology, she is now advocating to reform the school curriculum in Sierra Leone. "The world is evolving and changing, it's going more towards tech-based solutions, so Sierra Leone has to prepare the next generation."



Girls working on their robot at the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center, © Plan International Sierra Leone

With the support from Plan International, Hawa was able to get equipment for the Innovation Center including a 3D printer and tools for

YOUTH-LED INNOVATION CENTER

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robotics training. She is thankful to Plan International for being the first organisation to make a commitment to support and follow through. In the future, she is hoping for more capacity training and skills training for young people as well.

After Hawa Yokie officially launched her Youth-led Innovation Centre, she is looking hopeful to the future: “This is the place where ideas come to life to change Sierra Leone and Africa.”

YOUTH-LED INNOVATION CENTER



Hawa Yokie at the Kamara Yokie Innovation Center, © Plan International Sierra Leone



DO YOU WANT TO HEAR MORE FROM HAWA?

Listen to the new episode of the Girls Tech Show, a Plan International podcast. In the third episode, Hawa and Hawanatu discuss their experiences and the barriers they faced pursuing a path in STEM.

Click to listen on:





YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION MAKING

Young woman speaking up at the Country Leadership Team meeting © Plan International Sierra Leone

We recognize the role of young people to strengthen and influence our programmes to achieve our global ambition. Young people constitute a very strong force and voice for Plan International’s global influencing efforts to promote gender transformation. Putting young people at the heart of decision-making, Plan International Sierra Leone established a series of youth meetings with the Country Leadership Team and restructured its Youth Advisory Panel.

“We are not comfortable selling the bread in the shops only, but we want to be in the bakery – in the production room” – Youth Advisory Panel member

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT WITH THE COUNTRY LEADERSHIP TEAM (CLT) DECEMBER 2022

For the first time, Plan International Sierra Leone’s leadership team extended its management meeting to over 150 young people. This highly anticipated opportunity provided a space for young people from across Sierra Leone to share their concerns, appreciation, and recommendations with the management team.

Key points raised included internship and employment opportunities, a need for more flexible systems, funding opportunities, and support for youth-led initiatives. The leadership team happily noted these recommendations for further action. “The voices, concerns, and recommendations of the young people have been heard clearly during our Country Leadership Team engagement. Thank you for speaking up – we will make sure actions are taken” – Evariste Sindayigaya, Country Director of Plan International Sierra Leone.

As part of fulfilling Plan International leadership’s commitment to meaningful youth engagement, these meetings are key to ensuring that young people actively and directly participate in delivering our ambition.

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“We have committed to put young people at the heart of the new global strategy realisation and to make sure that they are at the centre of decision-making in Plan International,” says Mr. Rotimy Djossaya, Regional Director, Plan International West and Central Africa (WACA).

Plan International Sierra Leone is committed to fulfilling its promises. This engagement meeting with the Country Leadership Team was the first in a series of quarterly meetings, with many more to come. In addition, four youth members have been peer-selected to join the CLT and participate in recruitment panels.



Plan International Country Leadership Team engagement with young people, © Plan International Sierra Leone

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION MAKING



Youth meeting with the Country Leadership Team © Plan International Sierra Leone

RESTRUCTURING THE YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL (YAP) – DECEMBER 2022

Plan International Sierra Leone’s Youth Advisory Panel officially kicked off in 2014. As YAP members serve a 2-year term, frequent restructuring is a necessity to bring more young people on board. Over the years, YAPs existed in three locations – Port Loko, Moyamba, and at the Country Office in Freetown. This time around we have added three additional districts including Koinadugu, Bo and, Kailahun. This will strengthen our ability to deliver our ambition and support critical projects such as the Integrated School Feeding Programme.

The YAP is a platform that enables young people to participate in Plan International’s internal decision-making. Key roles include advising on policy and advocacy as well as strategy and governance and participating in events.

We believe that involving young people in decision making spaces, enables them to showcase their abilities at all levels. With a total number of 61 YAP members, including 38 young women and 23 young men across six districts the restructuring was a great success. It’s been an engaging and inspiring period, interacting with young people of diverse backgrounds.

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Kumba and Rachel, who are both visually impaired, are part of the newly restructured YAP in Koinadugu. During the engagement we discussed their dreams for the future. “We want to be lawyers. I feel a strong connection of becoming one, and we are well determined to achieve that. We won’t care about what people say. We believe we can do better than many abled people. We’re just blind but our brains are highly active. The YAP will offer a supporting space and opportunities for me,” says Kumba.

In addition, as part of fulfilling our commitment to supporting young people’s transition to adulthood, Plan International Sierra Leone is engaging graduated sponsored children, programme participants, and young people to join the YAP and Sponsorship Alumni Networks. This includes championing and guiding the peer selection processes of new YAP members.

NATIONAL YOUTH SUMMIT – FEBRUARY 2023

“Too often we are labelled as troublemakers, I’m glad that Plan is changing that cliché,” - says Mariam Samai, National Youth Advisory Panel Representative while addressing her peers at the opening of the National Youth Summit. The two days were filled with contagious energy and passionate speeches as we were focusing on youth in government and leadership, transitioning from consulting to meaningful involvement.



Mariam Samai speaking at the National Youth Summit, © Plan International Sierra Leone

It takes a great team to create impactful change. We are grateful for the continuous support and partnership with the Ministry of Youth Affairs, who works tirelessly to create an empowering space for the young people of Sierra Leone. Our young people are known for asking tough questions and demanding actions. The Hon. Minister participated in an interactive question and answer session regarding topics that are important to young people, including safety for the upcoming elections, youth participation in politics and the challenges young people with disabilities face to access education.

Magdalene, from a small community in Kailahun close to the border of Guinea, made her voice heard. Having a visual impairment makes her education a challenge, as her school does not have the right tools

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION MAKING



Newly restructured Youth Advisory Panel in Koinadugu, © Plan International Sierra Leone

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**- KUMBA, YAP
MEMBER IN
KOIDADUGU**

for her to participate in the lessons like her peers. Getting to school is another challenge in itself. Magdalene is demanding more accessibility for her and other young people with disabilities in her community to access education. Both the Minister and our Country Director pledged to prioritise the matter of making education more accessible for young people with disabilities.

YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF DECISION MAKING



Magdalene addressing the Minister of Youth about the challenges of young people with disabilities to access education at the National Youth Summit, © Plan International Sierra Leone

Day two of the National Youth Summit started with reviewing Plan International's Youth Engagement Strategy together with the young people to make sure their input and voices are included in everything we do. After the strategy review the second quarterly meeting with the Country Leadership Team and young people was held. The engagement serves as a platform to address issues and find solutions to the problems that are affecting young people. The day concluded with the graduation of the Youth Advisory Panel members who have served their term and are now making way for a new generation of young people. Honouring their valuable contributions was a great closing to the National Youth Summit.



Young woman speaking at the National Youth Summit, © Plan International Sierra Leone



Graduated YAP presenting their certificate at the National Youth Summit, © Plan International Sierra Leone



THE TIME IS NOW! GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN TAKE ACTIVE LEADERSHIP

Powering the movement of young people - last December the Girls and Young Women of the She Leads project organised and led their own Leadership Conference. They brought together over 200 girls aged 15 – 30, from different communities and networks across Sierra Leone, for mentorship, leadership training, and to take action on issues that affect them. Next to workshops, inspiring guests and role models were invited to speak. The conference was focused on four key themes:

- Girls in ICT;
- Political leadership for girls and young women;
- Access to inclusive quality education for girls;
- Girls and young women in peace building.

“We want you to lead, take actions on all matters that affect you. It is not tomorrow it is today.” – Evariste Sindyigaya, Country Director, Plan International Sierra Leone.

Girls and Young Women continue to face discrimination in political, economic, social, cultural and, educational spaces. Disproportionally affected by sexual and gender-based violence girls and young women in Sierra Leone face enormous challenges and barriers. Plan International

“THIS IS REALLY ENERGISING TO SEE HOW MUCH YOU CARE ABOUT HELPING OTHER GIRLS BE THE BEST THEY CAN, SMASHING DOWN THE BARRIERS.”

– BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER LISA CHESNEY



Young women speaking at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone

is implementing the She Leads project to support young women to advocate for their rights, break down barriers and bring gender transformative change to communities, institutions, and society. Girls and young women have the right to take up leadership positions and participate in decision-making.

This conference, organised by the girls and young women themselves, created an opportunity to connect, call to action, and commit to addressing policy gaps, mobilise resources, and strengthen institutions to promote girls' and young women's development. The sessions included a workshop on emotional intelligence to improve leadership skills and building strong relationships for work and personal effectiveness. Josephine told her peers: "Before you say anything try to take another person's perspective." The media training session, included how to stay safe online and how to use media in a positive way. Further, the question what it means to be a great mentor was discussed in depth. Meaningful mentorship between peers and role models can create a great learning and development opportunity for both mentor and mentee. In the session on advocacy, the girls and young women supported each other to be confident and not be defined by societal norms.

During the celebration of the [International Day of Persons with Disabilities](#) on the 3rd of December Adama and Jeneba spoke about inclusion. "The first thing that I have learned for persons with disabilities, we must be proud and accept ourselves. When we accept ourselves then society will accept us." – Adama



Adama (left) and Jeneba (right) speaking to their peers about inclusion at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone

"I have also learned about inclusion because during the conference persons with disabilities have been included and are not stopped from participating. It helps us express ourselves and feel like persons with disability are also part of the society." – Jeneba

The Director of Gender, Charles Vandi, joined the conference as a guest speaker to talk about the implementation of the recently enacted Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act and what opportunities arise for young women in the political landscape of Sierra Leone.

THE TIME IS NOW! GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN TAKE ACTIVE LEADERSHIP



Young woman at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone

"THE FIRST THING THAT I HAVE LEARNED FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, WE MUST BE PROUD AND ACCEPT OURSELVES"

– ADAMA



British High Commissioner Lisa Chesney during the panel discussion on political participation at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone

“I’ve been told to look less feminine to be taken seriously.” – British High Commissioner Lisa Chesney. During a panel discussion on the political participation of young women the British High Commissioner Lisa Chesney talked about her experience being a woman in politics. She talked about challenges but also said she is seeing positive change in society: “What I would say is that the world is slowly changing, my experience now is very different than at the beginning of my career.” During the panel discussion with Lisa, the young women talked about getting their voices heard in political decision-making spaces, how we need to do more in the area of inclusion of young women with disabilities, and encouraged their peers to keep demanding their rights.

The conference ended with a celebration with music and dance. The girls and young women showed their leadership capabilities by successfully organising and leading their own conference creating a safe space for everyone to contribute, learn and commit to actions to promote girls’ and young women’s development in Sierra Leone.

THE TIME IS NOW! GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN TAKE ACTIVE LEADERSHIP



Girls and young women with British High Commissioner Lisa Chesney at the She Leads Leadership Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone



Evariste Sindayigaya joining the celebration at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone



Evariste Sindayigaya joining the celebration at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone



Evariste Sindayigaya joining the celebration at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone



Evariste Sindayigaya joining the celebration at the She Leads Conference, © Plan International Sierra Leone

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Editor, Design and Layout

Chiara Herold - *Communications Coordinator*

Photo Credits

Sallieu Sankoh - *Communications Intern*

Chiara Herold - *Communications Coordinator*

Plan International Nigeria

Contributors

Evariste Sindayigaya - *Country Director*

Hawa Yokie - *CEO & Co-founder, Kamara Yokie Innovation Center and YAP Alumni*

Paulina Bangura - *Youth Advisory Panel member and Intern*

Kamanda Kamara - *Youth Engagement Officer*

Timothy Sam - *Youth Engagement Manager*



Plan International Sierra Leone
6 Cantonment Road,
Off King Harman Road
Freetown, Sierra Leone

plan-international.org/sierra-leone