

# Analysis of Sierra Leone's 2026 Budget



T H E M E

# Enhancing Domestic Revenue Mobilisation for Sustained Economic Stability and Improved Service Delivery



# About BudgIT Sierra Leone

BudgIT is a civic organization using creative technology to simplify public information, stimulating a community of active citizens and enabling their right to demand accountability, institutional reforms, efficient service delivery, and an equitable society.

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# Executive Summary

Sierra Leone's 2026 National Budget is themed "Enhancing Domestic Revenue Mobilisation for Sustained Economic Stability and Improved Service Delivery." But behind that title is a government wrestling with a very difficult question: how do you keep a country running, pay down its debts, and still invest in the future, all at the same time?

The government plans to spend NLe 30.1 billion this year but only has NLe 26 billion coming in. That NLe 4.1 billion gap, and NLe 7.9 billion if you exclude donor grants, has to be borrowed.

The clearest sign of that cost is debt repayment. This year, the government will spend NLe 8.6 billion just servicing its debts, more than the NLe 7.9 billion it will pay every teacher, nurse, soldier, and civil servant in the country combined. This means that a growing share of public money is going to creditors, not to classrooms, clinics, or communities.

On the revenue side, the government projects NLe 22.2 billion in domestic revenue, representing approximately 85% of total resources. While this development signals a shift toward self-reliance amid declining donor support, the revenue base remains narrow and structurally weak. Nearly 80% of domestic revenue is derived from income taxes, customs and excise duties, and Goods and Services Tax (GST), leaving the economy vulnerable to shocks affecting formal sector employment, trade, and consumption.

That ambition is right: donor money is shrinking, and Sierra Leone cannot run on external goodwill forever. But the tax base is too narrow. Nearly 80% of domestic revenue comes from income tax, import duties, and GST, a foundation that holds only as long as formal employment, trade, and consumption hold up. The moment any of those weakens, the whole revenue picture shifts.

Perhaps the country's natural resources represent the greatest missed opportunity. Sierra Leone exports roughly US\$1.2 billion in minerals every year. Yet the government collects only about US\$43.6 million from that — just 3.6 cents on every dollar of mineral wealth leaving the country. That gap is not

inevitable. It is the result of outdated agreements, weak oversight, and a governance framework that has historically favoured investors over citizens. Fixing it will not happen overnight, but the new Mineral Wealth Fund and the Mines Corporation are steps in the right direction.

On the spending side, the budget leans heavily on keeping the government running day-to-day. Recurrent spending, wages, debt payments, goods and services accounts for more than 70% of the total. That leaves capital investment, the money that builds roads, hospitals, schools, and irrigation systems, at just NLe 8.4 billion, down sharply from NLe 13 billion last year. Cutting development budgets to cover running costs has long-lasting consequences: unbuilt roads, unopened clinics, and unsupported farms.

The sectoral numbers also raise questions. Feed Salone, the government's flagship programme gets 6% of the budget. Health gets 8%, well below the 15% that African governments committed to under the Abuja Declaration. Youth employment, one of the Big Five Game Changers, receives a fraction of what the scale of the problem demands.

There are real positives. Inflation has fallen dramatically, from over 46% in 2023 to 4.4% as in October 2025 with a projected increase of 9.0% in 2026. The exchange rate has been relatively stable. GDP is growing. These are genuine achievements that have provided ordinary Sierra Leoneans with some breathing space. But that breathing room is fragile and new taxes on rice, cooking gas, and construction materials risk squeezing people who have only just started to recover.

The 2026 budget points in the right direction. The IMF programme provides external discipline. The revenue strategy is the right priority. The development goals in the national plan are the right ones. What matters now is delivery: whether the money actually reaches the schools, the hospitals, the farms, and the roads, and whether, twelve months from now, ordinary Sierra Leoneans can see and feel the difference.





## Introduction

**Beyond fiscal analysis, this report underscores the imperative of citizen engagement in the budgetary process.**

Public budgets are fundamental instruments of governance, serving as the primary mechanism through which governments articulate their development priorities, allocate scarce public resources, and discharge their obligations to citizens. In developing economies such as Sierra Leone, where fiscal constraints are acute and development needs are substantial, the national budget assumes even greater significance as a determinant of social and economic outcomes.

Sierra Leone's 2026 National Budget represents the Government's fiscal response to a complex and evolving macroeconomic environment. This report, produced by BudgIT Sierra Leone, presents a systematic and evidence-based analysis of the 2026 National Budget. Drawing on official budget documents, fiscal data, and sectoral expenditure trends, the analysis examines revenue projections,

expenditure allocations, debt sustainability, and sectoral investment priorities. Particular attention is given to the alignment or misalignment between stated policy commitments and actual resource allocation across critical sectors including education, health, agriculture, and infrastructure.

Beyond fiscal analysis, this report underscores the imperative of citizen engagement in the budgetary process. Grounded in the principles of transparency, accountability, and participatory governance, it seeks to bridge the information gap between technical budget documentation and public understanding, thereby equipping citizens, civil society organisations, and policymakers with the evidence necessary to advocate for more efficient, equitable, and responsive public financial management.





## Overview of the Budget

**The major sources of government money are domestic taxes and grants from development partners. Total Revenue and Grants projected for 2026 amount to NLe 26 billion.**

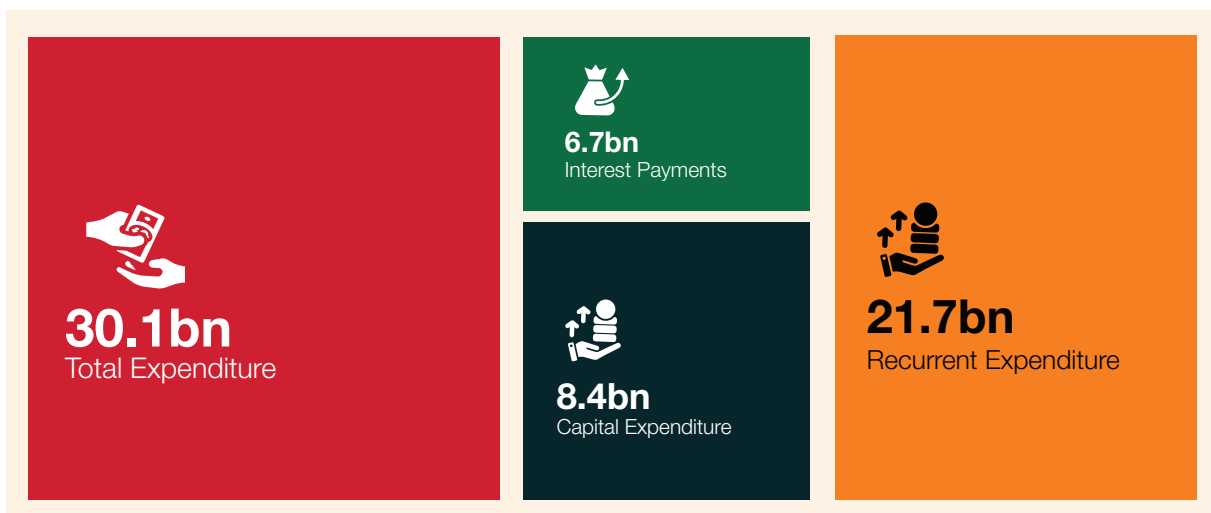
Sierra Leone's 2026 National Budget totals NLe 30.1 billion, reflecting planned investments in both recurrent operations and capital development. The programmed budget represents about 16% of GDP, signalling a continued effort to balance service delivery with fiscal discipline.

The major sources of government money are domestic taxes and grants from development partners. Total

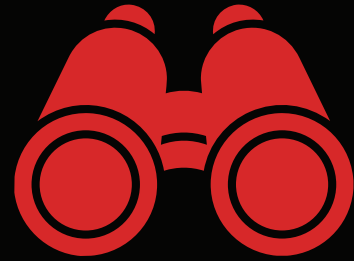
Revenue and Grants projected for 2026 amount to NLe 26 billion. Domestic revenue accounts for the overwhelming share, reflecting the Government's emphasis on self-sufficiency as external assistance continues to decline. On the expenditure side, the largest allocations go to Recurrent Expenditure (NLe 21.7 billion), interest payments (NLe 6.7 billion), capital investment (NLe 8.4 billion), and recurrent expenditure (NLe 21.7 Billion).

### How Big is the Budget?

Unit in NLe



## What to Watch in 2026



These are the key signals that will determine whether the budget succeeds or fails:

### Revenue Performance

Will the government actually meet the NLe22.2bn target, or fall short as in previous years?

### Debt Burden

Will debt servicing remain above NLe8.6bn, or begin to decline?

### Capital Project Delivery

Will the NLe8.4bn capital budget translate into real projects on the ground?

### Inflation Trends

Will new taxes on rice and essential goods push prices back up?

### Exchange Rate Stability

Can the Leone remain stable with reserves below 3 months of import cover?

**If these indicators worsen, citizens will feel it through higher prices, fewer services, and slower development.**





## Fiscal Framework

**Sierra Leone's 2026 revenue budget projects NLe 22.2 billion in total domestic revenue, built on a functional but structurally fragile foundation.**

### I Where The Money Comes From (Revenue)

Of the NLe 26 billion available to the government this year, NLe 22.2 billion, roughly 85% must be generated domestically. This is the central fiscal challenge of 2026 and the core theme of the budget. The single largest revenue source is income tax at NLe

8.3 billion, followed by customs and excise duties at NLe 5.5 billion and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) at NLe 3.9 billion. External grants from development partners contribute the remaining NLe3.8 billion.

Revenue Source	2026
Income Taxes	NLe8.3bn
Goods and Services Tax (GST)	NLe3.9bn
Customs and Excise Duties	NLe5.5bn
Mining Revenue	NLe1.3bn
Fisheries and Royalties	NLe142.0m
Parastatals' Dividends	NLe405.3m
Other Government Departments	NLe 452.0m
Treasury Single Account(TSA) Agencies	NLe1.6 bn
Road User Charges and Vehicle Licenses	NLe 671.2m
<b>Grants</b>	<b>NLe 3.8bn</b>
<b>Total Domestic Revenue</b>	<b>NLe 22.2 bn</b>

Sierra Leone's 2026 revenue budget projects NLe 22.2 billion in total domestic revenue, built on a functional but structurally fragile foundation. Income taxes lead at NLe 8.3bn, followed by customs and excise duties at NLe 5.5bn and Goods and Services Tax at NLe 3.9bn, three heads that together account for nearly 80% of domestic revenue. This reflects an economy where formal sector taxation dominates, but informality remains widespread. Grants contribute NLe 3.8bn, a concerning 17.1% of total revenue that underscores a significant donor dependency, while natural resource revenues from mining NLe 1.3bn and fisheries NLe 142m together amount to just 6.5% of the total, a stark underperformance for a country endowed with diamonds, iron ore,

and rich maritime resources. Treasury Single Account (TSA) Agencies NLe 1.6bn, Road User Charges and Vehicle Licenses NLe 671.2m; other government departments NLe 452m; and parastatals' dividends: NLe 405.3m round out the remaining streams. The overarching fiscal challenge is clear: the government must broaden its Goods and Services Tax net to capture the informal economy; aggressively reform resource rent capture frameworks to unlock the true value of its natural endowments; and pursue domestic revenue mobilization with enough ambition to reduce reliance on donor grants, which, at nearly a fifth of public revenue, remain a vulnerability that no sovereign budget should carry indefinitely.

## I Where The Money Goes (Expenditure)

The NLe30.1 billion expenditure envelope is divided between recurrent spending, the cost of keeping the government running today, and capital spending, which is investment in the

infrastructure and services that will underpin growth tomorrow. The balance between these two categories is one of the most important design choices in any budget.

Revenue Source	2026
Wages and Salaries	7.9 billion
Interest Payments on Debt	6.7 billion
Goods and Services	3.8 billion
Subsidies and Transfers	3.3 billion
<b>Total Recurrent Expenditure</b>	<b>21.7 billion</b>
Foreign-Financed Capital Investment	4.5 billion
Domestic-Financed Capital Investment	2.7 billion
Capital Transfers (BSL Recapitalisation)	1.2 billion
<b>Total Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>8.4 billion</b>
<b>TOTAL EXPENDITURE</b>	<b>30.1 billion</b>

Sierra Leone's 2026 expenditure budget totals NLe 30.1bn, NLe 21.7bn in recurrent expenditure and NLe 8.4bn in capital expenditure, a ratio that immediately reveals a budget weighted heavily toward consumption over investment. Wages and salaries dominate at NLe 7.9bn a 26.2% of total expenditure, reflecting the fiscal weight of a large public sector workforce, while interest payments on debt at NLe 6.7bn are the most alarming line item nearly matching the entire wage bill and signaling a debt servicing burden that is crowding out productive expenditure. Goods and services NLe 3.8bn and subsidies and transfers NLe 3.3bn complete the recurrent picture, together consuming another NLe 7.1bn that leaves little fiscal room for maneuver.

On the capital side, foreign-financed investment leads at NLe 4.5bn versus NLe 2.7bn in domestically-financed investment, a dependency on external financing for development projects that mirrors the grant vulnerability seen on the revenue side, while the NLe 1.2bn Capital Transfers (BSL Recapitalisation) recapitalization transfer points to underlying stress in the central bank's balance sheet. With the total expenditure of NLe 30.1bn against total domestic revenue of NLe 22.2bn, the budget carries a NLe 7.9bn gap a fiscal deficit that underscores the urgency of both revenue mobilization and expenditure rationalization, particularly on debt servicing, if Sierra Leone is to achieve any meaningful degree of fiscal sustainability.

## Accountability Box

### Where Your Money Is Going



Out of every **NLe100** the government plans to spend:

**NLe26**



Wages and Salaries

**NLe22**



Interest Payments (Debt)

**NLe13**



Goods and Services

**NLe11**



Subsidies and Transfers

**NLe28**



Capital Projects (Infrastructure, Health, Education, etc.)

**More money is going to debt than to building the future.**

## I Budget Deficit and Borrowing

A budget deficit arises when government expenditure exceeds the revenue generated from taxes, grants, and other non-borrowing sources. In Sierra Leone, the fiscal deficit has shown notable fluctuations in recent years, reflecting growing pressure on public finances. The deficit increased from NLe1.96bn in 2023 to NLe2.6bn in 2024, before rising sharply to NLe7.5bn in 2025 - an increase of more than 60 percent within a single year.

Although projections indicate a reduction to NLe4.1bn in 2026, the persistence of a deficit means the government must continue relying on both domestic and external borrowing

to finance its operations and close the funding gap.

Sustained borrowing, while necessary in the short term, constrains fiscal space and limits the government's ability to invest strategically in critical areas such as infrastructure, social services, and long-term economic development. These trends underscore the importance of strengthened fiscal discipline, efficient and value-for-money public spending, and enhanced transparency and accountability in public financial management.

**Year-on-Year Budget Deficit**

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Including grant	2.52bn	1.96bn	2.6bn	<b>7.5bn</b>	<b>4.1bn</b>
Excluding grant	6.29bn	5.75bn	8.5bn	<b>16.4bn</b>	<b>7.9bn</b>

## I Economic Context

The 2026 Budget is anchored on macroeconomic targets that reflect both gradual stabilisation achieved in 2025 and the Government's ambition for sustained economic recovery. Sierra Leone enters 2026 with improved macroeconomic conditions, though significant vulnerabilities remain. Headline inflation declined dramatically from a peak of 54.5% in October 2023 to 4.4% by October 2025 returning to comfortable single-digit levels. The Leone has maintained relative stability against major currencies since mid-2023, supported by prudent monetary policy.

However, gross international reserves stood at approximately 1.7 months of import cover as at October 2025, still below the recommended 3.0-month threshold. Total public debt is estimated at US\$3.2 billion as at June 2025, with external debt at US\$1.8 billion and domestic debt at NLe 32.3 billion (equivalent to US\$1.4 billion). The Government has maintained its commitment to macroeconomic management, underpinned by a staff-level agreement with the IMF under the Extended Credit Facility.

### GDP Growth Rate over the Last Five Years

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Real GDP (%)	5.3	5.7	4.4	4.4	4.5

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone

### Percentage Contributions to GDP by Sector for five years (2019-2023)

Sectors	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Agriculture (%)	35.1	33.7	38.8	29.1	29.2
Industry (%)	17.6	19.2	20.8	26.1	25.6
Services (%)	43.4	43.4	42.1	42.1	42.5

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone Rebased GDP Report December 2024.

Sierra Leone's economy recorded modest growth of 4.4% in 2024, with projections of 4.5% for 2026 and an average of 4.6% over the medium term. Growth is driven by agriculture, services, and mining, alongside

improving macroeconomic stability. However, the economy remains vulnerable to external shocks, declining ODA, and persistent structural constraints in infrastructure and human capital.

### Inflation Rate Trend (2021 -2025)

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Inflation Rate (%)	11.85%	26.95%	46.62%	29.79%	7.74%

Source: Statistics Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's headline inflation collapsed from 54.5% in October 2023 to 4.4% by October 2025, driven by tight monetary policy, improved food supply under the Feed Salone programme, and relative exchange rate stability. The Government projects inflation to remain low and manageable

in 2026. However, new tax measures on essential commodities — including a rice import tariff rising from 5% in 2024 to 10% in 2025 — may introduce fresh cost-of-living pressures, disproportionately affecting low-income households.





## Revenue Analysis

**The revenue structure is heavily concentrated in three conventional tax heads income taxes of 37.4%, customs and excise duties of 24.8%, and Goods and Services Tax GST of 17.6%**

Sierra Leone's 2026 domestic revenue projection of NLe 22.2bn reflects an ambitious fiscal consolidation agenda, though its credibility rests on several assumptions that merit careful examination.

The revenue structure is heavily concentrated in three conventional tax heads income taxes of 37.4%, customs and excise duties of 24.8%, and Goods and Services Tax GST of 17.6% which together account for nearly 80% of total domestic revenue, creating significant exposure to simultaneous erosion should formal sector employment contract, import volumes decline due to Leone depreciation, or domestic consumption soften.

The income tax dominance raises equity and structural concerns, as the burden falls disproportionately on a narrow pool of formal wage earners in an economy where informality predominates, while the GST projection assumes meaningful compliance improvements in wholesale, retail, and services sectors that have historically underperformed without stronger enforcement mechanisms such as e-receipting and integrated audit systems.

Customs and excise revenues, though substantial, remain vulnerable to external shocks and exchange rate volatility, and the implicit fiscal cost of energy subsidies administered through duty waivers or below cost petroleum pricing represents a budgetary burden that does not appear transparently in the revenue framework.

The mining revenue of 5.9% and fisheries & royalties of 0.6% together contribute just 6.5% of domestic revenue, a chronic underperformance relative to Sierra Leone's natural resource endowment that reflects outdated mining agreements, weak transfer pricing enforcement, and inadequate fisheries rent capture.

The credibility of this revenue framework depends not merely on policy intent but on the government's demonstrated capacity to translate tax measures into actual collections, a record that, given historical shortfalls, demands transparent in-year reporting, time-bound administrative milestones, and sustained institutional commitment to domestic resource mobilization.

Revenue Category	Amount	% of Total domestic Revenue
Income Taxes	NLe8.3bn	37.4%
Goods and Services Tax (GST)	NLe3.9bn	17.6%
Customs and Excise Duties	NLe5.5bn	24.8%
Mining Revenue	NLe1.3bn	5.9%
Fisheries and Royalties	NLe142.0m	0.6%
Parastatals' Dividends	NLe405.3m	1.8%
Other Government Departments	NLe 452.0m	2.0%
Treasury Single Account(TSA) Agencies	NLe1.6 bn	7.2%
Road User Charges and Vehicle Licenses	NLe 671.2m	3.0%
<b>Total Domestic Revenue</b>	<b>NLe 22.2 Billion</b>	<b>100%</b>

## I Non Tax Revenue and External Financing (Grant)

In addition to domestic tax revenues, the Government expects NLe 3.8 billion in grants from development partners, bringing total revenue to NLe 26 billion.

Grant Source	Amount	Purpose
World Bank & EU Budget Support	NLe 1.2 Billion	Macroeconomic and sector support
Project Grants (Development Partners)	NLe 2.6 Billion	Capital project co-financing
<b>Total Grants</b>	<b>NLe 3.8 Billion</b>	





## An Overview of the Domestic Revenue and Recurrent Expenditure in the Last Five Years (NLe)

**The government must pay key attention to it to maintain the current economic stability and prevent a volatile economic situation that can cause implosion and economic decline in the near future.**

The Sierra Leone government has had difficulty raising adequate revenue to fund its priorities. The government is aware of the declining domestic revenue and intends to further implement the measures from the Medium-Term Revenue Strategy (MTRS) and new tax policies on goods and services across the country to generate more revenue in 2025 and 2026. This year's intensive domestic revenue generation drive will definitely trigger widening of the tax base. Like most low-income nations with high development needs, Sierra Leone continues to experience the adverse effects of global inflation and tighter monetary policies to manage the impact of the ongoing global crisis. Domestic factors like climate change and food insecurity further exacerbate these external factors.

Consequently, the government implemented robust macroeconomic policies in 2023 and 2024, resulting in economic recovery and stabilization of the Leones in relation foreign currencies like the US dollars. Inflation which increased exponentially in recent years was stabilized and continues to ease in 2024 reducing from a high level of 54.5 percent in October 2023 to 20.2 percent in September 2024. We

applaud the government's efforts to decelerate the inflation rate, which showcases signs of economic resilience.

However, this decline is yet to tangibly reflect on the prices of commodities in the market and the lives of ordinary Sierra Leoneans. Recent changes to the tax structure in Sierra Leone raise significant concerns about their potential impact on the nation's vulnerable populations. Also, the sudden increase in taxation on essential commodities like rice, cooking gas, cement, iron rods, alcohol and beverages, and plastic products could impose substantial hardships on ordinary citizens. For instance, the new tax levy on rice imports is set to rise from a current rate of 0 to 5% in 2024 to 10% in 2025. Given that rice is a staple food in Sierra Leone, this adjustment will likely lead to increased prices, making it even more difficult for low-income families to afford basic necessities.

Also, the Budget reported that there is a decline of the International Reserve of the Bank of Sierra Leone from 2.0 months of import cover as at June 2024 to 1.7 months of import cover as at October 2025. This is worrisome

because a decline in International or Foreign reserve has negative implications on economic growth. A strong International Reserve for instance increases market confidence in a country's economic stability, attracting more foreign investments. On the contrary, a decline in foreign reserves can reduce investments, erode foreign investments, increase the cost of doing business, accelerate

inflation and undermine economic stability. The government must pay key attention to it to maintain the current economic stability and prevent a volatile economic situation that can cause implosion and economic decline in the near future. The government must make conscious efforts to increase exports and improve the country's foreign exchange earnings.

## I Mining Industry Revenue

Sierra Leone's mineral sector presents a stark fiscal paradox: despite generating approximately US\$1.2 billion in export value in 2024, government receipts from royalties and licenses amounted to just US\$43.6 million equivalent to 3.6 percent of export value reflecting a longstanding structural gap between resource extraction and public benefit. To address this imbalance, the Government has established two dedicated institutions: the Sierra Leone Mines and Minerals Development and Management Corporation (SLMMDMC) and the Mineral Wealth Fund (MWF), both mandated to increase financial returns through direct mining operations, equity participation, dividend generation, and value addition, while fostering broader economic linkages and infrastructure development.

The Mineral Wealth Fund is currently advancing the Tonkolili-North iron ore project, having secured the requisite land lease agreements and licence from the National Minerals Agency, with investments in mining operations, rail, and port infrastructure underway and a

first iron ore shipment projected by end of 2026, though this timeline remains contingent on financing and infrastructure milestones. Both institutions are expected to operate under international transparency standards, including publication of audited financial statements, merit-based appointment of independent board directors, and a robust performance management framework. On the regulatory front, the Government has committed to upholding the fiscal provisions of the Extractive Industries Revenue Act (EIRA) 2018 in all new agreements and renewals, with an explicit undertaking that no concession overriding the Act's fiscal or non-fiscal obligations will be submitted to Parliament for ratification. Consistent with the Act, the Government will enforce a 10% undiluted free carried interest and retain the option to acquire up to 35% equity participation in new large scale mining projects, signaling a more assertive posture in resource governance aimed at ensuring that Sierra Leone's mineral wealth generates commensurate public revenue.

Revenue Items	2025	2026
Royalty on Rutile, Ilmenite & Zircon	21,982	21,565
Royalty on Bauxite	29,299	29,433
Royalties on Diamond & Gold	236,964	378,490
Royalties on Iron Ore	892,306	524,082
Licences (incl. Petroleum Revenue)	229,399	331,431
<b>Total Mining Revenue</b>	<b>NLe 1,409,950</b>	<b>NLe 1,285,000</b>

Sierra Leone's mining revenue is projected to decline from NLe 1.41 billion in 2025 to NLe 1.29 billion in 2026, a contraction driven primarily by a sharp drop in iron ore royalties from NLe 892.3 million to NLe 524.1 million, likely reflecting weakening global iron ore prices or reduced production activity. This decline is partially offset by

growth in diamond and gold royalties, which rose notably from NLe 237.0 million to NLe 378.5 million, and increased licensing revenue including petroleum. Royalties on rutile, ilmenite, zircon, and bauxite remain broadly flat, underscoring the sector's continued dependence on a narrow commodity base with limited diversification.





# Expenditure

**For 2026, Sierra Leone’s total expenditure is projected at NLe30.1 billion, reflecting planned investments in both recurrent and development activities to support economic growth and public service delivery.**

Expenditure refers to how the Government intends to allocate and spend public resources to deliver services and implement national development priorities. For 2026, Sierra Leone’s total expenditure is projected at NLe30.1 billion, reflecting planned investments in both recurrent and development activities to support economic growth and public service delivery.

Recurrent expenditures are akin to everyday household expenses. They represent the money the Government spends to keep public institutions and services running smoothly. This includes salaries for civil servants (teachers, doctors, and police), utilities for government offices (electricity and water), maintenance of roads and public infrastructure, and social protection programs

such as pensions and welfare. In 2026, recurrent expenditures are projected at NLe21.7 billion, accounting for approximately 70% of total expenditure, highlighting the Government’s commitment to sustaining essential public services.

Less than 30% of expenditure is allocated to development and capital projects, including infrastructure expansion, agricultural programmes, health and education projects, and investments in energy and transportation, designed to stimulate economic growth and enhance living standards across the country. This expenditure framework reflects the Government’s effort to balance the need for immediate service delivery with strategic investments that promote long-term economic stability and development.

## 2026 Recurrent Expenditure Breakdown

Recurrent Expenditure (NLe)	NLe
Wages and Salaries	7.9 bn
Goods and Services	3.8 bn
Subsidies and Transfers	3.3 bn
Interest Payment	6.7 bn
<b>Total</b>	<b>21.7bn</b>

Recurrent expenditure is projected to fall from NLe22.1 billion in 2025 to NLe21.7 billion in 2026. The wage bill will increase to NLe7.9 billion (6.0% of GDP), while pensions and gratuities are allocated NLe460 million and contributions to the Social Security

Fund are projected at NLe675 million. These allocations ensure continued delivery of essential public services, support the public workforce, and maintain social protection for retirees, while preserving fiscal stability.

### Government Expenditures over the Last Five Years

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Total Expenditure (NLe)	13.68bn	15.09bn	23.5bn	35.3bn	30.1 bn
Recurrent Expenditure (NLe)	9.60bn	10.9bn	16.4bn	22.1bn	21.7 bn
Capital Expenditure (NLe)	4.08bn	4.19bn	7.05bn	13.0bn	<b>8.4 bn</b>

## I Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditures are akin to savings or investments. They represent money the government spends on long-term projects or assets, such as building new schools and hospitals, upgrading infrastructure like roads, railways, and airports, or procuring equipment for health and education facilities. These investments are crucial for fostering economic growth, improving public services, and promoting intergenerational equity.

Capital expenditure is one of the most important aspects of the budget because it focuses on building new assets or enhancing existing ones for the future benefit of citizens. Properly planned and implemented capital spending can drive sustainable development, improve citizens' welfare,

and support long-term economic prosperity.

For 2026, the Government of Sierra Leone plans to allocate NLe8.4 billion (approximately less than 30% of total expenditure) to capital projects. This represents a decrease from the NLe15.0 billion budgeted in 2025, continued attention is required to ensure sufficient investment in critical infrastructure, social services, and productive sectors, which are essential for improving the well-being and quality of life of Sierra Leoneans. Stronger capital allocation will be vital to accelerate economic growth, reduce regional disparities, and support long-term development objectives.

**2026 Capital Expenditure**

Domestic financed capital expenditure	2.7 bn
Foreign financed capital expenditure	4.5 bn
<b>Capital Transfers</b>	1.2 bn
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.4 bn</b>

**Accountability Box**

**Accountability Questions  
Citizens Should Ask**



**1**

Where is the NLe8.4bn capital budget being spent in my community?



**2**

Why is so much money going to debt instead of services?



**3**

How is the government improving mining revenue collection?



**4**

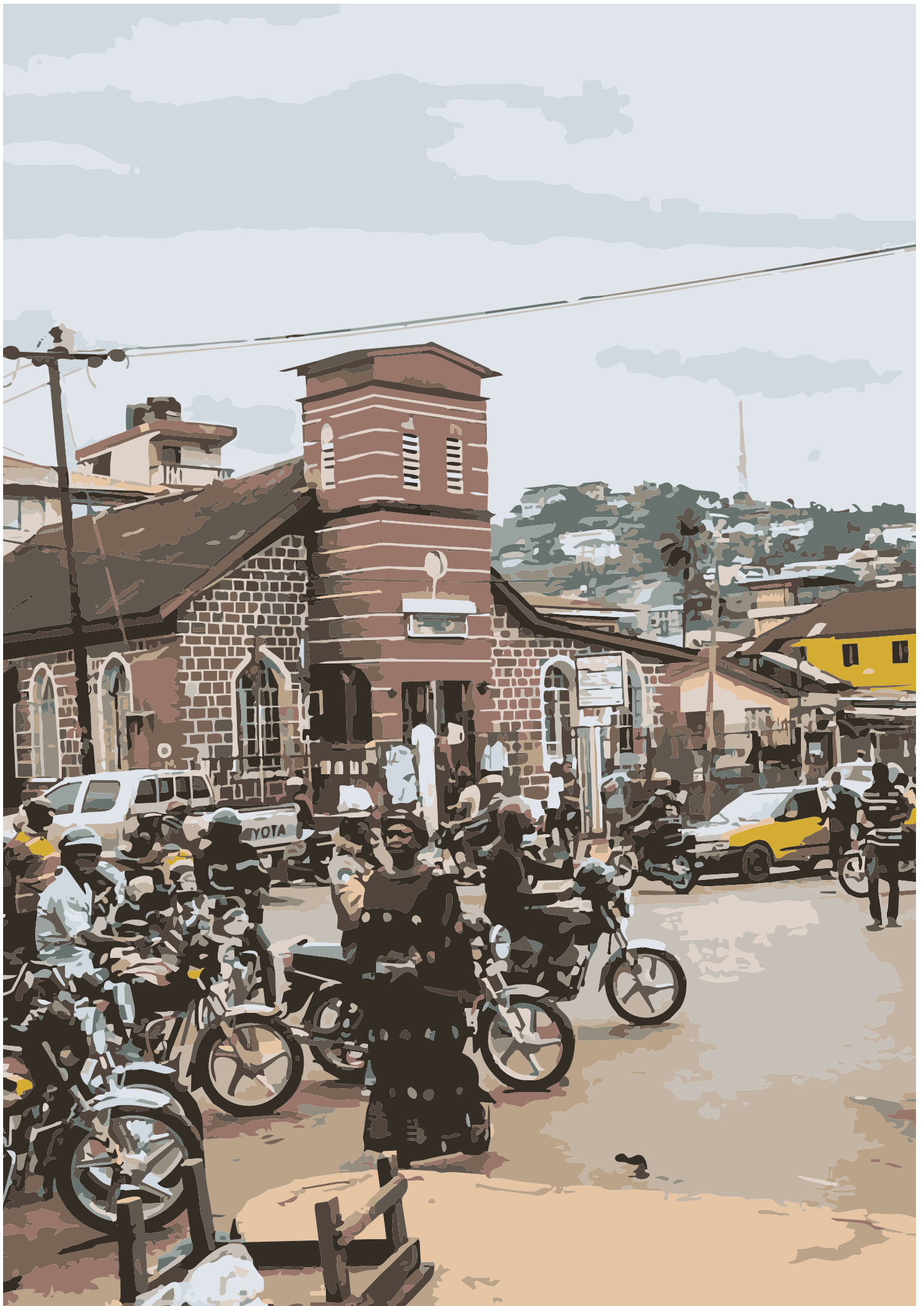
What measures are in place to protect citizens from rising prices?



**5**

Are projects being completed on time and within budget?







## Budget Allocation by Sector

**Feed Salone was introduced as the flagship program, replacing the former Human Capital Development initiative as the government's central focus, while Human Capital Development will continue alongside the other priority areas.**

### Summary of Allocations to the BIG FIVE (5) and Other Key Sectors of Government

Sierra Leone launched a new Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2024 - 2030, designed to align with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The seven-year plan outlines the country's development strategy through five key priorities known as the Big Five Game Changers: Feed Salone, Human Capital Development, Youth Employment, Technology and Infrastructure, and Revamping the Public Sector.

Feed Salone was introduced as the flagship program, replacing the former Human Capital Development initiative as the government's central focus, while Human Capital Development will continue alongside the other priority areas. The 2026 national budget is aligned with the MTNDP to support implementation and accelerate progress toward sustainable development. Overall, the Big Five Game Changers serve as the government's main spending and development priorities through 2030.

### Below are Allocations to the BIG FIVE and other Key Sectors showing government 2026 priorities

#### **Agriculture (Feed Salone):**

NLe 998.16m is allocated to the agricultural sector including the government flagship programme accounting for 6% of the budget. The money allocated to the Agricultural Sector is abysmally low for a sector considered as the government's flagship programme (Feed Salone). Such a low allocation does not show commitment from the government to a "Feed the Nation" Policy Agenda.

#### **Education:**

NLe3.6bn to the education sector, representing 21% of total primary expenditures. The challenge in education is not primarily one of budget allocation; it is one of conversion. Sierra Leone spends increasing sums on education, but infrastructure gaps in rural schools, high teacher vacancy rates in remote areas, and curricula that do not reflect labour market realities all mean that spending is not translating

into the human capital the economy needs. More money is necessary but not sufficient. The government must pair increased funding with rigorous monitoring of where money goes and what it produces.

allocated for Public Administration that include the following institutions (Ministry of Public Administration and Political Affairs, Cabinet Secretariat, Public Service Commission, Human Resource Management Office, Public Sector Reform Unit, Wages and Compensation Commission).

**The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Ancillary Bodies:**

National Youth Commission, National Youth Service, and National Sport Authority and project support is allocated a combined budget of NLe 104.2m. This is a positive signal, though the absolute figure remains small relative to the scale of youth unemployment.

**Health:**

NLe1.4bn to the health sector in 2026, accounting for 8 percent of the budget. This allocation is below the 2025 allocation of NLe 1.5bn. It also falls short of meeting the Abuja Agreement threshold of 15%. This is worrisome for a sector that encompasses all sectors because it is only a healthy nation that can work towards the development strides of a country.

**Infrastructure and Technology:**

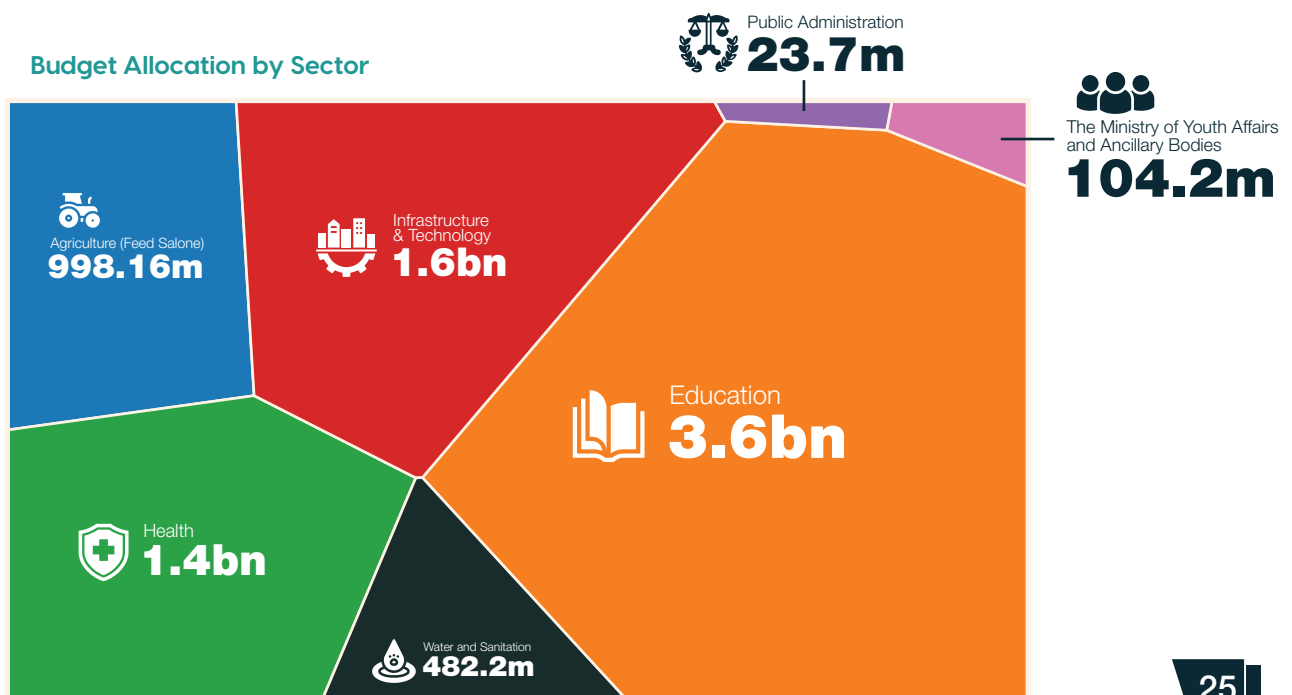
receives a combined NLe1.6bn including both government funding and development partner contributions. This is one of the largest year-on-year sectoral increases in the budget and reflects both domestic ambition and the ability to leverage external financing for capital works. NLe 837.5m for the implementation of Infrastructure and Technology projects( Government allocation and Counterpart funding), NLe 796.8m Development Partners support to infrastructure projects.

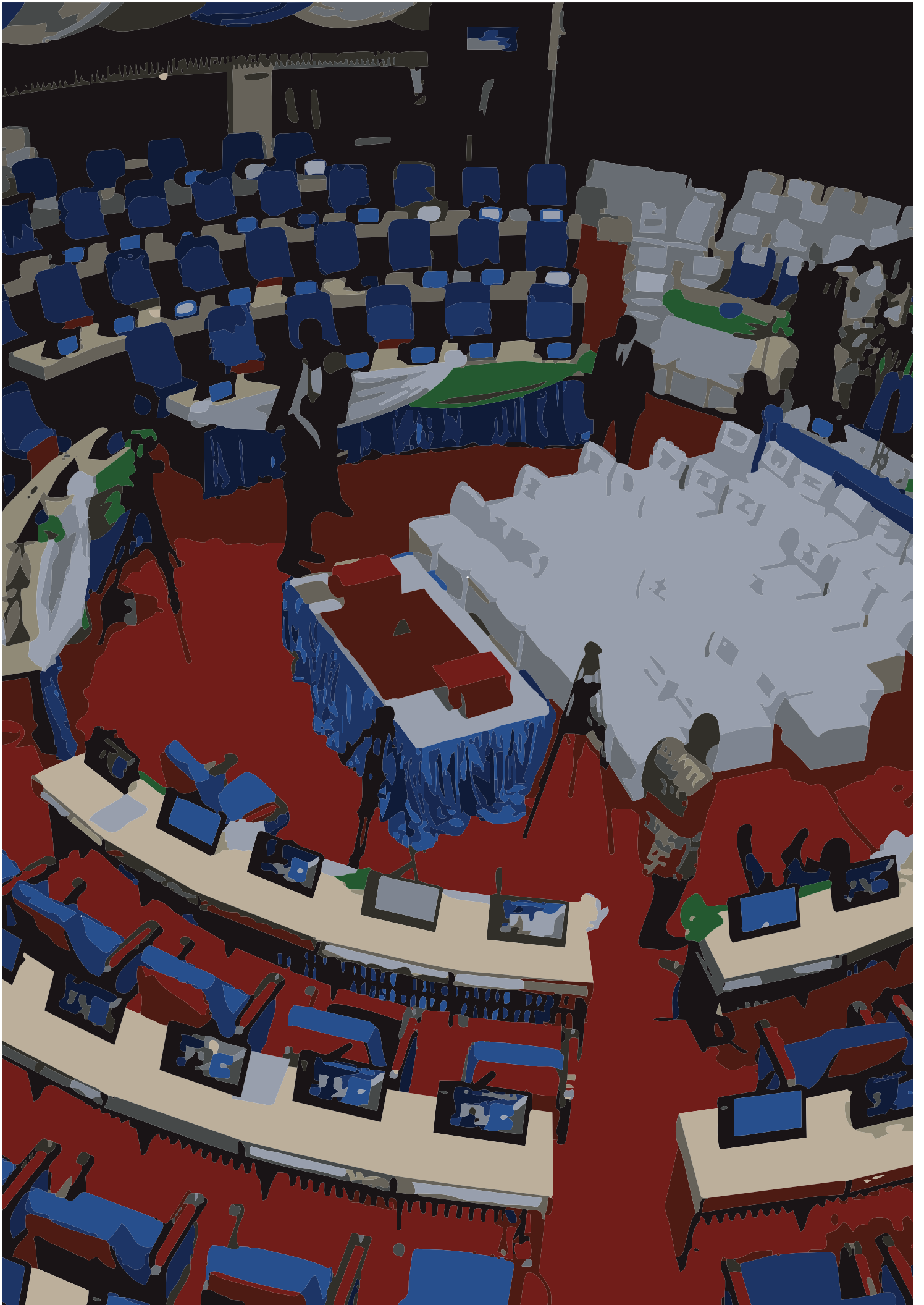
**Water and Sanitation:**

Water and Sanitation receives NLe482.2m in 2026, a more than twofold increase from a total allocation of NLe221.6m 2025. This increase is welcome but still very low to address the challenges faced in the water sector. Access to clean water is foundational to health outcomes, economic productivity, and gender equity (women and girls disproportionately bear the burden of water collection in communities without piped supply). There is also the question of whether the administrative and implementation capacity exists to deploy these funds effectively within the year.

**Public Administration:**

A combined total of NLe23.7m is







## Gender and the Budget: Who Bears the Cost?

**Sierra Leone's 2026 budget contains no gender-disaggregated expenditure analysis. No sector allocation is assessed for its differential impact on women and girls.**

A budget is not gender-neutral. Every spending decision and every tax measure lands differently depending on whether you are a man or a woman in Sierra Leone. How does the 2026 budget not acknowledge these disparities?

Sierra Leone's 2026 budget contains no gender-disaggregated expenditure analysis. No sector allocation is assessed for its differential impact on women and girls. The likely effect on female-headed households is not considered when evaluating any revenue measure. This is not a technical omission; it is a governance gap. A budget that does not consider women cannot serve their needs.

This issue matters because the fiscal choices in this budget fall unevenly. The 10% tariff on rice imports and new levies on cooking gas will disproportionately affect women, who manage household food budgets and bear primary responsibility for feeding families in most Sierra Leonean households. When the price of a staple rises, it is women who absorb the shortfall by eating less, pulling children from school, or taking on additional economic burdens. The budget does not count this cost because it does not look for it.

### I Where Women Need the Budget Most

Three sectoral allocations carry direct consequences for women and girls.

Health receives just 8% of the budget, well below the 15% Abuja Declaration commitment, and maternal mortality in Sierra Leone remains among the highest in the world. Underfunding the health sector is not a gender-neutral decision. It is a decision about whose life is protected and whose is not.

Water and Sanitation received NLe 482.2 million in 2026, a welcome fourfold increase from 2025. This is the budget's most consequential gender investment, even if it is not framed that way. In communities without piped water, it is overwhelmingly women and girls who bear the burden of water collection — hours each day that cannot be spent in school, in productive work, or in rest. Every functional water point built is time

returned to women and girls.

Education receives 21% of the budget, the largest sectoral allocation. But infrastructure gaps in rural schools, inadequate sanitation facilities, and high

dropout rates among adolescent girls mean that spending is not reaching girls equitably. Allocation without attention to access is not inclusion.

## I What the Government Must Do

Gender-responsive budgeting is not a separate budget. It is a lens applied to the existing one. The Government of Sierra Leone should take three steps immediately.

First, mandate gender impact assessments for all major revenue measures before implementation, particularly those affecting essential commodities.

Second, require all Ministries, Departments, and Agencies to disaggregate expenditure reporting by

gender beneficiary, beginning with health, education, water, and social protection.

Third, establish a minimum floor for social protection transfers that expands in step with any fiscal measures that raise the cost of basic goods, and ensure that those transfers reach the women-headed households most exposed to price shocks.

Sierra Leone has signed the commitments, and the national budget must begin to honor them.



# Key Government Projects

**Sierra Leone has the resources to do better. What is required now is the will to collect them fairly, spend them wisely, and account for every Leone in public.**

Capital expenditure is where the budget becomes most tangible for ordinary citizens. A road project means communities can get goods to market and children can reach school. A water supply scheme means hours saved from fetching

water each day. A hospital rehabilitation means patients do not travel hours for basic care. The NLe8.4 billion in capital spending for 2026 covers projects across every major sector. Below is a structured overview.

## Major Capital Projects by MDAs



### Agriculture & Fishery

**NLe290.6m**

for the development of two agro-ecological production zones: Tormabum and Gbondappi in the South, and Mambolo and Kychum in the North-West including internal roads, electricity, water supply, and irrigation infrastructure.

**NLe95m**

for broad-based agricultural support projects across the country.

**NLe219.4m**

for the construction of a modern fish harbour, a critical piece of infrastructure for a sector that could generate far more export income than it currently does.



### Education

**NLe202.2m**

for the construction of the University of Science and Technology in Kono, rehabilitation of government secondary schools, and works at Milton Margai Technical University.

**NLe193.1m**

for a digital connectivity project and the Education Sector Support Programme, a potentially transformative investment if it reaches rural schools.

**NLe20.0m**

for the rehabilitation of two government secondary schools.

**NLe14.5m**

for a National Archive and Record Centre and the conversion of Technical Institutes into Community Technical Colleges.

## I Major Capital Projects by MDAs



### Health

**NLe34.6m**

Construction of Cancer and Diagnostic Medical Centre; rehabilitation and expansion of district hospitals.

**NLe470.2m**

Support for various health projects including Pharma Grade Warehouse.

**NLe18.0m**

Counterpart contribution for donor-funded health projects.



### Social Protection

**NLe5.0m**

Establishment of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts.



### Infrastructure and Technology

**NLe1.6bn**

Government and Development Partners support the Implementation of infrastructure and technology projects.



### Roads

**NLe792.9m**

Construction, rehabilitation, and completion of trunk and township roads and bridges. Includes major trunk roads such as Kabala-Falaba-Limbaya, Bandajuma- Pujehun- Gbondapi road, and Kambia-Madina-Kukuna-Konta, Moyamba-Sembehun road, Mano junction- Tongo Road, etc.

**NLe544.6m**

Development partner support (AfDB, BADEA, IsDB) for roads and bridges projects.

**NLe150m**

by the World Bank

**NLe102.2m**

from the European Union

**NLe44.6m**

Government counterfunding



### Energy

**NLe60.9m**

Completion of Seven Districts Electricity Project.

**NLe354.7m**

from multilateral partners (Indian Exim Bank, World Bank, AfDB, EU) for the construction of Yiben/Bumbuna to Newton Freetown.

**NLe61.8m**

Will be disbursed by EU and MCC to support energy projects

**NLe13.4m**

Government Counterpart Funding for Energy Projects

## I Major Capital Projects by MDAs

### Water Supply and Sanitation

**NLe246m**

Construction of water supply facilities and systems in six districts .

**NLe35.9m**

Development partners support to SALWACO for four towns' water supply projects (Mongor, Daru, Njala and Matru Jong)

**NLe188.0m**

Development partners support to Guma Valley Water Company for the implementation of the Freetown WASH and Aquatic Environment Revamping Project

**NLe12.3m**

Government Counterpart Funding

### Public Administration

**NLe7.6m**

Construction of the Public Service Commission headquarters.

### Governance and Accountability (Security Sector)

**NLe202.2m**

Infrastructure projects to strengthen the security sector.

### Economic Diversification (Tourism)

**NLe2.5m**

Construction of Tourist Information Centres at Gbalamuya- Guinea Border and Gendema-Liberia Border.

**NLe5.0m**

to the monuments and Relics Commission for the construction of the cultural heritage centre

**NLe65.5m**

is for the development of tourist sites including Leicester Peak, Tacugama Sanctuary, and Bureh Beach.

**NLe1.5m**

as government counterpart funding

### Environment and Climate Change

**NLe6.0m**

for national Tree Planting

**NLe5.0m**

for the restoration of degraded mangrove forests

## Accountability Box

# Are Priorities Funded?



Sector	Allocation	Reality
Agriculture (Feed Salone)	6%	Too low for a flagship program
Health	8%	Below 15% Abuja target
Education	21%	Strong allocation, weak outcomes
Youth	Very Low	Not matching unemployment crisis

**Stated priorities are not fully backed by funding.**





## Debt and Fiscal Sustainability

**The domestic debt service figure tells a particularly sobering story; in 2022, it stood at NLe1.64bn. By 2026, it has reached NLe6.4bn, nearly four times higher in just four years.**

As Sierra Leone approaches 2026, it grapples with a national debt of approximately US\$3.2 billion. Of this, US\$1.8bn is owed to external creditors, while the remainder NLe32.3bn has been borrowed domestically, largely from Sierra Leonean banks and financial institutions. Servicing this debt will cost the country NLe8.6bn in 2026 alone, broken down into NLe6.4bn in domestic repayments, NLe1.9bn in external principal repayments, and NLe275.8m in foreign debt interest.

stood at NLe1.64bn. By 2026, it has reached NLe6.4bn, nearly four times higher in just four years. This is not the result of reckless spending in isolation; it is the accumulated cost of the high interest Treasury bill borrowing the government was forced to rely on during the inflation crisis, when ordinary financing options were limited and the economy was under severe strain. Those emergency decisions made sense at the time. Their price tag is now landing on the national budget in full.

The domestic debt service figure tells a particularly sobering story; in 2022, it

Year	Total Interest and Debt Service	Domestic (NLe)	Foreign (NLe)
2022	1.80bn	1.64bn	161.9m
2023	2.45bn	2.23bn	220.9m
2024	4.10bn	3.80bn	319.6m
2025	7.40bn	7.10bn	319.0m
2026	8.60bn	6.40bn	275.8m

What makes the numbers harder to sit with is what they reveal about priorities. In 2026, Sierra Leone will spend more on repaying its debts (NLe8.6 bn) than it will spend paying every single person on the government payroll.

Every teacher standing in front of a classroom, every nurse working a night shift, every soldier, every civil servant—their combined wages of NLe7.9bn are exceeded by what the country owes its creditors. Interest payments alone, at NLe6.7bn, absorb roughly 22% of all government spending. That is money that has already been spent on obligations already incurred, and it is money that cannot be redirected to build a road, equip a clinic, or keep the lights on in a school. When citizens ask why services remain stretched despite a growing budget, the debt burden is a large part of the answer.

Looking beyond 2026, the trajectory of this debt burden poses risks that Sierra Leone cannot afford to ignore. The country's foreign currency reserves currently cover only about seven weeks of

imports, less than half of the three-month minimum the international community regards as a basic safety standard. With such a thin buffer, any weakening of the Leone immediately raises the local-currency cost of servicing the US\$1.8bn external debt, tightening an already constrained fiscal position further. Capital expenditure, the investment in roads, energy, water, and infrastructure that future generations depend on, has fallen sharply from NLe13bn in 2025 to NLe8.4bn in 2026, crowded out by the rising cost of debt. The IMF Extended Credit Facility provides valuable discipline and access to concessional financing, but it does not shrink the debt itself.

The 2026 budget offers a modest but meaningful sign of progress domestic revenue is projected to exceed recurrent expenditure for the first time yet unless that momentum is sustained and accelerated, the debt-to-revenue ratio will continue to worsen, and the fiscal choices being made today will arrive as an inheritance that the next generation of Sierra Leoneans never asked for and may struggle to carry.

## I The Wage Bill

A government wage bill represents the total amount a country spends on salaries, wages, and other benefits for civil servants, public sector employees, and government officials. As one of the largest components of the national budget, it plays an important part in determining fiscal stability, spending priorities, and the overall health of the economy.

In 2026, Sierra Leone's wage bill is projected to increase to NLe7.9bn, rising from a revised estimate of NLe7.2bn in 2025. While investing in public workers is essential for effective governance and service delivery, the continued upward trend is placing growing pressure on government finances. Higher personnel costs often lead to increased borrowing, which raises interest payments and reduces the resources available for critical

development projects. If left unchecked, an expanding wage bill can crowd out vital capital investments. This means fewer resources for infrastructure development, healthcare improvements, education expansion, and other initiatives that drive long-term economic growth and improve citizens' quality of life.

To ensure sustainability, the government must take deliberate steps to manage the wage bill responsibly.

Key actions include:

- Strengthening efforts to curb corruption and eliminate wasteful spending
- Harmonizing salaries and allowances to promote fairness and efficiency

■ Enhancing transparency and accountability in public financial management.

Prudent wage bill management is not simply a budgetary exercise; it is a pathway to sustainable development. By directing public funds toward productive investments rather than disproportionately

financing recurrent personnel costs, Sierra Leone can safeguard economic stability while advancing national development and improving the welfare of its people.





## Budget Deficit and Financial Risks

**Domestic revenue has grown remarkably from NLe6.92 billion in 2021 to a projected NLe22.2 billion in 2026, and that progress deserves acknowledgement.**

The 2026 budget opens with a deficit of NLe4.1bn when donor grants are counted and a much harder figure of NLe7.9bn when they are not. This gap, which has appeared in varying sizes in every recent budget, indicates a structural problem that goes deeper than any single year's spending decisions. The government plans to spend NLe30.1bn but has NLe26bn to work with, and the difference must be borrowed. The reason for that gap is not mysterious. Interest payments alone, at NLe 6.7 bn, swallow 22% of the entire budget, which means that decisions made in previous years to borrow at high interest rates are now eating directly into what is available for

people today. Domestic revenue has grown remarkably from NLe6.92 billion in 2021 to a projected NLe22.2 billion in 2026, and that progress deserves acknowledgement. But expenditure has grown alongside it, and the new tax measures brought in to close the remaining gap, including a 10% tariff on rice imports and new levies on cooking gas and construction materials, risk pushing up prices for ordinary households who are already managing tight budgets. A government cannot credibly describe a budget as pro-poor while simultaneously making the staple food of its poorest citizens pricier.

### Year-on-Year Budget Deficit

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Deficit (incl. grants)	2.52bn	1.96bn	2.6bn	7.5bn	4.1bn
Deficit (excl. grants)	6.29bn	5.75bn	8.5bn	16.4bn	7.9bn

The government's strategy for gradually reducing the deficit involves several components, collectively forming a credible direction despite the uncertainty in pace. The Medium-Term Revenue Strategy 2023–2027 is the centerpiece, focusing on widening the tax net to capture businesses and earners currently outside the formal system, modernising tax administration through technology, and closing the loopholes that allow smuggling and illicit financial flows to drain revenue that should reach the public purse. The IMF Extended Credit Facility sits alongside this as an important external commitment; it brings concessional financing and imposes the kind of fiscal discipline that keeps the reform process on track even when political pressures push in the other direction.

On the expenditure side, the government has pointed to the wage bill, which grew from NLe7.2bn to NLe7.9bn in a single year, as an area requiring rationalisation, including the elimination of ghost workers and a more disciplined approach to the NLe3.8bn goods and services budget. Perhaps the most consequential long-term opportunity, however, lies in mining. Sierra Leone exports approximately US\$1.2bn in minerals every year, yet the government collects only US\$43.6m from that production, a capture rate of just 3.6%. The newly established Sierra Leone Mines and Minerals Development and Management Corporation and the Mineral Wealth Fund are designed to change that equation, and if they deliver, the revenue implications for future budgets could be transformative. None of this, however, is without risk, and the risks are serious enough to

warrant plain speaking. The NLe22.2bn domestic revenue target requires a 17.5% increase on 2025 estimates, an ambitious task that depends on enforcement systems, taxpayer compliance, and economic conditions all cooperating at once. If any one of those variables disappoints, the deficit widens and borrowing increases.

There is also the inflation risk, Sierra Leone has worked hard to bring headline inflation down from a devastating 46.62% in 2023 to 7.74% in 2025, and that progress has brought real relief to households across the country. But taxing rice and cooking gas at a time when that relief is still fresh and fragile is playing with fire, price pressures do not need much to reignite, and a reversal would be deeply damaging both economically and socially. The thinness of foreign currency reserves, at just seven weeks of import cover against a recommended Three months adds another layer of fragility, leaving the Leone vulnerable to depreciation that would make the US\$1.8 billion external debt pricier to service almost overnight. Sierra Leone's budgets have long been plagued by the gap between what is promised and what is built. Capital expenditure has already fallen sharply from NLe13bn in 2025 to NLe8.4bn in 2026, and the pattern of cutting development spending whenever fiscal pressure mounts is one that cannot continue indefinitely without consequences. Roads not built, hospitals not equipped, and irrigation systems not installed are not neutral outcomes; they are foregone growth, and growth is ultimately the only path out of the deficit for good.



## Policy Recommendations

**Sierra Leone's budget is not broken. But it is under serious strain and, left unaddressed, becomes a crisis. These recommendations are not a wishlist. They are the minimum actions required to ensure that the 2026 budget delivers something real for ordinary Sierra Leoneans.**

1

### **Enforce tax collection – not just tax policy**

Sierra Leone does not primarily have a tax design problem. It has a tax collection problem. The National Revenue Authority assesses far more than it collects, and that gap represents real money that never reaches schools, hospitals, or roads.

The NRA must shift from assessment to enforcement. E-receipting must be deployed at scale across wholesale, retail, and service sectors. Integrated taxpayer databases should automatically flag non-filers, and audit resources should focus on the areas with the greatest revenue leakage. The informal economy will not be formalised through an announcement alone; it requires simplified business registration, fair and predictable tax rates, and an NRA presence that is consistent rather than episodic.

The objective is not to extract more from people already paying. It is to bring into the system businesses and earners who currently pay nothing.

2

### **Capture the true value of Sierra Leone's natural wealth**

Sierra Leone exports approximately US\$1.2 billion in minerals every year. The government collects US\$43.6 million from that production, 3.6 cents on every dollar of national wealth leaving the country. No single number in this budget better illustrates the gap between Sierra Leone's potential and its fiscal reality.

This is not primarily a legal problem. The Extractive Industries Revenue Act 2018 already establishes the rules: royalty floors, transfer pricing requirements, a 10% free carried interest, and the option to acquire up to 35% equity in large-scale mining projects. The problem is enforcement. Mining agreements that deviate from the Act's provisions, through inflated deductions, understated production, or opaque related-party transactions, represent direct deductions from public services. The Mineral Wealth Fund and the SLMDDMC must be operationalised transparently and urgently: published audited accounts, independent board appointments made on merit, and clear public performance reporting. No new agreements should be submitted to Parliament that override the Act's fiscal obligations. Citizens cannot hold institutions accountable that they cannot see.

### 3 Shift the balance from consumption to investment and protect it

More than 70% of the 2026 budget is dedicated to recurrent expenditures. Less than 28% goes toward building anything. Capital expenditure has already fallen from NLe 13 billion in 2025 to NLe 8.4 billion in 2026 — a reduction of nearly 35% in a single year, continuing a pattern in which development spending is the first casualty whenever recurrent pressures mount.

Roads not built mean farmers cannot get produce to market. Hospitals that are not equipped mean patients travel for hours for basic care. Irrigation systems not installed mean food insecurity extends into the next season and the one after. These are not neutral outcomes. They are foregoing growth, and growth is ultimately the only sustainable path out of the deficit.

The government must establish a protected minimum capital allocation ring-fenced against mid-year revision. The NLe 3.8 billion goods and services budget requires a line-by-line review, with savings redirected to investment rather than absorbed back into recurring costs. Project selection must be driven by economic returns and geographic equity — not the political geography of the electoral cycle.

### 4 Confront the debt burden honestly and urgently

Sierra Leone will spend NLe 8.6 billion servicing its debts in 2026. Interest payments alone NLe 6.7 billion, absorb 22% of everything the government spends. That money is already committed and unavailable for any other purpose. It cannot build a road, equip a clinic, or keep a school lit. When citizens ask why public services remain strained despite a growing budget, debt is a large part of the honest answer.

The trajectory is the deeper concern. Total debt service has risen from NLe 1.8 billion in 2022 to NLe 8.6 billion in 2026 — a near-fivefold increase in four years. Foreign currency reserves cover approximately seven weeks of imports, well below the three-month international minimum. Any depreciation of the Leone immediately raises the domestic cost of servicing the US\$1.8 billion external debt, compressing fiscal space that is already dangerously thin.

The government must stop adding high-cost domestic debt to its stock. Concessional lending from multilateral institutions must be the explicit default. Beyond that, a time-bound, medium-term debt-reduction plan with clear annual targets must be published — one that citizens and civil society can monitor and hold the government to.

### 5 Make the budget visible, and keep it that way

Budget transparency is not a condition attached to donor financing. It is a basic obligation of democratic governance. Sierra Leone's citizens deserve to know, in plain language and on time, how public money was spent, which projects were completed and which were not, and why.

This obligation has three practical components. The Ministry of Finance must publish quarterly budget execution reports in formats accessible to citizens, journalists, and civil society, not only to technical specialists. Ministries, Departments, and Agencies must disclose capital project status against original timelines and budgets. And the data that independent organisations require to conduct fiscal monitoring must be treated as a public good, not a bureaucratic concession to be withheld or delayed.

Transparency also demands honesty about trade-offs. A government that introduces new tariffs on rice and cooking gas, goods that low-income households cannot substitute away from, while describing its budget as pro-poor, must explain that contradiction publicly. Revenue must be found where the capacity to pay is greatest: in the mines that send billions overseas untaxed, in the informal businesses that pay nothing, and on the public payroll, where ghost workers continue to draw salaries. The burden of fiscal adjustment must not be placed on the people with the least to give.

A government that publishes its numbers fully and on time is a government that has accepted its citizens' right to hold it accountable. That accountability is not a constraint on good governance. It is the condition for it.





## Conclusion

**Sierra Leone has the resources to do better. What is required now is the will to collect them fairly, spend them wisely, and account for every Leone in public.**

Sierra Leone's 2026 budget is not a budget without a plan. There is a revenue strategy. There is an IMF programme providing discipline. There is a national development plan that names the right priorities. The direction is not wrong.

What's wrong is the gap between the plan and the numbers, and between the numbers and people's lives.

The government will spend more this year repaying debts than paying the workers who deliver public services. The flagship agricultural programme receives 6% of the budget. Health gets 8% against a 15% commitment made two decades ago. Capital spending has been cut nearly in half. These are not peripheral details. They represent the distinction between a budget that transforms Sierra Leone and one that merely sustains it.

Stabilisation is not the finish line. It is the starting point. The true measure of the 2026 budget lies not in the stability of macroeconomic numbers, but in the ability of a farmer in Kono to transport her produce to market on an existing road, a mother in Kenema to deliver her child in a hospital equipped with running water and medicines, and a young man in Freetown to find a job without having to leave the country.

Those outcomes will not come from projections. They will come from decisions about where money actually goes, who is held accountable when it does not arrive, and whether citizens are empowered to demand better. Sierra Leone has the resources to do better. What is required now is the will to collect them fairly, spend them wisely, and account for every Leone in public.

