A photograph of a construction site with several tall cranes and buildings under construction. The image has a teal and blue color cast. A large, semi-transparent white circle is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Citizens' Guide To Sierra Leone's 2026 National Budget

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SIERRA LEONE

BUDGET THEME:

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



PUBLISHED BY **BUDGIT SIERRA LEONE.**

We provide a simplified guide to help citizens understand the process of raising public resources, their allocation, and how they can hold the government accountable. Our goal is to make public finance easy to understand, empower individuals with the knowledge they need to participate in governance, ask informed questions, and promote transparency and accountability in the management of public resources.



Introduction

Public budgets directly shape citizens' everyday lives. They influence the quality of our schools, hospitals, roads, water systems, and social protection programs. The 2026 National Budget of Sierra Leone sets out the government's plans to strengthen domestic revenue mobilisation, promote economic stability, and improve public service delivery across the country. This Citizen's Guide breaks down the national budget into simple, easy-to-understand information. It explains how the government generates revenue, how public funds are allocated, and how citizens can monitor whether government commitments are being fulfilled.

At BudgIT, we believe that informed citizens are empowered citizens. By promoting transparency, accountability, and active public participation in government finances, this guide provides the tools people need to monitor public spending, ask informed questions, and advocate for better services in their communities.



What is a Government Budget?

A government budget is more than just numbers on paper; it is a financial roadmap that outlines how a government plans to collect and spend money over the course of a year. It determines how resources are allocated to vital public services like education, healthcare, and infrastructure development. By clearly showing where funds come from and how they are used, the budget also promotes transparency and allows citizens to understand and monitor how public resources support national growth and community well-being.



Sierra Leone's Budget Process

The national budget follows four main stages:

01 Preparation: The Ministry of Finance sets the direction, and government ministries prepare spending plans.

02 Approval: The budget is reviewed by the Parliament of Sierra Leone, and the President signs it into law.

03 Implementation: Funds are released to MDAs and Councils, and projects are executed.

04 Monitoring & Audit: Oversight institutions like the Audit Service of Sierra Leone audit spending; Parliament conducts oversight; and citizens monitor how the money is used.

- *Active citizen participation helps strengthen transparency and accountability throughout the process.*

Sierra Leone's 2026 Budget At A Glance

Total Revenue
& Grants

26bn

Total Government
Spending

30.1bn

Budget Deficit

4.1bn

Interest Payments

6.7bn

GDP Growth
Target

4.5%

Inflation
Target

9.0%

DID YOU KNOW?

Sierra Leone's interest payments are more than the allocations for Education NLe3.6 billion), Health NLe1.4 billion, and Agriculture NLe 998.16 million) put together.

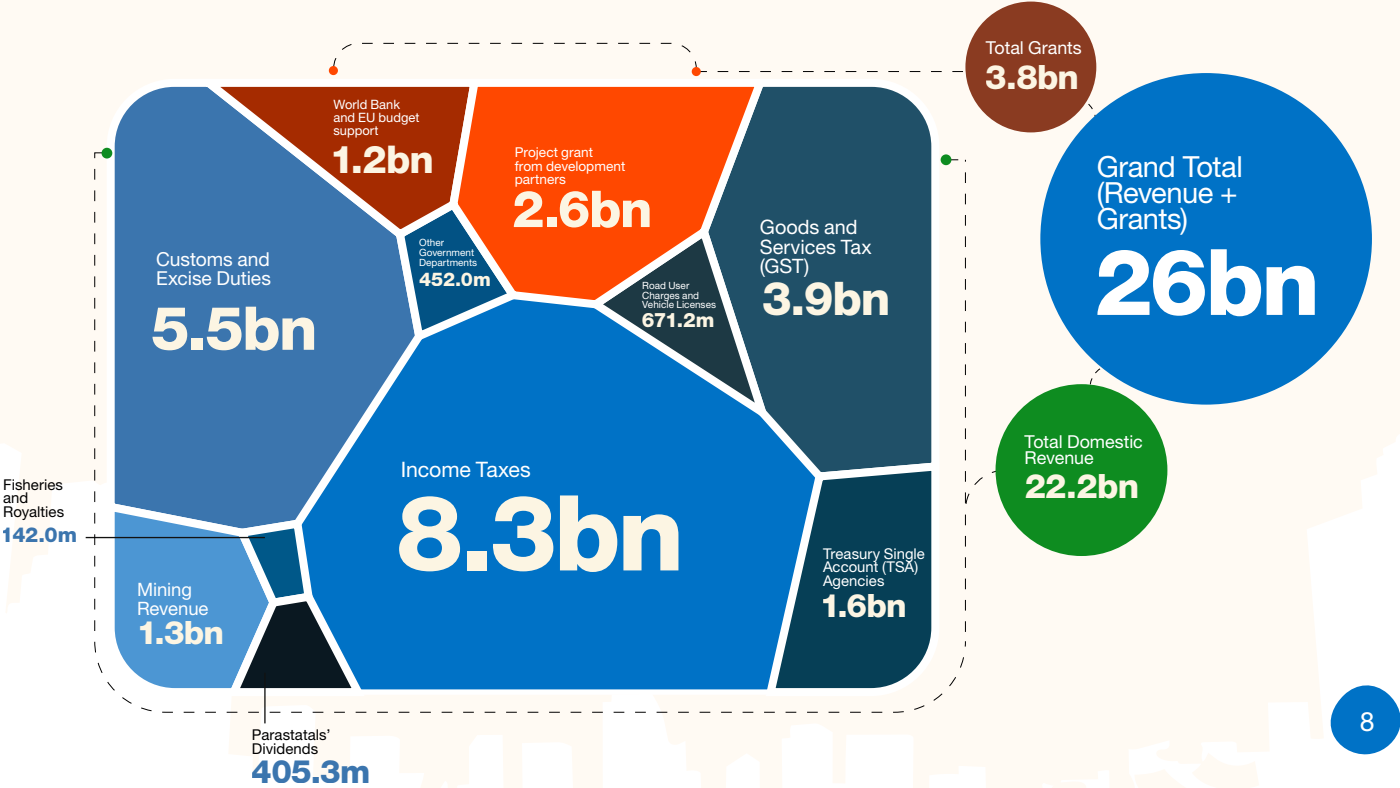
Where Will This Money Come From?

Sierra Leone's total revenue projection for 2026 stands at NLe 26 billion, reflecting an ambitious effort to strengthen public finances and economic resilience. Of this amount, approximately NLe 22.2 billion is expected to be mobilized through domestic revenue generation, underscoring the government's growing reliance on internal economic activity.

Income tax remains the backbone of revenue collection, contributing the largest share at NLe 8.3 billion. This is followed by customs and excise duties, projected to generate NLe 5.5 billion, while the Goods and Services Tax (GST) is anticipated to add NLe 3.9 billion to the national purse. Complementing domestic efforts, external grants from development partners are expected to provide NLe 3.8 billion, supporting key national priorities and development initiatives.



Revenue Sources Breakdown

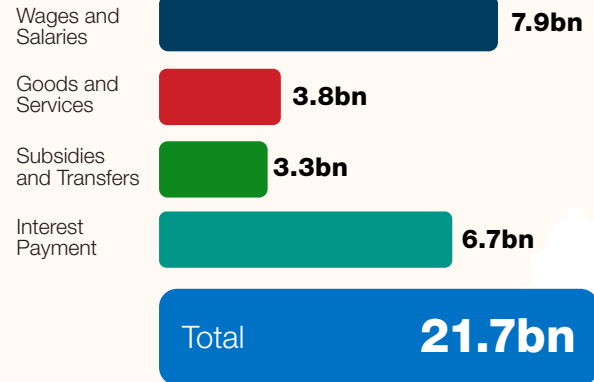


Where Your Tax Money Goes

Expenditure, both recurrent and capital, refers to the Government's intended allocation and spending of 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.

Where Nle 30.1bn of Government Spending Goes?

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); and social protection programs such as pensions and welfare.



Where NLe 100 Goes?

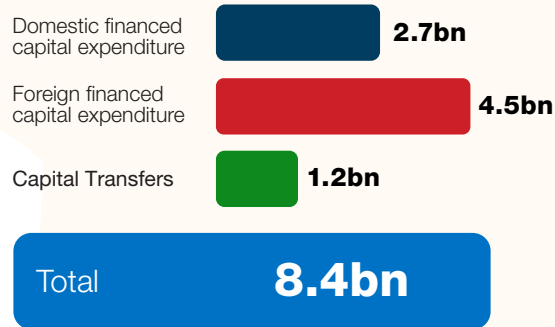
Out of Every NLe 100 the Government Spends...



A large share goes to recurring costs—leaving limited room for development.

2026 Capital Expenditure

Capital expenditure is money the government spends on long-term projects and assets, such as building new schools and hospitals, upgrading infrastructure (roads, railways, and airports), or procuring equipment for health and education facilities. These investments are critical to driving economic growth, improving public services, and promoting intergenerational equity.



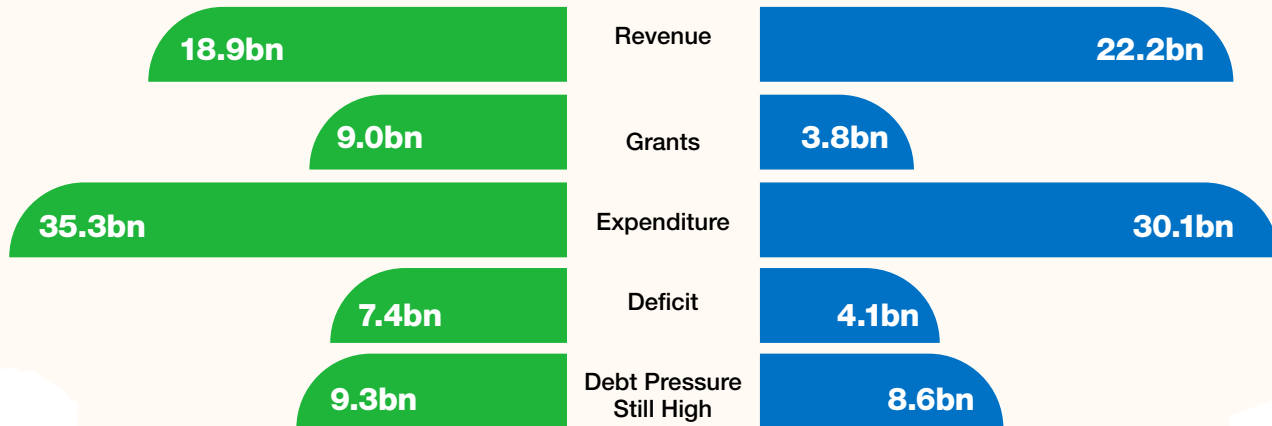
Government's Focus For 2026

Sierra Leone's 2026 National Budget, themed "Enhancing Domestic Revenue Mobilisation for Sustained Economic Stability and Improved Service Delivery," reflects the Government's attempt to navigate difficult fiscal realities while continuing to invest in national development priorities. The budget aligns with the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2024–2030 and is structured around the Government's Big Five Game Changers: Feed Salone, Human Capital Development, Youth Employment, Infrastructure and Technology, and Public Administration Reform.

The fiscal strategy for 2026 emphasizes domestic revenue mobilisation as the country is increasingly pressured to rely more on internal resources, and external assistance is waning. The budget also aims to achieve macroeconomic stability while supporting economic recovery, enhancing service delivery, and building institutional capacity. However, while macroeconomic indicators show gradual improvement, fiscal vulnerabilities remain. The rising cost of servicing debt, the limited fiscal space for capital investment, and the continuing pressure on household welfare all point to the need for stronger public financial management and a more efficient allocation of public resources.



What Changed in 2026?



A Quick Analysis of How Much The Government Will Raise and Spend In 2026?

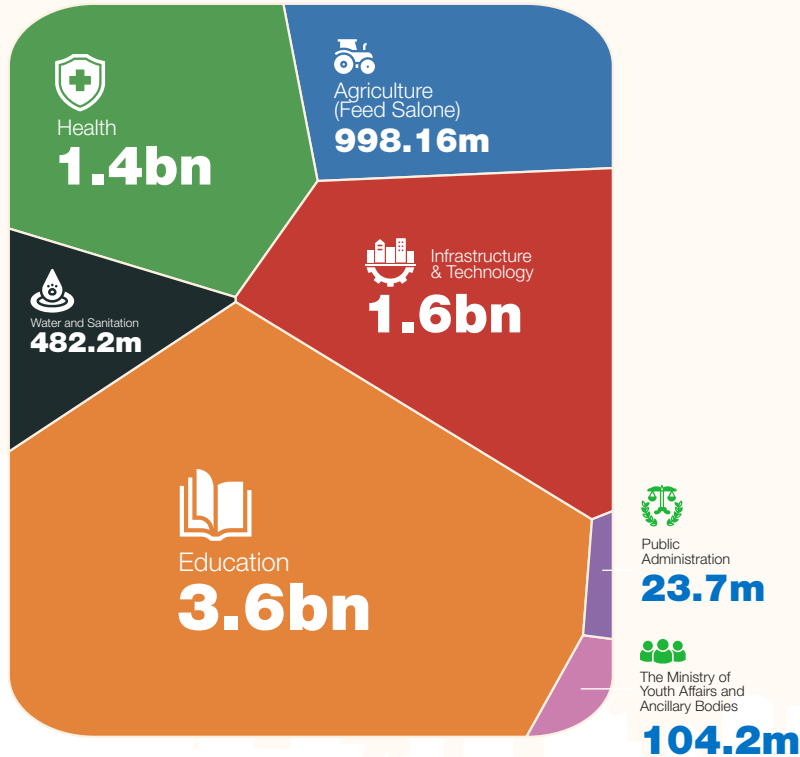
The 2026 budget projects total domestic revenue of NLe22.2 billion, reflecting the Government's commitment to strengthening revenue generation through improved tax administration, an expanded tax base, and enhanced compliance measures. Grants from development partners are expected to complement domestic revenue, bringing the total available resources to approximately NLe 26 billion.

Government spending continues to prioritize the delivery of essential public services and national development programs, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure, to ensure sustainable growth and improve citizens' quality of life. Recurrent expenditure, estimated at NLe21.7 billion, accounts for the majority of spending and supports wages, public administration, social transfers, and operational costs across ministries and agencies.

Capital expenditure, estimated at NLe8.4 billion, is allocated to infrastructure development, agriculture, energy, water supply, education, and health projects to improve service delivery and support long-term economic growth.

Sectoral Spending

(The Big Five Plus Health And Water)



Accountability Highlight: Agriculture, Education, and Health Spending

The money allocated to the Agricultural Sector is abysmally low for a sector considered the government's flagship programme (Feed Salone). Such a low allocation does not demonstrate the government's commitment to a "Feed the Nation" Policy Agenda.

The money allocated to Education constitutes 21% of the total budget. Citizens should monitor this allocation to ensure that it reflects tangible development on the ground, like classroom construction, teacher availability, learning materials, and whether overcrowding in schools is actually reducing.

The Health Sector Allocation of NLe 1.4 billion is below the 2025 allocation of NLe 1.5 billion. It also falls short of meeting the Abuja Agreement threshold of 15%. This is worrisome for a sector that encompasses all sectors because a healthy population is the foundation of national development.

Key Government Projects For 2026

Agriculture (Feed Salone)

Development of two agro-ecological zones (Tormabum & Gbondappi in the South; Mambolo & Kychum in North-West), including roads, electricity generation and transmission, water supply, and irrigation systems.

290.6m

To support various agricultural projects

95m

For the construction of fish harbour million

219.4m

Social protection

Establishment of rehabilitation centres for drug addicts

5.0m

Infrastructure and Technology

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

1.6bn

Public Administration

Construction of Public Service Commission headquarters.

7.6m

Energy

Completion of Seven Districts Electricity Project.

60.9m

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

354.7m

Will be disbursed by EU and MCC to support energy projects

61.8m

Government Counterpart Funding for Energy Projects

13.4m

Key Government Projects For 2026

Education



Construction and equipping of a National Archive and Record Centre; transformation of Technical Institutes into Community Technical Colleges.

14.5m

Rehabilitation of government secondary schools Mathora and Jimmy Gbagbo

20m

Construction of University of Science and Technology in Kono, rehabilitation of government schools, Milton Margai Technical University, and various schools in Sierra Leone

202.2m

Digital connectivity project and Education Sector Support Project

193.1m

Governance and Accountability (Security Sector)

Infrastructure projects to strengthen the security sector.



202.2m



Accountability BOX 1: EDUCATION – ARE WE GETTING VALUE?

HEADER:

Education Spending: Are Students Actually Benefiting?

KEY FACT:

NLe 3.6 billion allocated to education in 2026

WHY IT MATTERS:

Education remains one of the largest investments, but funding must translate into better learning outcomes.

WHAT TO TRACK (CITIZENS):

Are new classrooms being built in your community?
Has teacher availability improved in your school?
Are learning materials reaching students on time?
Is school overcrowding reducing?

Key Government Projects For 2026

Environment and Climate Change

National Tree Planting

6.0m

Restoration Of Degraded Mangrove Forests

5.0m

Health

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

34.6m

Support for various health projects including Pharma Grade Warehouse.

470.2m

Counterpart contribution for donor-funded health projects

18.0m



Accountability BOX 2: Health – Below Expectations

HEADER:

Health Funding: Is It Enough to Protect Lives?

KEY FACT:

Health funding is below the Abuja Declaration target of 15%, raising concerns about service delivery.

WHAT TO TRACK (CITIZENS):

Are hospitals receiving essential drugs?
Are health workers adequately staffed and paid?
Are district hospitals being upgraded?
Is the Cancer Diagnostic Centre completed?

RED FLAG:

Patients are still buying basic drugs out-of-pocket.

Key Government Projects For 2026

Water Supply and Sanitation



Construction of water supply facilities and systems in six districts

246.0m

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

35.9m

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

188.0m

Government Counterpart Funding

12.3m

Economic Diversification (Tourism)



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

2.5m

To the Monuments and Relics Commission for the construction of the cultural heritage centre .

5.0m

Development of tourist sites including Leicester Peak, Tacugama Sanctuary, and Bureh Beach.

65.5m

Government counterpart funding.

1.5m

Key Government Projects For 2026

Roads

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.

792.9m

By the World Bank

150m

From the European Union

102.2m

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

544.6m

Government counterfunding

44.6m

Budget Deficit and Borrowing Needs

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 NLe1.96 billion in 2023 to NLe2.6 billion in 2024, before rising sharply to NLe7.5 billion in 2025 - an increase of more than 60 percent within a single year.

Although projections indicate a reduction to NLe4.1 billion 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.



How Will the Government Finance the Deficit?

The overall fiscal deficit, including grants, will be financed through a combination of foreign and domestic sources. External financing is expected to reach NLe602.3 million, while principal repayments on external debt are projected at NLe1.9 billion.

On the domestic front, net financing of the deficit is estimated at NLe3.8 billion. Of this amount, NLe2.3 billion is expected to be sourced from the banking system, with the remaining NLe1.5 billion to be raised through non-bank financing channels.



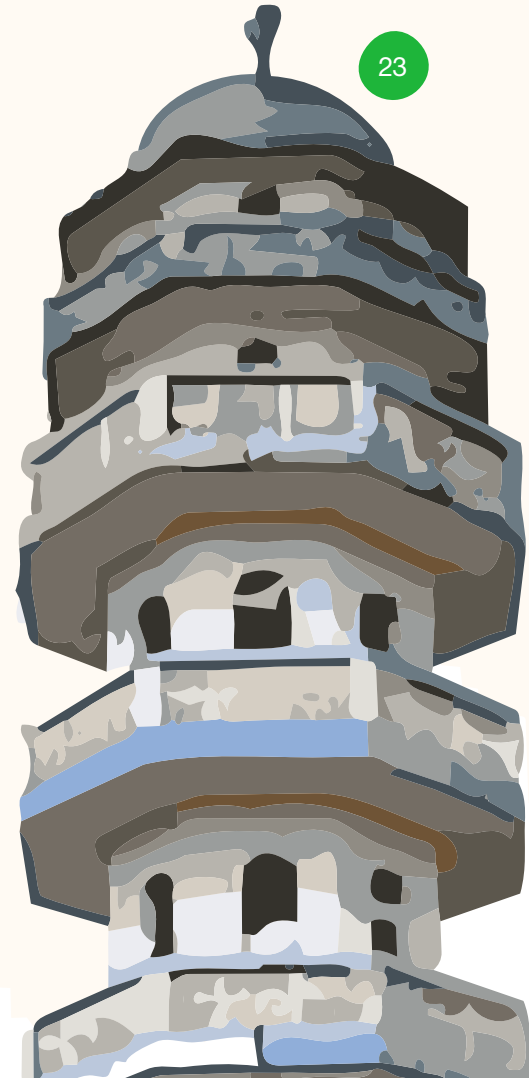
Accountability Highlight: Borrowing and Debt

The Government of Sierra Leone is projected to spend NLe 8.6 billion on debt service payments, equivalent to 4.6% of GDP. Of this amount, NLe 6.7 billion will go toward interest payments, while NLe 1.9 billion will be used to repay the principal on external debt. Interest on domestic debt alone accounts for NLe 6.4 billion, while interest on foreign debt is projected at NLe 275.8 million. When compared to the total national budget of about NLe 30.1 billion, debt servicing represents a significant portion of government spending. For a country working to improve healthcare, education, infrastructure, and economic opportunities, this level of spending on debt repayments raises critical concerns about fiscal sustainability.

What Does Borrowing Mean For Citizens?

When the government borrows money, it is essentially making a promise on behalf of every Sierra Leonean, a promise that must be repaid, with interest, using money collected from the very same people. Right now, that promise is costing the country NLe 6.7 billion in interest payments alone in 2026 money that cannot be spent on a child's classroom, a mother's hospital visit, or a farmer's seeds and fertilizer. Every Leone that goes to a creditor is a Leone that does not reach a community. And because the government needs to raise more money to meet these obligations, citizens are already feeling it in their pockets through higher taxes on everyday things like the fuel that powers transport, the cement used to build homes, and basic food imports.

What makes this especially personal is that borrowing does not just affect people today it shapes the life of the Sierra Leonean who has not yet entered the workforce, who will inherit this debt and be taxed to repay it. The 2026 budget is candid about this pressure, warning that if domestic revenue targets are not met, the government may be forced to cut spending on Feed Salone, Free Quality School Education, and transfers to local councils the very programmes that the poorest and most vulnerable Sierra Leoneans depend on most. Borrowing, in this sense, is not a number on a government spreadsheet. It is a quiet tax on the present and a heavy load placed on the future.



What Changed From The 2025 Budget?

Category	2025 Budget	2026 Budget	What Changed?
Total Revenue & Grants	NLe 27.9bn	NLe 26bn	Declined mainly due to dramatic fall in grants from development partners
Domestic Revenue	NLe 18.91bn	NLe 22.2bn	Increased share as government pushed harder on internal revenue mobilisation
Total Grants	NLe 9.0bn	NLe 3.8bn	Fell sharply as international donor support declined and off-budget grants were eliminated entirely
Total Expenditure	NLe 35.3bn	NLe 30.1bn	Reduced as government tightened spending in response to constrained fiscal space
Budget Deficit	NLe 7.5bn	NLe 4.1bn	Narrowed significantly reflecting fiscal consolidation efforts
Interest Payments	NLe 7.4bn	NLe 6.7bn	Slightly reduced but remained the single largest recurrent spending item
Capital Expenditure	NLe 13bn	NLe 8.4bn	Fell substantially driven by lower foreign loans and grants available for investment

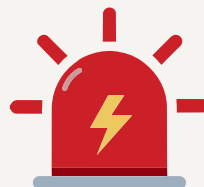
What Changed From The 2025 Budget?

Category	2025 Budget	2026 Budget	What Changed?
Wages & Salaries	NLe 7.6bn	NLe 7.9bn	Slight increase reflecting continued payroll commitments for teachers and health workers
Education Allocation	NLe 3.4bn	NLe 3.6bn	Modest increase same 41,700 teachers maintained on payroll
Health Allocation	NLe 1.5bn	NLe 1.4bn	Slight decrease despite adding 53 more health workers.
Agriculture (Feed Salone)	NLe 1.3bn	NLe 988m	Reduced allocation despite remaining the government's flagship programme

KEY INSIGHT

The single biggest story from 2025 to 2026 is the collapse of external grants from NLe 8.97 billion down to NLe 3.77 billion forcing Sierra Leone to fund a much larger share of its own budget domestically.

Key Budget Risks For Citizens To Watch



Global Trade Uncertainties & Tariff Wars:

Retaliatory tariffs particularly between the US and China, a key buyer of Sierra Leone's iron ore could weaken demand for exports and reduce the mineral revenues the government depends on to fund services.

Escalation of Global Conflicts:

Ongoing and new conflicts worldwide can disrupt supply chains, pushing up the prices of food and petroleum imports that Sierra Leoneans buy every day, fuelling inflation and increasing government expenditure.

State-Owned Enterprise (SOE) Inefficiencies:

Poorly managed SOEs, particularly in the energy sector, are a major source of fiscal risk. If energy sector reforms stall, subsidies will keep rising and divert money away from schools, hospitals, and roads.

Failure to Meet Domestic Revenue Targets:

If the government does not collect the taxes it has projected, it may be forced to cut spending on Feed Salone, Free Quality School Education, infrastructure, and transfers to local councils, hurting the poorest Sierra Leoneans most.

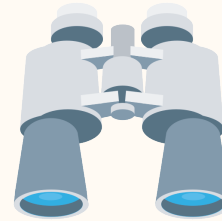
Delays in IMF & Development Partner Reforms:

Non-implementation of reforms agreed with the IMF under the Extended Credit Facility, or delays in World Bank, European Union, and African Development Bank budget support, could hold up critical funding and complicate budget execution.

Fall in Iron Ore & Mineral Prices:

Mineral exports dominate Sierra Leone's export earnings. A drop in global iron ore prices would directly reduce government revenues, widening the deficit and forcing difficult spending choices.

How Citizens Can Monitor The Budget



Participate in Budget Planning and Monitoring:

The Minister of Finance explicitly calls on Sierra Leoneans to continue to strengthen their participation in budget planning, budget monitoring, and the implementation of the budget and related programmes both at the national and local levels.

Engage With Local Councils:

The budget reports on the financial performance of local councils across all districts. Citizens can engage their local councils directly, asking how much was received, how it was spent, and whether projects were completed. The 2026 data shows that most councils are now reporting fully, meaning more information is available to the public than before.

Track Key Programme Promises:

Citizens can hold the government accountable by watching whether these specific commitments are delivered in 2026: the Feed Salone agricultural programme, Free Quality School Education for 41,700 teachers and their students, free healthcare drugs and medical supplies for 19,619 health workers, construction of the Cancer Diagnostic and Treatment Centre, rehabilitation and equipping of district hospitals, and strengthening of the National Emergency Ambulance Services.

Monitor Tax Exemptions:

The budget publishes a full table of duty and tax exemptions granted to businesses, embassies, NGOs, and government agencies totalling over NLe 1.29 billion in 2024. Citizens and civil society can scrutinise whether these exemptions are justified and benefiting the public interest.

Our Commitment

BudgIT remains committed to strengthening transparency, citizen participation, and public accountability in Sierra Leone's public finance system.

For years, we have walked into communities across Sierra Leone, translating complex budget documents into conversations that make sense at the kitchen table. Through our Tracka platform, simplified budget guides, and civic education sessions, we put information in the hands of those who need it most.

Sierra Leone's 2026 budget makes big promises. We will be watching, asking the hard questions, and making sure citizens have everything they need to do the same.



