

**Launch Ceremony event
for the project “Salone Access to Finance”**

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Manuel Müller, EU Ambassador to Sierra Leone

Check against delivery

Honourable Minister of Finance, Mr. Sheku Bangura

**Honourable Minister for Agriculture and Food Security -
Dr Henry Musa Kpaka**

**Representative of the UN Capital development Fund- Mr
Mohammad AlBatayneh**

Representatives of the Government

Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

Members of the press

Distinguish guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

The EU is honoured to be here today with you for the launch of
“Salone Access to Finance” project.

It is always delightful to see ideas and plans becoming a reality
in particular when it is about joint efforts of Sierra Leone and
the European Union in the country.

“Salone access to finance” is part of the EU Jobs and Growth Programme in Sierra Leone, one of the EU flagship initiatives to support Sierra Leonean efforts for development.

The “Jobs and Growth Programme” aims at addressing the investment-education-employment nexus

(1) improving the investment climate,

(2) upgrading the human capital, and

(3) creating jobs for a predominantly low qualified work force.

Agriculture is a key sector for Sierra Leone’s economy. It contributes to more than 50% of GDP. More than two thirds of the country’s active population work in agriculture.

Yet, challenges persist to transform it into a more vibrant sector capable of driving the sustainable socioeconomic development of the country.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Did you know that only 1% of total banking lending goes into agriculture investments in Sierra Leone. It is unfortunately one of the lowest rate in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Agricultural transformation is a priority in the policy agenda of the Government of Sierra Leone to meet the challenges of food

and nutrition insecurity, climate change, youth unemployment and overall economic growth.

The freshly adopted Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030, puts a strong emphasis on the role of a diversified, resilient, green and competitive economy.

The "Feed Salone" flagship initiative of the Government aims to increase food self-sufficiency, reduce food imports and strengthen the resilience of the economy.

Blended financing to leverage private sector financing is one of the key pillar of Feed Salone. Leveraging development financing will be critical for the Government to fund Feed Salone budget estimated at 260 Mio USD for 2024 and more that \$1.6 billion by 2028.

Today's event is a demonstration that the EU is committed to pursuing its efforts to support Sierra Leone in that endeavour.

Implemented by the United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) over a 4-year period, "Salone Access to Finance" will specifically support an improved investment climate and business environment to leverage private sector investment in the agriculture sector.

Funded by the European Union, this intervention will act as de-risking instrument to leverage responsible private sector investments in agriculture.

The action is designed around 4 main components: i) Concessional Blending Financing for investment; ii) Agriculture Insurance; iii) Digital Financing and iv) Policy and Regulatory Framework.

Honourable Ministers,

The EU is happy to note that under this initiative, the Government of Sierra Leone will pioneer the first insurance scheme to de-risk investment in agriculture.

Additionally, the support will also pioneer blended concessional financing with domestic financial institutions. The commercial banks will be strengthened in their capacities to develop the most needed financial products and services for agriculture investments and fully fledged agri-desks.

Last but not least, the project will work with the chambers of commerce to strengthen private sector capacities to develop viable and bankable business model.

In terms of results and impact, it is expected that the project will improve and increase digital financial services to some 400.000 new customers.

At least 150 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises will be supported with entrepreneurship and business development as well as access to concessional blended financing.

Additionally, the insurance scheme will de-risk investments benefiting at least 500 farmers, opening opportunities for a scaling up approach.

These are just few figures that I found relevant to illustrate how the support will contribute to Government's policies and strategies in addressing major challenges of the sector.

I am confident that the financing of the European Union will contribute in de-risking private sector investments, leveraging responsible investments and cutting-edge solutions for an inclusive socio economic development of the agriculture sector.

To conclude my speech, I wish to thank the Government and the UN Capital Development Fund for organising this event.

I understand that the afternoon session will be devoted for technical discussions on several topics to already start paving the way for implementation.

I commend this proactive approach and wish all of you constructive discussions and success in your endeavour.