

Championing A Youth Front for Climate Action



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Letter from the Co-Founders

Dear Friends, Partners, and Supporters,

As we reflect on 2025, we are filled with gratitude and pride for what the Youth Initiative for Climate Action - Sierra Leone (YICA-SL) has accomplished together with our communities, partners, and dedicated team of young climate advocates.

This year marked a significant milestone in our organizational journey. We transitioned from primarily awareness-raising and policy advocacy to direct community-based environmental action. This evolution reflects our belief that meaningful climate action must be rooted in the communities most affected by environmental degradation.

In August, we conducted our first comprehensive field assessment in Kono District, documenting the devastating impacts of unregulated artisanal mining on wetlands and agricultural lands. What we witnessed in Bumbeh and Sandor communities strengthened our resolve to develop practical, community-owned solutions. This assessment laid the groundwork for our innovative Chiefdom Environmental Enforcement Coordination Committees (CEEComs) model.

We were honored to represent Sierra Leonean youth at the World Mayors Summit and COP30 Local Leaders Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. These platforms allowed us to bring the voices of our communities to global decision-makers and to learn from climate leaders worldwide. We returned with renewed energy and new partnerships to strengthen our work.

Our Young Women Climate Mentorship Programme completed its first cohort, empowering 20 young women with the skills and resources to lead their own climate projects. From school gardens to disaster resilience initiatives, these young women are already making tangible impacts in their communities. We are proud to have supported their growth and to have awarded mini-grants to help them implement their visions.

Through the NatureUp School Garden Project, we are transforming school compounds into living laboratories where young people learn sustainable practices hands-on. These gardens are not just about growing vegetables; they are about growing the next generation of environmental stewards.

As we look to 2026, we are excited to scale our community-based restoration work, establish the first CEEComs in Kono District, and continue building the capacity of young climate leaders across Sierra Leone. Our role as Regional Coordinator for the Youth Climate Council Global Alliance allows us to connect and support youth-led organizations across eight African countries.

In solidarity,

Esther and Foday

About YICA

WHO WE ARE

Youth Initiative for Climate Action - Sierra Leone (YICA-SL) is a youth-led non-profit organization dedicated to empowering young people to lead climate action and environmental protection efforts in Sierra Leone. Founded by young environmental advocates, YICA-SL bridges the gap between community-level environmental action and national policy frameworks.

Our organization is 100% youth-led, with all decision-makers under the age of 35. We work primarily with young people aged 15-35, who make up over 80% of the communities we serve.

OUR MISSION

To empower young people across Sierra Leone to become active agents of environmental change through education, advocacy, community action, and policy engagement.

OUR VALUES

Youth Leadership: Young people are not just participants but leaders in climate action

Community-Based Solutions: Sustainable change must be rooted in local knowledge and ownership

Inclusion: Climate action must include all voices, especially marginalized groups

Evidence-Based Action: Our interventions are grounded in research and field assessment

Partnership: Collaboration with communities, government, and partners multiplies impact

OUR VISION

A Sierra Leone where young people lead the transition to a sustainable, climate-resilient future, where communities thrive in harmony with their environment, and where youth voices shape environmental policy at all levels.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2025

In 2025, the organization recorded major progress across its programmes, partnerships, and institutional development. The year reflected strong growth, wider engagement at both community and international levels, and the successful rollout of several new initiatives. These achievements strengthened the organization's operational capacity, expanded its impact, and reinforced its role in advancing inclusive and locally driven climate action.

20

YOUNG WOMEN MENTORED AND PROVIDED WITH SEED FUNDING

Through the Young Women Climate Mentorship Programme, 20 young women received mentorship from experience climate action professionals in areas such as project management, communications, policy advocacy, and fundraising. The programme also included 6 monthly training workshops on various topics and field visits to climate and environment project sites, and provision of seed funding for mini projects.

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CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES INFLUENCED

For the first time, we facilitated the collection of youth inputs into two critical climate change policies to ensure young people can meaningfully participate in policy making processes. We were able to facilitate inputs into Sierra Leones third generation Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs 3.0) by organizing youth consultations across all regions and developing a comprehensive youth position paper in collaboration with the Youth Climate Council Sierra Leone.

200+

YOUNG PEOPLE TRAINED IN CLIMATE CHANGE TOPICS

We led trainings on various climate action topics including understanding climate change for young people, project and grant writing, climate change communication and policy advocacy. Through our capacity building efforts, five youth organizations started new initiatives and gained access to finance and partnerships to scale.



Global Advocacy: COP30 Local Leaders Forum & World Mayors Summit

In 2025, YICA-SL Co-Founders Foday Kamara and Esther Yealie Kamara represented Sierra Leonean youth at two major global forums in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: the World Mayors Summit and the COP30 Local Leaders Summit. The invitation to participate in these prestigious international events represented significant recognition of YICA-SL's work and the importance of youth perspectives in global climate discussions.

Our presence in Rio provided an opportunity to engage meaningfully at the global level. Key activities included:

- Sharing the experiences and challenges of Sierra Leonean communities affected by environmental degradation
- Advocating for greater youth inclusion in climate decision-making at local and national levels
- Contributing African and youth perspectives to discussions on Just Transition and local climate action
- Building partnerships with international organisations and youth networks

At the World Mayors Summit, which brought together local government leaders to discuss urban climate action and sustainable development, we participated as youth representatives in sessions covering youth engagement in urban planning, community-led climate resilience, and financing mechanisms for local climate action in developing countries.

Our participation yielded concrete outcomes for YICA-SL's ongoing work in Sierra Leone. We established connections with international youth climate organisations, urban sustainability networks, and potential funders interested in supporting grassroots climate action in West Africa.

Field Assessment: Kono District



Background

Kono District in Eastern Province is historically known for diamond mining, but in recent years, unregulated artisanal mining has expanded significantly into wetland areas that communities depend on for rice cultivation and water resources. Reports from community members and local leaders highlighted growing concerns about environmental degradation and its impact on livelihoods.

In August 2025, YICA-SL partnered with Nature for Mangroves, a wetland restoration specialist organization, to conduct a comprehensive field assessment. The objective was to document the extent of environmental damage, understand community perspectives, and identify opportunities for restoration interventions.

Communities Visited

The team visited two communities in different chiefdoms:

Bumbeh (Nimikoro Chiefdom): A community with both active and abandoned mining sites, experiencing severe wetland degradation affecting traditional rice farming.

Kayima (Sandor Chiefdom): A community facing similar mining pressures with significant impacts on water quality and agricultural productivity.



Key Findings

Environmental Degradation: The assessment documented extensive environmental damage resulting from decades of uncontrolled mining:

- Large-scale destruction of wetland ecosystems that previously supported rice cultivation
- Abandoned mining pits creating safety hazards and disrupting water flow patterns
- Soil degradation rendering previously productive land unusable for farming
- Sedimentation of waterways affecting water quality for human and agricultural use
- Loss of vegetation cover and biodiversity in affected areas

Socioeconomic Impacts: Community members reported significant livelihood impacts:

- Loss of rice farming land forcing families into food insecurity or migration
- Women particularly affected as they traditionally manage wetland rice cultivation
- Youth caught between limited mining income and disappearing agricultural alternatives
- Community tensions between those benefiting from mining and those losing livelihoods

Governance Gap: A critical finding was the absence of community-level monitoring and enforcement structures. While Sierra Leone has environmental laws prohibiting illegal mining, there are no mechanisms for communities to monitor compliance or report violations effectively. Traditional authorities lack resources and technical capacity to address environmental issues, and national enforcement agencies have limited presence in rural areas.



Stakeholder Consultations

The team engaged with key community stakeholders to understand local perspectives:

Paramount Chiefs: Traditional leaders from both chiefdoms expressed concern about environmental degradation and welcomed support for restoration and governance

Youth Leaders: Young people showed strong interest in alternative livelihoods and environmental stewardship roles

Women's Groups: Women highlighted the loss of traditional farming areas and expressed desire for restoration of wetlands

Farming Households: Approximately 20 households were identified as directly affected and interested in participating in restoration activities. Traditional authorities lack resources and technical capacity to address environmental issues, and national enforcement agencies have limited presence in rural areas.

The CEECom Model

Based on the assessment findings, YICA-SL developed the concept of Chiefdom Environmental Enforcement Coordination Committees (CEEComs) to address the governance gap.

CEEComs are community-owned monitoring structures that:

- Provide local monitoring capacity through trained community volunteers
- Connect communities with Environmental Protection Agency reporting mechanisms
- Enable documentation of environmental violations for evidence-based advocacy
- Create accountability mechanisms linking traditional authorities with formal enforcement

Next Steps

The Kono assessment has positioned YICA-SL to pursue community-based restoration interventions. We are currently seeking funding to pilot the CEECom model and implement initial restoration activities in Bumbeh and Sandor communities. The assessment report and photographic documentation provide the evidence base for our grant applications and stakeholder engagement.

National Policy Engagements

Our Policy Work

Since 2022, YICA-SL has maintained active engagement with national government agencies to ensure youth perspectives are included in environmental and climate policy. Our policy work bridges community-level concerns with national decision-making processes.

Key Partnerships

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA): YICA-SL has built a collaborative relationship with the EPA, providing entry points for community voices in environmental governance. Through this partnership, we have supported awareness campaigns, contributed to policy discussions, and helped design community-based monitoring approaches that complement EPA's enforcement work.

Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change: Our engagement with the Ministry has focused on ensuring youth participation in national climate planning processes. We have contributed to consultations on climate policy and supported the Ministry's efforts to communicate climate information to young people.

Freetown City Council: YICA-SL has engaged with the Freetown City Council to support the integration of youth perspectives into urban climate planning and local governance. This partnership has provided opportunities to contribute to city-level resilience initiatives and strengthen the link between community-based environmental action and municipal priorities.

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

A significant achievement of our policy work has been facilitating youth consultations that informed Sierra Leone's updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). These consultations ensured that young people's priorities and perspectives were reflected in the country's climate commitments to the international community.

- Organized youth forums to gather input on climate priorities
- Synthesized youth recommendations for submission to NDC process
- Advocated for ambitious targets that address youth concerns

Community-Level Advocacy

Beyond national policy, YICA-SL works to strengthen environmental governance at the local level:

- Organizing community dialogues where citizens engage local councils on environmental compliance
- Documenting environmental violations and presenting findings to relevant authorities
- Supporting community representatives to participate in chiefdom and district planning processes



Looking Forward

In 2026, we will continue to strengthen our policy engagement by:

- Piloting the CEECom model in Kono District to demonstrate community-based environmental governance
- Engaging with district councils to advocate for local environmental protection measures
- Supporting the implementation of Sierra Leone's climate commitments through youth-led monitoring
- Building capacity of young people to participate effectively in policy processes





Young Women Climate Mentorship Programme

Programme Overview

The Young Women Climate Mentorship Programme (YWCMP) is designed to address the underrepresentation of women in climate leadership while building practical skills for community-level climate action. Recognising that young women are disproportionately affected by climate change yet consistently underrepresented in decision-making spaces, the programme creates a structured pathway for emerging women leaders to develop the knowledge, networks, and resources needed to drive change in their communities.

The programme is built around four integrated components:

- **Skills Training:** Participants receive hands-on training in project design, proposal writing, budget management, and community engagement, equipping them with the core competencies required to plan and deliver climate initiatives
- **Mentorship:** Each participant is paired with an experienced climate professional who provides ongoing guidance, feedback, and professional development support throughout the programme
- **Peer Learning:** Structured group work and collaborative project development foster a supportive community of practice among participants, encouraging shared learning and collective problem-solving
- **Mini-Grants:** Seed funding is awarded to enable mentees to move from planning to implementation, giving them direct experience managing and delivering their own community-level climate projects

First Cohort: 2025

In 2025, YICA-SL successfully completed the first YWCMP cohort, marking a significant milestone for the programme. Sixteen young women were organised into four project groups, each tasked with developing a community-focused climate project from concept through to proposal stage. The cohort progressed through the full programme cycle — from initial skills training and mentorship sessions to peer review and final project presentations — before receiving mini-grant support to begin implementation. The quality and ambition of the projects developed demonstrated the capacity of young women to lead credible, community-rooted climate action when provided with the right enabling environment.

Impact and Learning

The first cohort produced measurable outcomes and generated important learning that will shape future programme delivery:

- 20 young women completed the full programme cycle across four project groups
- 4 community climate projects designed, developed, and approved for implementation
- Mini-grants awarded to all four project groups to support a three-month implementation phase
- Peer networks established among a growing cohort of young women climate leaders in Sierra Leone



Beyond the numbers, the cohort surfaced valuable insights into the barriers young women face in accessing climate leadership opportunities — including time constraints, limited prior exposure to project management, and confidence gaps — which are informing adjustments to the programme design for the 2026 cohort. The YWCMP has established a replicable model for inclusive climate leadership development that YICA-SL intends to scale in the coming years.



Looking Forward to 2026: Our Strategic Priorities

As we enter 2026, YICA-SL is poised to build on the foundation laid in 2025. Our focus will be on scaling community-based interventions, strengthening youth leadership, and deepening our policy engagement.

Strategic Priorities for 2026

- 1. Launch CEECom Pilot in Kono District:** Building on our 2025 field assessment, we will establish the first Chiefdom Environmental Enforcement Coordination Committees in Bumbeh and Sandor communities. This pilot will demonstrate the viability of community-based environmental monitoring and governance.
- 2. Begin Wetland Restoration:** With funding secured, we will begin practical restoration work on degraded mining sites in Kono. Working with communities who will provide labor and indigenous knowledge, we will demonstrate that damaged ecosystems can be rehabilitated.
- 3. Scale Young Women Climate Mentorship:** Following the success of our first cohort, we will launch a second YWCMP cohort while continuing to support first-cohort mentees in implementing their projects. We aim to reach 30+ young women through the programme in 2026.
- 4. Implement NatureUp School Garden Project:** Complete the installation and training phases of our school garden project, and document the model for replication in additional schools.
- 5. Expand School Climate Literacy Programme:** Build on partnerships developed through our December training to integrate disability inclusion throughout our programmes and advocate for inclusive climate policies.





Thank You

YICA-SL wishes to express its sincere gratitude to all partners and funders whose support made the work documented in this report possible.

We are deeply grateful to Plan Sierra Leone Youth Climate Action Accelerator (YCAA), Dreamtown, and the Fund for Global Human Rights' Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) Children and Youth Programme for their financial contributions, which provided the foundation for our programme delivery throughout 2025. Their belief in youth-led climate action and willingness to invest in grassroots organisations remains a critical enabler of our work.

We acknowledge our implementation and technical partners; Nature for Mangroves, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Sierra Leone, and the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency for their institutional collaboration, technical guidance, and support in facilitating community access and policy engagement across our programmes.

We also acknowledge the Youth Climate Council (YCC) for their partnership in advancing youth climate action, and the Youth Climate Council Global Alliance (YCCGA) for their ongoing network support and for the opportunities they have created for YICA-SL to engage at the regional and global levels.

Finally, we acknowledge the communities of Bumbeh and Kayima in Kono District, Susan's Bay, and Cocklebay, as well as the Paramount Chiefs of Nimikoro and Sandor Chiefdoms, whose trust, participation, and local leadership remain the cornerstone of everything we do.



Get Involved

Join us in building a sustainable future for Sierra Leone

Contact Us

Address: 70 Bass Street, Brookfields, Freetown Sierra Leone.

Contact: +23276283979 | +23276595296

Email: yicasalone@gmail.com | info@yica-sl.org

Website: www.yica-sl.org

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