

PROBLUE

IMPACT STORIES

Sierra Leone: Inspiring Innovation to Reduce Single-Use Plastics in Tourism and Beyond



CHALLENGE

Like in many countries in West Africa, the consumption of single-use plastics in Sierra Leone has increased exponentially. Without adequate formal recycling facilities or waste collection systems, plastic waste litter streets, ravines, rivers, and streams increasing the risks of flooding and mosquito-borne diseases. From the rivers, plastics make their way to the beaches and ocean, where they impact the health of coastal populations, reduce beach attractiveness for tourism, and can end up being consumed by marine species or filling the nets of fisherfolk.

The growth of plastic pollution in Sierra Leone threatens not only public health but its overall Blue Economy, including fisheries but also other key economic sectors such as tourism, an essential industry for job creation and economic growth. The country is rich in biodiversity, has a strong cultural legacy, and possesses beautiful beaches and islands but plastic pollution has begun to be a problem. Recent studies have shown that the tourism sector alone uses over 42 million pieces of single-use plastic per year, in a country where only about 6 percent of it is properly recycled.

APPROACH

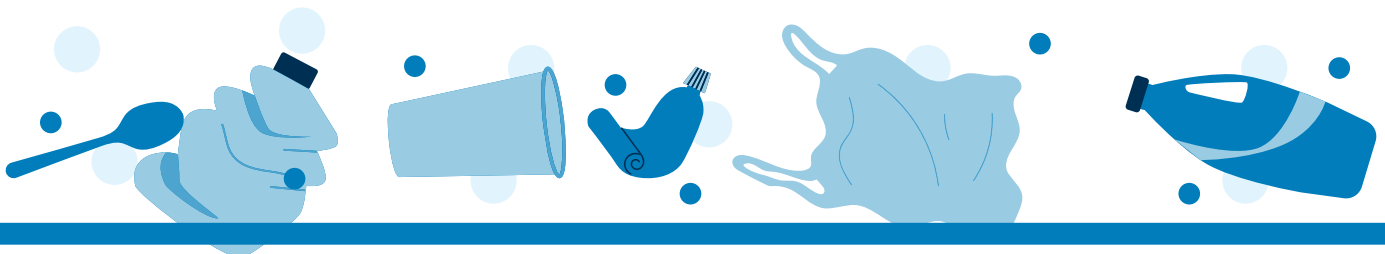
A [PROBLUE](#)-supported activity was designed to tackle the issue, supporting the US\$40 million Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project with the objective to increase investment in the non-mining sector. The PROBLUE-supported activities were developed in two phases. A diagnostic assessment was carried out to identify sources of plastic waste, and plastic use in the tourism sector, and connect with businesses producing alternatives to single-use plastics. This phase also included a pilot with hotels to identify and reduce the use of specific plastic products and policy dialogue through a public-private forum called the Plastic Leadership Platform (PLP) chaired by the Ministry of Finance.

2024 GO CIRCULAR WEEK: The World Bank with support from PROBLUE and in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone, organized week-long activities from February 19-23 in Sierra Leone to raise awareness of the importance of reducing plastic pollution, engage in circular practices and to showcase results achieved so far under the PROBLUE/Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP)/Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project (RUSLP) initiative. The program encompassed a range of initiatives, starting with a “Trash to cash” beach clean-up event that mobilized more than 80 volunteers to remove 664 kg of plastic debris from the coastal area. Additionally, 20 hotels and restaurants were recognized with certificates for their efforts to minimize their plastic waste. The week culminated in a Youth Innovation Challenge held at Limkokwing University. Among the winning pitches were an innovative solution for the collection and use of plastic waste for 3-D printing and the collection and transformation of old tires into designer furniture.

The second phase built on the increased awareness of the scale of the plastics problem and supported the Ministry of Environment in the passing of the Plastics and Single Use Plastics Policy as well as in the development of a Green Taxonomy. The Policy defines five goals, that support the overarching vision of a “plastics life cycle that eliminates negative environmental, social, health, and economic impacts and supports economic growth and job and wealth creation through a combination of circularity and sustainable development.” This phase of the work also supported the expansion and formalization of the *Go Circular* program in hotels and provided mentorship for small businesses that focus both on plastics reuse and on providing alternatives to plastics. The *Go Circular* program for hotels helps participating enterprises calculate their single-use plastics footprint and identify an action plan for items that they will remove or exchange. Finally, work conducted in this phase helped connect suppliers of alternatives to hoteliers, creating markets for products like recycled textile laundry bags, bamboo cutlery and large water dispensers to replace small plastic bottles. The results of both phases of work were celebrated during *Go Circular Week* between February 20 and 23, 2024.



*Volunteers collecting plastic pollution at a local beach in Freetown, Sierra Leone in a PROBLUE-supported activity.
Photo Credit: The World Bank/Louise Twining-Ward*



RESULTS

- **Policy Change.** The data produced by the diagnostic report and the high level of engagement in the Plastic Leadership Platform (PLP) and the Resilient Sierra Leone Project contributed to the passing of the Plastics and Single Use Plastics Policy.
- **Budget Change.** A green taxonomy was developed, and an agreement was reached on a list of products to avoid. As a result, the 2024 Budget Speech noted an increased tax on some of the most polluting plastic products.¹ Work is now ongoing with a task force of domestic commercial banks to provide reduced-interest financing for green innovations and alternatives.
- The **Go Circular program** for hotels was expanded and in February 2024, 20 hotels were presented with their certificates for their pioneering role in the program. A governance plan, as well as a Green Rewards program (e.g., reduction in licensing costs for certified enterprises), is being set up to provide incentives to participating hotels and restaurants.
 - More than **600 people** were involved in Go Circular week and learned new ways to avoid plastic waste.
- The **Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) circular business mentorship** helped to expand markets to several local producers below.
 - One new local cosmetics company, Shea&More, supported by this initiative, now sells its products at hotels and produces refillable amenity bottles to single-use type.
 - Another company, Enviro Solutions, also supported by this initiative, scaled its business to make 5,000 building blocks a day from discarded plastics. The company recruits waste collectors, weighs, and pays for plastics using digital payment systems.
 - Finally, Waste Away makes backpacks out of discarded plastic water sachets. Each backpack is woven from 350 sachets collected from the streets by young people.
- These companies create demand for end-of-life plastics, which will help to reduce littering.



Photo Credit: The World Bank/Louise Twining-Ward

¹ Imposing a specific excise tax on plastics at the rate of NLe16.0 per kilogram, to protect the environment.

“From my perspective, I believe we can shift from single-use plastic packaging for amenities like shampoos and soaps through two steps. Firstly, by convincing hotels and restaurants to use refillable dispensers, and secondly, to also convince them to shift towards local supplies, from local cosmetic manufacturers as a way to ensure them of constant supply to refill these dispensers.”

–Haja Dalanda Massally,
Owner Formulator, Shea & More Natural



Above: Before intervention with our team outside Haja’s house with a leaking roof where she made soap in her kitchen. Below: After intervention as Haja is an entrepreneur in her new store.
Photo Credits: Amadu Jalloh

PARTNERS

The project has involved partnerships with the Sierra Leone Economic Diversification Project (SLEDP) and Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project (RUSLP) projects, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Environment, and Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs, the Sierra Leone Hotel and Tourism Association, Freetown City Council, and the National Tourism Board. The consulting firm Anteja provided technical inputs.