

POLICY BRIEF

Priority policy entry points for biodiversity and ecosystem services in Sierra Leone

Using biodiversity and ecosystem services evidence in national policy, planning and decision-making

Purpose of this brief

This brief identifies practical entry points for strengthening the use of biodiversity and ecosystem services evidence in Sierra Leone's national and sector policies, strategies, laws, plans and programmes. It focuses on live and near-term policy processes that can help bring biodiversity evidence into national development planning, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining, land governance, coastal management, climate action, tourism and natural resource management. It also explains how a proposed National Multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Platform for Sierra Leone can help connect biodiversity evidence with policy, planning and implementation, including through better use of assessments from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

About this brief

This brief draws mainly on Sierra Leone's *Rapid National Landscape Review of Existing Science-Policy-Practice Initiatives and Mechanisms in Sierra Leone*, prepared under CABES in 2025. Unless otherwise stated, information on Sierra Leone's policy and planning instruments, implementation challenges and practical entry points is drawn from that review and the Sierra Leonean policy processes and instruments cited in it. The brief also reflects country input provided in 2026 to update.

This brief is intended to support country-led dialogue on how biodiversity and ecosystem services evidence can inform national policy, planning and decision-making in Sierra Leone.

Key messages

- Biodiversity and ecosystem services support Sierra Leone's economy, food security, livelihoods, cultural heritage and resilience. They are especially important for agriculture, fisheries, forestry, water resources, tourism and coastal communities.
- Sierra Leone has several policy entry points where biodiversity evidence can inform implementation, investment, monitoring and decision-making. These include the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026, the Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030, the Feed Salone Strategy 2023-2028, environmental assessment processes, mining and land reforms, fisheries and coastal management, climate commitments, forestry, wildlife and protected area governance, and tourism planning.
- The main challenge is implementation. Biodiversity is reflected in several policies, strategies and laws, but evidence is not always used consistently in planning, budgeting, enforcement, monitoring and investment decisions.
- The proposed National Multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Platform can help connect evidence, institutions and policy processes. It can provide a practical space for government, researchers, civil society, communities, traditional authorities, the private sector and development partners to work around shared evidence needs and policy questions.

- One immediate opportunity is to use the proposed platform to support evidence-informed implementation of live policy processes, including national development planning, NBSAP implementation and future updating, Feed Salone, environmental assessment, mining safeguards, fisheries management, land-use planning, climate action and biodiversity finance.

Why biodiversity and ecosystem services matter for Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone's biodiversity and ecosystem services provide food, income, materials, water regulation, coastal protection, cultural value and other benefits that are important for people and the economy. They support agriculture, fisheries, forestry, water resources, tourism and coastal livelihoods.

These ecosystems are under pressure from deforestation, mining, unsustainable agriculture, overfishing, land-use change, coastal ecosystem degradation and climate change. These pressures affect livelihoods, food security, ecosystem health and long-term development.

Sierra Leone has made important progress in developing institutions, laws, strategies and community-led programmes for biodiversity and natural resource management. Recent reforms, including the Environmental Protection Agency Act 2022, the Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022 and the Wildlife Conservation (Amendment) Act 2022, provide stronger legal foundations for action.

The policy issue is therefore not only whether Sierra Leone has biodiversity commitments, but whether biodiversity evidence is used clearly and consistently in the policies, plans and programmes that shape land use, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining, coastal management, tourism, climate resilience and national development planning.

Priority policy entry points for evidence use

The policy processes and instruments below provide practical entry points for using biodiversity and ecosystem services evidence in implementation, investment, monitoring and decision-making.

Policy process or instrument	Why it matters	Practical opportunity
National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026	Sierra Leone's main national framework for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use.	Use evidence to support implementation, review, future updating, monitoring and alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.
Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030	The country's core development planning framework to 2030.	Make biodiversity and ecosystem services more visible in planning, reporting, public investment and sector delivery.
Feed Salone Strategy 2023-2028	A major agricultural transformation agenda linked to food security, livelihoods and land use.	Promote agroecology, agroforestry, soil health, pollinator-friendly practices, water protection and landscape restoration.
Environmental Protection Agency Act 2022 and strategic environmental assessment / environmental impact assessment processes	Provides a legal basis for environmental oversight, compliance and assessment.	Strengthen strategic environmental assessment, environmental impact assessment, post-approval monitoring, public reporting and the use of biodiversity evidence in project review.

Policy process or instrument	Why it matters	Practical opportunity
Mines and Minerals Development Act 2022	Mining decisions can affect forests, water, land, biodiversity and communities.	Use biodiversity evidence to identify risks, avoid sensitive areas, strengthen restoration, improve monitoring and guide biodiversity offset discussions where appropriate.
Customary Land Rights Act 2022 and land-use planning	Land decisions at chiefdom and community levels shape long-term ecosystem outcomes.	Integrate biodiversity, ecosystem service values, Indigenous and Local Knowledge, gender considerations and community priorities into land-use planning.
Fisheries and Aquaculture Act 2018 and coastal ecosystem management	Fisheries, mangroves and coastal ecosystems support food security, livelihoods and protection from climate risks.	Improve fisheries stock information, bycatch data, mangrove monitoring, nursery area protection and community-based management.
Forestry, wildlife and protected area laws and reforms	Forests and protected areas support biodiversity, livelihoods, climate resilience and ecosystem services.	Strengthen enforcement, forest restoration, community forestry, wildlife protection, habitat connectivity and protected area financing.
National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2015 and updated Nationally Determined Contribution 2021	Climate action can strengthen biodiversity and resilience when ecosystems are properly included.	Use biodiversity evidence to support nature-based solutions, mangrove restoration, watershed protection, blue carbon and climate finance proposals.
National Strategic Tourism Plan 2024	Nature-based tourism can support conservation, livelihoods and local economic opportunities.	Set nature-positive tourism standards and link tourism benefits to protected area management and community livelihoods.
Proposed National Multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Platform	A practical mechanism for linking science, policy and practice across sectors.	Use the platform to identify evidence needs, convene targeted dialogues, translate IPBES and national evidence, and support policy implementation.

Source note: The policy entry points in this table are drawn mainly from Sierra Leone's rapid national landscape review, updated with CABES Sierra Leone country input (2026) and selected Sierra Leonean policy processes and instruments cited in the review.

Main policy gaps and implementation challenges

1. Implementation remains uneven: Sierra Leone has important biodiversity-related policies, strategies and laws. The priority now is to turn these commitments into coordinated implementation, clear responsibilities, adequate resourcing and practical action.

2. Evidence is fragmented and not always decision-ready: Spatial data, ecosystem information, fisheries data, post-approval monitoring, biodiversity indicators and valuation evidence are spread across institutions and projects. This makes it harder for decision-makers to use evidence consistently when planning, budgeting, assessing projects or monitoring results.

3. Institutional mandates and sector action can overlap: Several institutions and initiatives influence biodiversity and natural resource management. Without regular coordination, actions can be fragmented or duplicated, and important issues can fall between institutional mandates.

4. Biodiversity needs a stronger place in development planning and budgets: Biodiversity supports food security, water security, livelihoods, disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and economic development. These links are not always visible enough in development planning, public investment

decisions, sector budgets and annual reviews.

5. Mining, infrastructure and land-use decisions need stronger biodiversity safeguards: Mining, infrastructure and land-use decisions can have long-term effects on forests, watersheds, habitats, coastal ecosystems and communities. Biodiversity evidence can help identify risks earlier, guide avoidance and mitigation, strengthen restoration and improve public reporting.

6. Climate, coastal and restoration actions need biodiversity and ecosystem service evidence: Sierra Leone's climate, coastal and restoration priorities can deliver stronger benefits when they are guided by evidence on mangroves, watersheds, forests, soil health, carbon storage, water regulation, livelihoods and community resilience.

7. Indigenous and Local Knowledge is not yet fully integrated: Local communities and traditional authorities hold important knowledge on seasonal restrictions on fishing and other natural resource use, sacred groves, community tenure and ecosystem management. This knowledge is not always documented, validated or reflected in formal planning and decision-making.

Practical policy options

1. Use the proposed platform as a practical evidence and coordination mechanism

The platform should focus on solving specific policy problems, not only sharing information. Early topics could include NBSAP implementation and future updating, Medium-Term National Development Plan indicators, mining impacts, fisheries enforcement, land-use planning, mangrove restoration, nature-based solutions and biodiversity finance.

2. Support implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026

The platform can help identify priority actions, evidence needs, implementation gaps, responsible institutions and monitoring approaches. It can also help prepare for future updates to the NBSAP and strengthen alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

3. Make national biodiversity priorities easier to use

National biodiversity priorities need to be translated into clear, practical messages for sector ministries, local authorities, communities, partners and the private sector. This can help turn national commitments into sector checklists, planning guidance, investment criteria and monitoring tools.

4. Strengthen biodiversity integration in national development planning

Biodiversity and ecosystem services can be linked more clearly to economic planning, public investment and sector delivery, especially in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining, water, tourism, climate, land-use planning and coastal management.

5. Use biodiversity evidence to improve agriculture, fisheries, restoration and climate action

Agriculture, fisheries, restoration, coastal management and climate programmes can use evidence to guide where and how interventions take place, which ecosystems and species need protection, how risks are managed and how benefits are monitored.

6. Support implementation of environmental assessment, mining, land, fisheries, forestry and wildlife instruments

Evidence and dialogue can help avoid fragmented implementation across environmental assessment, mining, land-use planning, fisheries, forestry, wildlife conservation, protected area governance, coastal management and tourism.

7. Produce short evidence products for decision-makers

The platform can prepare policy briefs, evidence notes, maps, presentations, sector-specific checklists and decision-support summaries. These should be short, practical and written in plain language.

8. Strengthen monitoring, learning and public reporting

The platform can help Sierra Leone track what is working, what is not working and where policy implementation needs to improve. Harmonised indicators, practical monitoring tools and public reporting can help move biodiversity commitments from policy documents into measurable action.

How the proposed National Multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Platform can support this agenda

Sierra Leone's rapid national landscape review makes a clear case for establishing a National Multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Platform as a coordinating and knowledge-brokerage hub. The review proposes that the platform be anchored within the Environmental Protection Agency of Sierra Leone, subject to national endorsement and institutional arrangements.

The platform should be practical and problem-focused. Its value would come from helping institutions work together, identify evidence needs, translate scientific and local knowledge, and support better policy decisions.

For the policy entry points in this brief, the proposed platform can:

- identify policy questions where biodiversity and ecosystem services evidence is needed;
- connect government agencies, researchers, civil society, traditional authorities, communities, private sector actors and development partners;
- translate IPBES findings, national research and Indigenous and Local Knowledge into short, clear products for decision-makers;
- support implementation of the NBSAP, Medium-Term National Development Plan, Feed Salone, environmental assessment processes, land-use planning, fisheries, mining, forestry, tourism and climate action;
- establish a shared biodiversity and ecosystem services Data Room, harmonised indicators, baseline maps, monitoring protocols and public reporting tools;
- convene targeted dialogues on strategic environmental assessment, natural capital accounting, fisheries enforcement, chiefdom land-use planning, mining safeguards and nature-positive tourism standards;



Stakeholder engagement meeting, Sierra Leone, 3 July. Photo credit: RIST, Sierra Leone.

- package nature-based solution and restoration ideas, such as mangrove restoration and watershed protection, into fundable proposals for climate, biodiversity and development finance; and
- support monitoring, learning and accountability through regular review of progress, lessons and implementation gaps.

Concluding message

Sierra Leone has strong opportunities to make biodiversity and ecosystem services more visible and useful in national policy, planning and decision-making. The priority is to move from commitments to implementation. This means linking biodiversity knowledge to development planning, NBSAP implementation and future updating, agriculture, fisheries, forestry, mining, land governance, coastal management, tourism, climate resilience and public investment.

A proposed National Multi-stakeholder Biodiversity Platform can help make this happen by connecting institutions, translating evidence into practical policy messages and supporting country-led dialogue on implementation. With a clear mandate, practical work programme and sustained support, the platform can help Sierra Leone use biodiversity knowledge more effectively for people, nature and long-term development.

References

- *Rapid National Landscape Review of Existing Science–Policy–Practice Initiatives and Mechanisms in Sierra Leone*. 2025. Prepared under the Capacity Development for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (CABES) project.