

A State the Citizen Can Trust

Governance & public-sector reform

Picture a young woman who needs a business permit. She takes a day off work, travels to town, and is sent from desk to desk. At the last one, an official tells her the form is missing a stamp — a stamp he can arrange, for a fee. She pays, because she has no other way through.

WHY THIS MATTERS

That small, grinding corruption is the kind most Sierra Leoneans actually experience — not grand theft in the news, but a permit, a certificate, a form that only moves when money changes hands. It happens because officials are given room to say no, to lose a file, or to invent a step, and citizens have no choice but to pay their way past it. Meanwhile, the public payroll itself carries the names of workers who don't exist, and power that was promised to local councils two decades ago has never really left Freetown — so the clinic, the road and the market closest to a citizen are often run by people with no real authority to fix them.

WHAT WE'RE PROMISING

A public service that citizens can trust: hired on merit, not connections; that serves them without demanding a bribe; that answers to the communities it serves rather than only to Freetown; and that treats a friend of government and a stranger to it by exactly the same rule.

FLAGSHIP — Government in One Visit

The fix isn't a lecture to officials about honesty — it's removing their power to make people wait and pay. We will open one-stop government service centres, starting at district headquarters, where a citizen can get an ID document, a birth certificate, a business permit, or a vehicle registration in one visit, at one published fee, with no official able to invent a delay to be paid to remove it. Other reforming countries have used exactly this approach to cut bribery for public services from common to rare — not mainly through arrests, but by taking away the discretion that makes a bribe possible in the first place.

HOW WE'LL MAKE IT REAL

- Hiring and promotion will run on merit, not who you know. We'll strengthen the independence of the bodies that decide who gets a public-service job, and turn the existing civil-service training college into a real public-service academy — so competence, not connection, opens the door.
- We'll clean the payroll using biometric verification: every worker confirmed by their own fingerprint or face, so the ghost workers currently drawing salaries for jobs no one is doing are finally removed. Other African governments have recovered real money this way — money that can instead pay actual public servants properly and on time.
- We'll make decentralization real instead of nominal. Sierra Leone devolved power to local councils two decades ago on paper, but the money that's supposed to follow that responsibility still arrives late, unpredictably, and as only a small fraction of the national budget, and councils were never given the staff to actually run what they're responsible for. We'll transfer the genuine authority, the money and the staff together, and finally settle the long-unclear relationship between elected councils and our traditional chiefs, so citizens know who's actually accountable for the services nearest to them.
- We'll put the community scorecard directly into citizens' hands — letting the people who use a clinic, a school or a water point score its performance themselves, sit down with those who run it, and track whether what's agreed actually gets fixed. Done properly elsewhere in our region, this has measurably improved services, because it turns the citizen from someone who silently suffers bad service into its active inspector.

- And we'll design corruption out of the system rather than just chase it after the fact — digital services with fixed fees that leave nothing to negotiate, open procurement so contracts are awarded in view of the public, and audits that actually lead to money recovered and consequences applied, starting with the people at the top declaring their own assets first.

“A capable, fairly paid, merit-based public service is the instrument through which every other promise in this manifesto must be delivered.”