

India-Sierra Leone Bilateral Relations

Political

India and Sierra Leone share cordial and warm relationship based on common values and shared vision which dates back to almost six decades. India is committed to being a reliable partner of Sierra Leone in its development journey through soft loans, scholarships, and capacity building.

India and Sierra Leone also cooperate at the United Nations and other multilateral fora. India had played an important role in achieving peace and stability in Sierra Leone by contributing troops to the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) in 2000-2001.

In line with the Government of India's decision to open resident Missions in more African countries, India opened its Mission in Freetown in August 2020. Sierra Leonean Government is according high priority to establish their resident Mission in Delhi.

India has extended e-Visa facility to Sierra Leonean nationals for ease of mobility. Also, in accordance with the MoU signed in February 2020, diplomatic and official/service passport holders of both countries will be allowed visa-free travel once the MoU is operationalised. These reflect the desire of the two countries to deepen bilateral ties.

VVIP Visits from Sierra Leone

Former President Ernest Bai Koroma, along with the Foreign and Trade Ministers, visited India from 27-29 October 2015 for the 3rd India-Africa Forum Summit themed "Partners in Progress: Towards a Dynamic and Transformative Development Agenda." President Koroma met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to discuss enhancing cooperation in agriculture, mining, and ICT. Additionally, Foreign Minister Dr. Samura Kamara met EAM Smt. Sushma Swaraj, while Sierra Leone's Trade Minister attended the Trade Ministers' Meet.

Visits from India

Hon'ble Vice President Shri Venkaiah Naidu visited Sierra Leone from 12-14 October 2019, marking the first-ever high-level visit from India. He was accompanied by Shri Sanjeev Kumar Balyan, Minister of State for Animal Husbandry, Dairy, and Fisheries, and Shri Ramvihar Netam, Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha).

During discussions with President Dr. Julius Maada Bio, both leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and addressing global and regional issues of mutual interest. Several MoUs and agreements were signed, including a \$30 million Line of Credit for irrigation development in Tomabum and the reactivation of a \$15 million Line of Credit for a potable water project.

Additionally, agreements were signed for a Joint Commission, Foreign Office Consultations, Diplomatic Training, and a Cultural Exchange Programme. The Vice President also met with Speaker Abass Chernor Bundu, Foreign Minister Nabeela Tunis, and the Indian community.

Foreign Office Consultations

The inaugural Foreign Office Consultation (FOC) between India and Sierra Leone was held in Freetown on 25-26 March 2021, led by Secretary (ER) Mr. Rahul Chhabra and Sierra Leone's Director General Ms. Florence Bangalie. Discussions covered bilateral ties, regional, and multilateral issues, with meetings held with President Dr. Julius Maada Bio and Foreign Minister Nabeela Tunis.

The second FOC took place in New Delhi on 10-11 March 2025, led by Additional Secretary (C&WA) Mr. Sevala Naik Mude and Sierra Leone's Foreign Affairs Director General Mr. Alan E. Logan. Talks focused on high-level visits, defense, trade, agriculture, energy, digital infrastructure, and ongoing Line of Credit projects.

Relations at UN

India appreciates Sierra Leone's leadership as Chair of the C-10 in advocating Africa's stance on UN reforms, particularly the expansion of the UN Security Council. Both nations share similar views on the need for comprehensive UN reforms.

India contributed significantly to peacekeeping in Sierra Leone, deploying a 4,000-strong military contingent under Maj Gen V.K. Jaitley in the UN Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) from 2000-2001, leaving a lasting positive impact.

In January 2025, JS (UNP) held talks with Sierra Leone's Foreign Affairs Director General to discuss the African Union's model for UNSC reforms. On 16 February 2025, President Dr. Julius Maada Bio, as C-10 Coordinator, presented the AU's 35th C-10 report on UNSC reform at the 38th AU Assembly in Addis Ababa.

Economic and Commercial

India continues to be a major trading partner of Sierra Leone and ranks 02nd in terms of imports by Sierra Leone. Bilateral trade figures for the last few years are as follows:

(US\$/million)

Period Financial Year April-March	India's exports to Sierra Leone	India's Imports from Sierra Leone	Total Trade	Balance of Trade
2020-21	152.11	8.71	160.82	143.40
2021-22	178.80	16.92	195.72	161.88
2022-23	237.38	49.79	287.17	187.59
2023-24	267.86	30.67	298.53	237.19
2024-25	385.47	23.04	408.51	362.43
2025-26 (Apr-Jan)	331.71	25.26	356.97	306.45

(Source: Department of Commerce, GOI)

Major export commodities from India included engineering goods, rice, pharmaceuticals, plastics and ceramic products. While major items of imports from Sierra Leone included bulk minerals and ores, Iron and steel, aluminium and products of aluminium, copper and products made of copper.

Developmental Cooperation

India is committed to be a reliable partner of Sierra Leone in its development journey. Our developmental cooperation with Sierra Leone through our Lines of Credit and through ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) aggregates to US\$ 250 million covering a range of sectors. The projects implemented/signed/approved are:

- (i) US\$ 15 million for Agricultural projects including procurement of tractors, harvesters, rice threshers, rice mills, maize shellers and pesticide spray equipment in 2008 (completed);
- (ii) US\$ 30 million for Rehabilitation of existing facilities and addition of new infrastructure to supply potable water in 2010 (completed);
- (iii) US\$ 29.45 million for modernization and expansion of network and infrastructure of Sierratel project in 2010 (through EBID); procurement of buses for university and tertiary institutions through EBID ;
- (iv) US\$ 20 million for public lighting of Freetown and 13 municipal headquarters through solar energy (through EBID) in 2011;
- (v) US\$ 78 million for Transmission line and sub-station project in 2016;
- (vi) US\$ 30 million for Irrigation Development in Tomabum in 2019;
- (vii) US\$ 15 million for expansion of rehabilitation of existing potable water facilities in four communities in 2019;
- (viii) US\$ 32 million for Construction of University of Science & Technology at Koidu Town, Kono District (under loan agreement signed between EXIM Bank of India and EBID for US\$ 500 million in 2018 meant to be funding projects in ECOWAS countries) in 2020.

The “Digital Financial Services in Sierra Leone” project, implemented from 2018-2021 by United Nations Capital Development Fund and supported by the IBSA Fund, expanded financial inclusion through digital savings, credit, and insurance solutions in Sierra Leone. It reached over 1,33,000 users and beneficiaries, strengthened FinTech innovation, and advanced regulatory frameworks for inclusive digital finance and economic resilience.

Humanitarian & Other Assistance

India has consistently provided humanitarian assistance to Sierra Leone. During the Hon'ble Vice President's visit in October 2019, India announced a donation of 1,000 MT of rice, delivered in March 2021. To combat COVID-19, India sent 7,060 kgs of medicines worth \$149,720 in February 2021.

India contributed \$100,000 to the Sierra Leone Residual Special Court in 2023 and previously provided \$50,000 for flood relief in 2017. In response to the Ebola outbreak, India donated \$50,000 in medical supplies in 2014, along with contributions to the UN Trust Fund (\$12 million) and WHO (\$50,000).

Past assistance includes 40,000 tonnes of rice in 2008, 200 military barracks in 2009, and repeated donations of indelible ink for elections.

In 2025, India provided a \$990,000 grant for the project titled “Specially Abled Persons in Sierra Leone (Persons with Disabilities), being implemented under the Commonwealth Window of the India-UN Development Partnership Fund.

15 Units of Hemodialysis machines were handed over to Sierra Leone in March 2026 on

grant basis, which would address growing burden of kidney diseases in Sierra Leone.

On 24 March 2026, India has shipped 1,000 MT of rice to Sierra Leone today to support Sierra Leone's school feeding programme.

ITEC & Other Capacity Building Programmes

During the Hon'ble Vice President's visit in October 2019, an MoU was signed for Sierra Leone's participation in India's Pan-African Tele-Education and Tele-Medicine initiatives (e-VBAB). Over 450 Sierra Leoneans have enrolled in the e-VidyaBharati programme for online education from Indian universities. A Learning Centre was established at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, with India providing essential infrastructure and internet costs. The Centre was inaugurated in July 2021.

Sierra Leone benefits from India's ITEC programme, receiving 50 training slots annually, increased to 86 in 2024-25. The ICCR scholarship scheme also expanded from 15 to 50 slots for UG, PG, and Ph.D. courses. Defence training opportunities include courses in combat leadership, maritime law, search and rescue, and engineering, with several personnel undergoing specialized training in India.

Additionally, Sierra Leonean scholars have benefitted from the Netaji Subhas ICAR International Fellowships in Agriculture. In 2018, Indian experts provided cybercrime training to the Sierra Leone Police.

The "Leadership Development and Capacity-building for Human Development and Poverty Reduction" project of USD 1 million completed in May 2013, supported by India under IBSA Fund and implemented by United Nations Development Programme, strengthened governance institutions in Sierra Leone. It enhanced leadership, policy planning, and service delivery through training and South-South exchanges.

Culture

India and Sierra Leone signed a Cultural Exchange Programme MoU during the Hon'ble Vice President's visit to strengthen people-to-people ties. As part of Freedom70, a Kathak dance troupe visited Freetown in January 2018. Since 2015, Freetown has hosted the International Day of Yoga annually. The Mission also organizes various cultural events. An India Corner was established at Fourah Bay College Library, inaugurated by Sierra Leone's Deputy Minister of Technical and Higher Education on 27 March 2024.

A 12 member Sierra Leone dance troupe participated in Surajkund Mela held in Haryana in February 2026.

Indian Community

Indian traders first arrived in Sierra Leone in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By 1977, the Indian population was around 600, with two-thirds engaged in trade and the rest as teachers and experts. Today, the Indian community has grown to approximately 7,000, primarily involved in trade and manufacturing. The Indian Business Council Sierra Leone, Indian Mercantile Association, Sierra Leone Malayalee Association, Sierra Leone Sindhi Association, Sierra Leone Tamil Association and Sierra Leone Telugu Association represent the community. There are two religious sites: a Hindu temple managed by the Indian Mercantile Association and a Sikh Gurudwara run by the Jeety Group.

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