



Sierra Leone Youth Network

About the Network

The youth network in Sierra Leone, called VIONet (Volunteering Involving Organizations Network), has been working with the government to advance youth participation and inclusion, forming strategic partnerships to improve youth representation and collectively address their specific needs.

The network has been recognized by the Ministry of Youth as a vibrant and transformative network that has successfully engaged young people in Sierra Leone. Where once young people were shut out of policymaking, VIONet provides avenues and opportunities for collaboration between young people, communities and decision-makers.

VSO supports young people to build knowledge, skills and confidence in leadership, advocacy lobbying, social inclusion and resilience, resource mobilization, proposal development, entrepreneurship and employability. Inclusiveness and advocating for the most marginalised groups are at the centre of its approach.

As a result, young people in Sierra Leone have been actively participating in policy development and implementation, citizen-led monitoring, media outreach, advocacy campaigns, and lobbying

Amplifying Youth Voices

VIONet is a National Youth Network working to amplify youth voices at a national level and advance volunteering for development.

In 2020, the government of Sierra Leone conducted a review of its National Youth Policy. To ensure that marginalized youth could participate equally in a review, 70 youth volunteers from the network were



trained in a two-day workshop on credible data collection. These trained volunteers then targeted every district and chiefdom in their various regions, crossing rivers to access remote communities in ensuring that the review process reach out to youth who, for the first time ever, were able to participate and share their hopes and concerns in the new youth policy.

Prior to the intervention, youth policies would be developed with little to no consultation. According to VIONet regional director, Abdul Rahman Kowa, policymakers would even often characterise young people as "idlers, lawless drug addicts perpetuating violence". Now, however, those young people are representing themselves.

Humanitarian response

In Sierra Leone, youth volunteers have been crucial in the humanitarian response to crises such as the Ebola and Covid-19 outbreaks, and to natural disasters such as flooding and mudslides.

Volunteer networks help to build resilient communities in times of calm, and are the first responders when disaster strikes. They are connected within and between communities, helping bring assistance in and broadcast marginalized voices out when it matters most.

VSO has given life to the silent voices of youth in Sierra Leone, we are now able to participate in policy development, hold duty bearers accountable and position volunteering as strong means for development through their V4D model.

Swaliho Mahatma Kanneh, Eastern Region
Program Coordinator, VIONet

Our community volunteers... are the ones who have been reducing plastic waste, clearing drainage canals, and preparing their communities for floods.

Kaday Mansaray, Director of
Operations, VSO

With the establishment of the youth network by VSO, youth have been given a seat at the table to lead and decide their own future.

Abdul Rahman Kowa, Regional
Coordinator, VIONet

**If you would like to know more about VSO's work
worldwide, visit www.vsointernational.org**

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