



## University of Sierra Leone

DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNICATION & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

[dircir@usl.edu.sl](mailto:dircir@usl.edu.sl)

+23233323565

3<sup>rd</sup> Floor University House

Fourah Bay College Mount Aureol Freetown

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## A CASE FOR CLEAN WATER AT FBC TOWARDS THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

*Staff, students, and lecturers at Fourah Bay College are battling a daily lack of clean water, as aging infrastructure and rapid population growth overwhelm a colonial-era dam.*

For students waking before dawn to prepare for lectures, and for lecturers arriving to



teach the next generation of Sierra Leonean leaders, the day at Fourah Bay College (FBC) begins not with a book or a note, but with a search for water.

The Fourah Bay College community, including staff quarters, student hostels, and offices, is in dire need of clean water. What was once an intermittent inconvenience has now become a perennial problem, affecting

the well-being of the historic institution planted on top of the mountain overlooking Freetown.

**“The depth of this crisis cannot be dramatized,”** said a lecturer in the natural sciences, who spoke on condition of anonymity. The lecturer described the situation as **“academically crippling,”** noting that practical sessions in laboratories, which require water for experiments, cleaning glassware, and safety showers, have been curtailed or delayed.

**This situation is beyond the capacity of the administration and the University management. Much efforts have been put together for stop-gap measures, but there is need for sustained framework.**

Over the years, the population of both the college and the surrounding communities, Gloucester, Leicester, and Kamanda Farm, has grown rapidly to the point that the original water supply plan can no longer suffice. The Bathurst Dam, designed to supply water for fewer than 300 people, remains unchanged in size, depth, and height. It was filled with mud and cannot supply water to the treatment centre, recently refurbished by the BADEA Project.

**“We have a dam that people can walk on top of without even knowing it is a dam,”** said Professor Andrew Baio, Deputy Vice Chancellor of FBC. After visiting Bathurst Dam, he observed that mud had covered the reservoir to such an extent that its very identity had been erased.

Professor Baio has since instructed the Estate Department to dig out the dam and remove hard materials and mud. He has also engaged a structural engineer to design and cost all that is needed for the dam to serve the present population.



**“The walls of the dam are too short to retain more water,”** Professor Baio explained. **“We are urgently advocating to build retaining walls to prevent mud from refilling the dam, especially as we approach the rains.”**

Another factor worsening the crisis is environmental degradation. People have cleared the rainforest around the dam, making it easier to access water, but destroying natural water retention. Buildings and gardens now sit on the usual runway of water. Outdated pipes have also made the supply impossible in some parts of the campus.

The effects are not merely inconvenient, they are a threat to public health. Bathrooms go uncleaned. Toilets cannot be flushed, creating unsanitary conditions that risk outbreaks of cholera and typhoid. Female students face particular hardship during menstruation, with some missing classes because they lack water for personal hygiene.

The crisis is not limited to student housing. Academic staff reports that offices in many buildings have no running water, forcing them to bring personal supplies from home. The college library, administrative blocks, and even the clinic have experienced intermittent supply, raising serious questions about hygiene and emergency preparedness.

Professor Baio, who has made water access a priority among his development pillars for the Bicentenary, says, **“Access to water is a fundamental right,”**.



He has engaged water supply experts to explore different options to alleviate the crisis. These include boreholes, harvesting rainwater during the rainy season with storage for the dry months, and even investing in a water bottling business in partnership with the private sector. **“This dam alone cannot suffice,”** Professor Baio said.

With 2027 approaching, FBC's 200th anniversary, the water crisis represents both a practical failure and a symbolic embarrassment. It is hardly a fitting welcome for international visitors, alumni, and dignitaries invited to celebrate two centuries of learning to find a campus where even a glass of clean tap water cannot be guaranteed.

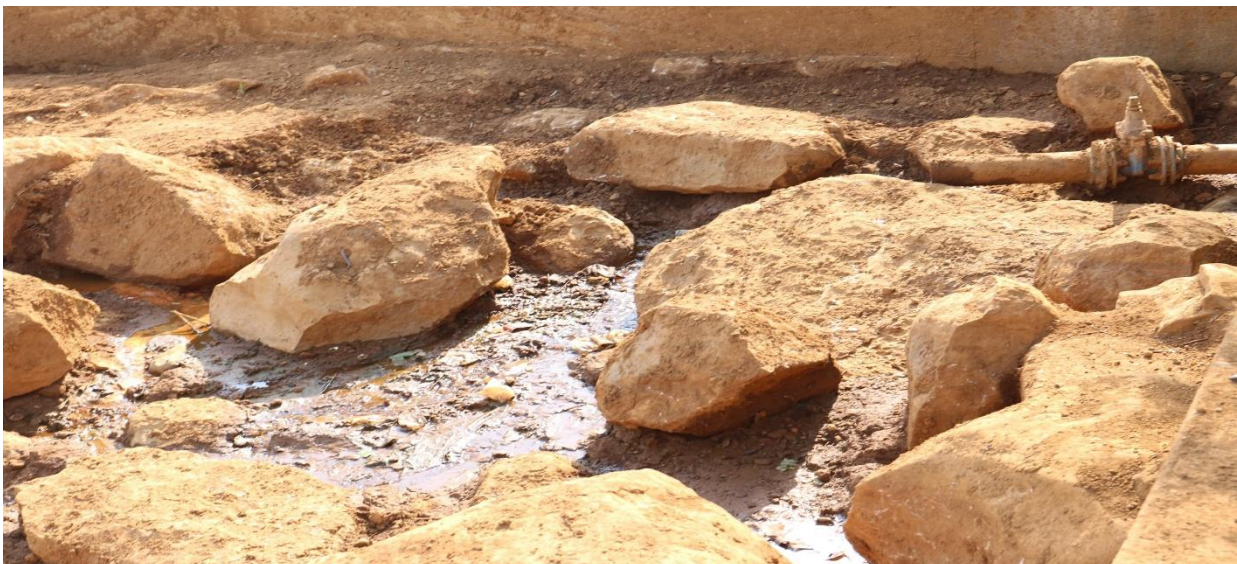
The Minister of Technical and Higher Education, **Dr. Haja Ramtulai Wurie**, has assured



the university that she will engage decision-makers to fully support the bicentennial celebration. The university and college administrations have begun quietly lobbying the government and development partners, arguing that water infrastructure should be part of the bicentennial legacy projects alongside fencing and road repairs.

### **What is needed?**

- Rehabilitation or replacement of aging main pipelines
- Installation of additional storage tanks with adequate capacity
- Solar-powered pumping systems to bypass grid electricity failures
- Regular water quality testing and a preventive maintenance plan
- Facilities to harvest rainwater and store it for the dry season
- Improvement of the Bathurst Dam





### **A call to action**

For Fourah Bay College to truly honour its bicentennial, it must first quench the thirst of its own community. The road, the fence, and the classrooms matter little if the people inside them have nothing to drink.

The Vice Chancellor and Principal **Professor Aiah Lebbie** is advocating to well-wishers, alumni, development partners and private sector to support the USD200 Million development projects for the Bicentennial in 2027.



**By**

**Dr. Tonya Musa**

**Director of Communications and International Relations**

