University of Sierra Leone

DIRECTORATE OF COMMUNICATION &
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Stakeholders Advance Plans to Protect Sierra Leone's Threatened Plants

Key stakeholders convened for a follow-up workshop on the Tropical Important Plant Areas (TIPA) project at Sierra Palms on Aberdeen Beach Road on October 28th, 2025. The workshop built upon the project's launch in March 2024, focusing on identifying and conserving Sierra Leone's most critical and threatened plant species.

The TIPA project, funded by The Woodspring Trust, is a collaborative initiative involving the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the National Herbarium of Sierra Leone, Njala University, the University of Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Environment, and environmental NGOs (EFA).

Focus on Threatened Species and Community Impact

According to the national project lead, Professor Aiah Lebbie, who is also the Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the University of Sierra Leone the workshop addressed the critical condition of threatened plant species within their natural habitats.

“The TIPA project identifies key areas for these plants and assesses their importance to local communities,” Professor Lebbie stated.

Project Officer Fanny Katumu Massally outlined the workshop's key objectives: to update stakeholders on the project's progress since its 2024 launch, to discuss research gaps and challenges, and to secure continued commitment for the initiative.

Echoing this sentiment, the Director of Forestry, Mrs. Kate Karemo-Garnett, emphasized the workshop's collaborative nature. “This workshop is a critical opportunity for all of us. Part of our mission is to collaborate, share knowledge, and develop comprehensive conservation plans for Sierra Leone. By working together, we can achieve these plans, especially in the area of biodiversity,” she said. “Our results will be communicated to decision-makers to inform policy formulation.”

Endemic Species and Land-Use Challenges Highlighted

A key point of discussion was the status of unique endemic species, including *Habropetalum dawei*, an endemic genus found only in Sierra Leone, and *Dorstenia astyanactis* (Moraceae).

The *Habropetalum*, locally known as 'Sangi', exists in a unique habitat that is also vital for local livelihoods. The same land is used for cultivating cassava, one of the nation's staple foods, highlighting the complex balance between conservation and community needs.

Pathway to Policy and Community Action

The project team presented extensive documentation to stakeholders. The next phase will focus on advocating for policy initiatives to protect these critical sites and engaging communities on sustainable best practices. This includes supporting the planned legislation of the Forestry Act and Wildlife Act, both slated for 2026.

Professor Lebbie emphasized the urgent need to document plant species disappearing from the ecosystem, identifying slash-and-burn agriculture as a significant threat.

"Several efforts have been made to document these plants," Professor Lebbie continued. "At one point, even the British High Commissioner visited us in the field while we were collecting data at Solima. We have surveyed several areas, from the Western Area to Solima and the Tingi Hills. Our work involved documenting the plant species present, their habitat, and the status of that habitat—whether it has been impacted by human activities or not. We have come across and documented many interesting species."


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region of Sierra Leone. It has been described as a shrub of Pleistocene origin (Burkill 1985), and Airy Shaw (1951) describes the family as "A remarkable new family of flowering plants".
There are three monotypic genera (and species) in the family: Dioncophyllum thollonii, Triphyophyllum peltatum, and Habropetalum dawei. Only the latter two species occur in Sierra Leone, with Habropetalum being endemic.
As part of a TIPA initiative, fieldwork was
late 2024 to assess the existence of
dawei after nearly 50 years without any new collection records for this species.
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Methodology
Habropetalum dawei is listed on the IUCN list as a Critically Endangered plant. Prior to November 2024, only 6 collection records existed of its occurrence at 4 localities in Sierra Leone, and no new records existed of its current status in the coastal park savannah where it had been collected.
After doing some nitial research to find previous collection sites, three trips were planned to check its existence, current conservation status, and ethnobotanical value.
A team from the National Herbarium of Sierra Leone visited Sulima in southern Sierra Leone at the end of the rains in 2024, followed by two more visits in 2025. These visits led to new herbarium collections, enhancing our understanding of the plant's ecology and local uses.
Literature cited
Airy Shaw, HK. 1951. On the Dionconphyllaceae, a remarkable new family of flowering plants. Kew Bulletin 6(3):327-347.
Burkill. 1957. Useful Plants of West Tropical Africa.

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