



Ranger patrolling the Western Area Peninsula National Park. Photo by Renato Granieri / Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary

# Western Area Peninsula Water Fund

## THE CHALLENGE

The past decade has seen Sierra Leone's capital grow at a remarkable rate. Designed for 400,000 inhabitants, Freetown is currently home to approximately 1.2 million residents and is on track to reach 2 million within the decade (World Bank, 2018).

Urbanization and agricultural expansion associated with the growth of Freetown have led to extensive encroachment into the Western Area Peninsula National Park (WAPNP). Degradation of the Park's forests threatens the watersheds that provide about 90% of Freetown's water supply, increases the risks of floods and landslides, and destroys critical habitat for wildlife, such as the critically endangered Western Chimpanzee, which was recently named Sierra Leone's national animal. This in turn leads to poor health outcomes and diminished sustainable livelihood opportunities, forcing people to engage in negative coping mechanisms that further degrade the ecosystem. Urgent, coordinated action is needed to stop this downward spiral.

Since 2019 Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) have been working with more than a dozen local and national partners to create a Water Fund, which will facilitate investments in nature-based solutions for the protection and restoration of the WAPNP, ensuring sustainability of the Western Area Peninsula's water supply for future generations. Nature-based solutions represent an effective and financially sound means to address the growing water security challenges facing Sierra Leone's capital of Freetown and the surrounding Western Area Peninsula region.

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*"My own dream is to ensure that we conserve Western Area Peninsula catchment areas to make sure we get water from those sources that do not require much treatment as compared to water from the rivers. The government is serious about conserving this forest reserve because they see the importance of conserving it for reasons of providing water to its people as well as for touristic purposes and to prevent disasters like what happened a few years ago".*

**Former MINISTER FOR WATER RESOURCES – ENG. PHILIP K. LANSANA**

## WHAT IS A WATER FUND?

[Water funds](#) unite the public and private sectors and civil society around the common goal of securing water. Downstream water users – businesses, utilities, and governments – financially support the water fund, along with international donors. These funds benefit upstream farmers, landholders, and communities by paying for conservation activities, such as reforestation, enhancing forest protection, or restoring wetlands that filter pollution. Water users then benefit from improved water quality and quantity.

Over the last two decades, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and partners have successfully created water funds in more than 43 cities around the world, including Cape Town and Nairobi.

## WESTERN AREA PENINSULA WATER FUND

The vision for the Western Area Peninsula Water Fund (WAPWF) is a restored WAPNP that sustainably provides biodiversity and clean water benefits to the Greater Freetown Area. The Water Fund's mission is to protect and restore the watersheds within the WAPNP so that they can supply the quantity and quality of water needed for all users in the Greater Freetown Area while improving the livelihoods of the people in the watershed, conserving the area's rich biodiversity, and reducing risks of acute shocks — in the context of a changing climate.

The WAPWF would directly contribute to achieving targets under the Mayor's [Transform Freetown](#) resilience cluster and Goal 3 of the National Water Resources Management Agency's (NWRMA) strategic plan 2019-2023, whereby 'watersheds and catchments are protected against deforestation and other environmental problems'.

## THE CASE FOR CONSERVATION

Water funds are developed by following a five-phase process: feasibility, design, creation, operation, and maturity. The feasibility phase began in April 2019 and design continues into 2021 as pilot interventions have begun. A Business Case report was developed, validated and endorsed by key government stakeholders. The results of the Business Case demonstrate a clear economic basis for the establishment of the WAPWF. A USD 20 million investment in the Water Fund's interventions is likely to return USD 55 million in economic benefits over a 30-year timeframe. **In other words, for every USD 1 invested by the Water Fund, stakeholders on the Peninsula will see at least USD 2.70 worth of benefits accrued.**

The considerable benefits to the people and biodiversity of the Western Area Peninsula include:

- Increase water available to households during the dry season months by 11,000 m<sup>3</sup>, with an annual cost saving to poor households of USD 436,941;
- Reduce sediment entering the rivers of the Western Area Peninsula by half, and extend the lifetime of the Guma Reservoir by 60%;
- Reduce average annual flood damages across Freetown's seven urban watersheds by USD 2.05 million;
- Sequester 12.13 million more tons of carbon, leading to the avoidance of USD 1.08 billion worth of global, and USD 240,000 of national, climate related damages every year;
- Increase employment and livelihood opportunities to thousands of households through ecological restoration projects, agroforestry and nature-based tourism; and,
- Conserve the invaluable biodiversity of one of the last strongholds of primordial forest in Sierra Leone, as well as a significant portion of the remaining forest cover in the Guinean Forests of the West Africa Biodiversity Hotspot.



Marie Massaquoi works in her sister's backyard garden. Water funds have the potential to generate a mix of biodiversity, flood mitigation, climate, and livelihood benefits. Photo by Elie Gardner for CRS

*"The Western Area Peninsula Water Fund is a priority for the city of Freetown as it provides a long-term solution to an age-old problem that many of our residents face - severe water shortage each dry season despite torrential rainfall every rainy season."* **YVONNE AKI-SAWYERR OBE – MAYOR OF FREETOWN CITY COUNCIL (FCC)**

## EXPECTED RESULTS BY 2030

By 2030, the WAPWF expects to accomplish the following:

- Raise funds from private and public sectors to implement green infrastructure solutions for people and nature based on key stakeholders' priorities.
- Broaden and intensify engagements with government stakeholders at all levels, donors, the private sector, civil society organizations, as well as research and academic institutions to foster collective action.
- Create a robust and transparent public-private governance body for the Water Fund.
- Implement pilot projects to engage stakeholders in concrete action and learning for scale up.
- Develop a strategic plan, through the public-private governance mechanism, to guide long-term implementation.
- Prepare a fundraising strategy to operate the Water Fund, implement interventions, and engage stakeholders.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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You can learn more about the WAP-WF Business Case at:  
<https://www.crs.org/stories/freetown-water-fund-business-case-technical-reports>