



# Sierra Leone Youth Rise for Mental Health

## ***A National Call to Conscience, Responsibility, and Renewal***

There comes a time in the life of a nation when silence ceases to be neutral. It ceases to be patience, caution, or restraint. It becomes complicity. It becomes abandonment. It becomes danger.

### ***Sierra Leone has reached such a moment.***

Across our communities, among our students, within our families, and in the hidden struggles of our young people, a crisis has been growing quietly, deeply, and painfully. It is not always visible from the outside. It does not always announce itself in dramatic ways.

Sometimes it hides behind a forced smile, a withdrawn child, a young man numbing himself in silence, a young woman overwhelmed by despair, a student losing direction, an unemployed graduate sinking into discouragement, or a family that does not know how to name what is happening in its own home.

Too many of our sons and daughters are carrying invisible burdens. Too many are living under emotional distress, confusion, trauma, fear, depression, addiction, hopelessness, discouragement, and isolation. Too many are suffering without language, without support, and without protection.

### ***This reality can no longer be ignored.***

We cannot continue to speak of national development while neglecting the internal collapse of the very generation that must carry the future. We cannot claim to be building a stronger Sierra Leone if thousands of young people are left to fight invisible battles alone.

We cannot hope for peace, leadership, productivity, moral renewal, and social stability if the emotional and psychological wellbeing of our youth remains buried under stigma, denial, and neglect.

Mental health is not a secondary concern. It is not an imported issue. It is not an elite discussion reserved for professionals and conferences. And it is certainly not a private embarrassment to be hidden behind closed doors. It is a matter of human dignity. It is a matter of family stability. It is a matter of public health. It is a matter of national wellbeing, national responsibility, and national destiny.

That is why **Sierra Leone Youth Rise for Mental Health** was created.

This initiative is born out of listening. It is born out of observation. It is born out of direct contact with the experiences of young people whose pain is too often minimized, dismissed, mocked, or normalized. It is born from a profound sense of moral and national duty. It is a response to the suffering that has been pushed aside for too long and to the dangerous illusion that youth pain can remain hidden without consequence.

It cannot.

The emotional destruction of young people never remains a private matter. It spills into every sphere of national life. It appears in broken confidence, in family conflict, in substance dependence, in violence, in school dropout, in reckless behavior, in despair, in self-destruction, and in the silent loss of talent that a nation can never fully recover. A society that ignores the pain of its youth pays for that neglect in instability, fragmentation, fear, and lost possibility.

This is why youth mental health must now move from the margins of conversation to the center of national concern.

We are launching this initiative because we believe that the youth of Sierra Leone deserve more than survival. They deserve more than endurance. They deserve more than slogans about empowerment while their inner lives are collapsing under pressures that too few are willing to confront honestly.

They deserve truth.

They deserve support.

They deserve safe spaces where they can speak without shame.

They deserve institutions that respond.

They deserve families and communities equipped to listen.

They deserve leadership with the courage to look directly at what others prefer to overlook.

At the heart of this initiative is a simple conviction: a nation that listens to its youth becomes stronger; a nation that abandons them weakens itself.

The young people of Sierra Leone are not a burden to be managed. They are not a risk to be feared. They are not a problem to be silenced. They are a living force of intelligence, resilience, creativity, and renewal. But no force, however promising, can thrive where pain is denied, where suffering is ridiculed, and where vulnerability is treated as weakness.

For too long, many young people have been told, in one form or another, to be quiet, to endure, to pray harder, to be stronger, to stop complaining, or to accept what is breaking them inside. For too long, we have confused silence with resilience. We have mistaken suppression for strength. We have allowed shame to replace care, and appearances to replace truth.

This must end.

**Sierra Leone Youth Rise for Mental Health** is not merely a social project. It is a national commitment. It is not an act of charity. It is an act of justice. It is not about creating dependency. It is about restoring strength, responsibility, voice, and hope.

Its vision is clear: to build a Sierra Leone where young people can speak without shame, seek help without fear, and find communities and institutions prepared to respond with seriousness, dignity, and humanity.

Its mission is equally clear: to break the silence surrounding youth mental health, to create spaces for honest dialogue, to train peer advocates, to build public awareness, and to hold institutions accountable for reform and meaningful support.

This work matters because the crisis is not only psychological; it is cultural, civic, and moral. When a society loses the ability to hear the pain of its youth, it loses something essential about itself. When institutions respond to visible suffering with indifference, delay, or superficial gestures, they erode trust. When public conversation leaves no room for mental and emotional truth, people begin to live double lives: one for appearance, and one in private collapse.

***That is not the foundation of a healthy nation.***

We need a new national ethic. One that recognizes mental health as part of human dignity. One that values prevention as much as intervention. One that understands that timely listening is more powerful than late regret. One that sees youth not as a demographic category, but as the conscience and future of the Republic. One that understands leadership not as performance, but as responsibility before truth.

This initiative therefore stands for a different approach.

It stands for communities that listen before judgment.

It stands for schools that recognize distress before crisis.

It stands for families that replace silence with conversation.

It stands for media that illuminates rather than stigmatizes.

It stands for institutions that can be questioned, challenged, and improved.

It stands for a generation that refuses to accept emotional abandonment as normal.

Through this movement, we seek to bring together families, educators, health practitioners, social workers, artists, community leaders, young people, the diaspora, private citizens, companies, and all people of conscience. We seek to build a broad and practical alliance around one urgent truth: the wellbeing of our youth is too important to be postponed, politicized, or reduced to symbolic concern.

This initiative will create safe spaces where young people can speak honestly about what they are experiencing. It will support the training of youth advocates and peer supporters who can help break isolation and guide others toward help. It will use dialogue, radio, digital media, art, culture, civic engagement, and public accountability to move this issue from the shadows into the light of national responsibility.

But beyond its programs, this initiative represents something deeper: a refusal.

We refuse the culture of silence.

We refuse the normalization of suffering.

We refuse the idea that the emotional destruction of young people is a minor problem.

We refuse every system of neglect that asks the youth to endure what the nation has a duty to address.

And we affirm something greater.

We affirm that healing is possible.

We affirm that listening is powerful.

We affirm that truth is not a threat to the nation, but a path to its renewal.

We affirm that a stronger Sierra Leone must be built not only with infrastructure and policy, but with restored dignity, emotional strength, and human care.

This is why the time to act is now.

The suffering of youth does not wait for perfect systems. It does not wait for official convenience. It does not wait for public comfort. Every day that mental health is neglected, another young person loses confidence, withdraws, hardens, breaks down, or turns to harmful coping mechanisms. Every day that truth is postponed, the burden grows heavier. Every day that institutions fail to respond, trust is weakened.

***A nation cannot rise while its youth are silently collapsing.***

If we truly want a better Sierra Leone, then we must think more deeply about what national progress means. Progress is not only roads, buildings, budgets, or speeches. Progress is also whether a young person can seek help without shame. Whether a family can recognize pain without fear. Whether a student can find support before crisis. Whether communities know how to respond to suffering with wisdom rather than stigma. Whether leadership is willing to confront invisible realities with the same seriousness given to visible ones.

***This is the Sierra Leone we must now build.***

A Sierra Leone mature enough to listen.

A Sierra Leone courageous enough to face reality.

A Sierra Leone compassionate enough to protect the vulnerable.

A Sierra Leone honest enough to name what is broken.

A Sierra Leone strong enough to heal.

A Sierra Leone wise enough to understand that protecting its youth is the same as protecting its future.

To the young people of this nation, I say this:

Your pain is not invisible.

Your voice is not irrelevant.

Your struggle is not a source of shame.

Your future is not disposable.

And your country must not ask you to carry alone what it has a duty to help address.

To families, schools, faith communities, institutions, and leaders, I say this:

The time has come to rise above indifference.

The time has come to replace dismissal with listening.

The time has come to replace stigma with understanding.

The time has come to build systems of care and support worthy of our people.

And to the citizens of Sierra Leone, to friends of this nation, to members of the diaspora, to companies, partners, and all people of goodwill, I say this:

Join this cause. Not for appearances. Not for image. Not for slogans. But for national transformation.

The youth are not asking for pity.

They are asking to be heard.

They are asking to be protected.

They are asking for support that is real.

They are asking for the truth to matter.

They are asking for the nation to act.

Let us answer that call with the seriousness it deserves.

Let us build a Sierra Leone where silence no longer destroys, where truth is no longer feared, where dignity is restored, and where the rising generation can stand with strength, clarity, and hope.

The youth are rising.

The nation must rise with them.

Together, We Rise !

Dr Alpha Grace Bangourah, PhD

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alpha Grace Bangourah', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.