
“LET THE PLANES FLY”... SIERRA LEONE COMMENCES NATIONWIDE AIRBORNE GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY

The President of the Republic of Sierra Leone, His Excellency, Brigadier (Rtd.) Julius Maada Bio, commissioned a Nationwide Airborne Geophysical Survey for Sierra Leone on Monday 28th January 2019, at the Presidential Lounge of the Lungi International Airport. Funded by the World Bank, under the second phase of an Extractive Industries Technical Assistance Project (EITAP-2), the survey is the first step to help determine the full extent of the country's mineral potentials, with the view of attracting foreign direct investments into the minerals sector, and putting the Government of Sierra Leone in a stronger bargaining position when negotiating mining deals.

Delivering the keynote address at the historic launch of the survey, President Bio recalled his earlier commitment to transform the minerals sector to ensure that it delivers maximum benefits for the people of Sierra Leone, and noted that, “No Government can get a good deal from the exploitation of its minerals if it does not have and control geological information”. He pointed out that unlocking the potentials of the mineral sector for economic growth and transformational development requires accurate geological information, and that lack of geological data has severely constrained effective policy choices regarding governance and management of the mineral sector. He assured the Nation that his administration is determined to depart from the failed policies of private sector led geo-data acquisition to a Government driven geo-data acquisition agenda. This, he said was being manifested in the Government embarking on a nationwide airborne geophysical survey, and he ordered the planes to fly for the benefit of the people.

President Bio maintained that the survey will provide useful information on the types of minerals that exist in the country and their quantity, grade, indicative value and location. This, he said, will put Government in a strong position when negotiating mining concessions with prospective investors and other interested parties in the mineral sector, and such information will also be an incentive to attracting credible investors into the minerals sector. He assured Sierra Leoneans of his government's fullest commitment to ensuring that the mining sector becomes an engine for economic growth and transformational development that will take Sierra Leone in the right direction.

Earlier, the Minister of Mines and Mineral Resources, Hon. Dr. Morie Manyeh, stated that the step in the direction towards acquiring reliable geological information is another indication that the mining sector is on the road to recovery, and noted that the history of the country will completely change after the survey.

Project Coordinator of EITAP, Mustapha Sheku Gibril, explained that the EITAP 2 is a US\$20M project wholly funded by the World Bank, and it seeks to compliment Government's effort to strengthen governance, knowledge and sustainability of the extractive sector in Sierra Leone. Addressing the challenge to enhance geological knowledge, he went on, is in line with the President's vision to optimize the benefits of our mineral wealth for the people under his New Direction, and also in line with the African Mining Vision's desire for “Improved Geological and Mining Information Systems to underpin investment in exploration and mine development” in

Africa.

The Director of Geological Survey at the National Minerals Agency, Prince Cuffey, gave a brief background to the project, noting that it was conceived out of the urgent need to address the huge gap in geological knowledge that was affecting the development of the minerals sector in Sierra Leone. He noted that the previous Department of Geological Survey suffered from neglect over the years, which limited its ability to collect geological information, to the extent that the NMA Directorate of Geological Survey started on an almost zero baseline. This prompted the NMA team to prioritize geological data acquisition as a major strategic objective, which has now attracted the support of the World Bank. He commended the Ministry of Mines, the NMA, and the EITAP team for working assiduously on the project from conception to fruition.

World Bank Representative, Kemoh Mansaray, assured the President and people of Sierra Leone of the Bank's continued support to assist Sierra Leone to address the major challenges to national development.

The survey will be conducted by Xcalibur Airborne Geophysics, a South African firm, using specialized aircrafts equipped with medium resolution magnetic and radiometric technology that will be flying at an altitude as low as 50m and in straight lines at 150m line spacing nationwide.

A demonstration flight by the Xcalibur crew formed the high point of the launch.