

UNIVERSITY OF MAKENI  
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INTRODUCING SUSTAINABLE LEGAL EDUCATION IN SIERRA  
LEONE: The University of Makeni Experience:

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## Brief background of the Sierra Leone Legal System

- The Sierra Leone legal system is based on English common law, Equity, indigenous customary law (of Sierra Leone) and some form of Mohammedan law, that governs marriage and property inheritance relating to Muslims.

Sierra Leone, is a Former British Colony. She inherited English Common Law, and doctrines of equity and Statutes pursuant to section 74 of the Courts Act 1965 which provides that “subject to the provisions of the constitution, and any other enactment, the common law and doctrine of equity and statutes of general application in force in England on the 1st January 1880 shall be in force in Sierra Leone”

## Establishment of the Law Department

- The University of Makeni is the first private University established in Sierra Leone pursuant to Section 43 (1) of the the Universities Act, 2005 which provides for individuals and or institutions to establish Private Universities in Sierra Leone.
- The Law Department was established in October, 2006. Initially it offered Law and Paralegal courses leading to the award of a Diploma in Law and Paralegal Studies.
- The Law Department is now accredited by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC), to offer undergraduate Law Courses leading to the award of a Bachelor in Laws, with Honours degree, LLB (Hons)
- The Department has produced two sets (2 gentlemen and 2 Ladies) of Law graduates. These graduates have successful pursued the Sierra Leone Bar Finals Course and are now practising and teaching Law in Makeni Sierra Leone. The third set of the University of Makeni Law graduates (13) were admitted to the Sierra Leone Law school in October, 2016, they are currently pursuing the Sierra Leone Bar Finals Course.
- In the 2016 Bar finals examinations and call to the Bar, one of the University of Makeni graduates; Victoria Adama Koroma from Makeni, became the best Pupil amongst 70 candidates who took the examinations. She won a commonwealth scholarship and is currently pursuing LLM in Gender Law at the Ulster University Northern Ireland.

## Challenges in Establishing the Law Department

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- Legal Education in Sierra Leone was for many years accessed in England by Sierra Leoneans who can afford the huge costs of acquiring legal education in Britain.
- In 1987 the University of Sierra Leone established a law Department at Foray Bay College.
- In 1990m the Sierra Leone Law School was established pursuant to the Council of Legal Education Act, 1989, to provide for the Sierra Leone Bar finals Course ( the Vocational training for Law graduates ) from Sierra Leone and the Commonwealth
- In 2000, the legal Practitioners Act, was enacted to govern the enrolment of Barristers and Solicitors to practice Law in Sierra Leone.
- The interpretation and applications Section of 10 (1) (a) of the Legal Practitioners Act, became a contentious issue.
- The Sierra Leone Bar Association and the General Legal Council objected to the Admission of the University of Makeni Law graduates to the Sierra Leone Law school and registration as Barristers and Solicitors of the High Court of Sierra Leone.
- The University of Makeni successfully Lobbied Parliament and amended the controversial section 10 of the Legal Practitioners Act, 2000

## Effect of Overcoming Legal framework Challenges

- The Law Department is growing fast. It has within, a short while attracted unprecedented national and international attention. The Department has created an option for legal Education in the rural part of Sierra Leone, which hitherto was centralised in Freetown.
- The Department introduced flexible innovation into Legal Education by running two admissions; regular and matured admissions.
- The regular admissions provides for students just from secondary school with five West Africa Senior Secondary School Examinations Certificate ( WASSCE) or 5 GCE Levels including English Language.
- The mature admissions provides for working adults with an undergraduate degree in any social science subject, who are interested in the study of Law.
- The flexible innovations and producing one of the best graduates has increased the demand and interest for admission into the Law Department . Last academic we experienced more than 200% increase in admissions.

## Current Prospects and Challenges

- The Department has a well-equipped law library, dedicated lecturers and lecture rooms. However, these facilities and the teaching and learning capacity need transformation to match international standards and the growing demand for admissions.
- Firstly there is an urgent need to recruit at least three visiting Law Professors, five full time academic Law Lecturers who must spend not less than 40 hours per week on campus, lecturing, counselling students, and researching and publishing.
- There is a need to build the capacity of existing law lecturers to engage in research and publication. There is a need to provide scholarships and fellowships for existing law lecturers to pursue research and post graduate studies.
- Secondly there is a need to transform our current manual Law library to an electronics and online Law Library
- In order to sustain the transformation, there is a need to provide lecture halls and theatres equipped with modern teaching and learning materials such as power point projectors, white boards and multi –media facilities.

## **Innovations to Overcome Challenges and archive our goals of sustainable legal education in Sierra Leone**

- **Academic Chairs Projects:**
- We are seeking collaboration and Networking with Law Schools and Organisations in the UK and Europe to support academic chairs for at least three Law Professors for the University of Makeni Law Department for period of five years.
- These Law Professors will support and mentor our Law Lecturers and students on modern research, publication, teaching and lecture delivery skills.
- This will transform the quality of lecture delivery in the Law Department. The skills acquired during the project period will remain with our Lecturers after the termination of the project. This transformation will enable at least three (3) of our lecturers to attain the level of Assistance Professorship by the end of the Project. At the moment the department has 10 Sierra Leonean Law Lecturers and One Research Visiting Professor. Professor Curtis Doebbler.

## Why Establish a Law Department in Makeni Rural Sierra Leone

- The University of Makeni is frequently asked this question in many quarters in Sierra Leone. There are many answers to this question:
- Sierra Leone's justice system needs support and capacity building to respond to the high demand for access to justice in Sierra Leone.
- It is well recorded in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report findings and recommendations that, lack of access to justice for many Sierra Leoneans was the main cause of the 11 years brutal civil war.
- It was recommended that in order for Sierra Leone to maintain sustainable, peace security and the rule of Law, Sierra Leone must strive to strengthen the judiciary and the justice sector.
- It is against this backdrop that the Diocese of Makeni led by Bishop George Biguzzi now Bishop Emeritus established the University of Makeni, with the mandate to contribute through education to sustainable peace, security, the rule of law and democracy. The Law Department and other Departments and Faculties are established for this purpose.
- The University of Makeni believes that sustainable and accessible legal education will play a crucial role to archive this.
- The University of Makeni believes that Sierra Leone needs more Lawyers, particularly Lawyers with an understanding and appreciation of the socio cultural context of Sierra Leone within which to support the rule of law and democracy . These are essential for development aspirations of Sierra Leone.