

SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL YOUTH CONSULTATION REPORT.



Contribution to the Second Independent Progress Study
on Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2250 at 10)



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AWLN	–	African Women Leaders Network
CSO	–	Civil Society Organization
CSPPS	–	Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
FGD	–	Focus Group Discussion
NAP	–	National Action Plan
UNSCR	–	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WANEP	–	West Africa Network for Peacebuilding
YPPD	–	Youth Partnership for Peace and Development
YPS	–	Youth, Peace and Security



Executive Summary

This report presents the outcomes of the Sierra Leone National Youth Consultation held on 27 January 2026 at the Civil Service Training College in Freetown as part of the global YPS Consultations for Big Impact initiative. The consultation contributes to the Second Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), commemorating ten years since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250. Initially designed as consultations across three districts, the process was expanded to a national-level dialogue, bringing together 120 participants representing diverse youth voices from all sixteen districts of Sierra Leone. The consultation was convened by the Youth Partnership for Peace and Development (YPPD) in partnership with the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), WANEP Sierra Leone, and the National YPS Coalition, with support from Interpeace and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS).

The consultation provided a platform for young people to assess progress made since 2015, reflect on ongoing challenges, and propose priorities for strengthening youth participation in peacebuilding and governance. Participants emphasized that while recognition of youth as peace actors has improved and opportunities for civic engagement have expanded, youth participation often remains consultative rather than influential in decision-making processes. Young people reported actively contributing to community-level peacebuilding through mediation, civic awareness, and social cohesion initiatives, yet these efforts largely operate without consistent institutional recognition or sustainable financing.

Economic exclusion and unemployment emerged as central concerns, with participants identifying limited livelihood opportunities and inequality as significant drivers of frustration, vulnerability, and potential instability. Young women highlighted persistent structural and cultural barriers that continue to restrict equitable leadership opportunities despite growing awareness of gender inclusion. Climate change also featured prominently in discussions, with youth increasingly linking environmental stress, livelihood insecurity, and resource pressures to emerging peace and security risks, particularly in rural communities.

The consultation further demonstrated the growing strength of youth coalitions and networks as platforms for collective advocacy and engagement with national stakeholders. Participants noted that coordinated youth action has improved dialogue with government and development partners, though institutional mechanisms for sustained engagement remain limited. Discussions underscored the importance of building intergenerational trust, strengthening partnerships, and embedding youth participation within permanent governance structures rather than relying solely on project-based engagement.

Overall, the findings indicate that Sierra Leone has made meaningful progress in advancing the YPS agenda, particularly in expanding civic space and recognizing youth contributions to peacebuilding. However, persistent gaps remain in institutionalization, financing, and equitable participation across regions and genders. The consultation concludes that advancing the next decade of UNSCR 2250 implementation requires moving from recognition to co-leadership, ensuring that young people are not only consulted but empowered as partners in shaping policies, strengthening social cohesion, and sustaining peace. These insights contribute evidence-based

perspectives to the global Progress Study while informing ongoing national efforts toward the development and implementation of a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security in Sierra Leone.

Snapshot of Key Findings

The consultation generated several key insights reflecting young people's experiences, priorities, and perspectives on the current state of Youth, Peace and Security implementation in Sierra Leone, summarized as follows:

- Youth coalitions are emerging as effective partnership platforms.
- Youth participation in peace and governance processes has increased, but engagement often remains consultative rather than influential in decision-making.
- Young people are actively contributing to community peacebuilding through mediation, awareness raising, and local initiatives, largely without formal institutional support or sustainable funding.
- Economic exclusion, unemployment, and limited livelihood opportunities are widely perceived by youth as major drivers of instability and social tension.
- Young women continue to face structural and cultural barriers that limit equitable participation and leadership in peacebuilding and governance spaces.
- Climate change is increasingly understood by youth as a peace and security issue, particularly due to its impact on livelihoods and community stability.
- Youth coalitions and networks are emerging as effective platforms for coordination, advocacy, and engagement with government and development partners.

I. About This Report

1.1 Purpose of the Consultation

The consultation was convened to generate youth-led evidence and perspectives to inform the Second Independent Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, marking the tenth anniversary of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250. It provided an opportunity for young people across Sierra Leone to reflect on progress made since the adoption of the YPS agenda, assess current challenges, and articulate priorities for advancing meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding and governance processes. By centering youth experiences, the consultation sought to ensure that national realities contribute directly to global learning and policy development.

The process also aimed to strengthen national dialogue on the implementation of UNSCR 2250 within Sierra Leone. Bringing together youth leaders, civil society actors, and government representatives created a shared platform for reflection, accountability, and collaboration. The consultation encouraged constructive engagement between generations and institutions, helping to

bridge gaps between policy commitments and lived experiences while reinforcing youth agency as an essential component of sustainable peace.

As part of the global YPS Consultations for Big Impact initiative supported by Interpeace and the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS), the consultation positioned youth not only as beneficiaries but as producers of knowledge and policy insight. Through participatory dialogue and collective analysis, young people contributed evidence grounded in local realities, strengthening the credibility of global YPS discussions and reinforcing the importance of youth-led consultation as a legitimate and necessary approach to shaping peace and security agendas.

1.2 Organizing Institutions

The consultation was convened by Youth Partnership for Peace and Development (YPPD) in partnership with the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN), WANEP Sierra Leone, and the National YPS Coalition, with collaboration from CSPPS and Interpeace.

1.3 National Context

Sierra Leone's post-conflict recovery reflects a gradual but significant transition from a history of violent conflict toward stability and democratic consolidation. More than two decades after the end of the civil war (1991–2002), the country has made notable progress in rebuilding institutions, strengthening civic participation, and promoting peaceful political transitions. Recent global assessments place Sierra Leone among the more peaceful countries in Africa, reflecting improvements in political stability, reduced violence, and strengthened community peacebuilding efforts. These gains demonstrate national resilience and the growing role of civil society and citizen engagement in safeguarding peace.

At the same time, Sierra Leone continues to face structural fragility shaped by socioeconomic vulnerabilities and institutional capacity constraints. According to the Fragile States Index, the country recorded a score of 82.6 in 2024, indicating persistent pressures linked to economic inequality, governance challenges, and social resilience gaps despite long-term improvement since the immediate post-war period. Fragility in Sierra Leone today is less about active conflict and more about underlying risks, including poverty, limited-service delivery, and economic shocks that can erode public trust if left unaddressed.

Demographically, Sierra Leone is a profoundly youthful society, with approximately 60 percent of the population under the age of 25. This large youth cohort represents both a major opportunity for national development and a continuing peacebuilding challenge. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain widely recognized as structural drivers of instability, reflecting limited private-sector opportunities, skills mismatches, and persistent socioeconomic inequalities. Historical analysis links youth exclusion directly to past conflict dynamics, reinforcing the importance of inclusive governance and economic participation as pillars of long-term peace.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 2250 in 2015, youth-led organizations in Sierra Leone have expanded advocacy, civic engagement, and peacebuilding initiatives, contributing to stronger national dialogue on youth inclusion. Platforms such as youth coalitions and multi-stakeholder partnerships have increased opportunities for engagement; however, institutional integration remains incomplete. Youth participation is still largely project-driven rather than embedded within permanent governance structures, and disparities in access persist across regions, genders, and socioeconomic groups. Within this context, advancing the Youth, Peace and Security agenda represents both a continuation of Sierra Leone’s peacebuilding journey and a strategic pathway for addressing the structural drivers of fragility.

2. Methodology and Consultation Approach

2.1 Consultation Design

The consultation was initially designed to be conducted across three districts. However, recognizing the importance of capturing diverse national perspectives and ensuring inclusive participation, the process was expanded into a one-day national consultation bringing together young people from all sixteen districts of Sierra Leone. The consultation followed a participatory dialogue model that enabled collective reflection and co-creation of recommendations. Data were collected through focus group discussions, thematic group presentations, rapporteur documentation, and plenary validation sessions. Sessions were jointly facilitated by AWLN and WANEP Sierra Leone, guided by youth-led moderation principles encouraging inclusive participation.

2.2 Participant Profile

The consultation brought together **120 participants**, including youth leaders, representatives of youth-led and civil society organizations, government stakeholders, and peacebuilding practitioners. Efforts were made to ensure gender balance, geographic representation across all districts, and inclusion of marginalized groups including young women and youth from underserved communities.

2.3 Limitations

While the consultation generated valuable insights, several limitations should be acknowledged. The one-day format constrained the depth of discussions, limiting opportunities for extended reflection and deeper exploration of complex thematic issues. Some topics, particularly those related to long-term structural reforms and localized peacebuilding dynamics, would have benefited from additional time for deliberation and follow-up dialogue.

Representation also presented challenges despite efforts to ensure nationwide participation. Although youth from all sixteen districts were present, not all constituencies could be equally

represented, particularly young people from remote communities, persons with disabilities, and youth who are not affiliated with organized networks. Structural participation barriers, including financial constraints, travel limitations, and unequal access to information, continue to affect inclusive engagement and highlight the need for sustained, decentralized consultation processes in future YPS engagements.

3. National Perspectives on Youth, Peace and Security

3.1 Youth Understanding of Peace and Security

Participants defined peace as inclusive governance, economic opportunity, social justice, and community cohesion. Security was understood not only as absence of violence but as access to livelihoods and equitable services.

3.2 Youth Experiences Since 2015

Youth observed greater recognition of their role in governance discussions since UNSCR 2250, though progress remains uneven. Civic engagement opportunities have expanded but decision-making influence remains limited.

3.3 Trust in Institutions

Participants reported mixed trust in institutions. While engagement channels exist, many youth perceive limited responsiveness to their inputs, contributing to frustration and disengagement.

4. Findings Organized by the Five YPS Pillars

4.1 Participation

Youth face barriers accessing decision-making spaces, including economic constraints and political gatekeeping. Participants emphasized moving beyond tokenistic consultation toward meaningful inclusion.

Evidence Area	Youth Perspectives	Key Evidence from Consultation	Implications for Progress Study
Youth inclusion in decision-making	Participation remains largely consultative rather than influential	Youth reported being invited to dialogues but rarely involved in final policy decisions	Demonstrates global gap between symbolic participation and shared governance
Political representation	Limited youth presence in formal governance structures	Calls for youth quotas and institutionalized representation mechanisms	Supports recommendation for structural participation reforms

Civic education	Limited understanding of governance processes among rural youth	Youth requested expanded civic education and leadership training	Highlights need for long-term investment in youth political literacy
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Esther, Youth Participant at the Consultation in Freetown:

“Consulting us after decisions are made is not participation, it is tokenism.”

4.2 Prevention

Youth play informal roles in mediation and community dialogue. Economic inequality, unemployment, and social exclusion were identified as key drivers of conflict.

Evidence Area	Youth Perspectives	Key Evidence from Consultation	Implications
Community peacebuilding	Youth actively mediate local conflicts informally (The Kolhat Barray)	Youth groups already functioning as early warning actors without formal recognition	Youth prevention roles remain under-supported globally
Conflict drivers	Economic exclusion and inequality identified as major risks	Youth unemployment repeatedly linked to instability and social tension	Reinforces economic justice as core prevention strategy
Local governance	Weak engagement between youth and local authorities	Participants called for decentralized peace dialogue platforms	Highlights importance of local governance inclusion

Saidu Bangura, Community Education and Training Officer at YPPD Sierra Leone.

“Youth are already preventing conflicts in communities, but without recognition or resources.”

4.3 Protection

Participants highlighted shrinking civic space and limited awareness of legal protections. Young women and marginalized youth face additional risks.

Evidence Area	Youth Perspectives	Key Evidence	Implications
Civic space	Fear of exclusion and limited safe engagement spaces	Youth activists described shrinking opportunities for open civic engagement	Signals need for stronger protection frameworks
Rights awareness	Limited knowledge of legal protections	Requests for legal literacy and safe reporting mechanisms	Indicates gap between policy commitments and youth awareness

Gender protection	Young women face cultural and political barriers	Women highlighted intimidation and social resistance	Aligns with global evidence on gendered participation risks
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Bintu Aruna:

“Participation must also mean protection, young people need safe spaces to speak, organize and take action.”

4.4 Partnerships

Coalitions among youth organizations are strengthening collaboration, yet partnerships with institutions remain inconsistent and under-resourced.

Evidence Area	Youth Perspectives	Key Evidence	Implications
Youth–government collaboration	Engagement improving but inconsistent	Government participation welcomed but youth requested sustained dialogue mechanisms	Shows importance of institutionalized partnerships
Coalition building	Youth coalitions seen as effective platforms	National YPS Coalition identified as key coordination mechanism	Demonstrates value of youth-led networks
Resource equity	Youth-led organizations underfunded	Participants emphasized unequal access to funding compared to larger institutions	Supports global calls for direct funding to youth actors

Valnora Edwin, Coordinator at AWLN – Co-Convener:

“Partnership means shared power, not occasional consultation.”

4.5 Disengagement and Reintegration

Youth emphasized the need for psychosocial support, economic reintegration opportunities, and community reconciliation initiatives.

Evidence Area	Youth Perspectives	Key Evidence	Implications
Social inclusion	Marginalized youth face stigma and exclusion	Participants emphasized psychosocial and economic reintegration needs	Reinforces link between inclusion and sustainable peace
Economic reintegration	Employment central to stability	Youth unemployment identified as driver of crime and migration pressures	Economic reintegration critical to YPS outcomes

Community healing	Intergenerational dialogue still needed	Youth requested reconciliation and mentorship platforms	Highlights unfinished post-conflict recovery processes
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Tejan Kellah, President of the National Youth Council:

“Without opportunities, reintegration becomes survival, not recovery.”

Cross-Cutting Evidence Emerging Across All Pillars

Young women reported structural barriers including cultural norms and limited access to leadership opportunities.	Economic insecurity was widely identified as a core driver of instability and migration pressures.	Environmental degradation and climate shocks were viewed as emerging security threats affecting livelihoods.	Rural youth and persons with disabilities face disproportionate exclusion from governance and development opportunities.	Digital platforms offer opportunities for youth engagement but also pose risks related to misinformation and exclusion.
Gender Equality and Young Women's Leadership	Youth Unemployment and Economic Exclusion	Climate Change and Peace Nexus	Inequality and Marginalization	Digital Civic Space

5. Opening Session and Government Leadership

6.1 Keynote Reflections

The keynote address was delivered by Hon. Chernoh Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education, who reflected on his participation as a youth advocate during the 2015 Amman Conference where the Youth, Peace and Security agenda was conceived. He emphasized the historical continuity between global commitments and national action, noting that the tenth anniversary of UNSCR 2250 presents an opportunity to move from commitments to measurable outcomes.

Key highlights of the Minister's address included:

- A call for transitioning youth engagement from symbolic participation to meaningful co-leadership in governance and peacebuilding processes.
- Recognition of youth as drivers of innovation, social cohesion, and democratic accountability.
- Emphasis on civic education as a foundation for responsible citizenship and peaceful societies.
- Encouragement for stronger collaboration between government institutions and youth-led organizations to translate dialogue into policy implementation.

The Minister underscored that sustainable peace in Sierra Leone depends on investing in youth leadership and ensuring that young people are active partners in shaping national development priorities.

5.2 Government Perspective

The Ministry of Youth Affairs reaffirmed government commitment to advancing the YPS agenda and highlighted progress made since 2015, including ongoing collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme in recruiting a consultant to develop the National Action Plan to fully operationalize the YPS implementation.

5.3 Youth Leadership Perspectives

YPPD emphasized youth co-leadership in shaping peacebuilding policy, while AWLN and WANEP underscored inclusive dialogue and intergenerational collaboration.

6. State of YPS Implementation in Sierra Leone

6.1 Progress Achieved

Over the past decade, recognition of young people as important stakeholders in peacebuilding and governance has steadily increased in Sierra Leone. Youth issues are now more visible within national policy discussions, and references to youth participation and leadership have become more common across development, peace, and governance frameworks. This shift reflects a growing understanding among policymakers and institutions that sustainable peace requires the active inclusion of young people as partners rather than passive beneficiaries.

Another significant area of progress has been the strengthening of youth coalitions and networks. Youth-led organizations have increasingly coordinated their efforts through structured platforms, enabling collective advocacy and shared learning across districts. The emergence of national coordination mechanisms, including the National YPS Coalition, has improved collaboration among youth groups, civil society actors, and development partners, creating a more unified voice capable of engaging government institutions on policy and reform priorities.

Civic engagement among young people has also expanded, with youth increasingly participating in dialogue forums, community initiatives, and policy consultations. Young leaders are contributing to mediation efforts, civic education, and local peacebuilding activities, demonstrating growing confidence and capacity to influence their communities. While challenges remain, these developments signal a positive trajectory toward deeper youth engagement in shaping Sierra Leone's peace and governance landscape.

6.2 Persistent Gaps

Despite notable progress in recognizing young people as important actors in peacebuilding, the institutionalization of youth participation remains limited. Youth engagement often occurs through consultations or project-based initiatives rather than through permanent decision-making structures embedded within governance systems. As a result, youth contributions are not consistently translated into policy influence, and participation risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

Overwhelming data confirms the limited inclusion of youths at the start of policy design and at the decision-making structures on the very issues that affects their lives. This becomes more glaring for young women especially those in strong cultures where social norms override legislations and policies creating limited access to resources, mentorship, and leadership platforms

Financing for youth-led initiatives also continues to be insufficient and unpredictable, constraining the ability of youth organizations to sustain long-term peacebuilding efforts. Many youth groups operate with limited resources despite being closest to community realities and conflict prevention work. Additionally, participation remains uneven across regions and genders, with rural youth, young women, and marginalized groups facing greater barriers to access leadership spaces and national dialogue platforms. Addressing these disparities is essential to ensure that the YPS agenda advances inclusively and reflects the diversity of youth experiences across Sierra Leone.

6.3 Lessons for YPS Engagements

Youth-led consultations demonstrate that young people are not only participants in peace processes but credible producers of knowledge and evidence. When youth are trusted to convene dialogue, document lived realities, and articulate priorities, the outcomes reflect grounded perspectives that are often missed in traditional policy processes. These consultations create space for authentic expression, allowing diverse voices, including those from rural and marginalized communities, to shape national conversations on peace, governance, and development. As a result, policies informed through youth-driven engagement are more responsive to real social dynamics and better aligned with community needs.

Equally important, localized dialogue strengthens legitimacy by connecting national and global agendas to everyday experiences at community level. Sustainable peace depends on rebuilding trust between generations, institutions, and citizens, and intergenerational collaboration provides a pathway for this renewal. When young people and decision-makers engage as partners rather than as separate actors, mutual understanding grows, reducing mistrust and fostering shared responsibility for peacebuilding. Strengthening these relationships ensures that peace efforts are not temporary interventions, but enduring processes rooted in cooperation, accountability, and collective ownership.

Pillar	Indicator	Baseline Situation	Target Outcome	Lead Actors	Data Source	Status
Participation	Youth representation in national policy platforms	Ad hoc participation	Institutionalized youth advisory structures	Ministry of Youth Affairs, YPPD	Meeting records	Yellow
	Youth inclusion in local council planning	Limited engagement	Youth consultation embedded in district planning	Local Councils	Council reports	Yellow
	Youth-led policy submissions adopted	Minimal	Annual youth policy contributions recognized	Parliament, CSOs	Policy tracking	Red
Prevention	Youth participation in early warning systems	Informal involvement	Youth integrated into prevention mechanisms	WANEP, Local Authorities	Early warning reports	Yellow
	Community peace initiatives led by youth	Scattered initiatives	Structured youth peacebuilding programs	CSOs	Project reports	Yellow
	Conflict drivers addressed through youth programming	Limited coordination	Employment & cohesion integrated into prevention	Government, Partners	Programme data	Red
Protection	Safe civic space for youth engagement	Uneven across districts	Legal protections strengthened	Ministry of Justice	Civic monitoring reports	Yellow
	Awareness of youth rights frameworks	Low awareness	National civic education rollout	Ministry of Information	Survey data	Red
	Protection of young women leaders	Structural barriers remain	Gender-responsive safeguards implemented	AWLN, MoGEWE	Gender reports	Yellow
Partnerships	Government–youth dialogue platforms	Event-based	Permanent YPS coordination platform	Ministry of Youth Affairs	Meeting records	Yellow
	Funding access for youth-led organizations	Limited	Direct financing mechanisms established	Donors, Government	Funding data	Red
	Multi-actor YPS coordination	Emerging coalitions	Institutionalized partnership framework	CSPPS, CSOs	Coordination reports	Yellow
Reintegration	Youth employment reintegration programs	Fragmented	National livelihood pathways	Ministry of Labour	Employment data	Red
	Psychosocial support access	Limited services	Community-based youth support systems	NGOs	Service data	Red
	Social cohesion initiatives	Project-based	Integrated reconciliation programming	Peacebuilding actors	Programme reports	Yellow

Figure 1 Sierra Leone YPS Implementation Dashboard

Green = On Track || Yellow = Moderate Progress || Red = Limited or No Progress

7. Policy and Practice Recommendations

7.1 National Government

The Government of Sierra Leone should prioritize the development, adoption, and resourcing of a National Action Plan on Youth, Peace and Security to provide a clear institutional framework for implementation of UNSCR 2250 and related resolutions. Youth participation mechanisms should be institutionalized within national and local governance structures, ensuring that young people are meaningfully involved in policy design, implementation, and monitoring processes. Strengthening civic education, expanding youth representation in decision-making bodies, and integrating youth priorities into national development and peacebuilding policies will be essential for translating commitments into measurable outcomes.

7.2 Development Partners

Development partners are encouraged to provide sustained and flexible support to youth-led peacebuilding initiatives, moving beyond short-term project cycles toward long-term investment in youth leadership and institutional capacity. Support should prioritize locally led approaches, strengthen youth research and monitoring capacities, and promote inclusive participation models that reach rural youth, young women, and marginalized groups. Partners should also support the integration of economic empowerment and climate resilience within YPS programming, recognizing the interconnected nature of development and peace.

7.3 Civil Society and Youth Coalitions

Civil society organizations and youth coalitions should continue strengthening coordination platforms to amplify collective advocacy and ensure consistent engagement with government institutions. Expanding mentorship, leadership development, and peer learning opportunities will help sustain youth participation across districts. Youth organizations are also encouraged to deepen evidence-based advocacy through research, documentation, and monitoring of YPS implementation, contributing to accountability and reinforcing youth leadership as a cornerstone of sustainable peacebuilding in Sierra Leone.

Conclusion

The Sierra Leone National Youth Consultation reaffirmed the growing recognition of young people as essential partners in peacebuilding, governance, and national development. Ten years after the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250, youth across the country continue to demonstrate commitment to sustaining peace through community engagement, civic participation, and collective action. The consultation highlighted both progress achieved and the persistent challenges that limit the full realization of the Youth, Peace and Security agenda, particularly in relation to institutional inclusion, equitable access to opportunities, and sustainable support for youth-led initiatives.

The findings underscore that sustainable peace in Sierra Leone depends not only on maintaining stability but on addressing the structural drivers of exclusion that affect young people, including unemployment, inequality, gender barriers, and emerging climate-related pressures. Youth voices emphasized the need to move beyond symbolic participation toward genuine co-leadership, where young people are actively involved in shaping policies and influencing decisions that affect their futures. Strengthening intergenerational dialogue and building trust between institutions and young citizens remain central to this transition.

As Sierra Leone looks toward the next decade of YPS implementation, the consultation provides a timely evidence base to inform national policy development and contribute to the global Second Independent Progress Study. The process demonstrated the value of youth-led consultations as credible mechanisms for generating knowledge and strengthening democratic legitimacy. Moving forward, sustained collaboration among government, development partners, and youth organizations will be essential to translate dialogue into action and ensure that young people are fully empowered as agents of peace, resilience, and inclusive development.

FOR MORE, REACH OUT!



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