

**Welcome Remarks at the Workshop
“Building Digital Payments Ecosystem
to Deliver Transformative Financial
Services for Small-holder Farmers in
Sierra Leone”**

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Sierra Leone

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Bank Complex

Honourable Minister Finance & Economic
Development

Honourable Minister Agriculture, Forestry
& Food Security

Our co-organizers – UNCDF’s Mobile
Money for the Poor & the Better Than
Cash Alliance

Members from the Financial Sector & the
Agriculture Sector

Distinguished Guests

Ladies & Gentleman

I am delighted and honoured to welcome
you today to the Workshop “**Building
Digital Payments Ecosystem to Deliver
Transformative Financial Services for
Small-holder Farmers in Sierra Leone**”.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think we will all
agree that financial services are the

lifeblood of any economy. Access to, but more importantly, usage of financial services increases economic opportunities and helps reduce vulnerabilities. Households and businesses have a chance to save, invest and protect themselves against risks. This is crucial to the economic empowerment of individuals, families and communities.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the macro-economic gains of wider access to financial services are quite substantial. According to a new McKinsey report, widespread use of digital finance could add up to \$3.7 trillion to the collective

GDP of emerging economies within the next 10 years. This figure is based on the reduction of costs and leakages from subsidies and on the increases in savings that are transformed into more credit to MSMEs, which of course will result in more jobs.

Digital Financial Services (DFS) are playing an increasingly central role in the financial inclusion efforts in Sierra Leone. The Bank of Sierra Leone, recognizing DFS as a priority, highlighted it in our National Strategy for Financial Inclusion 2017 – 2020 as one of its objectives:

“to enable financial services and delivery channels to leverage technology to design and deliver services for a diverse range of population including women, youth, rural-based population and MSMEs.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As part of the implementation of this priority, many initiatives are underway such as the creation of the Digital Financial Services Working Group, the launch of the Sierra Leone FinTech Challenge 2017, and the Government to People (G2P) Digital Payments Initiative.

We can today boast of many successful examples of how digital financial services have been used to serve various sectors eg mobile money transfer payments of electricity bills, satellite TV bills, salaries of Ebola workers.

With such success, it is fitting that we try to be more ambitious and use DFS to stimulate larger and more critical sectors of the economy.

With this in mind, recognizing agriculture and smallholder farmers as the backbone of the economy and source of livelihood for over 70% of the population, the Bank ,

the Ministry and other stakeholders decided that concerted efforts are also required to deliver the promise of digital financial services to this critical group and potential growth sector.

Agriculture is the mainstay of the rural population and the most dominant of the country's economic sectors followed by mining. The nature of the business, their distance from brick-and-mortar branches of banks and other financial institutions and high risk profile have contributed towards the unattractiveness which traditionally excluded them from access to formal financial services. For these

reasons and considering the greater reward, this sector is one that would benefit greatly from our experience with DFS.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Relatively little is known about the financial services needs of the Sierra Leone agriculture sector. The first step therefore in reaching these clients successfully is to better understand their needs, preferences, aspirations and behaviours. With that knowledge and a robust digital payments ecosystem, the Government, financial services providers, Fintech companies and other stakeholders

can develop and pilot more effective financial services and products designed to enhance the value proposition for all value chain actors in general and smallholder farmers in particular. The focus will be on improving their risk management ability and lowering delivery costs of the providers through the use of technology.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The objectives of today's workshop are:

1. Share lessons from other countries on how client-centric DFS for the agriculture value-chain and smallholder farmers can lead to cost-

savings for Government, greater outreach and impact, and transformative financial inclusion;

2. Achieve greater clarity on the role of key stakeholders of Government, including Ministry of Finance & Economic Development, Bank of Sierra Leone , Ministry of Agriculture, Development Partners and the private sector;
3. Explore the common challenges and solutions to building sustainable agriculture for smallholder farmers in Sierra Leone and how digital

payments can be used to address the challenges.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I challenge each of you to contribute to today's discussion so that together we can develop a Digital Payments Strategy for our agriculture sector.

I welcome you again to this workshop and wish you fruitful discussion.

I thank you all for your attention.