

**TRANSCRIPT:
ENERGY DAY**

***KEYNOTE SPEECH BY TIFFANY PERSONS, SHINE ON SIERRA LEONE
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Hallo, such an honor to be here today. My organizations Shine On Sierra Leone is about creating change and it is in this spirit of positive action that I give my support to the CGDC. Shine On Sierra Leone is about change not charity: President Stoyanov, Stamen and myself are united in the common goal of building partnerships across communities, cultures and countries. Back in 2005 when I first visited Sierra Leone, after 10 years of a bloody civil war, I was making a documentary, also I thought, about the journey of a path of a diamond from the earth all the way to the consumer and different lives that would affect along the way. That story took a very different turn that I could ever imagine at that time and as I stand here today and reflect back and think of my life now I can truly say that my life really is a self-discovery documentary in its own right.

I meant I left the Sierra Leone with the documentary as I intended but what I left with was something bigger and better that I could ever dream of. Sierra Leone touched me personally. Here was the place where I was greeted with human warmth and smile, the perfect beginning for a dialogue and on my journey I picked up insights about cooperation, democracy and most of all myself which I could have not imagined again just 6 years ago, and to be honest, before I got experienced this magic I had to truly engage with the people that I worked with and see them in a very different way.

There is a quote by Achuar tribe and I want to share it with you. It is a South American tribe in the rainforest and it says: "If you are coming to help us then you are wasting your time, but if you are coming because you know that your elaboration is bound up with ours then let us work together." I soon realized that money was not the only solution. The need would never end and this has been the same since the beginning of the time and then searched to find a way that I could help without becoming a part of the problem. Well, realizing that the change that we were seeking was not only to come from them but also from me. I first had to reexamine the way that I viewed poverty. I had to shift my understanding of the community from poor, impoverished victims to seeing them as powerful human beings as they are.

People worthy to be my partner. Within we changed our name from charity to partnership and asked them simply if they want to be our partner and then we began to use the participants – because we can call it a participatory approach. By this I mean including the voices, hearts, hands and solutions of the people in Sierra Leone in every single thing that we did. This democratic model gave voice to every member in the community. And although it took time to work through the challenges and expectations and communications, I am proud to say that together we have grown to build a community that's in harmony.

This is a foundation that we now call Shine On Sierra Leone. Our first project was a school advised by the people in the village. It's currently run by the members of the community and as I have already said we have rehabilitated this school, which had been burn down to the ground during the civil war and it was right number 600 out of 600 schools at the time and it is currently today ranked number 5. Something I am very proud of. We have since started many different collaborative programs, inspired by the pioneering work of Mohammed Yunus and his microfinance creation. We have created a micro credit program that has now since this video given out 7,000 loans to over 5,000 mothers of school-aged children. We have raised over 650,000 dollars for this project.

Thinking about the topics of energy poverty and access from this morning, which were debated from the panels I was reminded of the importance of these issues in Sierra Leone. To address these needs we have an eco-thermal program which introduces the use of solar panels. And by introducing solar panel technology visitors and communities that visit this eco-thermal project use 0.05 kWh from renewable energy resources. Well, the average American uses 5.7 kWh that is 1 % of what the average American uses.

Clearly, it is not an understatement to say that my time in Sierra Leone was life changing, it is life changing. I ask myself: What do my experiences have of interest to you all gathered here today? My key learnings or in order to create dialogue and cooperation I first need to focus on building trust. I did this in the most practical way possible by being on the ground, getting my hands dirty and continuing to challenge myself and my view of the world. I want to thank you for the opportunity to share my personal story with you here today and I have a quote that really sums up what my experience has been like. I wanna share that with you today: "Give me the grace to see the beauty in unexpected places and in unexpected people". Thank you.