

Amida Adiatu Bangura – Energizing Healthcare Conference Remarks

Fourteen years ago, I lost my elder brother—not to illness, but to a lack of reliable energy.

My brother was admitted to a government hospital in Sierra Leone, battling a sickle cell crisis. The rainy season was in full force, and the cold weather intensified his condition. He had been hooked up to an oxygen machine that helped with his low blood oxygen levels. On that particular evening, the rain was quite heavy and windy. Everything went dark. I still remember the sound of the machine powering down and the deafening silence that followed. Minutes felt like hours as doctors tried to resuscitate him. But by the time the backup generator kicked in, it was too late. My brother's death was not inevitable—it was preventable. That night, the little girl I was understood something fundamental—the importance of reliable electricity in a country.

During my work with SEforALL on the second phase of the Healthcare Electrification Project, our duty station was the Kailahun Government Hospital in Kailahun Town. This part of the country does not have access to the national grid system.

The hospital depended on generators to power its system. Diesel generators are a common backup in hospitals but are often faulty and unreliable, leading to missed opportunities for life-saving interventions. Moreover, they pollute the air and contribute to the climate crisis, causing respiratory illnesses and preventable deaths.

This hospital could not operate critical equipment because of a lack of energy, compromising patient care. Critical patients were transferred to Kenema, a neighbouring town, for better medical attention. The journey took six to eight hours by ambulance, and often, patients did not survive the journey. I remember one occasion when, during a patient transfer, the ambulance had to turn back because of roadblocks caused by heavy rain the previous night. That day, it was not a critical case—but what if it had been? What if another life was lost simply because of an unreliable power source?

The Healthcare Electrification Project by SEforALL has transformed healthcare in Sierra Leone. One hospital and 25 community health centres were powered with 24/7 solar electricity. As a STEM Trainee, I worked to install solar systems at these community health centres. My role spanned from the initial work of building the footing for the ESS battery container to climbing rooftops to mount the panels, retrofitting and pre-commissioning the sites.

In addition to developing technical competencies, I gained a deeper understanding of essential soft skills in energy-related topics, such as energy consumption, energy efficiency, and the importance of energy advocacy. I had the opportunity to engage in hands-on and soft skills training that expanded my technical skills and understanding of renewable energy. During my training, I saw firsthand how providing access to clean and reliable energy improved patient care for mothers, babies, and entire communities. Today, the Kailahun Government Hospital is a fully functioning hospital operating at maximum capacity, with all departments, including its ICU, in full operation.

The hospital in Kailahun is now a place where doctors no longer have to tell patients they'll be transferred to another town because critical machines are down. Now, lives are saved right there—thanks to solar energy. Furthermore, there is maximum security around the hospital, as the premises are brightly lit at night. I can proudly say that the hospital is running like a well-oiled machine, helping to save lives every day.

Aside from providing energy, this project by SEforALL increased women's participation in the energy sector. Through this initiative, 11 women stepped into roles traditionally dominated by men. Now, they are trained in solar installation and renewable energy skills. These women are lighting the way for future generations of women to lead in the energy sector.

Personally, working on this project has inspired me to pursue my master's degree in the renewable energy field, as this would give me a better opportunity to advance clean energy solutions in the healthcare and education sectors by incorporating energy-efficient technologies with maximum impact at minimal cost to underserved communities. It would also create a space for me at the table to engage with policymakers to prioritize energy investments in low-income regions.

The Healthcare Electrification Project was more than a professional experience—it was a turning point in my life. It gave me a clearer vision of a career path I eagerly want to explore. I am committed to advancing renewable energy solutions, building climate-resilient healthcare systems, and empowering communities to create a healthier, more sustainable future.

By providing energy access, we underpin health, education, gender equality, and economic development, advancing progress toward achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

The future is in our hands. Whether you advocate for policies that power communities, support initiatives like the Healthcare Electrification Project, fund scholarships for tomorrow's energy leaders, or simply share the story of how energy changes lives—we all have a role to play.

Today, I stand before you as that little girl who lost a brother. But I also stand as a woman working to ensure that no one else loses a loved one to the darkness of unreliable energy.

So, I ask you: If light represents life, how many lives will you choose to brighten?

Thank you.