

RUGSAL TRADING COMPANY RECYCLING COCONUT HUSK FOR ECO-FRIENDLY BRIQUETTES IN SIERRA LEONE

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Rugsal Trading Company, established in Freetown, Sierra Leone, has developed a relevant contribution to fighting deforestation, producing cooking briquettes made of coconut husk agro-waste.

Awarded in 2019 by UNEP as a Young Champion of the Earth, the entrepreneur Alhaji Siraji Bah, the founder of the Rugsal Trading Company, makes coconut husk briquettes as an alternative for burning coal, to combat deforestation in Sierra Leone. With his company, in 2019 they produced more than 120 tons of clean and smokeless briquettes from coconut, saving thousands of people from health risks by providing them with clean and affordable fuel, while saving more than 15,000 trees.



In 2020, Sierra Leone had 5.47 Mha of natural forest, extending over 75% of its land area. In 2024, it lost 121 kha of natural forest, equivalent to 67.0 Mt of CO₂ emissions, according to the [Global Forest Watch](#) organization. Deforestation not only releases more carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, it weakens slopes. Canopies are critical for soaking up rain and taming floods and tree roots anchor the soil. The mountain of Sierra Leone's Freetown was going bald as people collected timber to clear lots for housing and make charcoal, the top cooking fuel in a nation where electricity is often unreliable. Most households in Sierra Leone rely on charcoal for cooking and heating, but felling trees for charcoal is one of the main contributors to deforestation and land degradation in the country. Burning it also pollutes the air and can cause respiratory disease. Globally, around 3.8 million people die every year as a result of [household exposure to smoke](#) from fuels including charcoal, according to the World Health Organization. Charcoal is used by the majority of households as a cooking fuel because it is cheap and easy to access.



At the same time, a lack of waste collection services in Sierra Leone means garbage is often dumped in streets, gutters and river courses. This blocks drains and can lead to flooding, soil erosion and the spread of disease. In Africa, almost 1,000 tons of waste are produced every day, around 50 percent of which is predominantly plastic and biomass waste.

Alhaji Siraji Bah founded the Rugsal Trading Company to help reduce this waste, while also creating a viable businesses opportunity. The Company tackled the waste crisis by producing coconut husk briquettes as an alternative to burning coal, to combat deforestation in Sierra Leone.



The young entrepreneur decided to invest his last \$20 in making eco-friendly, biodegradable paper bags from banana leaves to tackle plastic pollution. He started producing recyclable bags made of 70 percent banana leaves, which he sold to local businesses. The Rugsal Company has produced roughly 250,000 bags, and using the funds earned from sales, has expanded into producing an eco-friendly alternative to charcoal. Bah learned how to produce smoke-free briquettes, which he says burn for four hours longer than coal or wood. He collects coconut shells, sugar cane, rice husk, and palm kernel waste from farmers and households in Freetown, grinds the raw material and binds it with starch before it is extruded through a machine.

The briquettes made by Rugsal Trading produce no smoke and burning significantly longer than coal or wood.

Rugsal Trading works to reduce the felling of trees in Sierra Leone, a loss that scientists say contribute to the deforestation and its many consequences, by encouraging people to swap wood-based charcoal for a substitute made from coconut scraps. Heaps of shells and husks discarded by juice sellers around Freetown provide an energy source that requires no chopping. The company now employs 38 workers and has produced over 120 tons of briquettes which has saved more than 15,000 trees.

Since 2019 the Rugsal Trading Company and its founder Alhaji Siraji Bah have received many national and international recognitions for their work. Among others, in 2019 Alhaji Siraji Bah was awarded the title of [Young Champion of the Earth](#) by UNEP. In the framework of the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration, the Young Champions of the Earth is a forward-looking prize designed by UNEP to breathe life into the ambitions of brilliant young environmentalists. The following year he received an invitation to participate in a conference on emerging businesses at Harvard Business School, where he received an award for his invention. Bah also received a nomination for the 2022 edition of the [African Genius Awards](#), which rewards African innovative excellence. In 2023 Alhaji Siraji Bah [won the prize organized by The Index Project](#).

Since 2019 the Rugsal Trading Company has ramped up production and plans to buy better machines to speed up briquettes from coconut hush production and help expand sales in the future in Guinea, Senegal and Liberia.

To know more

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[Champions of the Earth 2019 UNEP](#)

[Article in cnn.com](#)

[Article in roundaboutcommunity.com](#)

[Article in elespanol.com](#)

[Article in karunanews.org](#)

[Globalforestwatch.org website](#)

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