MINISTRY OF
**BASIC AND SENIOR**
SECONDARY EDUCATION
SIERRA LEONE

NATIONAL POLICY ON RADICAL INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS

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FOREWORD BY THE MINISTER OF BASIC AND SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION

Providing equitable access to education for all children in Sierra Leone is a priority of the New Direction Government of His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio and a critical component of the Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023 (NDP) titled "Education for Development". The NDP aims to improve the country's overall human development outcomes and increase economic growth. Continued government commitment to this priority through the provision of policies, and resources to implement those policies, is critical to the achievement of equitable access for all children in Sierra Leone.

The 1960 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Convention against Discrimination in Education and the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in Jomtien, Thailand, call on countries to take measures to ensure equality in education and no discrimination in access to learning opportunities for under-served groups. These texts have influenced countries' national laws and policies on which progress towards inclusion hinges. For example, the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 states that it is the responsibility of the government to direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal rights and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels by ensuring that every citizen is given the opportunity to be educated to the best of their ability, aptitude and inclination by providing educational facilities at all levels and aspects of education such as primary, secondary, vocational, technical, college and university.

Fulfilment of this responsibility requires an inclusive education system – one that is accessible to all children and acknowledges, addresses and responds to the diverse realities and needs of all learners. Such an inclusive system will help to break cycles of poverty and, ultimately, boost the country's national economy as the private average global return to every year of schooling is approximately 9 percent per year.[1] A recent Ministry of Finance and International Monetary Fund (IMF) study in Sierra Leone indicated that closing gender pay gaps and increasing the quality of education could yield annual gains of 8% and 27% of Gross Domestic Product respectively.[2]

This National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools seeks to ensure that schools throughout Sierra Leone are accessible to, and inclusive of, all children – especially those that are typically

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[1] https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/strong-link-between-education-and-earnings

[2] International Monetary Fund, African Department, Sierra Leone: Selected Issues, (April 17, 2020), pg 3. for the IMF study on Sierra Leone.

marginalised or excluded. In particular, the policy focuses on four excluded and marginalised groups: *children with disabilities; children from low-income families; children in rural and underserved areas; and girls - especially girls who are currently pregnant and in school or are parent learners*. In choosing these groups of marginalised children as the focus of this policy, we remain acutely aware that equitable access to education for all also means increasing access to facilities such as early childhood education and healthcare which are highly inequitable; providing technical and vocational education to facilitate labour market inclusion of vulnerable groups; providing options for other non-traditional pathways to success; supporting the learning of gifted students with access to resources, services, and opportunities that cater to their learning needs and that challenge them to develop their full potential in all areas of development; and drastically closing the current digital divide that puts the most disadvantaged children at risk of learning losses and dropping out of school.

However, policies do have limitations and an important limitation of a policy on inclusion is that while it attempts to, it does not cater to all and every child experiencing exclusion and marginalisation in Sierra Leone. Resource and other constraints simply exceed the capacity of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary (MBSSE) to address the learning needs of all marginalised children through policy. Nevertheless, effective resourcing and implementation of this policy will secure equitable access, retention and inclusion in basic and senior secondary education for the children targeted by the policy even as we strive to reach the ideal of inclusion for all. The ultimate goal is to generate a critical mass of highly educated, trained, and skilled Sierra Leoneans with the capacity to fulfil their potential, contribute to the national and global economy, and deliver better leadership and services in the public sector.

We are grateful for the opportunity to provide the first ever policy on radical inclusion in education in Sierra Leone. This policy is based on collaborative engagements, and data on inclusion that highlight gaps in educational opportunities and outcomes among learner groups, identifying those most at risk of being left behind and the severity of the barriers they face. Further data will be collected during implementation of this policy to see where discrimination in education still exist in society. After all, as argued in the Global Education Monitoring Report (2020), inclusion is a process and, as such, we will continue to monitor and strive toward "actions that embrace diversity and build a sense of belonging, rooted in the belief that every person has value and potential and should be respected regardless of background, ability, or identity".

David Moinina Sengeh
Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

answered our numerous questions during country-wide consultations. Their views, knowledge, and experience form the basis of the conclusions and recommendations put forth in the policy.

ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM / ABBREVIATION	EXPLANATION
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
BoGs	Boards of Governors
CEO	Chief Education Officer
DEO	District Education Office
EPG	Education Partnership Group
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
MGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
MTHE	Ministry of Technical and Higher Education
NDP	Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
OPP	Operation Policy Pillar
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SMC	School Management Committee
SOP	Standards of Operations
SSS	Senior Secondary School
TEIL	Toolkit for Enabling Inclusive Learning. Toolkit being developed for schools by MBSSE
TSC	Teaching Service Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination

GLOSSARY OF TERMS / DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Accessibility CRPD Article 9	Accessibility is a key condition to ensure all children participate in education independently. According to Article 9 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), accessibility encompasses the physical environment, transportation, information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and other facilities and services related to learners' health, development and learning.[3]
Inclusion	We use the UNESCO definition of inclusion, namely: "Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children".[4]
Radical Inclusion	The intentional inclusion of persons directly or indirectly excluded (from education) due to actions or inactions by individuals, society or institutions. Sometimes silence and infrastructure added to other intentional actions exclude. Radical inclusion means that these silent exclusionary policies, moral stances, formally stated actions, institutional regulations, national laws and systemic frameworks should be removed intentionally and with urgency to achieve inclusion.
Person with Disabilities Act 2011	The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2011 of Sierra Leone established the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities. The Act establishes laws to prohibit discrimination against persons with disability, to achieve equal opportunities for persons with disabilities and to provide for other related matters.

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[3] https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/issues.html#accessibility

[4] UNESCO, 2005, Guidelines for inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000140224

Persons with Disability CRPD Article 1	According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) definition, Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. [5]

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[5] https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-1-purpose.html

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools is the first attempt by any Government in Sierra Leone to provide a roadmap for the day-to-day operations of schools and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to ensure inclusion and positive experience for all students regardless of their status in society. Radical Inclusion, as defined by the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Hon. Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, is "*the intentional inclusion of persons directly or indirectly excluded (from education) due to actions or inactions by individuals, society or institutions. Sometimes silence and infrastructure added to other intentional actions exclude. Radical inclusion means that these silent exclusionary policies, moral stances, formally stated actions, institutional regulations, national laws and systemic frameworks should be removed intentionally and with urgency to achieve inclusion*."

The policy's main concern is the removal of all infrastructural and systemic policy and practice impediments that limit learning for any child[6]. It is about creating an enabling and inclusive environment that eradicates stigma, harassment, intolerance and exclusion of any kind. Radical inclusion is a process and a way of increasing justice and equity in peoples' lives and organisations.[7] The policy particularly emphasizes the inclusion of historically marginalised groups: **pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children from rural and underserved areas, and children from low-income families.** It is about creating an inclusive education system that allows all children in Sierra Leone to thrive. It calls for a meaningful and timely allocation and efficient use of resources to create a society in which both girls and boys are given equitable and appropriate support to access school and continue learning irrespective of their personal situation or socioeconomic and other status. The policy ensures compliance with existing laws and regulations surrounding inclusion and provides guidelines for decision-making and streamlining internal processes.

This policy is a combination of two frameworks on inclusive education for children with disabilities and on radical education for pregnant and parent learners. The policy has therefore been informed by insights from dialogue with constituencies across Sierra Leone - including families, communities, teachers and pupils - that have been finding ways to push back against destructive norms and policies and to imagine ways for pregnant and parent pupils to continue to learn, grow and prosper, and for children with disabilities, those from poor backgrounds, and those living in rural remote communities to enjoy the same educational facilities as their well-off, able-bodied, urban-dwelling counterparts.

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[6] Adapted from a recorded video of Minister Sengeh regarding what Radical Inclusion means, April 2020.

[7] https://justiceandpeaceconsulting.com/preemptive-radical-inclusion/, p 1

To ensure ownership, the policy was developed under the leadership of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education with extensive consultations with a working group of key stakeholders in the sector who provided critical input and feedback throughout the process.

The policy is divided into four sections. Section 1 provides the country context and background information on the national, international, and legal contexts of the policy. This section contextualizes the state of marginalization and exclusion of the four groups that are the main target of this policy—girls especially pregnant girls and adolescent parent learners, children with disabilities, children from poor/low-income backgrounds, and children living in remote under-served areas of the country. The section also identifies the policy rationale and objective, scope of the policy, and the four MBSSE principles guiding the policy (universal access to education; radical inclusion, quality learning; and comprehensive school safety). The section ends with a description of the policy development process and policy financing. Section 2 lists the four policy statements, the sub-objectives guiding these statements (create inclusive learning environments, target support to vulnerable groups, engage families and communities, and enable policy environment and effective implementation), and the proposed actions/actors for implementing the policy statements. Section 3 defines the roles and responsibilities of government (MBSSE) and schools in the management and coordination of each corresponding policy statement. To ensure effective and efficient implementation of the policy, this section also outlines outcomes and key indicators that will provide a basis of the evaluation, success and possible gaps in the policy and its implementation. Section 4 outlines the structures and plans that will be put in place to ensure that the policy is implemented, monitored, and reviewed effectively.

Implementation of the policy will involve an initial sensitisation and training process in schools, followed by the introduction of criteria that reflect radical inclusion in all school census and data collection programmes, as well as benchmarking and tracking the progress of these targeted groups of marginalised children. Training will be provided to school officials and staff who will play central roles in implementation. After a five-year period, the policy and implementation will be reviewed to strengthen the impact and to advance new interventions as needed. Benchmarks and criteria need to continually be developed to understand the indicators regarding the quality of education and review and augment the existing policy.

The Policy of Radical Inclusion in Schools has a justice and equity imperative as part of the broader human capital development and capacity building programme and vision of Sierra Leone. It pursues the guiding principles of the MBSSE—universal access to quality and equitable education, radical inclusion, and comprehensive safety of all learners. With this important imperative as its goal, MBSSE will work assiduously with the Law Officers Department and other

government Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Sierra Leone to ensure that the necessary institutional and legal frameworks are in place to achieve this goal.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Country Context and Background

Sierra Leone is a small country on the west coast of Africa with a population of approximately 7 million people. Geographically, it is divided into Western Area (where the capital, Freetown, is located) and four Provinces: Eastern, Northern, North-Western, and Southern. The country is further divided into 16 districts including Western Area- Urban and Western Area- Rural. The country experienced a ten-year civil war (1991-2001), followed by a devastating Ebola outbreak in 2014-2015 which killed thousands and severely disrupted public service delivery. Both of these events led to significant loss of learning time as schools were forced to close for significant periods of time. While Sierra Leone has a proud history of education in sub-Saharan Africa, the devastation of warfare, health, natural and human made disasters have negatively impacted the country's education infrastructure and its economic and social stability. This has meant that a significant number of children, particularly those who are most vulnerable and marginalised in various ways, have not participated in formal education leading to high rates of illiteracy. Despite these challenges, in many ways, the country serves as an international model in its ability to maintain peace and move forward, even in the face of adversity.[8]

Politically, Sierra Leone is a democratic nation and a constitutional republic. The Parliament of Sierra Leone is the legislative branch of the government, principally responsible for making laws. There are three spheres of government including the national government, local ccouncils and chiefdom ccouncils. At the national level, the President is elected for a maximum of two consecutive five-year terms and is head of state and government. Local ccouncils are a blend of elected officials and public officials who work to provide devolved services, including education, as mandated in the 2004 Local Government Act.

Historically, Sierra Leone holds a focal place in education in sub-Saharan Africa. Known as "the Athens of West Africa", Sierra Leone had the only institution of higher learning in West Africa from 1827 to 1948, with its establishment of Fourah Bay College, which played a pivotal role in training the first corps of doctors, administrators, and teachers in Anglophone West Africa. Additionally, the first secondary school for boys and also one for girls in the sub-region was founded in Sierra Leone. Both of these schools are still prominent today and continue to set the standards for excellence in girls' and boys' education. Today, the Government of Sierra Leone

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[8] Systems-level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone, April 2020: Education Partnerships Group

continues to actively pursue education as the foundation for human capital development. The current government is committed to transforming education service delivery and improving learning outcomes for all children and young people through its 'Education for Development' Medium-Term National Development Plan.

1.2. Focus of Policy

Historically, certain groups have been marginalised or excluded from pre-primary, basic and senior secondary education in Sierra Leone. In particular: girls, including girls who are or have been pregnant and are parent learners; children with disabilities; children from low-income families; and children from rural and underserved areas. Membership of these groups intersect, compounding the disadvantage for those children. Within the last decade, researchers found a general school completion rate of just one percent among the poorest rural girls and 56 percent for urban boys from the richest families.[9] This statistic is to highlight the two extreme positions rather than a mode of comparison. While girls enroll in and complete primary school at equivalent or higher rates to boys in Sierra Leone, the transitions through junior and senior secondary school reverse these trends, with greater proportions of boys ultimately graduating.[10] According to the 2019 Annual School Census (ASC) Report, out of 1.7 million students, 56% are females (73% of those are in primary); however, females are less likely to pursue higher levels of schooling. When Sierra Leone's schools closed for nine months in 2014-15 to stop the spread of Ebola, girls experienced higher dropout rates as a result of teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. Over the next decade, as many as 13 million more girls could be forced into early marriage by economically struggling parents.[11] The deprivations that people experience are not only due to lack of technical or financial resources, but are often linked to deeply rooted structures of social and political inequality and discriminatory laws and social norms. Thus, women typically have fewer opportunities than men; the poor have fewer opportunities than the rich; and some ethnicities have fewer opportunities than others.

Poverty has been one of the greatest barriers to education in Sierra Leone. Analysis of the Out-of-School Census (OOSC) survey data with respect to wealth status of households reveal that 79% - 81% of households in the poorest wealth quintile have out-of-school children, as opposed to 19% - 21% of affluent households with out-of-school children.[12] In most countries, out-of-school

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[9] UNESCO Office Dakar and Regional Bureau for Education in Africa: Sierra Leone: education country status report; an analysis for further improving the quality, equity and efficiency of the education system in Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone. Ministry of Education Science and Technology, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226039.

[10] Research Triangle Institute, *The Early Grade Reading Assessment and Early Grade Mathematics Assessment: Sierra Leone* (2014).

[11] UNICEF, Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: A National Assessment of the situation of out-of-school children in the Sierra Leone, July 2016, p 4.

[12] UNICEF, Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children: A National Assessment of the situation of out-of-school children in the Sierra Leone, July 2016, p 4.

children were reported to be more prevalent in low-income families residing in rural areas, as well as those residing in urban areas and/or metropolitan slums.[13] Cultural, economic, financial and practical factors prevent children from the poorest households from starting and staying in school. However, education is known to be one of the best routes out of poverty. Socio-economically, poverty decreases significantly with increased educational levels, which is why the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy of the Sierra Leone Government aims to achieve greater access to education by reducing financial barriers to school enrollment and improving teaching and learning outcomes for all students. Poverty affects girls in gender specific ways, involving issues such as transactional sex, early marriage, and the burden of having to perform a disproportionate share of household chores. As a result, girls from low-income families are less likely to receive an education than their male counterparts.[14] To compensate for the chronic neglect of female education, this policy will encourage positive discrimination in favour of girls in basic education[15] and provide measures that aim to foster greater equality by supporting them so they also can have access to opportunities as others in the community.

A significant educational divide exists between regions and rural and urban areas. The Western region - the region with the lowest concentrations of poverty - generally performs best across most learning outcomes and educational variables.[16] Rural areas have greater concentrations of poverty than towns and cities, and practical problems such as access to schools, transportation to school, hunger, and trained and qualified teachers are prominent. A 2013 study by UNESCO found that one in 10 children in rural areas have to spend more than 45 minutes getting to school compared to just three percent in urban areas.[17]

People with disabilities are less likely to be in education or employment than those who are without disabilities. In many cases, there are socioeconomic gaps between persons with and persons without disabilities, because persons with disabilities often experience lower levels of education, higher rates of unemployment and economic inactivity. They also lack social protection in comparison with their peers. These effects are exacerbated with age and grade level. As school levels increase, less students participate in school. According to the ASC (2019), nearly 48,000 students (1.5% of total school enrollment) across the four levels of education live with a disability. The primary level has the largest number of schools with disabled students

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[13] UNICEF, The Out-of-School Children Initiative, *Evaluation Report,* February 2018, pg 26.

[14] Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF, 2019. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019: Key Indicators, Freetown, Sierra Leone and Rockville, Maryland:

[15] https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/1334/Sierra-Leone-EDUCATIONAL-SYSTEM-OVERVIEW.html

[16] Sierra Leone. Ministry of Education Science and Technology, UNESCO Office Dakar and Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, Pôle de Dakar, 2013 : Sierra Leone: education country status report; an analysis for further improving the quality, equity and efficiency of the education system in Sierra Leone" World Bank, UNESCO Institute for Statistics, United Nations Children's Fund. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000226039

[17] ibid

enrolled. The primary level also has the highest percentage of schools with disabled students enrolled. The total number of schools in Sierra Leone as of 2019 is 11,168 with 7,154 of these schools being primary schools. Approximately, 50% of all schools in Sierra Leone have at least one student with disability enrolled.

School Level	Number of schools with at least one student with disability	Percentage
Primary	4,470	62%
JSS	961	59%
SSS	307	49%
Total	**5,738**	**51%**

Out of all 11,168 schools in Sierra Leone, only 10% have ramps; the primary school level has the largest number of schools (110) and senior secondary level the highest percentage (15%) of schools with ramps. Many schools remain inaccessible to children with disabilities and social stigma creates significant challenges. For example, families keep children with disabilities out of school; and in school, students with disabilities face bullying, provocation, and stigmatising language.[18]

Education is critical to breaking down the stigma around disability and reducing cycles of poverty. Poverty can be both a cause and consequence of disability.[19] Inclusive education is a gateway to higher education, employment and financial independence, benefiting individuals, families and society. The evidence points to inclusive education leading to economic benefits,[20] while negative stereotypes are undermined by a surge in the number of economically-active citizens with disability. Similarly, children with and without disabilities learn side-by-side, helping to break the cycle of stigma, discrimination, and marginalisation that underpin the exclusion of people with disabilities from employment and education. Whether abled and disabled students are in the same learning space or not (as there is an acknowledgment that disabled students' development can flourish or be inhibited in a 'mainstream' classroom), in order to maximise equitable access and the learning environment, experience and outcomes of students with disabilities, there needs to be an on-going partnership and engagement between special needs and mainstream education. The 2009 Global report, *Better Education for All* by Inclusion International highlighted the need for comprehensive national policies on inclusion.

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[18] Journal of Educational and Social research, Vol 3 (1), January 2013, pp 187-198. Stigma, Discrimination and Marginalisation: Gateways to Oppression of Persons with Disabilities in Ghana, West Africa, Baffoe, M./ British Journal of Social Work, 2009, pp 936-949, Advance Access Pubication, Jan 17, 2008, Choosing Language: Social Service Framing and Social Justice, Vojak, C.

[19] World Bank, 2009, People with disabilities in Sierra Leone

[20] CSDRC 2012 Helpdesk Research Report: Economic Benefits of Disability-Inclusive Development
2015 Banks and Polack, The Economic Costs of Exclusion and Gains of Inclusion of People with Disabilities

While girls enroll in and complete primary school at equivalent or higher rates to boys in Sierra Leone, the transitions through junior and senior secondary school reverse these trends, with greater proportions of boys ultimately graduating.[21] It is important to highlight that access does not ensure equity of outcomes because while female enrollment has increased sharply thereby closing the gender gap at the primary and junior secondary levels, there are important gender disparities in terms of both access to schooling and retention and completion rates. Multiple overlapping social and economic pressures face girls. These include expectations that adolescent girls engage in caring for, and economically supporting their families, and threats to their safety and bodily integrity. Systemic factors disproportionately affect the protection, attendance and performance of girls in school as they reach adolescence and adulthood, such as sexual exploitation by teachers and the low number of female teachers and other role models.[22]

Despite these challenges, women continue to experience higher average returns to schooling; providing yet another reason why girls' education should remain a priority. Private returns to education for women exceed returns to schooling for men by 2 percentage points, and this gap has increased since previous reviews when the advantage for women was 1 percentage point.[23]

Indeed, girls' education presents a critical strategy for intergenerational change across various markers of health, access to assets and services, and economic standing, children with educated mothers fare far better than those whose mothers are excluded. The evidence is clear that education carries critical potential for disrupting intergenerational cycles of poverty, and for reducing adolescent pregnancy. As a World Bank study found, developing countries' investments in girls' education, particularly at the secondary level, carry profound promise for bolstering national economies – vastly outpacing similar investments in boys' education.[24] However, it is important to note that while access to universal basic education is critical and progressing, disparities in learning outcomes remain significant and are widening in relation to gender, language, poverty, and disability disparities.[25] Access without a reasonable chance of success by

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[21] World Bank, 'FREE Education Project Information Document', 10 June 2019:
http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/203331559783894358/pdf/Appraisal-Environmental-and-Social-Review-Summary-ESRS-Sierra-Leone-Free-Education-Project-P167897.pdf

[22] UNICEF, *Gender Analysis of the Situation of Women and Children in Sierra Leone,* December 15, 2011.

[23] "Strong link between education and earnings." *World Bank Blogs*, 07 December 2018,
https://blogs.worldbank.org/education/strong-link-between-education-and-earnings.

[24] The World Bank, : Jad Chaban and Wendy Cunningham, "Measuring the Economic Gain of Investing in Girls" Policy Research Working Paper, 2011, 5753.

[25] https://www.varkeyfoundation.org/media/4666/education-equity-and-inclusion-policy-v2.pdf.

engaging with systemic issues related to inequity and addressing students' diverse needs will not be access at and for all.[26]

Supporting girls who are or have been pregnant, and parent learners, to stay in school is critical if the education system is to be gender inclusive particularly in areas where there are high teenage pregnancy rates. Unintended pregnancy amongst school-age girls is not new to the education system, but its wide-ranging impact in the post Ebola and on-going Covid-19 context requires an immediate response. Where teenage pregnancy was perhaps once the norm across the social spectrum, adolescent birth rates now reflect economic inequality. National data reflects immense disparities: 18 percent of girls from the wealthiest households give birth, while the rate is 40 percent among those from the poorest households. Education holds critical promise for levelling these gaps. Teenage pregnancy rates decrease as education levels increase nearly half (43.5 percent) of adolescent girls with no education have already begun childbearing by age 19, compared with 16.5 percent of those with secondary or higher education.

Adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in Sierra Leone are among the highest globally, resulting in an estimated 20% of girls dropping out of the classroom.[27] Even with these realities, there are positive trends in Sierra Leone that serve as foundation for the successful implementation of this policy. As reported in the UNESCO GEM Report, 2020: "Some studies in Sierra Leone indicate localized increases (Elston et al., 2016) but at national level the rate of girls aged 15 to 19 who had a live birth fell from 26.4% in 2010 (Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF-Sierra Leone, 2011) to 19.3% in 2017 (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2018)". Historically, pregnant girls were not allowed to attend school or sit for examinations while visibly pregnant. This was formalized by the Government of Sierra Leone through a Cabinet Conclusion in 2010 which was enforced in 2015. The legal basis of this position was challenged in the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Court of Justice, which ruled in December 2019 that banning pregnant girls from school and public examinations was not tenable and ordered the immediate overturn of the policy.

In March 2020, the Government overturned the policy with immediate effect. This decision provided the basis for a policy on radical inclusion and comprehensive safety of all children in the education system. Since the overturn of the policy, there has been a significant increase in the number of pregnant girls as candidates for both the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Out of 71,657

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[26] https://www.educationopportunities.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/NEON-The-Future-of-Student-Outcomes.pdf: Access without a reasonable chance of success, it not access at all: a case study at the University of Cape Town (South Africa), Pym, J, October 2020, pp 10-12.

[27] Statistics Sierra Leone and ICF, 2019. Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019: Key Indicators, Freetown, Sierra Leone and Rockville, Maryland

females who sat the 2020 WASSCE; 2,064 (2.9%) of these students were pregnant. 1.4% of the total number (151,625) of WASSCE candidates were pregnant. Western Urban district had the largest number of pregnant students sitting WASSCE and Kambia District had the least number of pregnant students sitting WASSCE. See figure below for numbers by districts.

Number of Pregnant Girls who Sat WASSCE 2020
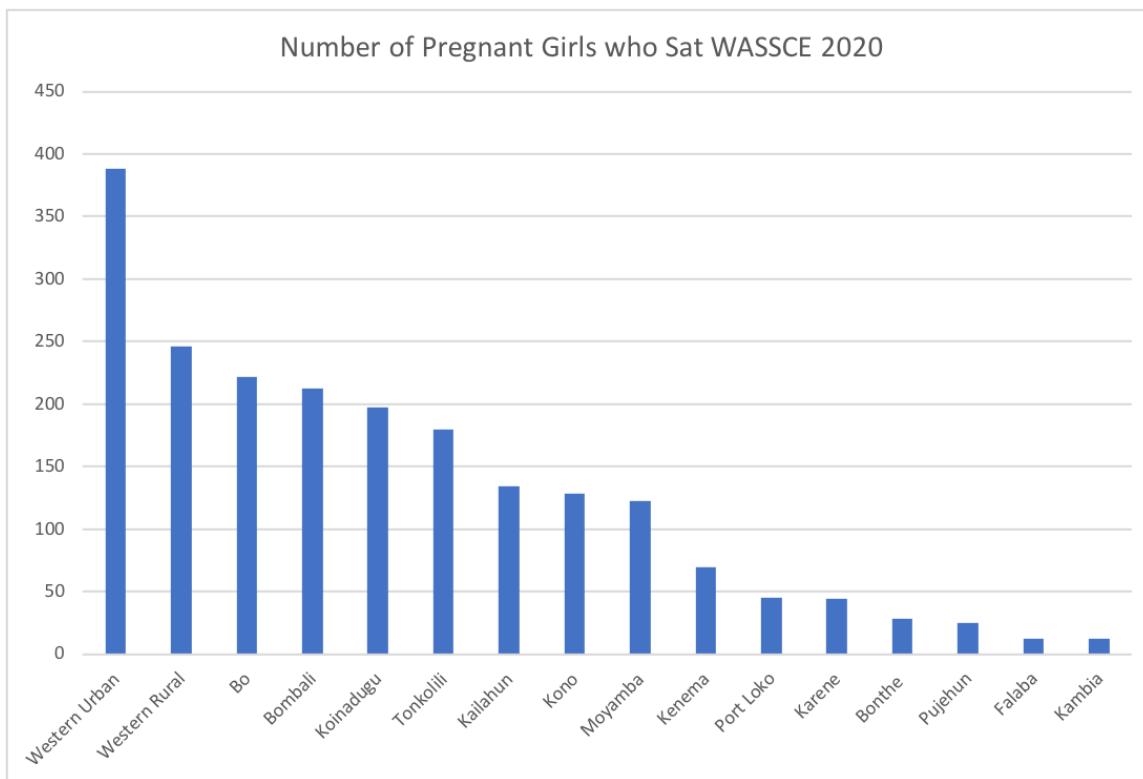
Despite the spike in school attendance and retention among pregnant girls, the stigma, discrimination and a lack of integration mechanisms for pregnant and parent learners still remain as a barrier to their full participation in school. This policy will help facilitate access to sexual and reproductive health services, including the provision of comprehensive sexuality education at school and in the community and engage communities in ways they can support all learners.

Robust support structures are required for girls and other marginalised learners to stay in school. This policy on radical inclusion in education is one such support structure and provides an inclusive framework for the most marginalised children. For example, practices informed by this framework would include inclusive remote learning, provision of printed learning material, food (for those students who, pre-Covid, would have a meal at school), use of broadcasting via radio and television stations and so on to support learning of students who cannot be in school for any reasons.

Finally, the MBSSE focuses on appropriate and 21st century curricula for learning. The newly developed Basic Education Curriculum Framework, the Civic Education Curriculum Framework, and Senior Secondary Education Curriculum Framework discuss what the Ministry identifies as the 5C's: computational thinking, critical thinking, comprehension, civics and creativity. As seen in the Statistics Sierra Leone Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017, there are huge discrepancies in access to learning materials or playthings for under-fives in rural and urban areas. Furthermore, children in rural areas receive significantly less engagements with adults in activities that promote learning and school readiness, and this is consistent for income and disability. This focus on quality learning which is translated into new syllabuses and learning frameworks will be critical for promoting inclusion, not just in classrooms or Sierra Leone, but globally.

1.3   Structure of the Education System

The delivery of basic education (pre-primary, primary and junior secondary) is a devolved function, governed by the Local Government Act 2004, and implemented by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). [28]   In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) was split into two ministries—the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE). The delivery of basic and senior secondary education is solely the mandate of the MBSSE, whilst higher and technical education is delivered by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE).

The country's education system is divided into four stages, constituting what is known as the 6-3-3-4 system: 6 years primary education; 3 years Junior Secondary education; 3 years of either Senior Secondary education or technical vocational education; and 4 years University or other tertiary education. The new MBSSE system is focused on systematic reform and restructuring of the management and administration of education at all stages. The sector-specific legislation governing and regulating the MBSSE is the Education Act, 2004. At the central level, basic education service delivery is the primary responsibility of MBSSE. At the district level, basic education has been officially devolved since 2004, and service delivery at Primary and Junior Secondary level is the responsibility of the Local Councils, who report to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD).

Within MBSSE, the Planning and Policy Directorate, reporting to the Chief Education Officer, who is the professional and technical head of MBSSE, is responsible for delivery of all policies. This involves collaboration with other directorates within the MBSSE, other ministries, stakeholder,

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[28] Government of Sierra Leone. (2004). The Local Government Act, Freetown, Sierra Leone. http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2004-1p.pdf.

partners and communities to develop guidelines and Standard of Operations (SOP) to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of all policies.

According to the 2019 Annual School Census, there were 11,168 basic and senior secondary education schools in Sierra Leone. Of these, pre-primary schools accounted for 15.7 percent, primary schools for 64.1 percent (7,154 schools), JSS for 14.6 percent (1,633), and SSS for 5.6 percent (623). There are approximately two million students in basic and senior secondary schools, more children are enrolled in schools than ever before in Sierra Leone, pointing the need for an inclusive policy that caters to the diverse learning needs of these students.

1.4   Legal Policy Context

This policy is grounded in the interests, rights and entitlements of all children as enshrined in the Constitution and laws[29] of the Republic of Sierra Leone which mandate the government to direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal rights and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens.

Although the Government of Sierra Leone has never before adopted a radical inclusion policy, there have been attempts to change the status quo on marginalization and exclusion of certain learners in the country's education system. The Education Act 2004 prohibits "discrimination between pupils or students in the matter of their admission to and treatment in any educational institution in Sierra Leone."[30] Discrimination includes any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which, being based on race, colour, sex, disability, language, religion, political, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or effect of impairing equality of treatment in education at any level.

The Persons with Disabilities Act 2011 affirms the right of people with disabilities to free education, and commits the Government to adapting educational institutions, providing learning facilities, and formulating a suitable curriculum.[31]

The 2018-2020 (extended to 2021) Education Sector Plan (ESP) for Sierra Leone commits to taking a number of important steps to improve access to, and the quality of, education for all students, and includes measures to target marginalised groups. The 2018-2020 ESP commits to improving school infrastructure for children with disabilities. Since 2015, hundreds of disability-friendly

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[29] For instance, the Education Act 2004, Persons with Disability Act 2011 and the Child Rights Act 2007 requires schools and educators to treat all children equally. This policy seeks to ensure the requirements of inclusion embedded in the 2004 Education Act and 2011 Persons with Disability Act are implemented

[30] Education Act 2004, section 4

[31] *Report on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Sierra Leone* (OHCHR), 2011

classrooms have been built.[32] Yet, the vast majority of school toilets remain inaccessible.[33] There is much more work to do to ensure that all children with disabilities benefit from life-changing education.

The Government of Sierra Leone's 2018-2020 ESP, and its Medium-Term National Development Plan pledged to take steps to mitigate some of the effects of poverty and geographical location on education. These include measures to recruit additional qualified teachers - especially women teachers – provide training and support of teachers, registration of approved teachers on the payroll and other interventions. In addition, it includes increasing the number of schools in underserved areas, expanding the school feeding programme, and promoting and strengthening the bus system in rural remote areas. Measures such as targeted grants are also needed if the goal is to increase equitable access to education and reducing costs.

The Government's flagship initiative Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSE), seeks to increase access to, and improve standards of pre-school, primary, basic and senior secondary education in Sierra Leone. This has meant creating an inventory of community schools and accelerating the approval of these schools so that they will legitimately receive the support of the FQSE including school subsidies. Support has included abolishing school and exam fees, keeping the costs of school uniforms under control, and providing free textbooks for the core school subjects, exercise books and pens. In addition, the FQSE is increasing access to the school feeding programme and increasing the number of trained and qualified teachers.

The National Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Strategy (2013-2015) and its successor National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage (2018-2022) were developed to guide the prioritization of all evidence-based adolescent pregnancy and child marriage reduction interventions. Their aim, during their respective tenors, was the reduction of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage in the country.[34] The 2018-2020 ESP contains provision to support girls in education. MBSSE, Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MoHS), Ministry of Social Welfare (MSW) and Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs (MGCA) are currently leading a broader review and development process on the wholesale prevention of adolescent pregnancy, including through such provisions as Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health Services.

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[32] Figures from the ESP 2018-2020

[33] See ESP 2018-2020

[34] Government of Sierra Leone, National Strategy for the reduction of adolescent pregnancy and child marriage, 2018-2022.

Since its launch in August 2018, the Government's FQSE Programme has seen a significant increase in enrollment, with senior secondary school girls showing the largest proportional increase. The overall number of enrolments of learners has increased by almost 700,000.[35]

Enrolment of Male and Female Students from 2018 to 2019
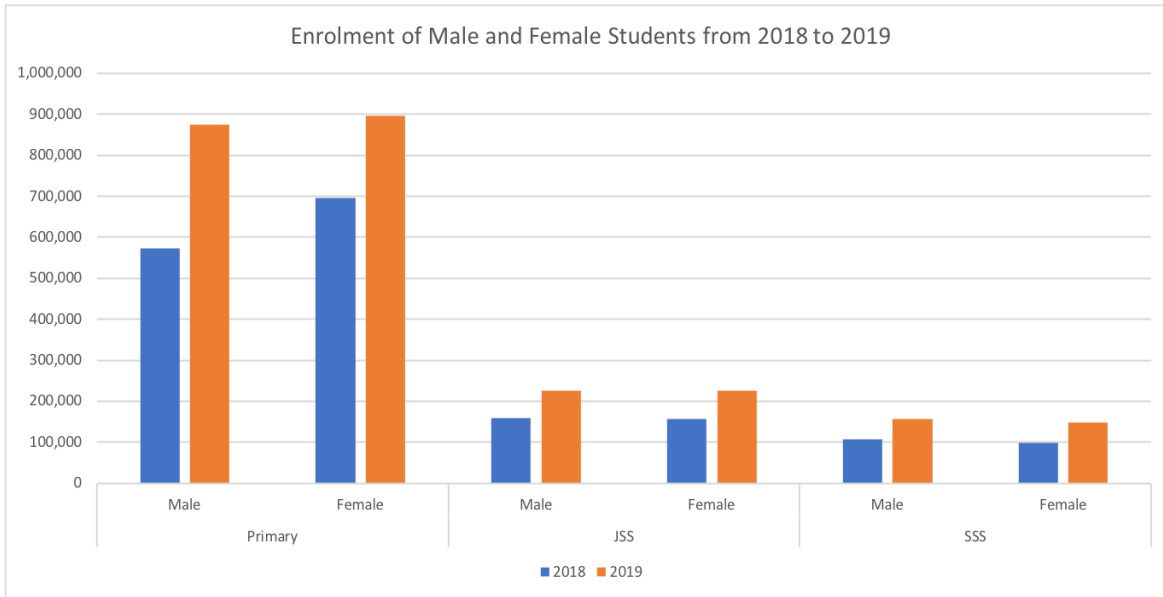
There has also been an increase in the overall total number of students who sat the national examinations in 2020.

Number of Male and Female Candidates from 2018 to 2020 for NPSE, BECE and WASSCE
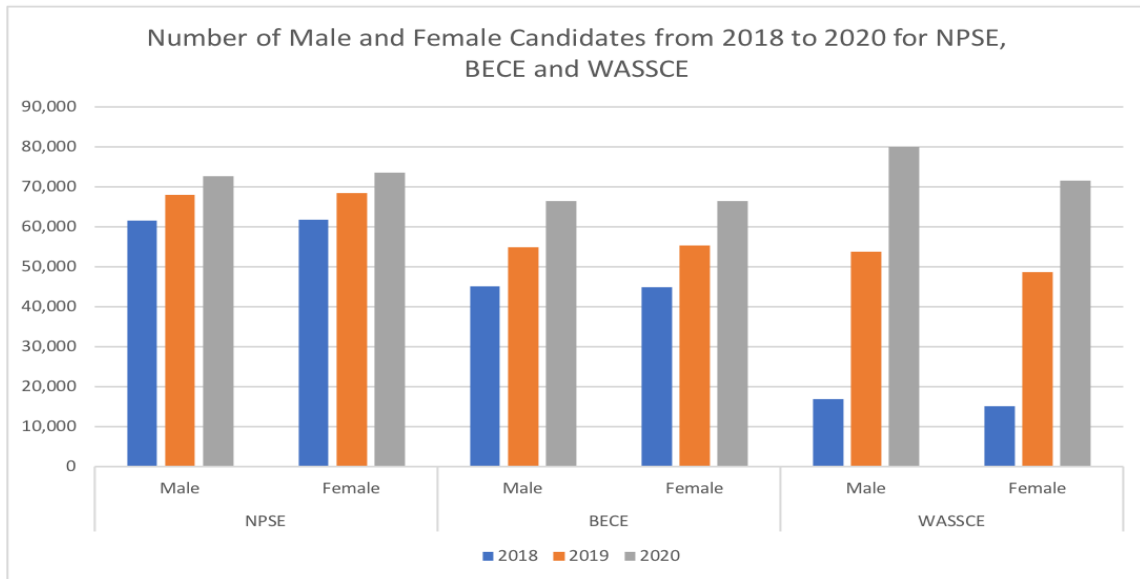
Despite clear gains, however, significant cohorts continue to be excluded from mainstream schools, due to compounding factors of poverty, lack of access, gender, social norms and stigma.

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[35] Sierra Leone Telegraph, Free education in Sierra Leone, 10/232020, p 1.

In 2017, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, started a process for the development of a Proposed Policy and Actions for the Promotion of Inclusive Education. Inclusive education asserts the rights of all children to receive an education that is appropriate to their needs. It promotes the attendance of all students in age-appropriate classes in local schools. The promotion of inclusive education has particular importance for those individuals and groups who have been marginalised in relationship to the education system and society because of poverty, gender, disability, social class, language, geographic location, or other circumstances. *The Sustainable Development Goals* (UNESCO 2015) emphasised the need for national governments to recognise and challenge those factors and conditions that have resulted in exclusion from school for many children. These goals further acknowledge the relationship between those pervasive conditions that have impacted upon the ability of national government to provide effective education for all. This recognition has led to the establishment of interrelated goals aimed at combating educational inequality.[36] This has focused on inclusion of children with disabilities. It was developed with important partners working in Sierra Leone and was finalised in 2020. That drafted policy and its key recommendations are incorporated into this Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools.

This policy has been created in the context of a broader review and development process led by MBSSE, focusing on updating and formalising various draft guidelines and policies to support education sector reform. It is intended to complement the policies on: School Approvals and Infrastructure; Teacher Recruitment and Allocation, Comprehensive School Safety, and the review of adolescent pregnancy policies. It is also linked to the School Health Policy developed by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation with support from MBSSE, with an aim to improve social inclusion and sustainable human capital development by creating safe and healthy school environment that is conducive for all learners. Together, these policies will create a safe and healthy school environment for learning, as well as improve social inclusion and sustainable human capital development.

1.5 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Government of Sierra Leone's new Medium-term National Development Plan (MTNDP) 2019-2023 has been grounded on renewed optimism as the country's democracy matures and the strong political commitment to deliver development results that would improve the welfare of Sierra Leone's citizens. The plan has been developed by incorporating a range of public participation processes, and has a holistic economic and social agenda, covering the first five years of a 20 years vision with the goal of achieving middle-income status by 2039. The focus is on sustainability with an appropriate governance framework that would be based on inclusive growth, poverty reduction and a diversified economy. Human capital development has been identified as the main channel through which we expect to deliver these goals. The specific goals

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[36] Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Draft, Freetown, May 2020.

include: a diversified, resilient green economy, a nation with educated, empowered healthy citizens capable of realizing their fullest potential; a society that is peaceful, cohesive, secure, and just and a competitive economy with a well-developed infrastructure. Education is viewed as the bedrock of long-term sustainable growth and socio-economic development of the country, helping to shift people out of poverty and create new opportunities to reduce inequitable income distribution and increase choices. Because the government of Sierra Leone views education for development as the overarching guiding principle for the new national development plan, the Free Quality School Education programme is its priority. For the next five years, this is the governments' flagship programme to provide a solid base to enhance human capital development and to facilitate the transformation of the economy.[37]

The FQSE programme focuses on the rights of all children to receive an education that is appropriate to their needs. This is particularly important for individuals and groups that have been marginalised and/or excluded within the education sector and society because of poverty, gender, disability, social class, language, geographic location and other circumstances.[38] A National Policy for Inclusive Education has emerged from the FQSE programme where there is a commitment to put mechanisms in place to review and implement inclusive education policies and laws relating to inclusion, making public facilities, especially schools, accessible, friendly, and welcoming for all categories of children. There is an emphasis on the radical inclusion of those who have been excluded through intentional actions, inactions, and moral stances. To this end, the Government of Sierra Leone is committing to a more inclusive approach to education by developing this Policy on Radical Inclusion in Education, which was first requested by H.E President Bio in December 2019.[39]

1.6 INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

Recognition that many children have been excluded from opportunities to access education that is appropriate to their individual needs and those of the socio-economic development of their countries, has led to the establishment of a number of international agreements aimed at improving educational access for marginalised students. This Policy on Radical Inclusion aligns with a number of international and regional human-rights agreements and obligations to which Sierra Leone is a signatory, including: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,1989; Salamanca Statement, 1994; African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,1999; United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006; Protocol to the African

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[37] Sierra Leone: Economic Development Documents – National Development Plan, 2019 -23. International Monetary Fund, African Dept.

[38][38] The National Policy for Inclusive Education (Draft), Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Freetown, May 2020, p 5.

[39][39] The National Policy for Inclusive Education (Draft), Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Freetown, May 2020, p 5 -7.

Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol) 2003.[40]

Aspects of inclusion are engaged with and referenced in these various policies and the following extracts give examples of some of the key points:

1.6.1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 28, Article 28: This states that Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular make primary education compulsory, available and free to all.

1.6.1.2   The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), Article 2, 3: We call upon all governments and urge them to:
- o give the highest policy and budgetary priority to improve their education systems to enable them to include all children regardless of individual differences or difficulties.
- o adopt as a matter of law or policy the principle of inclusive education, enrolling all children in regular schools, unless there are compelling reasons for doing otherwise.
- o develop demonstration projects and encourage exchanges with countries having experience with inclusive schools

1.6.1.3   The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), Article 11 (1) (6), Article 11: Education:
- o State Parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that children who become pregnant before completing their education shall have an opportunity to continue their education on the basis of their individual ability.

1.6.1.4   The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Article 24 (1) (2) (3), Article 24: Education:
- o Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full

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[40] Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003), Article 24 (1) (2) (3).
The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1999), Article 11 (1) (6).
The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), Article 2, 3.
The Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 4 (4.a).
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Article 24 (1) (2) (3).
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 28.

inclusion.

1.6.1.5 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Right on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) Article 12 (1), Article 12:
- o The Right to Education and Training states that parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and guarantee equal opportunity and access in the sphere of education and training.

1.6.1 RELATIONSHIP TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
In addition, the policy works towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which commit Sierra Leone to a series of educational, health, gender and other social and economic development targets, and which require a radically inclusive education policy as a matter of priority. These are the SDGs that are particularly pertinent:

- **SDG 1: End Poverty in all its forms everywhere**
  "Eradicating poverty is not a task of charity, it's an act of justice and the key to unlocking an enormous human potential."
  - o Target 1.1 ERADICATE EXTREME POVERTY
  - o Target 1.2 REDUCE POVERTY BY AT LEAST 50%
  - o Target 1.A MOBILIZE RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT POLICIES TO END POVERTY
  - o Target 1.B CREATE PRO-POOR AND GENDER-SENSITIVE POLICY FRAMEWORKS

- **SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all:**
  "Education liberates the intellect, unlocks the imagination and is fundamental for self-respect. It is the key to prosperity and opens a world of opportunities, making it possible for each of us to contribute to a progressive, healthy society. Learning benefits every human being and should be available to all."
  - o Target 4.1 FREE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
  - o Target 4.2 EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION
  - o Target 4.5 - ELIMINATE ALL DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION
  - o Target 4.7: EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP
  - o Target 4.A BUILD AND UPGRADE INCLUSIVE AND SAFE SCHOOLS

- **SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls**
  "Gender bias is undermining our social fabric and devalues all of us. It is not just a human rights issue; it is a tremendous waste of the world's human potential. By denying women

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equal rights, we deny half the population a chance to live life at its fullest. Political, economic and social equality for women will benefit all the world's citizens. Together we can eradicate prejudice and work for equal rights and respect for all."
- Target 5.1 END DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS
- Target 5.2 END ALL VIOLENCE AGAINST AND EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
- Target 5.3 ELIMINATE FORCED MARRIAGES AND GENITAL MUTILATION
- Target 5.C ADOPT AND STRENGTHEN POLICIES AND ENFORCEABLE LEGISLATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY

1.7 POLICY RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

1.7.1 RATIONALE

Despite the laws of Sierra Leone and international agreements to which Sierra Leone is signatory, marginalised groups are still systematically excluded from education in Sierra Leone. While various policies aim to tackle important aspects of the problem as outlined above, a central, policy on radical inclusion is required, focusing on key marginalised groups, and addressing the full range of factors that prevent their inclusion in education. Key issues highlighted regarding marginalised groups (but not exclusive) relate to:

- *Gender issues:* While female enrollment has increased sharply, closing the gender gap at the primary and junior secondary levels, there are important gender disparities in terms of both access to schooling and retention and completion rates.
- *Pregnant girls' and parent-learners' access to quality education:* Substantial progress has been made to increase access to education, especially among girls, and in March 2020, the Government overturned the policy that previously banned pregnant girls from attending school. The overturn plays a crucial role in the development of this policy on radical inclusion to establish systems that facilitate pregnant girls and young mothers to return to school and take exams.
- *Students with disabilities:* Every child deserves the opportunity to go to school, whether they have disabilities or not. Unfortunately, children with disabilities in Sierra Leone are often denied their right to education. They are not only substantially less likely to be in school but also, where they are in school, they are less likely to complete their primary education and transition successfully to secondary school. This policy will support the Government's commitment toward achieving a more inclusive approach to education and improving the learning environment for children with disabilities by eliminating barriers to full inclusion of persons with disabilities.
- *Low-income and inequitable access:* There are not only significant variations in students' access to education by gender, pregnancy status, ability/disability; socioeconomic status and geographical location further exacerbates these challenges, especially for children in

rural remote areas. This policy, backed up by the FQSE programme, removes financial and other barriers to school enrollment, making access and quality education possible.

1.7.2 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Although focusing on key marginalised groups, the goal of this Policy on Radical Inclusion in Education is to foreground, emphasise and realise the constitutional right of all children in Sierra Leone to equal access to quality pre-school, basic and secondary school education. This will enable them to contribute to the national and global economy, participate in public life, and fulfil their potential.

In practice, this goal means actively enabling those from marginalised and excluded groups to enter and remain in school until completion. It means adapting the education system to better meet their learning needs - ensuring school is a place of dignity, safety, and respect for all - while systematically reducing cultural, policy and practical barriers to education. Finally, it means developing the institutional structures, staff and tools necessary to support radical inclusion.

MBSSE will have a duty to put mechanisms in place to enhance the capacity of mainstream schools to respond to the varying learning needs of diverse children. However, a caveat to bear in mind here is that physical, social, and/or economic resource factors may simply exceed the capacity of MBSSE to address some kinds of inclusivity problems through policy. For example, this policy does not bring an end to the existence of the special schools currently serving children with more severe mental and physical disabilities. Children who would not benefit from mainstream institutions will stay in special schools to receive their education.

1.7.3 TARGET

The focus of this policy is on girls, especially pregnant girls and parent learners; children with disabilities; children in the rural remote areas; and children from poor/low-income backgrounds. These target groups were identified through several processes: a situational analysis of the current state of educational marginalization in Sierra Leone (see Section 1.2.2 of this policy); consideration of Sierra Leone's national legal obligations enshrined in the Constitution and laws of Sierra Leone (see Section 1.4 of this policy) ; consideration of a number of international, regional, and sub-regional human rights agreements and obligations of which Sierra Leone is a signatory (see Section 1.6.1 of this policy); the Government of Sierra Leone's National Development Plan which has human capital development at its centre (see Section 1.5 of this policy); and extensive and inclusive country-wide consultations with diverse key stakeholders including disability groups, children with disabilities, adolescent girls affected by the ban on pregnant girls attending school and taking public exams, children from low-income backgrounds,

children living in rural remote areas, parents/guardians, local council members, local chiefs, and Sierra Leone's education sector development partners.

1.7.4 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER POLICIES

The radical inclusion policy is the flagship policy for MBSSE and consolidates all existing inclusion policies. It relates directly to the Education Act 2004; Persons with Disabilities Act 2011; Child Rights Act 2007; Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2020; School Health Policy 2020; National Policy on Gender Mainstreaming 2009; National Policy on the Advancement of Women 2009; and African Union and ECOWAS gender policies.

1.7.5 ACCOUNTABILITY

Although the policy states that technical, vocational and higher education are not included in the scope (it is a policy for schools) and there is some overlap with this sector, the fundamental responsibility for most of this policy lies with the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (there will be on-going engagement with the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education and other appropriate Ministries including Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Sanitation and Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs).

1.8   SCOPE OF THE POLICY

1.8.1 DESCRIPTION

This is the first radical inclusion policy by any Government of Sierra Leone, and it pursues President Julius Maada Bio's vision for an inclusive nation. In 2019, the President said: "My government is focussed and committed to inclusive national development and that means radical inclusion of every citizen regardless of gender, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic status or other circumstance". In addition, this policy builds on the Government's Free Quality School Education Programme and other initiatives, to improve the enrollment, retention, and successful learning outcomes for children previously marginalised. Finally, it pursues the guiding principles of the MBSSE: Universal access to quality and equitable education, radical inclusion, and comprehensive safety of all learners.

With this policy, Sierra Leone joins a growing list of progressive countries championing radical inclusion in education systems through an explicit policy on inclusion. It will lead the way in guaranteeing the education rights of *all* children across the country.

1.8.2 RESPONSIBILITIES

The Policy provisions are aimed primarily at MBSSE, schools, and relevant stakeholders. The Planning and Policy Directorate, reporting to the Chief Education Officer (who is the professional and technical head of MBSSE) is responsible for delivery of the policy. Effective delivery involves collaboration with other directorates within the ministry, other ministries, stakeholders, partners

and communities to develop guidelines and Standards of Operations (SOP) to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the policy. Collaboration is also needed with the Legislative branch of the government, specifically the Law Officers Department, to ensure that the institutional and legal frameworks necessary for the implementation of this policy are in place.

1.8.3 BENEFICIARIES

Beneficiaries of this policy will be the marginalised students identified in this policy. The ultimate goal is the enrollment, retention and success of all students in pre-primary, primary and junior and senior secondary education, regardless of disability, gender, pregnancy or parenting status, geographic location, and socio-economic background.

1.9 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The policy is guided by MBSSE's four guiding principles: Universal Access; Comprehensive Safety; Radical Inclusion; and Quality Learning and Teaching. These principles are in alignment with the FQSE initiative, a five-year plan rolled out in 2018 to provide free quality pre-primary, primary and secondary education to all children, with the mission to develop and improve the country's Human Capital. MBSSE's four principles have the following underlying assumptions:

- o Radical Inclusion – Development is only complete when everyone and anyone is given equal access to education.
- o Comprehensive Safety – For effective learning to take place, it needs to be powered by a safe and enabling environment, including safe physical structures and psychologically safe learning environments.
- o Quality Learning and Teaching – Learning is purposeful when all learners are provided with the ability to effectively learn, and acquire skills, knowledge, and competencies that fulfill their potential.
- o Universal Access – Free quality education must be accessible to all learners; barriers that are based on social class, gender, geographical location, pregnancy status, physical and mental disabilities, and other markers of difference must be removed and replaced by equal opportunity for all children.

The radical approach pursued in this policy is based on the following assumptions:

- o *Upholding the worth and value of children:* Every child is valued and welcome in the education system of Sierra Leone, which recognises diversity as a strength and an asset.
- o *Holding all entities (government, ministries, schools, teachers, communities, etc.) accountable*: Inclusion is the responsibility of every school, every teacher, and every community leader.
- o *The right to inclusive education*: All children have the right to equal access, quality learning opportunities and outcomes in primary and secondary school education. This also means

that girls, children with disabilities, those living in poverty or in rural remote areas, and other disadvantages have the right to full and equal participation in general education.

- o *The right to non-discrimination:* No person or policy may discriminate against a learner; learners should be protected from all forms of discrimination.
- o *The right to dignity:* All learners must have their dignity respected; the right to meaningful choices is at the heart of having one's dignity protected.
- o *The right to learn free from all forms of violence*: All learners have the right to learn without fear of any form of violence, whether this be physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, psychological, recognising that adolescent girls are acutely vulnerable to multiple forms and types of violence.
- o *The right to privacy:* All learners have the right to keep confidential their health status, including but not limited to their pregnancy status.

1.10 POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The policy is based on:

- o the assessment of evidence gathered during the situational analysis exercise noting the current state of educational marginalisation of certain groups in Sierra Leone.
- o extensive national consultations before and during the development of the policy.
- o best practices in inclusive education policy.
- o Sierra Leone's national, international, Regional, and sub-Regional legal obligations.

In addition, this Policy is informed by, and incorporates the findings, recommendations and policy recommendations from the *2017 Proposed Policy and Actions for the Promotion of Inclusive Education*. This work focused on inclusion for children with disabilities and was finalised in 2020. In drawing up the policy, extensive consultations were held with a working group of key stakeholders in the sector who provided critical input and feedback throughout the process**.** Data and evidence were collected through a series of interviews and focus group sessions with these relevant stakeholders, including service providers. School documents were examined, and observation visits made to schools in four regions of the country.[41] The policy was drafted under the leadership of the Ministry for Basic and Senior Secondary Education with important development partners working in Sierra Leone, namely: Sightsavers, Helen Keller International, Handicap International (Humanity & Inclusion), Leonard Cheshire Disability International, and the Department of Special Education at the University of Makeni. Together, they made up the Education for Children with Disabilities Network (ECDN) and developed comprehensive proposals on inclusive education, in line with international best practice. These proposals were informed

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[41] https://www.inclusive-education-in-action.org/case-study/developing-policy-inclusive-education-sierra-leone

by the findings of research commissioned by ECDN and conducted by the University of Northampton, UK.

An extensive and inclusive consultation process took place that included key stakeholders across the country. In late 2019, The MBSSE established a broad-based Task Force on Sexual and Reproductive Health to advise the Minister and the government on issues relating to the radical inclusion of women and girls into Sierra Leone's national development. The 27-member taskforce was charged with the responsibility to commission and undertake relevant research, develop whitepapers and draft related policy documents. The responsibility also involved being a platform to engage civil society and the community on government policies affecting the right to access education by all girls irrespective of ability, ethnicity, and socioeconomic and other circumstances. A sub-group of the task force, including Purposeful, FCDO, Irish Aid, LAWYERS, Campaign for Good Governance, Femme Collective, UNFPA, UNICEF, Teaching Service Commission, Inter-Religious Council and Marie Stopes was mandated to focus on "policy review and development on pregnant girls' access to and rights in schools". The sub-group led an extensive consultation that included children, especially adolescent girls affected by the ban on school attendance and examinations, children with disabilities and students in rural areas. They then produced a draft of the Radical Inclusion in Education Policy focused exclusively on guaranteeing the schooling rights of pregnant and parent learners to access education.

The two policies on inclusive education for children with disabilities and on radical inclusion of pregnant girls and parent learners have been consolidated to produce this one comprehensive policy. This policy has therefore been informed by insights from dialogue with constituencies across Sierra Leone - including families, communities, teachers and pupils - that have been finding ways to push back against destructive norms and policies and to imagine ways for pregnant and parent pupils to continue to learn, grow and prosper, and for children with disabilities, those from poor backgrounds, and those living in rural remote communities to enjoy the same educational facilities as their well-off, able-bodied, urban-dwelling counterparts.

Understanding how policies (or the lack of them) have impacted on practices (using the example of pregnant girls) has helped inform the policy development process. Strong Sierra Leonean traditions and support related to community participation and involvement have been an important consideration when developing this policy.

While there is not a specific international case study that has been the prototype for the development of this policy on radical inclusion, there has been a broad engagement and understanding about what has made a difference to impactful policies and practices in Africa in relationship to pregnant girls and parent learners. Countries such as Benin, Lesotho, Nigeria, DRC,

Mauritania, and South Sudan have policies or strategies that provide 'continuation', allowing a pregnant girl to remain in school with no prescription for a mandatory absence after giving birth. Fifteen African countries have conditional re-entry policies that require pregnant girls and young mothers to drop out of school but provide avenues to return subject to the fulfilment of certain conditions. Twenty-four African countries lack a re-entry policy or law to protect pregnant girls' right to education. This often leads to irregular enforcement of compulsory education at the school level, where school officials can decide what happens with a pregnant girl's education.

Some governments give examples of best practice in inclusion including pregnant girls and parent learners by tackling the barriers that they face in returning to school, engaging in learning and factors contributing to dropping out of school. These include:
- Removing primary and secondary school fees to ensure all students can access school equally and targeting financial support for girls at risk of dropping out through girls' education strategies (Rwanda).
- Providing social and financial support for adolescent mothers (South Africa).
- Providing special accommodations for young mothers at school, for example, time for breast-feeding (Cape Verde, Senegal).
- Providing girls with a choice of access to morning or evening shifts (Zambia).
- Establishing early childhood centres close to schools (Gabon).
- Providing school-based counselling services for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers (Malawi).
- Facilitating access to sexual and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexuality education at school and in the community (Ivory Coast), access to a range of contraceptive methods and safe, legal abortion (South Africa)[42]

All countries are unique and have their own macro and micro realities that are different from Sierra Leone, but there has been value in engaging with best practices in Africa (as distinct from elsewhere) as there are common 'threads' with many African countries relating to the impact of a colonial history, great disparity of wealth, war, the vulnerabilities related to dependency on fluctuating markets on limited cash crops or mineral products, socio-cultural norms, and so on.

There has also been active engagement and partnerships with other global contexts and academic institutions and guiding reflections on frameworks and principles on international best practices for inclusion (see details in International Policy Context and various Charters listed in 1.6.1).

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[42] https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/06/14/leave-no-girl-behind-africa/discrimination-education-against-pregnant-girls-and-adolescent-mothers, June 14, 2018, p 5, 19-22.

The Sierra Leone National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools is ambitious, but it creates a realistic and visionary benchmark, seeking to strike a balance between the needs of marginalised groups and the realities of the education system in Sierra Leone.

1.11 POLICY FINANCING

Financing of this policy will be primarily covered as part of the signature Free Quality School Education program of the government and the budgetary allocations of MBSSE and the related government institutions. The policy will be covered in the government's core recurrent and capital funding for education and especially as part of the FQSE, which is a top government priority.

Education and public sector financing of education, which is an investment in human capital, is at the heart of the Government's Medium-Term National Development Plan (NDP) 2019–2023. There is significant variation in students' access to education by gender, socioeconomic status, ability/disability, and location. The Government has made its commitment to addressing these challenges explicitly through its adoption and implementation of its flagship FQSE Program. In efforts to fulfil this commitment, the government doubled its annual education budget from 11% (2017-2018) to now 22% (2021). Along with the government's budget, various development partners (DPs) have been engaged in supporting the education sector in Sierra Leone. This policy will be financed through the Free Education Project, an IDA US$50 million grant and US$15.97 million equivalent from FCDO, Irish Aid, and the EC through a World Bank-administered Sierra Leone Education Multi-Donor Trust Fund, focusing on addressing education sector challenges and transforming the education system over the long term.

Specifically, the first component of the project funds: Policy, Governance, Accountability, and System Administration with aims to strengthen the education system in areas of policy, governance, accountability, and administration. A subcomponent of this will address Gender Equality and Inclusive Education to support evidence-based education sector planning and rationalization. Examples include the development and implementation of this radical inclusion policy to support the Government's commitment toward achieving a more inclusive approach to education, increasing access to education, and improving the learning environment for all children.

SECTION 2: POLICY STATEMENTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO POLICY STATEMENTS

The goal of this Radical Inclusion Policy is to foreground, emphasise and realise the constitutional right of all children in Sierra Leone to equal access and to a quality basic education. This will

enable them to contribute to the national and global economy, participate in public life, and fulfil their potential. In practice, this goal means actively enabling those children from marginalised and excluded groups to enter and remain in school. It means adapting the education system to better meet their learning needs - ensuring school is a place of dignity, safety, and respect for all - while systematically reducing cultural, policy and practical barriers to education. A critical point about enhancing or enabling equity across the board is based on available resourcing and financing. The Government of Sierra Leone and MBSSE will provide resources and interventions informed by evidence of need across the country. This means for example, chiefdoms that are less food sufficient and poorer will benefit from School Feeding initially. The Ministry is also aware of the differences in challenges between the urban and rural areas and will develop other standalone policy frameworks like the "Village School Policy." Finally, it means developing the institutional structures, staff and tools necessary to support radical inclusion.

T*he goal of this policy will be achieved through the following four sub-objectives:*
- o   *Create inclusive learning environments.*
- o   *Target support to vulnerable learners.*
- o   *Engage families and communities.*
- o   *Enable policy environment and effective implementation.*

The policy statements set out below and the proposed actions/actors for implementing them are guided by these four sub-objectives.

2.2   POLICY STATEMENT 1: CREATE INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

2.2.1 *Schools will provide safe, inclusive, dignified, and accessible learning environments which meet the diverse needs and life circumstances of all children. Schools must embrace inclusive education, building school cultures where diversity is valued and supported*. This means:
- o   actively identifying and removing barriers to inclusion.
- o   actively promoting inclusivity in schools, for example, by having inclusion champions and support groups for marginalised groups in the school.
- o   visibly tackling misconduct and abuse of marginalized students.
- o   staffing, training, and supporting teachers with a view to promoting professional support to children and fellow teachers regarding the kind of school culture and practices that promote inclusion.

2.2.2   Make adaptations to school environments and teaching practices. This means, as far as possible, ensuring that schools are accessible in terms of their buildings, facilities, transportations to schools, as well as information and communications; provide learners with dignity including

but not limited to hygiene facilities; and provide learners with specialized and/or adapted learning materials that they need, individual support and reasonable accommodations.

2.2.3 Schools will have well-trained, proactive teachers who understand inclusive approaches to education, and can support pregnant girls, parent learners, students with disabilities, learners in rural remote areas, and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. This requires:

- o Pre- and in-service teacher training in radical inclusion in education.
- o Working hard to increase qualified teachers, particularly in underserved areas.
- o Ensuring that inclusion is understood and valued throughout the education system.
- o Integrating radical inclusion approaches in the Teacher Learning Circle to 'mainstream' radical inclusion as part of all teachers' continual professional development.

2.2.4 Institute and enforce mandatory reporting of offences. Inclusive education requires children to feel and be safe in school. This, in turn, depends on abuse being reported and dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.

2.2.5 In line with the requirements for the delivery of FQSE, a range of approaches will be deployed to improve access to school for learners in rural/underserved areas including:

- o Teaching Service Commission (TSC)'s teacher deployment approaches that aim to provide an incentivization scheme that will attract the deployment of teachers to remote areas, including in rural and underserved areas.
- o Different transportation alternatives provided in underserved areas to enable more learners to access schools.

2.2.6 Increase awareness and promote FQSE's commitment to eliminate financial barriers to school attendance.

- o Strengthening and empowering non-formal schemes for hard-to-reach areas; increase efforts to plan the expansion so that quality would not suffer.
- o Reducing gender disadvantage among poor children
- o Solicit support from strong partnership of development and local actors to supplement provision of FQSE, led firmly from the front by a highly committed Sierra Leone Government leadership.

2.3   POLICY STATEMENT 2: TARGET SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS

All children will be provided with holistic support, removing barriers that in anyway impact on children's learning, recognising the specific health, social and physiological needs of marginalised and vulnerable groups to access, quality learning and the ability to stay in school. Vulnerable and marginalised groups include pregnant or parent learners, children with a disability, those living in remote underserved areas, poverty, and/or a range of factors that contribute to marginalisation and exclusion.

2.3.1 Supporting individual needs:

Responding to the needs of individual learners is the foundation to inclusive education and requires recognition of the wide range of services that help children to stay in school. Adequate support depends on screening, early identification of needs and targeted interventions. This requires:

- o screening and assessment of children's functional abilities.
- o developing a range of teaching practices (including teaching in mother tongue particularly in younger grades) and nurturing a culture of care; building communities of learners and teachers who practice inclusion; involving children's varying vulnerabilities into their school experience so they can be understood; and helping build resilience and a sense of total inclusion.
- o development of individual learning plans for children with mental disabilities, with the involvement of parents and specialists where possible.
- o access to assistive technologies and referral to supportive services. This requires schools to understand the availability of such services in their locality.
- o engaging communities to value and emphasise girls' education as equally as boys' education.
- o creating leadership programs to boost girls' confidence and to empower girls.
- o getting the Government to pursue a national commitment to girls' education (e.g., passing laws against child marriage, and child labour that interferes with children's education).
- o allowing pregnant girls to return to school after giving birth and supporting them to stay in schools.
- o recruiting and training women teachers who will serve as role models for girls.
- o providing bridge programs that prepare pregnant girls, lactating adolescent mothers, and out of school children to re-enter formal schooling.
- o working with development partners to create programs that build skills and opportunities for young people who are disadvantaged due to poverty, gender, disability or ethnicity.
- o investing in early childhood intervention to reduce inequalities in educational outcomes and improving attainment among poor and marginalised groups.

2.3.2 Non-teaching staff and classroom assistants will be deployed to assist with the implementation of radical inclusion. Teachers and learners can benefit from assistants in inclusive classrooms. Given the range of vulnerabilities in a classroom, support could be engaged in varying languages, listening, follow up with children who are evidencing withdrawal, emotional stress, lack of involvement in their learning, shame and so on. It is also about building a community of care and involvement that focuses on a sense of belonging and learning community. Working with children with disabilities will involve helping to support individualised learning and assisting with access to the school building and facilities. There is a strong community and volunteer

tradition in Sierra Leone. While recognising that, given the varied livelihood needs and demands, not all parents can be involved, it is an opportunity to build on the tradition of parental volunteering schemes by recruiting and training those volunteer parents and community members who are available and willing. These are important ways of utilising as many appropriate resources in engaging a broad community of practitioners in the development a of vibrant radically inclusive schooling experience.

2.3.3 Specific provision for pregnant or parent learners. Radical inclusion in education explicitly includes children who are or have been pregnant, and those who are already parents. This requires that:

- o no student, teacher, or school principal should act as a barrier to a girl's retention in school during pregnancy or return to school after delivery or miscarriage.
- o girls who become pregnant have a right to remain in school during pregnancy, and to return to school after delivery or miscarriage.
- o girls have a right to attend medical appointments during pregnancy.
- o girls have a right of protected absence from school for 1 year after giving birth or miscarrying.
- o parent learners and girls who have miscarried have a presumptive right to enroll at a new school of their choosing.
- o girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, have the right to sit all examinations, including public examinations.
- o girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, are supported by a named support person.
- o girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, are supported to make up for lost lessons.

2.3.4 Vulnerable learners/children shall be supported. Often, children who are marginalised are also the most at risk for abuse at school and at home. This must be eliminated from the school setting. Children's confidentiality must be respected, and they must be offered support. They should be provided with a named trusted adult and signposted to available psychosocial and health services through established guidance counselors for example.

- o provide on-going support to schools with a toolkit explaining exactly what, how and when to act when encountering any form of abuse or harassment.
- o provide contact details of support personnel per district.
- o support teachers and other school staff to provide basic counselling, mentorship and information services, as well as onward referrals where possible and appropriate.
- o respect abuse-survivor's confidentiality and share information only with persons that the survivor feels comfortable with. Staff will need training and be able to differentiate between what is life threatening and would therefore have to be reported (always being transparent with the survivor about the need to report).

2.3.5 Vulnerable learners/children shall be supported including:
- o FQSE tuition waiver in government and government-assisted schools
- o provide a safe haven for school children, especially girls to thrive within the schooling system.
- o UPSHIFT – a programme supported by UNICEF, DSTI and ST Foundation aims at supporting out-of-school girls to enroll into formal schooling and equip them with socio-economic skills.
- o provision of Government Grant to girls pursuing Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics in higher and technical institutions
- o the formular-based MBSSE's School Subsidy and other grant guidelines could be used as an avenue to target girls' needs.
- o provision of welfare kits for girls, children with disabilities, those who are economically poor or from remote areas.

2.4 POLICY STATEMENT 3: ENGAGE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Schools throughout Sierra Leone must be accessible to, and inclusive of, all children - especially those individuals, families and communities that have typically been marginalised or excluded. In order to accomplish this, there is a need to meaningfully engage families and communities to implement this policy.

2.4.1 Families and community will be meaningfully engaged in implementing this policy, and in identifying marginalised children and enrolling them in school.

2.4.2 Tackling stigma and challenging norms: championing inclusivity and challenging norms are important in encouraging marginalised children to enroll and stay in school. Schools must advocate for inclusive education in their communities, and challenge the pervasive norms, narratives and behaviours that have prevented marginalised groups from learning. This should be done via:
- o appropriate involvement and engagement of children and adolescents to maximise their own learning and prompting attitudinal change in the classrooms.
- o parent volunteers acting as community champions.
- o community engagement opportunities.
- o school Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors (BoGs): as the SMCs and BoGs are the formal bridge between schools and communities, these committees will play a role in dealing with stigma and negative perceptions against marginalised children.
- o different community-based structures such as the Community Child Welfare Committees.

2.4.3 Mapping the local community also plays an important role in understanding the local population and its engagement with the school, in order to target community engagement more effectively.

2.4.4 Advocate for radical inclusion across society: Radical inclusion in education represents a considerable cultural shift for Sierra Leone. Therefore, its principles must be communicated

clearly, consistently, and through multiple channels for it to become embedded in the community, for example through faith-based leaders, parents, guardians and wider society.

2.5   POLICY STATEMENT 4: AN ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

2.5.1   Strong national leadership will guide the necessary structures, strategies and related policies that will be put in place to ensure this Policy on Radical Inclusion is enacted and its effectiveness is measured.

2.5.2   Structures, plans and schemes will be put in place to support radical inclusion in schools, among teachers and other education professionals, and within communities.

2.5.3 As part of FQSE, government and civil society will continue to engage communities and different constituencies to ensure local ownership. Local government and school authorities will act as champions of the policy

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

3.1   OVERVIEW OF IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The management and coordination of the implementation framework will primarily be led by the government through MBSSE, local government officials, civil society and school authorities. It will start centrally but, for effective implementation, will need to be institutionalised at all levels. The policy will be central to practices across the structures and the different levels of MBSSE.

Primary responsibility for this policy lies with MBSSE, working in concert and partnership with other relevant actors within government. Key government stakeholders will be the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Teaching Service Commission and Ministry of Finance to engage a multipronged approach to effective implementation.

The Directorate of Policy and Planning, reporting to the Chief Education Officer (CEO) is responsible for the delivery of this policy. As stated, effective delivery will involve collaboration with other directorates within the ministry, other ministries, stakeholders, partners, and communities. Guidelines and Standards of Operations (SOP) will be developed to ensure effective implementation and monitoring.

The implementation of the Policy on Radical Inclusion is linked and aligned to the National Development Framework in the following way:

- o   Strategic objectives:

- ✔ Significantly improve and increase access to quality basic and senior secondary education in both formal and non-formal settings, providing modern, free basic and secondary education services that are safe, inclusive, equitable, corruption free, and relevant to varying needs in order to impact productive economic activities.
  - o Key targets by 2023:
    - ✔ Implement free quality basic and secondary school education for all children in Sierra Leone.
    - ✔ Increase access, equity, and completion rates at all levels of schooling (formal and non-formal) above the 2018 rates and in particular for girls in senior secondary school.
    - ✔ Improve the basic and senior secondary learning environment at all levels above the 2018 rates.
    - ✔ Review and strengthen educational systems and governance architecture for improved quality education.

Ultimately, the success of any central policy depends on what happens at the school and in classrooms. The activities listed below can only happen under effective school management and leadership from the Board, Management Committees, Principals and Head Teachers. These functionaries will be supported and equipped to support the implementation and delivery of policy goals contained within this document.

The policy provides for a five-year review to reflect on the policy and strengthen it where necessary. This policy is fundamentally critical to justice, equity, inclusion, and Sierra Leone's human capital growth and development and Sierra Leone's economic, social, and broad development.

3.2 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY STATEMENT 1: CREATE INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

3.2.1: Building a culture of inclusion: Schools must embrace and strengthen inclusive education, building school cultures where diversity is valued and supported.

Implementing Actors and Actions:

A) The MBSSE will[43]:

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[43] **Learnings from other countries/contexts for information:** Targeted measures only tend to be effective if there is appropriate data to inform the approach. If targeted measures were to be introduced (for school building/approvals or teacher deployment/incentives), it would be important to develop a detailed classification of schools based on infrastructure, catchment area etc. (e.g. from urban, to semi-urban, rural, remote rural and extremely remote rural). If targeted measures were to be introduced based on student need (e.g. distance from school, or socio-economic status) reliable data would be needed and the bureaucratic implications of this need to be considered.

- o Define the desired school catchment areas in line with the stated intention of the School Infrastructure Planning policy, that in both urban and rural areas, children should be no further than one hours travel from their home.
- o Through the TSC's development of teacher related policies, establish standards for teacher: pupil ratios and manage teacher deployment with a focus on addressing needs in rural and underserved areas.
- o Develop a strategy for school building/development that is based on school catchment area targets and informed by data on distance travelled to schools, school-age population, and teacher: pupil ratios as proposed by the draft outline for the school infrastructure policy.
- o Provide transportation where possible for pupils – for example the provision of buses in district head quarter towns as currently done by the Local Councils under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development

B) *MBSSE will*:
- o Increase the number of classrooms and schools in rural remote areas of the country to increase access for children living in those areas. These classrooms and schools must be safe and have adequate learning facilities.
- o Provide adequate teaching and learning materials to children living in those areas
- o Enforce a quick and efficient approval process for government and government assisted school to receive financial assistance which will considerably reduce the costs of schooling on low-income families.
- o Ensure that all children in government and government assisted schools will enjoy the benefits of FQSE.
- o Ensure that schools desist from imposing additional school expenditures.
- o Ensure that all schools have WASH facilities that cater to the separate needs of boys and girls.
- o Ensure that girls experiencing their menstrual cycle are provided with sanitary towels on a quarterly basis
- o Develop a *Toolkit for Enabling Inclusive Learning [TEIL]*. This will include existing tools to guide:
  - ✔ Whole school accessibility assessments: These assessments will allow schools to identify and analyse impediments and/or challenges to inclusion within their school, and set out plans to overcome them, including clear targets, indicators, measures and outcomes. This will include ensuring that no policies or practices, including verbal and non-codified practices, act as a barrier to inclusion.

✔ Classroom accessibility assessments: These self-reflective analyses will help teachers to gauge how inclusive their lessons and classrooms are.

The TEIL will also include guidance and training on the role of Champions for the beneficiaries of this policy: children with disability; girls including pregnant girls and parent learners; children from poor/low-income backgrounds; and children living in remote rural communities.

C) *Schools will:*

o Comply with provisions under the Persons with Disabilities Act 2011 and the Education Act 2004 which give children in Sierra Leone the right to attend mainstream school and access teaching that meets their needs.

o Assess their inclusivity mechanisms every year, using the MBSSE TEIL, and put improvement plans in place.

o Have clear policies around malpractice, misconduct and abuse, in addition to the 2019 Code of Conduct for Teachers and Other Personnel in Sierra Leone. These must be actively enforced, including:

✔ A zero-tolerance approach to behaviour that stigmatizes, belittles or excludes marginalised groups.

✔ Clear mechanisms for reporting misconduct or abuse, which must be well advertised to students.

✔ A process for dealing with reports of misconduct or abuse, which must be clearly communicated to teachers and learners.

✔ Clarity on the consequences of misconduct or abuse, including that any sexual abuse and exploitation by teachers is an offence[44] which will be reported[45] to the police, and which constitute grounds for immediate dismissal. Bribery, corruption, and soliciting gifts will also constitute grounds for teacher dismissal.

✔ Clear sanctions for students found to be harassing other learners, particularly males harassing female learners, the harassment of children with disabilities and any instances involving various forms of sexual harassment.

o Schools will also appoint a minimum of one (ideally two) teacher as champions of inclusion. These champions will support and advocate for inclusivity in the school, making the case for inclusion, identifying poor practice when they see it, and guiding others in strategies and adaptations. Guidance on the role will be included in the TEIL.

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[44] The updated Sexual Offences Act 2020 makes it an offence for a person in a position of trust or authority, including a teacher, to have sexual contact with a child. The maximum punishment is 15 years imprisonment.

[45] As required by Section 38 of the Child Rights Act 2007: "Any service provider, parent and community member shall report sexual and other forms of abuse to family support units of the Sierra Leone Police".

- Appoint two teachers with at least one female teacher as a girls' champion. They will offer advice to girls on issues affecting them, including sexual harassment and abuse. They will receive counselling training so they can fulfill the role effectively. The role should be well publicised throughout the school. The Girls' Champion will also support and advocate for gender inclusivity. They will have a mandate to mitigate abuse and exploitation throughout the school, and to support a girl-friendly learning environment. Guidance on the role will be included in the TEIL *and* plans for providing counselling training will follow*.*

D) Teachers will

- Conduct a brief annual assessment, looking at how they can make their classrooms and the learning environment more accessible, following guidance in the TEIL.
- Meet their responsibility for creating a positive learning environment for all children, for treating all learners as valued members of the school, and for modelling inclusive attitudes and behaviours. In particular, they must:
  - ✔ Challenge negative gender stereotypes and language. Sanctions for harassment in relationship to sex or gender must be rigorously enforced.
  - ✔ Use appropriate language towards the learners targeted by this policy and direct students to do the same. They must challenge children found to be bullying, excluding or provoking children with disabilities, and must take an active role in combating misconceptions about these groups.
  - ✔ Create an inclusive environment in relationship to language, examples, case studies and assumptions regarding diverse languages and socio-economic status.

3.2.2 Make adaptations to the physical environment of schools. This includes providing ramps, making toilets more easily usable by pupils with disabilities, and making teachers more aware of the needs of students with dis- abilities in inclusive classrooms.

Implementing Actors and Actions

A) *MBSSE will*:

- Support a review of the Persons with Disability Act 2011, this will include:
  - ✔ progress against Section 14, which provides for structural adaptations to educational institutions so that they are easily accessible to children with disabilities; and
  - ✔ progress against Section 16, which requires schools to endeavor to introduce sign language and braille, as far as possible, within lessons.

  This review will be conducted and reported on within 3 months, and will include an action plan on the progress that needs to be made.

- o Review the accessibility of school buildings in Sierra Leone and develop a plan for bringing all schools buildings up to a national standard within a given time frame. This will include looking at financing and allocation of resources. A school catchment area and school development plan to be developed and kept updated.
- o Assess how it can viably ensure provision of specialised learning materials for children with disabilities.

B) *Schools will*:

Anticipate that there will be a longer term and more ambitious agenda regarding structures and systems, but in the interim there will need to be a minimum of reasonable adjustments for children with disabilities and special learning needs. For example, if a child uses a wheelchair, a school would be required to move that child's class to an accessible classroom, if one existed, but would not be required to build a new classroom if one did not. Likewise, if a pupil has a visual impairment, a teacher must allow them to sit at the front of the class or come up to the blackboard, if this helps them, but is not required to purchase glasses if none are available.

- o Provide separate toilets for boys and girls and outside play areas that are accessible to all children and free of bullying.
- o Ensuring a culture of continuous professional development and develop communities of practice that focus on nurturing an inclusive culture.

3.2.3 Schools will have well-trained, proactive teachers who understand inclusive approaches to education, and can support pregnant girls, parent learners, students with disabilities, learners in rural remote areas, and learners from low socio-economic backgrounds. This requires:
- o Training pre- and in-service teachers in radical inclusion in education
- o Working harder to increase qualified teachers, particularly in underserved areas
- o ensuring that inclusion is understood and valued throughout the education system.
- o integrating radical inclusion approaches into Teacher Learning Circles so that radical inclusion is a part of the continuous teacher professional development with a focus on transforming the learning environment.

Ministry of Technical and Higher Education and the Teaching Service Commissions (TSC) will:
- o Provide compulsory pre- and in-service training in diversity and inclusion for all teachers. A specific module on this topic will be developed and fully integrated into the National Teacher Training curriculum as a matter of priority. This curriculum will include, but not be limited to: human diversity and development including disability; gender sensitivity; human rights; identifying children's functional abilities; inclusive learning and varied teaching methods; inclusive

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approaches to assessment; the use of assessments and individualised learning plans; and the effective management of teaching resources for students with differing abilities. A programme of continuing professional development on inclusion will be developed, including issues such as effective classroom management.

o Provide pre- and in-service baseline training and refresher training at least once a year, in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) *in supporting and counselling learners who are or have been pregnant, and learner-parents* for at least two teacher-counsellors per school. Further, a specific training module on supporting pupils who are or have been pregnant and parent learners will be developed and fully integrated into the National Teacher Training curriculum as a matter of priority. In doing this, MBSSE will liaise with the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education.

o Coordinate baseline training and refresher training at least once a year for staff at every level of the education system, including District Education Officers, to ensure inclusivity is understood, prioritised and valued throughout the system.

o The Teaching Service Commission will explore viable ways to increase the number of trained and qualified teachers in rural areas, including attractive incentives, as well as the number of female teachers, teachers with disabilities, and teachers from other marginalised groups. This will build on the work the Government of Sierra Leone is already doing to recruit additional qualified teachers.[46]

o Deploy EdTech to support teacher training and mentoring in remote areas and explore blended learning approaches in underserved areas

o The Ministry of Technical and Higher Education will explore the viability and effectiveness of making scholarships available to support experienced teachers who wish to become inclusion specialists, and who commit to taking responsibility in this area for three years. These experts could then provide training and advice at regional and district levels and disseminate learning within schools.

3.2.4 Institute and enforce mandatory reporting of offences. Inclusive education requires children to feel and be safe in school. This, in turn, depends on abuse being reported and dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.
Implementing Actors and Actions
   A) *MBSSE will*:

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[46] Medium-term National Development Plan 2019-2023; ESP 2018-2020.

- o Adapt, for all basic and senior secondary education levels, the Reducing Violence in Schools Guide (MBSSE), which is currently introduced in all government secondary schools and rolled out nationally.
- o Provide detailed guidance on managing, safeguarding, and mandatory reporting in implementation guidelines.

B) Schools must:

- o Put in place robust safety protocols with clear reporting guidelines and redress mechanisms to prevent instances of harassment, abuse and/or violence in any form.
- o Ensure teachers and students are educated on improper behaviours and cultivate a culture of respect and accountability.
- o Refer any case of abuse to the local Family Support Unit as per standard Ministry protocol. It is not the schools' responsibility to investigate allegations or suspicions of abuse or to try to mediate between survivors and abusers.

Use the Teachers Code of Conduct as a basis for managing teacher non-compliance resulting in proportionate disciplinary action.

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY STATEMENT 2: TARGET SUPPORT FOR VULNERABLE LEARNERS

3.3.1 Supporting individual needs:

Responding to the needs of individual learners is at the heart of inclusive education and requires recognition of a wide range of services that help children to stay in school and learn. Adequate support depends on screening, early identification of needs and targeted interventions for learners with disabilities, for example. This requires:

- o screening and assessment of children's functional abilities.
- o development of individual learning plans for children with mental disabilities, with the involvement of parents and specialists where possible.
- o access to assistive technologies and referral to supportive services. This requires schools to understand the availability of such services in their locality.
- o facilitate the learning of Braille, alternative script, augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication and orientation and mobility skills, and facilitating peer support and mentoring;
  - o Facilitating the learning of sign language and the promotion of the linguistic identity of the deaf community
  - o Ensuring that the education of persons, and in particular children, who are blind, deaf or deafblind, is delivered in the most appropriate languages and modes and

means of communication for the individual, and in environments which maximize academic and social development.[47]

Implementing Actions and Actors:

A) *MBSSE will:*
- o Focus on whole school implementation with the teachers and disability personnel in a role of inclusion champions. Radical inclusion intentionally focuses on those structures, actions, policies, stances, attitudes, thinking, practices, or frameworks that in any way exclude any child.
- o As part of the aforementioned review of the Persons with Disability Act 2011, assess progress at least once a year, against Section 18 which provides that any child visiting a health service is screened for disability. This will involve discretion with specific emerging cases.
- o Provide information and guidance on identifying a child's functional ability, and developing individualised learning plans in the TEIL (in consultation and coordination with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation)
- o Ensure that guidance on identifying a child's functional ability, and individualised learning plans is part of teacher training (partnership and coordination with MTHE and other relevant ministries).
- o Provide guidance in the TEIL to schools on undertaking a mapping exercise to gather information on relevant health and social services, including for maternal and reproductive health, that can be accessed in the immediate community and further afield.
- o Oversee a review of assistive technology once a year with appropriate follow ups. This will include, examining different options for ensuring wider services, assistive technologies, and available resources, including service options such as itinerant teams; and planning how aids that facilitate learning and access to communication are in place and utilised effectively.
- o Professional resources which are often concentrated in special needs school will be assessed and made available to other schools.

B) *Schools will:*
- o Take appropriate measures to employ teachers, including teachers with disabilities, who are qualified in sign language and/or Braille, and to train professionals and staff who work at all levels of education.
- o Be empowered (in partnership with the relevant ministries and service providers) to screen for different types of disability/differently abled/specially gifted children as part of the school enrolment process. This will be a requirement of

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[47] https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-24-education.html

enrolment with follow ups once a year. Early screening will facilitate the consciousness and implementation of the radical affirmative action.

- o Assist with the facilitation of (with the specialised ministries to do more in-depth assessments) a fuller assessment, where disabilities are suspected. This would need to be done within the first month of a child enrolling in school. Parents will be involved in all stages of the assessment process. Assessment reports will be issued in non-technical language and will provide clearly written advice to teachers and other professionals working in schools to enable them to tailor the child's learning plans. This is an aspiration and not mandatory.

- o Undertake a mapping exercise to gather information on relevant health and social services, including maternal and reproductive health, that can be accessed in the immediate community and further afield. Schools should use the mapping template included in the TEIL.

- o Make medical referrals, where required, and assist children and their parents to access services and providers of assistive technology and other resources, where these are available and would benefit the learner. Learners may benefit from a wide range of services and resources. This will mean working with MOHS to ensure these referrals result in children receiving necessary follow-up support free of charge. Working with the health ministry will involve ensuring that health staff provide clear, relevant advice for parents and teachers about how to support these children so that they are able to benefit from the assessments. Where appropriate and feasible, learners with disabilities may benefit from health support such as speech and language therapists and assistive technologies, such as glasses. Vulnerable learners may require resources to enable school attendance, such as sanitary towels, transportation, and priority in school feeding programmes.

- o Continually normalise on-going norms, practices, language, expectations, and ways of being that include and give access to all children irrespective of different vulnerabilities and/or disability. This is about developing an overall culture of radical inclusion, as well as events and acknowledgements that honour and celebrate the diversity and varying 'capitals' that exist in the school. This will include ensuring that children with disabilities are able to participate in tests and assessments.

C) *Teachers will:*

- o When a child with a known disability enrolls at school, or a child enrolled in school is assessed as having a disability:
   - ✔ meet with the child's parents to ensure they have information about the child's individual needs and how best to support them.

✔ where possible or relevant, liaise with disability professionals who have worked with a particular child and/or identified his or her disability and request information on the child's needs. The focus is on developing a partnership of the teacher and the disability professional as inclusion champions.

✔ write a brief, simple and user-friendly individualised learning plan, setting out the child's needs, the adaptations and support to be provided, and safeguarding practices. This should follow the guidance for doing so, set out in the TEIL.

3.3.2 Non-teaching staff and classroom assistants will be deployed to assist with implementation of radical inclusion. Teachers and learners can benefit from assistants in inclusive classrooms. They can help to support individualised learning and assist children with disabilities to access the school building and facilities. While acknowledging that this will be an additional support and not necessarily sustainable or possible in all schools, building on the strong community volunteer culture and tradition in Sierra Leone is a valuable available resource. Volunteer parents can act as assistants, coordinated through parental volunteering schemes. This will involve making a provision for baseline training, particularly in relationship to child safeguarding issues, as well as inclusion briefing.

Implementing Actors and Actions

A) *MBSSE will:*
  o Provide guidance on establishing parental volunteering schemes and training participants, in the TEIL.
  o Explore the viability of implementing a new scheme for the effective training and deployment of non-teaching staff (this could include a variety of community and/or service providers such as social and health workers, expats with particular skills and so on, with a focus on building supportive partnerships) to support teachers in delivering appropriate learning for children with disabilities. Such individuals would work directly under the management of head teachers who may utilise these colleagues in a variety of ways that ensure that teachers feel adequately supported to include learners with diverse needs in their classrooms.

B) *Schools will:*
  o Aim to have classroom assistants throughout the school, particularly in classes that include a child with a disability.
  o Work with parents to develop a parental volunteering scheme, following guidance in the TEIL, CTA and PTA. However, no parent is obliged or expected to volunteer, and they must not be pressured into doing so.

3.3.3 Specific provision for pregnant or parent learners. Radical inclusion in education explicitly includes children who are or have been pregnant, and those who are already parents. This requires that:

- o No student, teacher, or school principal should act as a barrier to a girl's retention in school during pregnancy or return to school after delivery or miscarriage.
- o Girls who become pregnant have a right to remain in school during pregnancy, and to return to school after delivery or miscarriage.
- o Girls have a right to attend medical appointments during pregnancy.
- o Girls have a right of protected absence from school for 1 year after giving birth or miscarrying.
- o Parent learners and girls who have miscarried have a presumptive right to enroll at a new school of their choosing.
- o Girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, have the right to sit all examinations, including public examinations.
- o Girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, are supported by a named support person.
- o Girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, are supported to make up for lost lessons.

Implementing Actors and Actions

- A) *MBSSE will:*
    - o Develop a Toolkit for Supporting Pregnant and Parent Learners for supporting pupils who are or have been pregnant, and parent learners, to be utilized by: schools; teacher-counsellors; and the pregnant or parent learner's named support person. The toolkit shall contain information on a range of topics, including health related information appropriate to each trimester of the pregnancy and a framework for monthly one-on-one sessions with the support worker (See below). This Toolkit will act as a critical and trusted source of knowledge through the duration of the learners' time at the school.
- B) *Schools must:*
    - o Allow a girl who falls pregnant while enrolled in school to remain in school, in her current class, for as long as she chooses before giving birth, and to return to school after delivery or loss of the child.
    - o Permit pregnant learners to take all reasonable leave to attend medical appointments during the pregnancy. The student shall not be punished, excluded or expelled from school on the grounds of absence or any factor that can reasonably be related to pregnancy.
    - o Impose a zero-tolerance policy against demeaning behaviour or bullying of a pregnant student by staff or students.

- Prioritise pregnant and lactating learners in any school-feeding programs.
- Respect the right of all parent learners (encouraging the male to take responsibility regarding caregiving, but especially focused on girls), and girls who have miscarried a child, to a period of protected absence or maternity leave of up to 12 months, extended to 18 months upon the written request of the student, her parents or a medical doctor. During this period the students will remain automatically enrolled in the school and there will be no school attendance requirement.
- Respect the right of learner-mothers, or students who have miscarried, to enroll at a new school of their choosing. All schools are thus obliged to accept pupils onto the register irrespective of pregnancy or child-bearing status.
- Respect the right of girls who are or have been pregnant, and learner mothers, to sit all examinations including public examinations should they so choose, and to delay school examinations until such a time as they are physically and psychologically able to take them.
- Where possible, organise separate school-based exams for girls who miss exams as a result of pregnancy or pregnancy related illness. When this is not possible, ensure they have a right to sit the exams at the next offering by the school.
- At a minimum, make provision for lactating mothers based on the principles of dignity and choice. The school may either offer the pupil an adapted timetable so that they can leave the school premises to nurse or provide on-site facilities for breast-feeding. Such facilities should offer as comfortable and private a setting as the school building permits.
- Make all reasonable efforts to provide a desk and chair fit for use through the final trimester of the pregnancy.
- Identify at least one member of (female) staff as a named support person for each learner-pregnancy. This staff member should be identified by the individual learner, or by the Principal if the learner has no preference. The support person can be a teacher-counsellor, or any other member of staff.
  - ✔ This policy specifically provides that the named support person shall facilitate a minimum of monthly one-on-one sessions with the pregnant and parent learner. A framework for these sessions shall be found in the aforementioned toolkit.
  - ✔ The named support person will work with the learner to understand her family context and broader social support networks, including *supporting* the learner to disclose her pregnancy status to parents or carers.

✔ It is the named support persons' responsibility to communicate school-level policies to the learner, including their right to a period of protected absence.

✔ The named contact-persons should hold at least two joint meetings with the learner and their parents or caregiverss. It is important to note that a learner must be given the choice regarding meeting with parents or caregiver. The first meeting should happen as soon as possible after disclosure of pregnancy status. The objective of this meeting is to co-create a set of collective commitments that will help the learner remain engaged in education through the pregnancy. A mid-point meeting should be held to review commitments. A framework to facilitate these sessions can be found in the MBSSE *Toolkit for Supporting Pregnant and Parent Learners.*

✔ The named support person acts as a bridge between the learner and the school, is responsible for any necessary referrals, and either provides counselling or directs the learner to someone who will be able to provide basic counselling.

✔ The key person system shall take effect from the week in which the pregnancy becomes known to the school and last for the full term of the pregnancy, continuing for at least 12 months after the learner's return to school.

o Make every effort to support the learner to make up for any missed lessons during pregnancy and on-return. Specifically, this policy provides that:

✔ The school should facilitate a learner-buddy system whereby a pupil of the same grade and class is identified to share written or verbal notes with the pupil who is or has been pregnant, or parent learner, during occasional absences from school.

✔ The school authorities will make an effort to provide catch-up/remedial classes for pupils who are or have been pregnant, and parent learners, who miss critical classes during the school year and especially leading to examinations. The goal is to provide as much support for the learner to ensure she does not fall behind her peers.

✔ The school should make every effort to identify community level learning opportunities for learners who are or have been pregnant, and parent learners, particularly during any extended period of protected absence. Such opportunities could include for example safe-space initiatives, girls-groups run by CBO's, or faith-based initiatives. Remote learning could also be included as a way of supporting young parents. It is critical that these

external learning activities are framed as *supplements* rather than *alternatives* to the formal classroom.

✔ Learners who are on a period of protected absence can choose to return to take public and other key school based exams during their break. This option must be communicated to the learner in advance and the school will make provisions for the learner to take this option and return to their breaks. The learner will inform the school through their named support person or the principal of their plans in this regard.

3.3.4 Specific provision for learners from low-income families and rural and underserved areas as poverty is still the single greatest barrier to inclusion at all levels and in all regions of the world. Implementing Actors and Actions

A) MBSSE will:
- o Promote flexible learning pathways in both formal and non-formal settings including learning materials that supported accelerated or remedial learning for students.
- o Create opportunities for children, especially girls, from poor backgrounds to pursue an education (e.g., through grants and scholarship, and community support programs)
- o Build more and safe schools in rural remote communities to increase access by children living in those locations
- o Increase the number of qualified teachers in rural remote communities and provide teaching and learning materials to those communities
- o Accelerate the approval of existing schools to decrease the costs of schooling for poor parents
- o Provide school materials such as uniforms, bags, learning materials and prohibitive other costs associated with entering a new institution to lessen schooling costs for poor families
- o Support the development of innovative learning options in education for hard-to-reach groups—for example, by using EdTech, Radio Teaching Programs, blended learning approaches, and distributing print materials
- o Maintain school feeding in poor rural areas of the country
- o Develop and implement strategies to increase parental and community involvement.

B) Schools will:
- o Make accommodation for adequate provision of safe and gender-friendly learning environment
- o Implement school governance reforms that increase accountability and empower parents to get involved in schools
- o Promote and facilitate positive actions to promote girls' education and address social and institutional constraints on girls' learning
- o Evenly distribute school materials to students and families

C) School staff will:

- o Create a positive and inclusive school and classroom culture
- o play an important role in helping vulnerable learners to explore the dynamics of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, and to identify and/or report all situations
- o provide instructions and communication to families in mother-tongue when appropriate
- o implement flexible learning pathways like the use of technology in both formal and non-formal settings
- o encourage students and families to participate in the FQSE programme to inspire enrollment and retention of all students
- o talk to students and families to identify barriers to school attendance

3.4 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR: POLICY STATEMENT 3: ENGAGE FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

3.4.1 Tackling stigma and challenging norms: championing inclusivity and challenging norms are important in encouraging marginalised children to enroll and stay in school. Schools should advocate for inclusive education in their communities and challenge the pervasive norms, narratives and behaviours that have prevented marginalised groups from learning. This should be done via:

- o Parent volunteers acting as community champions
- o Community engagement opportunities.
- o SMCs, particularly bridging schools and communities in dealing with stigma.
- o Community Child Welfare committee providing support in dealing with stigma and negative norms against marginalized children.
- o Involving children and adolescents in the community.
- o Mapping the local community; this plays an important role in understanding the local population and its engagement with the school, to target community engagement more effectively.

Implementing Actors and Actions

A) MBSSE will:

- o Provide advice on developing parent/guardian volunteer community champions in the TEIL.
- o Provide guidance on facilitating community dialogue in the TEIL.
- o Consider how a mapping exercise setting out the different criteria of different vulnerabilities could be facilitated and funded.

- o Provide Guidance on facilitating community dialogues around pregnant and parent learners in the *Toolkit for Supporting Pregnant and Parent Learners*.
- o Provide guidance on facilitating dialogue between girls and boys around gender issues, about how the community can support learners with disabilities, learners living in economic poverty, and those living in rural remote areas.
- o Provide appropriate guidance, resources, training, and external monitoring to implement schemes in schools.
- o Develop a community Dialogue Manual on reducing and eliminating stigma, norms and practices that further marginalise children.

B) *Schools will:*
- o Aim to recruit parent-volunteer community champions who will act as advocates for inclusive education in the community and encourage school enrollment among marginalised groups.
- o Map children in the locality to understand the prevalence of marginalised groups and the level of school enrollment.

C) *School staff should:*
- o Make use of outreach opportunities throughout the year to champion the benefits of, and right to, education for all marginalised children, including pregnant girls and parent learners. Opportunities for community engagement could include, for example, parent-teacher meetings, open days, graduation ceremonies, or other community events.
- o Make use of outreach opportunities throughout the year to act as champions for vulnerable and marginalised learners, as well as pregnant and parent learners.

3.4.2 Advocate for radical inclusion across society: Radical inclusion in education represents a considerable cultural shift for Sierra Leone. Therefore, its principles will be communicated clearly, consistently, and through multiple channels for it to become embedded in the community, for example, through faith-based leaders, parents, guardians and wider society.

Implementing Actors and Actions
A) *MBSSE will:*
- o Put structures and systems in place to ensure that achievements are sustained and developed.
- o Develop a mass communications strategy to accompany this policy. A range of content forms, and communication channels will be used to ensure key stakeholders are well informed about the government of Sierra Leone's position on radical inclusion as expressed in this policy.
- o Develop a youth-friendly version of the policy.

- Develop and deliver a dissemination plan to accompany the youth-friendly version of the policy, including innovative means to communicate child rights, particularly the rights of pregnant learners.
- Produce a special briefing paper for staff and partners working across the basic and senior education sectors. This will communicate the government's position on radical inclusion.

Hold policy dissemination workshops with key relevant structures and Ministries, including the National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy, and the Ministries of Gender and Children, Social Welfare, Health, Higher Education, and Youth, as well as civil society organisations and other stakeholders working in education.

3.5   IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR: POLICY STATEMENT 4: ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

3.5.1 Under strong national leadership, the necessary structures, strategies and wider policies will be put in place to ensure this Radical Inclusion Policy is enacted and its effectiveness is measured.

Implementing Actors and Actions

A) *MBSE will:*

- Commission a status review every year on equal opportunities in education for girls, boys, children with disabilities and other marginalised groups. This analysis would be separate from the current sector analysis and be rigorous, detailed and multi-layered to serve as a sharpened 'tool' in mapping and understanding marginalised children and their schooling experiences. This review will focus on existing enrolment and learning data for marginalised children as well as the policies, programmes and financial instruments in place to support them. It will act as a baseline for measuring the effectiveness of this policy and offer guidance to MBSSE on the viability of rolling out wider programmes.
- As part of its review of the Persons with Disabilities Act 2011, include progress against Section 16. This requires schools to provide scholarships and grants to persons specialising in the instruction of people with disability.
- Review its school approvals and allocation policy to ensure schools are distributed evenly and new schools built in underserved areas. This is in the context of accelerating approval processes for existing community/unapproved schools. For example, the target of one primary school per administrative area will be revisited.[26] It will also look to ensure that the funding of public education is equitable especially in terms of accessibility to JSS and SSS for girls.

- o Review the provision for people with disabilities on leaving education and work with the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education and the private sector, to ensure higher education, skills training, and employment are accessible to all.
- o Explore the viability of increasing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics scholarships for girls.

3.5.2 Structures, plans and schemes will be put in place to support radical inclusion in schools, among teachers and other professionals, and within communities.

Implementing Actors and Actions

A) MBSSE will:

- o Conduct a curriculum review, in consultation with school principals, inspectors, and teachers, and if possible, also with parents of affected children and academic staff involved in teacher training. Also involve partners working in the sector on promising and best practices that can strengthen curriculum development. This will:
    - ✔ Assess the accessibility and appropriateness of the curriculum for marginalised children.
    - ✔ Identify both academic and social learning outcomes that are appropriate for learners of all needs and abilities.
    - ✔ Ensure the curriculum is flexible enough to support inclusion, ensuring that a broad range of teaching and assessment approaches are available in all schools, and allowing appropriate modifications around learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies, and accommodations in assessment and evaluation of student learning. This means ensuring that learners can return to school and where possible, enable catch-up learning remotely from home.
    - ✔ Ensure the curriculum is gender transformative.
    - ✔ Ensure the curriculum includes the different components of comprehensive sexuality education.
    - ✔ Ensure that the curriculum does not perpetuate stigma or harmful stereotypes.
    - ✔ Consider incorporating diversity and inclusion into the curriculum.
- o Provide and support libraries in rural areas (at least one functional library with ICT capabilities in every district head quarter town) including mobile and smaller school libraries.
- o Provide opportunities for professional development for education officers, inspectors and administrators on inclusion. These will raise awareness and help to embed inclusion across the system. This will mean working in partnership with the MTHE.

Review the financial viability of developing a cohort of trainers with expertise in disability and the promotion of inclusive education. These would be established in each region and would work to provide continuing professional development and advice to schools, as well as workshops for parents.

SECTION 4: MONITORING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Structures and plans will be put in place to ensure this Policy is implemented, monitored and reviewed effectively. This will involve considering ways of strengthening the national capacity of MBSSE by establishing an adequately resourced and staffed inclusive education unit within the MBSSE. The capacity of MBSSE to collect and utilize disaggregated data on vulnerable learners and disabilities at different levels in the education system will facilitate this.

Implementing Actors and Actions

   A) *MBSSE will:*
   - Create a coalition of development partners to provide partial financing and other technical support for the full implementation of this policy. A Radical Inclusion Steering Committee shall be constituted with key ministry officials, members of civil society and development partners and meetings will take place on a quarterly basis.
   - Develop a clear Implementation Plan for this Radical Inclusion in Education Policy. This will include costed work plans, and well-defined roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the policy at national, district and school level.
   - Establish a National Forum for Inclusion. This will include students with disabilities and their parents, NGOs working with people with disabilities, advocates for girls' education, and other marginalized groups, as well as representatives from every region, and the National Commission for Persons with Disability. The National Forum for Inclusion will help to distribute information related to support and good practice in inclusive education. It will consult regularly with local community leaders, officials and politicians in order to influence policy, increase community awareness, and engage in dialogue with individuals and groups at national, regional and district levels. Including:
       - ✔ Disseminating information about available supports and good practices and promoting awareness of radical inclusion in education.
       - ✔ Monitoring and reviewing the ways in which this policy is implemented, focusing specifically on available resources and financing for inclusion.
       - ✔ Reporting the outcome of this review and monitoring procedure to appropriate ministries annually. This will contribute to monitoring of the national inclusive education policy.

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- Establish a multi-disciplinary working group to develop the status review on equal opportunities in education (see point above regarding a steering committee). This will include representation from persons with disabilities, advocates for the education of girls, advocates for children living in poverty, and other marginalised children. It will report to appropriate government departments within a clearly defined timetable, recommending priority actions at the national, regional and district levels. It will also provide an implementation plan to support the enactment of its recommendations.
- Establish review bodies in each region of the country with representation from: girls; pregnant and parent learners; students with disabilities; parents of children with disabilities; children and parents from low-income backgrounds; those living in rural remote areas; local community representatives; district or local council representatives; education officials; and members of the therapeutic professions. These groups will report annually to MBSSE on progress towards implementing the policy and will establish priority regional and district targets for the following year, identifying responsibilities and resources required.
- Present a copy of the Implementation Plan for Radical Inclusion in Education at the National Forum for Inclusion each year. This will provide an opportunity for members of special interest groups and the general public to review progress made against the plan and make recommendations.
- Expand on any existing initiatives, particularly giving attention to those that are looking at employing District Inclusion Officers and School Support Officers. Explore the viability of setting up district educational support resource centres, with regional multi-professional teams, employing District Inclusion Officers and School Support Officers, where teachers, other professionals and families can go for advice and to access resources. These centres could also work with the National Forum for Inclusion, to review available resources and financing for inclusion and the efficacy of support provided to families. They would also support teacher training on inclusivity. These centres could provide a model rather than a template for policies and practices in relationship to radical inclusion.
- Encourage research on the systems and procedures which are either enabling or inhibiting inclusion and use it to inform policy.

Processes and procedures will be in place to ensure that the implementation of this policy is monitored, and its effectiveness measured. A robust approach to data collection, management and analysis is essential here.

Implementing Actors and Actions

B) *MBSSE will:*

- o Develop a format for schools to report on the implementation of this policy, including success factors and barriers. This will be included in the TEIL, and will include data collection on:
    - ✔ Retention and return rates of pregnant girls, pregnancy outcome, service provision at the school level, and incidences of onward referral.
    - ✔ The number of female students, their attendance, outcome, and any engagement with outside services.
    - ✔ Services provided to students living in rural remote locations and those from poor families (e.g., school transportation, school feeding, number of trained and qualified teachers, access to FQSE programs)
    - ✔ Abuse and misconduct complaints and their outcome.
    - ✔ Whether a whole-school review of inclusion has been completed.
    - ✔ The existence or otherwise of volunteer community advocates and volunteer classroom assistants.
- o Produce and disseminate an annual summation of key data including but not limited to number of pregnant girls in schools and taking exams, number of learners with disabilities, number of interventions and welfare packages for girls and other targeted beneficiaries at schools and communities, etc. for relevant stakeholders.
- o Establish a monitoring committee to review progress against policy goals and objectives annually. This will be based on available data; reports from regional review bodies; the National Forum for Inclusion Review and other insights. Their analysis shall guide any policy adaptations.
- o Examine how to gather more robust data on the prevalence of disability, and the enrolment of marginalised groups in schools to allow for full evaluation of the policy, including assessing the quality of education, children's experiences, and the success of screening.
- o In collaboration with civil society, development partners, and other MDAs, routinely publish a Basic and Secondary Education Monitoring Report that will include dedicated analyses on Radical Inclusion policies. This report will include primary data or derived data/analyses from other survey reports.

C) *The Directorate of Planning and Policy at MBSSE, responsible for policy implementation, will report quarterly to the office of the CEO on progress, and bottlenecks.*

D) *Schools will keep accurate records in support of this policy, in keeping with the guidance set out in the TEIL.*

4.1   EVALUATING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Key outcome indicators will provide a basis of evaluating the progress, success and possible gaps in the policy and its implementation:

- o New and different criteria for tracking the government school census to include data on all vulnerable and marginalized groups of children.
- o A comparison of the pre- and in-service teacher training and curricula for evidence of content, training and skills on radical inclusion.
- o Extent of schools' engagement in tracking and the type of tracking of marginalised children in their school. This will mean noting the number of schools that are appointing and training designated teachers as focal points, number of radical inclusion training sessions organised by MBSSE per year, and quantifying the increase in the number of schools involved in tracking, the micro-detail and quality of the tracking, and recording of these groups
- o The increased percentage of pregnant girls, parent learners, disabled learners, rural and poor children who are staying in the school system and/or returning to school

The quality of the education will be marked by success but needs on-going qualitative reflection and review in relation to teaching support, teaching pedagogy, practices of inclusion and safe encouraging learning environments for all learners, irrespective of their personal context and situation.

4.2   POLICY REVIEW

4.4.1 Anticipated process and time frames to review the policy and its implementation

- o The first year will involve the dissemination, familiarization, and socialization of the policy in schools and communities. There will also be a focus of training staff in the schools as well as support staff and volunteers. The training will outline the principles of the policy and the implications for practice. The training also needs to include the school children as they need to be closely involved to facilitate attitudinal and behavior change.
- o In the second year, the policy will begin to take shape insofar as being implemented and practiced in schools. This will mean that tracking and record keeping procedures regarding these targeted groups will be established so that monitoring of the numbers of these children entering the school, retention and success is normalized.
- o At the end of the third year there should be a focus on results showing different percentages relating to access and retention of these targeted groups.

After five years, there will be a policy review to assess the sustainability of the policy. This will involve conducting an evaluation on the policy to reflect and review what needs to be changed so that implementation can be improved and enhanced. It would be beneficial to engage a consultant to both provide an 'outsider' critical reflective lens and to assist in reviewing the policy and practices that might need adjustment or change to strengthen the impact.