

**The Out-of-school Children
of Sierra Leone**

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¹ See Annex 1 for a complete listing of the research team.

Executive Summary

1 Executive Summary

This primary-aged out-of-school study was commissioned by the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF) on behalf of their Development Partners, from February to July 2008, in order to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in tackling the salient issues affecting primary aged, out-of-school children.

This is a preliminary study, which intends to stimulate discussion at the national and district levels and provide a springboard for increased action towards the plight of primary-aged out-of-school children. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered through a literature review, interview with key informants, consultative meetings, focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with a cross section of adult community members and children (both schooling and out-of-school children; with a stronger focus on the latter). Qualitative data was collected to highlight the complex factors contributing to the discrimination of primary school aged children from schooling, whilst comparing and contrasting similarities and dissimilarities in various parts of the country. A mix of 54 rural and urban pilot communities, representing all possible scenarios in the country was selected. A total of 33 focus group discussions were conducted and 379 participants participated directly in the in-depth interviews which were carried out in the four regions of the country. Data collected in this study provides a snap shot into the lives of out-of-school children at any given time.

The main objectives of the primary-aged out-of-school study have been to answer four key questions: Who are the out-of-school children? Why are primary school aged children out-of-school? Where are these children and how (in)visible are they? How can we increase access to primary education for out-of-school children?

Poverty was ranked by all study participants, both young and old, as the primary reason as to why primary school aged children were out of school. Presently, Sierra Leone remains at the bottom of the Human Development Index (177/177). The average poor household spends 37% below the amount required to meet their basic needs. Families slipping in dire poverty urgently require the assistance of children to supplement the family income. For most marginalised families, it is a choice between putting food on the table or sending a child to school.

Children may be "at risk" of not being in school due to their geographic location, gender, religion and present situation (including those from marginalized, large, polygamous families). A child's family status and/or living situation greatly determine his or her vulnerability. Interview participants aged 6 to 15 years old identified the death of a parent or both parents as the main reason for either dropping out-of-school or never attending in the first place. Out-of-school children ranked the death of a parent(s), second to poverty as the reason why they are not in school. Parental death is a major life-changing event for many children; it also signifies the decline of a family's economic resources. Community-based researchers identified orphans and children living with extended family members (or caretakers) as the most exploited and marginalised children in their communities. Fifty-two percent of the out-of-school children interviewed were found to be orphans, whilst only one-third of the children had two living parents. Of those who said they had two living parents, the fathers were reportedly absent most of the time. Alternatively, these children were also found to be living with extended family

members (or caretakers) instead of living at home. Pockets of children in Pujehun along the Sierra Leone – Liberia border did not know their parents and in many cases, have been passed on from one guardian to another since the war ended. These children are in extremely precarious situations; many are not in school.

Findings reveal the following categories of children at considerable risk of dropping out or those that have dropped out of school, but are not limited to: orphans, children and those living with extended family members (or caretakers) who are exploited and abused, children who are internally trafficked for economic or domestic purposes, children involved in early or forced marriage, children who have been or are exposed to sexual harassment or sexual exploitation, disabled children, homeless or street children and children withdrawn from armed conflict.

An important finding in this report showed that in spite of women's limited economic activities, 37%² of the mothers struggled hard to financially support their children's schooling, paying hidden school fees through sales from their small vegetable gardens or other petty trading activities.

Every child that is not in school is a potential worker. Eighty-seven percent of children interviewed, both schooling and non-schooling, were found to be working in some form of income generating activity. Children that have dropped out of school spend most of their time performing two to three domestic and economic tasks daily. The majority of non-schooling children interviewed revealed that they worked long, excessive hours with little or no rest. Children who combined work and school talked about frequent absenteeism and poor grades resulting from the lack of time to study their lessons or do their homework. A small number of boys involved in communal farm work in farming communities who initially combined work and school, eventually dropped out of school preferring instead the quick, tangible financial remuneration they received from working. Many stated they would rather work and get paid than sit in school and be hungry.

Though commonly practiced in Sierra Leone for decades, internal child trafficking is a only a recently recognised phenomenon. Extreme poverty in many rural communities has seen young children trafficked to cities and other urban areas with parental consent. Families are lured into the false belief that their children will eventually be sent to school, have brighter prospects and access to better education opportunities than in the provinces. Fifty-four percent of children who are out-of-school are living either with extended family members or caretakers. Fifty-eight percent of non-schooling children (aged 11 to 15 years) reportedly live with their caretakers or extended family members. Though it is important to note that not all children living with caretakers or extended family are exploited and abused, results of this study show a much higher proportion of out-of-school children are exploited for domestic and/or economic purposes. Internally trafficked children end up working as child labourers, the majority of which are involved in petty trading, fishing, mining and other forms of hazardous work. Another commonly mentioned occupation is that of a domestic worker. Findings show that children

² 39 percent of children identified their fathers as the one paying for their school fees while 24 percent of children interviewed stated that extended family members financially supported their education.

working away from their families are constantly exposed to verbal, physical and/or sexual abuse, neglect and exploitation.

Under school related factors, high direct and indirect costs associated with schooling were reported as the main reason as to why children dropped out of school. The vast majority of children aged 6 to 10 noted that the poor accessibility to schools often resulted in the late enrolment of children. Community members indicated their reluctance of sending “very young” children to school due to various protection issues³ and the fact that children may not be able to cover the long walking distances required to reach the school. Children starting school at age 10, finish the primary cycle in their puberty years. The untimely pregnancy of young girls is ranked as the third most common reason for them dropping out of school. Investing in a girl child’s educational future has been a hard fought battle for many advocates of gender equality. The likelihood of a teenage pregnancy tends to pressure impoverished families into re-considering whether or not sending a girl child to school is a good long-term investment. The increase in untimely teenage pregnancies in both rural and urban communities has affected not only the unprepared teenage parents who stop going to school, but more the younger sisters of the mother to be. In a focus group discussion in Tombo, 43 % of the girls aged 11 to 14 years old stated that their parent(s) refused to send them to school and pay their “school fees” when their older sister(s) came home pregnant.

Though teenage pregnancy may have been the result of consensual relations between two people, child prostitution, older male classmates and teacher’s sexual harassments have also been mentioned as possible causes. Allegations of child prostitution were raised with children living away from their families and going to school in urban areas or small towns. This is apparently an “easy way of raising money” to pay for direct and indirect costs associated to schooling. For some children, peer pressure and rebellion are reportedly the reasons that lead them to child prostitution.

Local actors, including administrative and traditional leaders are becoming increasingly active in addressing the problems associated with the untimely pregnancies of young girls. Local by-laws and sanctions have been put in place to discourage boys’ and girls’ involvement in early sexual activities but the enforcement of such by-laws considerably vary across regions.

Not surprising, community members did not see the relationship between harmful cultural practices (such as early or forced marriages and initiations into secret societies) and children’s dropping out-of-school. A girl⁴ child’s initiation into a secret society signifies her readiness for family life. Grooms-to-be (usually older men) who have paid the “bride price” and provided other financial and work services for the girl’s family, reportedly “collect” their bride after the initiation period. This ends the girl child’s quest for education. Early sexual activity and the exposure of young girls to more sexually experienced men increase the vulnerability of young girls to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted deceases.

³ Snakebites, abduction and rape were some protection issues mentioned.

⁴ Girls may be initiated in secret societies as young as 12 years old.

Recommendations presented include the importance of a strong Government commitment and leadership in addressing the out-of-school problem in the Sierra Leone. Transparent, equitable, efficient and accountable resource allocation systems are absolutely vital in addressing prevailing economic disparities; poverty is the underlying cause of children dropping out-of-school. The country's resource scarcity requires a targeted approach to assist the most vulnerable and marginalised families and children. Obvious targets for such programmes are identified under the categories of children at considerable risk of dropping out or those that have already dropped out of school. A two-pronged intervention that provides both short-term/immediate and long-term assistance is vital in supporting marginalised families to improve their financial/economic resources whilst ensuring that their children continue their schooling. A specific example of such an intervention would be the provision of educational scholarship and other financial support. For example one meal-per-day could be provided to vulnerable girls and boys in tandem with providing assistance to families (particularly the mothers) in the form of vocational training, linked to literacy and micro credit programmes. Sustainable and replicable social protection programmes and class participation would greatly assist marginalised and vulnerable families, in addition to ensuring long-term school attendance. Another condition which may be added is that the child remains with his/her biological mother whenever possible. Allocation of sufficient funding is necessary to design and implement sustainable community safety nets. Capacity building is needed at all levels, including the installation of effective monitoring and evaluation systems to keep track of such programmes.

An important recommendation which comes from the study is the integration of child labour and child protection into both the Education Sector Plan (ESP) and other national frameworks. Integration of child labour and child protection in national frameworks, especially in the ESP will provide a greater awareness of the issues surrounding education; thus requiring concrete actions and budget allocations at the national, regional and district level. Special attention must be given to support out-of-school students, especially orphans and other vulnerable children in order to ensure accessibility to the entire primary school cycle. Radio broadcast is a popular form of leisure entertainment in the country. Community sensitisation campaigns on the importance and long-term benefits of education must harness this too in order to reach the largest number of families.

The recent surge in teenage pregnancy is a troubling trend. Children of young teenage girls who lack basic skills and education will most likely be in a more disadvantaged position than their mothers. Young girls' possible exposure to HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases remain unchecked in most cases. Age appropriate sexual and reproductive health information must be made accessible to children, especially girls. Assertiveness and saying "no" are some of the topics young girls need to be trained on.

Recommendations for school related factors to prevent student drop out consists of the setting up of girls' advisory clubs (GACs) in schools. The purpose of the GAC is to promote a "child friendly" and "girl friendly" school environment through advocacy for girls' education. This will be carried out by tackling protection issues directly at the school level; combating harmful cultural and traditional practices composed of, but not limited to early/forced marriage and addressing absenteeism related to secret society activities. Improving the quality of education must also be reflected in the school curriculum. A revision of the curriculum must also include a venue to discuss current social and moral issues including; HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies, gender based violence (GBV) and conflict. The appointment of female teachers in (remote) rural areas would provide young girls, not just with a positive role model, but also help to address protection issues in schools. Providing quality education requires a strong, well-trained teaching force. The provision of a complete primary schooling (up to class 6) in areas currently offering

up until class 4, would help address the problem of access to education. Instituting satellite schools for class 1 and class 2 in (remote) rural communities would encourage early and increased enrolment of young children to first grade.

The potential participation and inclusion of disabled children in education relies greatly on the accessibility of schools. Field visits in rural areas showed that only a small number of disabled children actually have access to education. The ones most commonly seen tend to be those with a physical disability who are using assistive devices. In spite of this, community school accessibility for physically challenged children remains poor. A baseline study on disability and education would assist the Government in developing a national framework that would realistically support the mainstreaming and empowerment of disabled children, allowing them to move towards a more independent living.

Unskilled, jobless, socially and financially alienated youths leads to discontent, conflict and crime. Disabled children and children aged 13 years old and above who have never been to school must have access to a “catch up education” linked to skills or vocational training programmes or apprenticeships if they are to avoid this.

Working with existing community structures such as administrative, traditional, religious and social leaders, school management committees, child welfare committees and encouraging the participation of children themselves in support of children’s rights would prove beneficial to all. A bottom up data collection system with the involvement of out-of-school children would give them a sense of responsibility and participation whilst providing credibility and reliability to the recommendations.

Addressing the complex and overlapping issues of out-of-school children requires a holistic approach that involves the various sectors and all stakeholders. Addressing the challenges of vulnerable and marginalised out-of-school children requires financial support. The Donor community must increase its financial support to education programmes for vulnerable children and support national frameworks set out by the Government. Actors working in education, child protection and social protection must develop joint criteria and guidelines, for the identification of out-of-school children and the provision of holistic programmes addressing the out-of-school problem. Lastly, national and district Government offices must have a referral system for the most marginalised and vulnerable children to ensure their continued protection and access to basic education and social services.

Education breaks the vicious cycle of poverty. It is the most powerful weapon that vulnerable and marginalised children have to change their future.

Table of Contents

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2	INTRODUCTION	16
2.1	AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY	16
2.2	SCOPE OF THE REPORT	16
2.3	PRINCIPLES IN WORKING WITH CHILDREN	17
3	RESEARCH OUTLINE AND METHODOLOGY	17
3.1	SITE SELECTION	17
	CRITERIA FOR SITE SELECTION	17
3.2	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	18
	LITERATURE REVIEW	18
	FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS	18
	IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS	19
	INTERVIEW WITH KEY INFORMANTS	20
	CONSULTATIVE MEETINGS	20
3.3	THE ASSESSMENT TEAM	20
	PROCESS	21
3.4	PHASES OF THE STUDY	21
3.5	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY	21
	CHILD PARTICIPATION	21
	TIGHT TIME ALLOCATION	21
	TARGETING OF CHILDREN	22
	INFORMED CONSENT	22
4	BACKGROUND	23
5	FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	25
5.1	WHO ARE THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN?	25
	FAMILY STATUS	25
	CHILDREN'S LIVING SITUATION	26
	The importance of mothers in children's schooling	27
	CHILDREN AT CONSIDERABLE RISK OF DROPPING OUT	28
5.2	WHY ARE PRIMARY SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN OUT-OF-SCHOOL?	28
	SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS	29
	Poverty	29
	High direct and indirect costs of schooling	29
	Low value placed on education	31
	FAMILY OR COMMUNITY RELATED FACTORS	32
	SCHOOL RELATED FACTORS	36

Accessibility	36
High rate of teenage pregnancy	37
Teacher's sexual advances	38
Corporal punishment	39
Poor quality of education	40
Disability	41
CHILDREN'S VALUES AND ATTITUDES	43
“Daily survival needs”	43
Peer pressure and rebellion	44
LAW ENFORCEMENT	44
Disconnection between legislative and field implementation	44
5.3 WHEN DO CHILDREN DROP OUT-OF-SCHOOL?	45
5.4 WHERE ARE THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN? HOW (IN)VISIBLE ARE THEY?	48
5.5 WHAT ARE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN DOING?	48
CHILD LABOUR	49
DOMESTIC CHILD WORKERS	50
WHERE DOES THE MONEY GO?	50
REST AND PLAYTIME?	51
STUDY TIME	51
5.6 BRINGING CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL	52
5.7 CHILDREN'S VIEWS	53
6 CONCLUSION	54
7 RECOMMENDATIONS	54
7.1 DATA/INFORMATION/MONITORING AND EVALUATION	54
DISSEMINATE STUDY TO GENERATE DISCUSSION AND AID OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN	54
BOTTOM UP DATA COLLECTION SYSTEM FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN	55
INTER-SECTORAL DEVELOPMENT OF CRITERIA, GUIDELINES, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN	55
INSTALLATION OF A KNOWLEDGE-BASED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	55
7.2 LEGISLATION AND POLICY	55
STRONG GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT	55
TRANSPARENT AND EQUITABLE ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF NATIONAL RESOURCES	56
ALLOCATION OF SUFFICIENT FINANCIAL RESOURCES	56
TARGETING THE MOST VULNERABLE FAMILIES AND CHILDREN FOR ASSISTANCE	56
MAINSTREAMING CHILD LABOUR INTO THE EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN	57
MAINSTREAMING CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES INTO THE EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN	57
INCREASING THE APPOINTMENT OF FEMALE TEACHERS IN REMOTE AND RURAL AREAS	57
7.3 PARTNERSHIPS AND INTER-SECTORAL APPROACH	58
BROADER UNITED NATIONS AGENCY INVOLVEMENT	58
PROVIDING ASSISTANCE AND REFERRAL PROGRAMMES FOR VULNERABLE OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN	58
TAPPING RELIGIOUS LEADERS AND THE BUSINESS SECTOR INTO EDUCATION-BASED SENSITISATION PROGRAMMES	58
7.4 ACCESS TO QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION/PROTECTION	58
ACCESS TO EDUCATION	58
A free school feeding programme	58

A complete primary education for all schools	59
Satellite schools for lower primary school classes	59
QUALITY PRIMARY EDUCATION	59
Review of the present curriculum	59
Increasing the availability of distance learning programmes	60
PROTECTION	60
Girls' Advisory Clubs (GACs)	60
Ensure that children have access to a child and girl friendly school environment with relevant quality education	60
EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAMMES	61
Create "bridge programmes"	61
Revive the accelerated learning programme (ALP)	61
Functional literacy programmes and livelihoods/vocational training	61
7.5 ADVOCACY	62
INCREASED DONOR FUNDING FOR INITIATIVES TARGETING OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN AND THE EDUCATION SECTOR	62
NATIONAL "RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD" CAMPAIGN	62
AGE APPROPRIATE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS	62
INCREASE CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT	62
FOCAL GROUP ON CHILDREN'S ISSUES	62
ENGAGE TRADITIONAL SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN CHANGING THE VIEWS ON HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICES	62
7.6 FURTHER RESEARCH	63
COMPREHENSIVE QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SELECTED GEOGRAPHIC AREAS	63
NATIONAL LABOUR MARKET STUDY	63
IMPACT OF GIRLS' SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMMES	63
POSITIVE DEVIANCE STUDY	63
EFFECTS OF DISABILITY ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	63
REFERENCES	65
SELECTED WEBSITES	68

List of Tables

TABLES

Table 1: Focus Group Discussion Sites	19
Table 2: Distribution of All Participants Per District	20
Table 3: Children's Family Status	26
Table 4: Children's living situation	27
Table 5: Sample of Direct & Indirect School Expenses for School Year 2007-08	30
Table 6: Sample of Class 6 Extra Expenses	30
Table 7: FGD – the class children dropped out from	47
Table 8: In-depth interview result – the class children dropped out from	47

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Map of Sierra Leone - Research Sites
Annex 2: Research Team
Annex 3: List of People Consulted
Annex 4: Figures from In-depth Interviews

Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ALP	Accelerated Learning Programme
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CREPS	Complimentary Rapid Education Programmes for Schools
CWC	Child Welfare Committee
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FGD	Focus group discussion
FTI	Fast Track Initiative
GAC	Girl's Advisory Club
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GOSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MEYS	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NGO	Non Government Organisation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UPE	Universal Primary Education
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
WFP	World Food Programme

Definition of Terminologies

Child

The term “child” is defined as every human below the age of eighteen...⁵

Out-of-school children

Primary school children aged 6 -15 years old who:

Have never been to school;

No longer attend school (children who have dropped out of school);

“Attend school irregularly” or absent for more than one-third of the year.

Primary school aged children who attended non-formal education or religious Islamic schools known as “madrassas” were counted as out-of-school children. For the purpose of this study, only non-formal schooling and/or alternative learning programmes recognised as a full equivalent of the formal primary education by the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) were counted as school going children.

Child Labour⁶

UNICEF defines child labour as work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of a child and on the type of work. Such work is considered harmful to the child and should be eliminated.

Ages 5 -11: At least 1 hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week.

Ages 12 -14: At least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week.

Ages 15 - 17: At least 43 hour of economic work or domestic work per week.

Worst Forms of Child Labour

Defined in the ILO Convention 182. It comprises (Article 3):

All forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for the use in armed conflict;

⁵ Article 1: *Convention of the Rights of the Child*.

⁶ Government of Sierra Leone. (2007). *The Child Right's Act*, Part VIII: Section 125. States that, “the age of fifteen shall be the age at which the compulsory primary education of a child shall end, and also the minimum age for the engagement of a child in full-time employment.” The minimum age for light work is 13 years old. (Section 127).

The use, procuring, or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performance;

The use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities – in particular, for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;

Work, which by its nature or because of the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of the child, commonly, known as hazardous work.⁷

Hazardous work in Sierra Leone includes:

Going to sea;

Mining and quarrying;

Porterage of heavy loads;

Manufacturing industries where chemicals are produced or used;

Work in places where machines are used; and

Work in places such as bars, hotels and places of entertainment where a person may be exposed to immoral behaviour.⁸

Child Trafficking

“...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of person/s, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments of benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”

Exploitation includes as a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”⁹

Exploitation in child trafficking

Exploitation in child trafficking means:

Keeping a person in a state of slavery;

Subjecting a person to practice similar slavery;

Compelling or causing a person to provide forced labour or services;

Keeping a person in a state of servitude, including sexual servitude;

Exploitation or the prostitution of another;

⁷ No 182 Article 3. *ILO Convention*.

⁸ Government of Sierra Leone. (2007). *The Child Right's Act*. Part VIII: Section 128.

⁹ United Nation's Children's Fund. (2005). *Child Trafficking in Sierra Leone*

Engaging in any other form of commercial sexual exploitation, including but not limited to pimping, pandering, procuring, profiting from prostitution, maintaining a brothel and child pornography; and
Illicitly removing human organs.¹⁰

¹⁰ Government of Sierra Leone. (2005). *Anti-Human Trafficking Act*.

The Out-of-school Study

2 Introduction

The out-of-school study was commissioned by the United Nation's Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sierra Leone from February to July 2008 in response to the recommendation of in-country donors. In the Appraisal Report for the Fast Track Initiative (FTI) Endorsement, in-country donors urged the Government of Sierra Leone to strengthen their plan of tackling the issue of out-of-school children. This study is the first step in responding to this request.

To reflect the diversity of Sierra Leone as well as the plight of the exclusion of primary school aged children in all four regions, 9 pilot districts were selected representing 54 communities throughout the country. The selected pilot sites represented both rural and urban communities embodying a broad range of possible scenarios found within the country.

The out-of-school study was conducted to establish baseline information on the broad and complex factors resulting in primary school aged out-of-school children. It further delves into ways of increasing children's access to safe, child friendly schools, which provides quality education and looks at other opportunities to help improve the lives of "older" non-schooling children. The out-of-school study endeavours to support the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL) in its thrust to achieve the Universal Primary Education (UPE) goal while shedding light on the lives of an estimated 300,000^{11 12} primary school aged out-of-school children throughout Sierra Leone.

2.1 Aims and Objectives of the Study

As stated in the Terms of Reference, the out-of-school study was commissioned to underscore the plight of out-of-school children aged 6 to 15 years of age. The study aims to answer four key questions:

Who are the out-of-school children?

Why are primary school aged children out-of-school?

Where are the out-of-school children? How (in)visible are they?

How can we increase access to primary education for out-of-school children?

2.2 Scope of the report

This report intends to provide a holistic understanding of the broad and complex situation of out-of-school children through the lenses of both children and adults alike, through pilot communities representing a microcosmic illustration of the different regions in the country. The out-of-school study report intends to explore cultural, traditional, religious and socio-economic impediments as well as school related factors that contribute to children's continued exclusion from accessing

11 Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF. (2005). *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3 (MICS3)*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF

12 UNICEF. (2007). *Out-of-School Study Terms of Reference*. "The Net Enrolment Rate for primary school is only about 70% according to the latest statistical figures (MICS3 Survey, 2005). This means that 30% of children of primary school age (~ 300,000) are out-of-school".

primary education. It is hoped that policy recommendations and effective programme designs to increase primary school aged children's access to education will be derived from this study. The out-of-school study does not intend to offer a geographic mapping of the most affected districts. It is anticipated that this baseline study will stimulate discussion at the national and district level and provide a springboard for increased action towards the plight of out-of-school children. Information in this report provides a snapshot into the lives of thousands of out-of-school children at a specific given time.

2.3 Principles in working with children

This research conducted with the participation of children follows the guiding principles of the Convention on the Rights of a Child (CRC), namely:

The best interest of a child. (Article 3.)

Non-discrimination. (Article 2.)

The right to life, survival and development. (Article 6.)

The right to respect the views of the child. (Article 12.)

The right to education on the basis of equal opportunity. (Article 28.)

Development of the child's personality and talents, mental and physical abilities to their "fullest potential". (Article 29.)

Education shall prepare the child for an active and responsible right fostering respect for basic human rights and developing respect for his/her own cultural and national values as those of others. (Article 29.)

3 Research Outline and Methodology

The research outline and methodology section is divided into five main areas: site selection, research methodology, the research team, research phase, and limitations of the study.

3.1 Site Selection

The out-of-school study was conducted in 54 communities nationwide: 11 communities from the Northern region, 11 communities from the Southern region, 12 communities from the Eastern region and 20 communities from the Western region. To reflect the diversity of Sierra Leone, the study was conducted in a mix of rural and urban communities, representative of all possible scenarios in the country.

Rural communities (home to 66% of the total population)

Urban communities – further classified into:

Provincial towns

Capital city¹³

Criteria for site selection

The following criteria were used in selecting the sites for this study:

Low primary school enrolment

High levels of poverty

Poor provision of education services¹⁴

¹³ Non-schooling children were also interviewed from slum communities though no separate analysis was done for this category of children.

3.2 Research Methodology

A descriptive and correlational study design was employed for this research. Purposive sampling¹⁵ was utilised in this research whilst collecting both qualitative and quantitative data from various sources. To ensure the integrity of data collected, triangulation¹⁶ was utilized. The following methodologies were employed in this study.

Literature Review

A review of literature related to children, education, child labour, child protection, social protection, child trafficking and orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in Sierra Leone was conducted. The Sierra Leonean Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS 2&3), Education Sector Plan (ESP), the 2004 Population and Housing Census, and Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities (2007) documents¹⁷ were reviewed along with papers from selected local and international organizations working in Sierra Leone. Documents from UNICEF, other UN organisations and NGOs related to the study were also examined.

Focus group discussions

A total of 26 focus group discussions were carried out in 8 districts¹⁸ representing the four regions of the country with a mix of both rural and urban areas. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were divided into FGDs with adult community members and children's FGDs, which gathered the adult's and children's perception on the four research questions.

Adult Focus Group Discussions: Ten FGDs were conducted in five rural areas and seven provincial towns with selected members of the District Councils, District Education teams, various traditional and religious leaders, members of school management committees, and parents of out-of-school children. Fifty-five people participated in the FGDs with a 53% male participation. The slightly higher turn out of men during FGDs may be attributed to the fact that men generally hold senior, local, traditional and government positions. To augment women's participation, higher numbers of in-depth interviews were conducted with women. Respondents were aged 30 years to over 60 years old coming from various religious backgrounds.

*Children's Focus Group Discussions:*¹⁹ A total of eleven FGDs were conducted with school going children and out-of-school children aged 6-15 years old. FGDs were separated into age groups; the first group was aged 6 to 10 years old while the second group involved older children

14 Pertains to the low Government provision of trained and qualified teachers in a specific school/district.

15 "Samples chosen by intentionally seeking individuals or situations likely to provide greater understanding of a concept of research interest." Available from <http://www.theorywatch.com/ist501/terms.html>; Internet; accessed July 30, 2008.

16 A process through which information was verified through different sources while utilizing varying tools.

17 World Bank. (2007). *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

18 Focus group discussions were carried out in 8 districts whilst in-depth interviews were carried out in 9 districts.

19 Initial data gathered included children up to the age of 17 years old. Supplemental focus group discussions were conducted with children aged 6-14 years old with the assistance of Save the Children UK and the International Rescue Committee. Unless otherwise noted, the data provided by children aged 6-15 years old were utilised for analysis in this study.

from 11 to 15 years old.²⁰ A total of 145 children participated in the focus group discussions with a 56% girls participation. (See *Table 1* below for FGD sites.)

Table 1: Focus Group Discussion Sites

Region	District	Adult FGD	Children's FGD
North	Koinadugu	✓	✓
	Kambia	✓	✓
Eastern	Kono	✓	
	Kailahun	✓	✓
South	Bonthe	✓	✓
	Pujehun	✓	✓
Western	Western Urban		✓
	Western Rural		✓

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted in all 54 selected communities. To gather personal and sensitive information, in-depth interviews were conducted in a secure and encouraging environment. The research team made full effort to inform the children about the purpose of the interview and made sure that the children were comfortable and relaxed. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured fashion drawing focused response on the four research questions. Interviews lasted for 45 minutes to an hour with children and between 1 to 1.5 hours with adolescent's aged 15 and above, including the adult members of the community. A total of 379 in-depth interviews were conducted with both adults and children alike with a 49% male and 51% female participation. Children interviewed included both out-of-school children and school going children. A cross-sectional representation of the community was used for the study; including parents, administrative, traditional and religious leaders, women leaders, influential figures in the community, representatives from the business sector, professionals, farmers and parents. Forty-seven percent of the participants are from rural communities, urban communities had a 22% representation, whilst Freetown, the capital city accounted for 31% of the participants. The breakdown of participants per region was as follows: from the North – 21%, from the East – 14%, from the South – 30% and from the West – 35%.

²⁰ Seventy-five percent of FGD participants came from the 11 to 15 year old age range. This is attributed to the original study design and focus given to the said age range. The writer was able to increase the number of participants from the younger age group through supplemental FGDs though due to various limitations, an equal representation from both age ranges were not possible to reach. Aside from FGDs, in-depth interviews conducted with children further assisted in gathering the perspective of younger children.

Table 2: Distribution of All Participants Per District

Region	District	Percentage
North	Kambia	8.4
	Koinadugu	8.2
	Makeni	2.6
East	Kailahun	9.0
	Kono	4.7
South	Pujehun	17.9
	Bonthe	10.0
West	Freetown	20.8
	Tombo/Hamilton	10.6
Total		92.2
Missing System		7.8
Total		100.0

Sixty-two percent of the respondents were Muslim and 38% were Christians. Forty-two percent of the respondents were within the target group of children aged 6-15 years old with a 54% female participation. To protect the confidentiality of the respondents, only ages and the (children's) locations are used in the report. All quotes from children in this report come from out-of-school children unless otherwise stated.

Interview with key informants

Interviews were held with key informants from different Government branches and workers in the NGO sector (See Annex 3 for a list of people consulted).

Consultative meetings

Consultative meetings were held with the international consultant, UNICEF Representative, UNICEF Education and Child Protection sections. Meetings were also conducted with the Technical working group²¹ whilst this study was being developed. The Education Development Partners²² were kept informed of the study's progress throughout.

3.3 The Assessment team

The research team was composed of one international consultant, two local consultants and six research assistants. The international consultant²³ has extensive work experience with children

21 The Technical group consists of members of the Government, UNICEF and NGOs with other members co-opted when necessary.

22 A group of Donors and Non Government Organizations working in the education sector.

23 Two international consultants were hired to conduct the study. The first consultant oversaw the data-gathering phase and compiled the quantitative information for the study. A second consultant who further collected supplementary data and provided the overall analysis, continued the study. Both consultants have extensive experience working with children.

complemented by two local consultants who have worked in nutrition and gender research projects with UNICEF. Research assistants are able to speak at least two dialects in Sierra Leone, which helped facilitate interviews in rural areas. The research team was divided into two groups for the actual field research, maintaining a gender balance of two men to two women in each.

Process

Training: The work of the research team, consisting of the national consultants and research assistants, started with a one-week training on: interview techniques, guidelines for conducting in-depth interviews (especially with children), the importance of maintaining privacy and confidentiality, report writing techniques and the research process.

Field test: To ensure the validity of the methodology in collecting data, pilot focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted in Makeni district with local consultants. Feedback from the pilot was integrated in the actual data collection process.

3.4 Phases of the study

The out-of-school study was divided into three phases. The first phase was the planning stage. During this phase, the development of the research design, tool development, site selection, field-testing, finalisation of research tools and the training of the research team were conducted. The second phase was the data collection stage. Data was gathered from 54 communities over a five week period. Interviews and consultations with various players in the development sector and selected Government offices were also conducted during this time.²⁴ The last or the third phase of the research was data collation,²⁵ the final data analysis and the first draft.²⁶

3.5 Limitations of the study

Child participation

Initial data collected focused on children aged 15 to 17 years old. Thus, supplementary fieldwork was required to compensate for the lack of data on “younger children’s perceptions”. The research team conducted FGDs and in-depth interviews with children aged 6 to 14 years old in two Western Rural communities and Pujehun.²⁷

Tight time allocation

Considering the scope of the research, time allocated for the field research was tight. The need to gather supplemental was also coupled with tremendous time constraints, thus data gathering had to be limited to a smaller geographic vicinity. In providing a sample of communities across all regions, as well as reaching the identified target groups, the research team travelled to many distant rural areas. In spite of long work hours, vital information was lost due to the lack of time available for daily debriefings. Although the original target number of interviews with the

²⁴ The first international consultant conducted the first and second phases.

²⁵ Interview transcripts were sent to the data analyst in Nairobi for compilation and analysis of quantitative data.

²⁶ Supplemental fieldwork, analysis of quantitative data was completed by the writer so with the production of the first draft.

²⁷ Special thanks to Save the Children UK and the International Rescue Committee for helping organize the supplemental FGDs and in-depth interviews in their respective work areas.

identified groups was not reached, it is felt that the data collected still provides sufficient research information.

Targeting of children

The initial study design did not put much emphasis on the conscious inclusion of various categories of children “at risk” of dropping out or those that have already dropped out of school. Such categories included disabled children, children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS and street children. Though efforts were made in supplementary interviews to have a fully-representative sample of “at risk children”, the tight time allocation prevented the collection of adequate data under all categories. One recommendation of this study is to focus on providing more detailed information on the different categories of children at risk and identify specific recommendations whenever necessary.

Informed consent

Great care was taken to ensure that communities, especially children were sensitised on the research topic before the interviews took place. Consent for children’s participation was solicited from parent/s, guardian/s, caretaker/s prior to the activity, whenever possible. Unfortunately, due to the mobility of some of the out-of-school children, it was not possible to acquire prior consent from all adult caretakers before in-depth interviews were conducted.

All participants, especially children, were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could leave if they chose not to participate. Children were also informed that they were free to stop the interview at anytime and/or chose not to answer any question they do not feel comfortable with.

Striving to Achieve Universal Primary Education

4 Background

In 2001/02 there were 115 million out-of-school children in the world; 24 million of these were found in West and Central Africa.²⁸ The same UNESCO report stated that 59 percent of Sierra Leone's primary school-aged children were out-of-school. Since then, the global momentum in the education sector has improved with 2005, recording just 72 million primary school aged children as being out-of-school.²⁹ Despite this progress in recent years, the problem remains huge, not least in sub-Saharan Africa where 33 million of these children reside. Sixteen percent of these children have been enrolled but left before finishing primary school,³⁰ the rest have never been to school. Studies show that children living in the poorest 20% of households are three times more likely to be out-of-school.³¹ One in ten out-of-school children will never be able to attend primary school.³²

The decade long civil war in Sierra Leone displaced and separated many families, shattering the lives and dreams of thousands of children and adults alike.³³ The conflict also led to the destruction of much of the country's basic social services and stunted the educational opportunities and progress of thousands of children. After the war, the Government of Sierra Leone (GOSL), emerged with a strong commitment to education paving the way for the remarkable revitalization and advancement of the education sector. Education is one of the Government's top priorities as evidenced in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). To provide a legal framework in improving access to quality education, the GOSL introduced the Free Primary Education Policy (2001) where free schooling was offered from Class 1 to Class 6. In 2004, the Education Act was enacted; this legislation required all children to complete basic education.³⁴ Both policies were in line with the internationally agreed-upon Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) on Education ensuring that all children complete basic primary education and the gender disparity is eliminated at all educational levels.³⁵ The legislations, especially the Government's move to offer free primary education have reportedly led to the doubling of primary school enrolment from 650,000 to 1.3 million between the school years 2001/2 to 2004/5.³⁶ Various Government, Donor and NGO programmes have further supported

28 UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2005). *Children Out-of-school: Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education*. Montreal, Canada: UNESCO.

29 UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2005). *Children Out-of-school: Measuring Exclusion from Primary Education*. Paris: UNESCO. The formula used for calculating the number of out-of-school children was revised. This contributed to the huge drop in number of out-of-school children.

30 UNESCO. (2007). *Education for All by 2015: Will we make it?* Paris: UNESCO.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 The Sierra Leone civil war was from 1991 until 2002.

34 Basic education is defined in Sierra Leone as 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education.

35 United Nations Millennium Declaration. (2000).

36 World Bank. (2007). *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

the recovery of the education sector. One of the most important programmes to assist in narrowing gender disparities has been the provision of scholarship and incentive programmes to young girls, to allow them to complete primary education and continue on to secondary school.

Education is every child's right. However, in spite of all the progress, net enrolment rates in primary school remain at just 70%. There is still an estimated 300,000³⁷ children in Sierra Leone who are out-of-school. In order to achieve Universal Primary Education (UPE), it is imperative that the remaining 30%, the majority of whom are living in abject poverty, are reached. Poverty is seen as the underlying factor as to why many children are out-of-school. For the estimated 75% of the population living below \$2 a day, 57% of which live below \$1 a day, sending a child to school equates to the loss of a supplemental family income. These are the children who are slipping through the cracks; they are the most vulnerable children who urgently require a relevant and meaningful education to help change and improve their lives for a better future.

³⁷ Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF. (2005). *Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3 (MICS3)*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Statistics Sierra Leone and UNICEF.

Who are the out-of-school children? What factors discriminate children from schooling?

5 Findings and Analysis

5.1 Who are the out-of-school children?

The nuclear family³⁸ is the basic unit of Sierra Leonean society. It is the fundamental entity for social learning, a customary setting for both economic and emotional security for children. The destruction of the nuclear family, coupled with increasing poverty levels in Sierra Leone, exposes children to a volatile and precarious living environment. This situation has resulted in an increase in number of vulnerable children whose basic needs (such as food, clothing, shelter, and access to health services and education) are not being met. Most of the children interviewed were unable to access an education due to poverty and the discrimination that accompanies it.

Family status

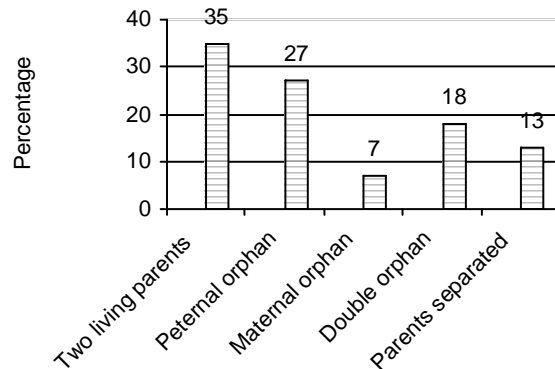
For the purpose of this report, the phrase “family status” refers to the relationship between parents and children as recognized by the law of the land. Over half of the research sample of out-of-school children surveyed,³⁹ (52%) were found to be orphans. Of this 52%, 27% were paternal orphans, 7% maternal orphans and 18% had lost both parents. Only one-third of the respondents stated that they still had two living parents. Of this latter category, a small proportion reported that their fathers were constantly absent⁴⁰ whilst others stated that they were sent to live with extended family members. One-tenth (13%) of the total respondents reported that their parents were either separated or divorced. Pockets of children in Pujehun along the Sierra Leone – Liberia border did not know their parents and had been passed on from one guardian to another since the war ended. These children are in extremely precarious situations; many are not in school.

38 Nuclear family in this sentence refers to immediate family composed of the parent(s) and the child/ren. The war and overwhelming poverty in the country has made it difficult for extended family members to provide financial support or safety nets for their kin.

39 All figures quoted from this section of the report onwards, are derived from a combined response of both schooling and non-schooling participant’s responses during in-depth interviews, unless otherwise noted.

40 “Absent fathers” pertains to fathers who worked and lived in another village or community, which may or may not have another family to support.

Table 3: Children's Family Status



Work has always been a part of children's socio-economic training and education in Sierra Leone. Results of this study support other research stating that orphans, those living with extended family members or caretakers, are more likely to be exposed to violence, abuse and exploitation.^{41 42}

Case Study 1: Aminata

"I am staying with my father's sister. My mother is dead, my father is alive but very old...he lives in the village. I am the person that does all the work in the house (aunt's house) and help her in the farm. I wash plates, sweep, grind cassava leaves for cooking and also help in cooking. (During daytime) I sell cassava leaves then work at the groundnut farm after selling. My aunt has 6 children, 4 of them go to school. I dropped out in Class 1...I don't know why I'm not in school." (10 year-old girl from Jenemba.)

Aminata further stated that even if there was someone to sponsor her school fees, she believes her aunt would still not allow her to go to school.

Children's living situation

Children's living situation or whom they live with, greatly determines their access to education.⁴³

⁴⁴ Seventeen percent of the children interviewed identified the death of both parents as the reason for dropping out-of-school. In-depth interviews and focus group discussion results from both adults and children alike identified orphans and those living with extended family

⁴¹ Phil, T. and Lamin, D. (2006). *Capacity and Vulnerability Assessment of Child Protection in Sierra Leone*. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

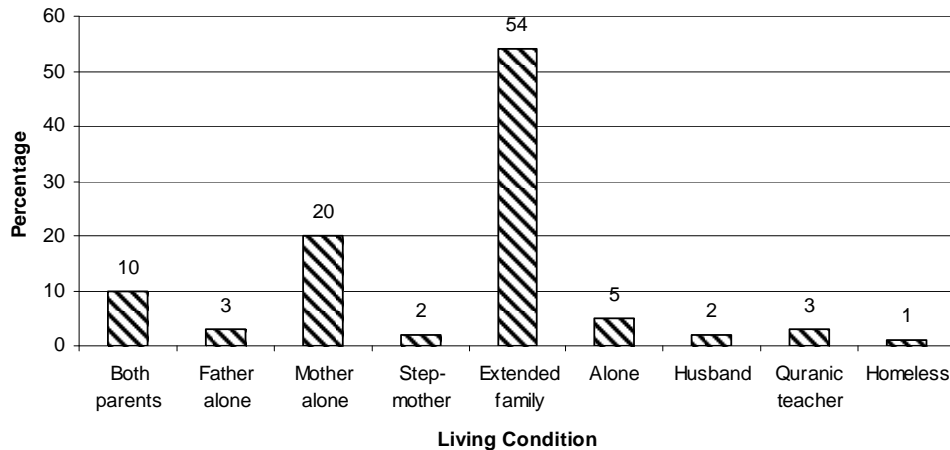
⁴² Foord, F. and Paine, K. (2005). *Situational Analysis Of Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Sierra Leone*. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

⁴³ Foord, F. and Paine, K. (2005). *Situational Analysis Of Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children in Sierra Leone*.

⁴⁴ Coinco, E. (2007). *Daily Realities and Hidden Truths Children Face in Slum Communities*. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

members/caretakers as the most vulnerable children in their communities. Fifty-four percent of the out-of-school children surveyed are living with extended family members. Five percent of all respondents reportedly live alone; 3% stated that they live with their Qur'anic teacher while one percent of the total number of children interviewed reported that they were homeless.

Table 4: Children's living situation



Twenty percent of respondents stated that they were living with their mothers whilst two-thirds said that they were living without or away from their biological mothers. Studies have shown that children living with their biological mothers are more likely to be protected and cared for. Children interviewed, aged 11 to 15 years logged the highest number of children living with extended family members at 58%. Children aged 6 to 10 years recorded 39% of the participants living with extended family members; the second most popular living arrangement for the said age group. It must be recognised that not all children living with extended family members are abused and exploited but based on the information gathered during this study, the proportion of those receiving care and support is much less than those who experience neglect and exploitation.

The importance of mothers in children’s schooling

“...my mother paid for my school fees...” is a phrase uttered repeatedly in various regions of the country by children interviewed. One important finding of this study is the high number of mothers striving to support their biological children’s education. While 39% of the children identified their father as the one who paid for their school expense,⁴⁵ 37% of the respondents said their mothers were the ones who shouldered their school charges even if the father was around. Twenty-four percent of the children identified their relatives as the one supporting their schooling. Further discussions with a small number of children who initially identified their fathers as the one supporting their education later clarified that though their father “permitted” or “chose”⁴⁶ them to go to school, the actual payment for school expenses came from the mother.

⁴⁵ Most children identifying their father as the one who supported their schooling came mainly from the capital region.

⁴⁶ In polygamous families, only hand “chosen” children by their fathers attend school. These children are also called the loved ones.

Mothers support their child's schooling through sales from their vegetable gardens or other petty trading activities.

“My father has 3 wives and 12 children...4 children are still in school and 6 have dropped out, 2 never went to school...their mother doesn't have the money to send them to school...to our father, the women are solely responsible for their children...if the mother doesn't have money to pay for her children's schooling then they will drop out-of-school.” (16-year-old female from Kambia.)

Children at considerable risk of dropping out

Children who have dropped out of school expressed extreme unhappiness and desperation in their present situation, many also expressed the fear of a bleak future. Whilst it is true that children may be “at risk” due to their geographic location, religion, gender, or their present situation, a combination of any of these coupled with a marginalised-low family income further aggravates a child's condition. Based on the study, the following children are at considerable risk of not attending school or completing the primary school cycle.⁴⁷

Orphaned children – especially doubled orphans and maternal orphans;
Children living with extended family members or caretakers who are exploited and abused;
Children who are internally trafficked for economic and/or domestic purposes with the false belief of (eventually) being sent to school;
Children involved in early or forced marriage;
Children who have been or are exposed to sexual harassment or sexual exploitation;
Disabled children;
Homeless or street children;
Children who have been withdrawn from armed conflict.
More than half of the out-of-school children interviewed reportedly experienced a lack of parental or adult care and guidance in their lives
Children from marginalized, large, polygamous families

5.2 Why are primary school aged children out-of-school?

There is a wide range of multiple and complex factors contributing to the discrimination of primary school aged children from schooling. Factors identified below were extrapolated from FGDs, in-depth interviews, anecdotal records and other sources. Though it is important to recognize that many of these factors overlap, barriers or challenges identified by respondents have been grouped into five main categories:

Socio-economic factors
Family or community related factors
School related factors
Children's values and attitudes
Law enforcement

⁴⁷ The list was generated by the status of children interviewed, it should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list. For instance, children infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS must be also be put in this category.

Responses under each category were ranked accordingly. It is important to note that interview participants, both young and old, did not rank any harmful cultural or traditional practice as a contributing factor to student drop out.

Socio-economic factors

“...I want to go back to school...but father says I must sell wood to save money for my schooling.” (7-year-old male from Tombo.)

Poverty

Poverty is the underlying reason provided by both children and adult participants alike in both FGDs and in-depth interviews of why primary school aged children are out-of-school. With the average poor household spending 37% below the amount required to meet their basic needs,⁴⁸ education is not seen as a priority. For the 80% of the poor living in rural communities, it is a choice between putting food on the table or sending their child to school.

High direct⁴⁹ and indirect⁵⁰ costs of schooling

The high direct and indirect cost of schooling was the second reason⁵¹ provided by both FGD and in-depth interview participants⁵² as to why school-aged children were not in school. Though primary education is free, there are still many indirect and direct expenses families have to cover in order to send their children to school. For daily wage earners or seasonal workers, the constant and sometimes continuous unofficial “collection” of fees is an added burden in sending their children to school. For children, the delay in “payment,” often associated to public humiliation and being sent home until the fee is paid, is a discouragement from going to school.

Although the GOSL has consistently allocated almost 20%⁵³ of its public expenditure to education, financial leakages within the educational system has prevented free primary education in becoming a reality. With delayed school subsidies, late teachers’ salaries, higher numbers of unqualified teachers who are not in the payroll but are more likely to be present in schools; schools are left on their own to find alternative source of funds for school improvements and provide stipends or salary to unqualified school staff. Fifty-six percent of all research participants identified the high direct and indirect costs associated with schooling as to the main reason why children were not in school. Eighty percent of children aged 6 to 10 and 51% aged 11 to 15 years old, reported this as the foremost reason as to why they were not in school. Parents/caretakers are unable to send their children to school due to high hidden direct and indirect costs associated

48 Government of Sierra Leone. 2005.

49 Direct costs associated with schooling refers to unofficial and/or compulsory fees charged in schools.

50 Indirect costs associated with schooling refers to, but is not limited to, school uniforms, textbooks, transportation and lodging costs.

51 High direct and indirect costs associated with schooling is ranked first under “school related factors” as to why school-aged children are not in school.

52 56% of all in-depth participants identified high direct and indirect educational costs.

53 There have been unconfirmed reports indicating GOSL’s intention of reducing public expenditure on education, though attempts to collect reliable information on the matter at the time of report writing proved difficult.

to schooling. With an estimated annual income of 472,000 leones (\$160 USD),⁵⁴ sending one child to primary school would cost a family ¼ of its annual income. A child in class 6 would have added expenses and in this respect, would cost the family 29% of their yearly income. Since the sample of hidden expenses does not include, transportation costs, food and lodging, it may still be considered a conservative estimate.

Table 5: Sample of Direct & Indirect School Expenses for School Year 2007-08

Sample of Direct and Indirect School Expenses for School Year 2007-2008	
Registration	2000
CT Salary/month	20000
School Renovation	6000
Exercise books	18000
School feeding	5000
Sports	10000
Socks	4000
Pants	1500
Vest	2000
Uniform	20000
Underwear	7000
Shoes	15000
Others	5000
Yearly Expense in Leones	115,500

Note: 115,500 leones = \$ 39.15 USD

Table 6: Sample of Class 6 Extra Expenses

Sample of Class 6 Extra Expenses	
Extra lesson	15000
Photos	5000
Total in Leones	20000

Note: 20,000 leones = \$ 6.78 USD

Expenditures in rural areas are 37% less than the amount required to meet basic needs while urban poor have a shortfall of 27%.⁵⁵ For the 80% of the rural poor, sending a child to school is a long term, uncertain, high-risk investment which they cannot afford while they strive for daily

54 CIA Fact book. (2007). Average annual income is between \$160-220 USD. Since the focus of the study is on the lower income family bracket, \$160 USD was utilized to compute for the estimated annual income with the prevailing exchange rate of 2.95 to a dollar. Available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-worldfactbook/print/sl.html>; <http://library.thinkquest.org/J002335/SierraLeone/sierraleone.html>. Internet; Accessed on June 15, 2008.

55 World Bank. (2007). *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

survival. Frequent school collections discourage many low-income families from continuously sending their child to school. Farmers in particular, would rather bring their children to the field and teach them the farm trade; a “family tradition” which parents learnt from their forefathers and has usually been the family’s main source of income for generations. Many farmers associate their heritage with their land and work. It is expected that someday, their own children will continue the farming legacy and pass this on to future generations, thus education is not seen as a priority.

People with (extremely) low levels of education tend to place little value on schooling their children. These parents/caretakers are usually themselves, from marginalised, low-income families. Not sending their children to school is something which ultimately perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty.

Low value placed on education⁵⁶

Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with both children and adults show different values placed on education by either the parent or child. Although there is a slow mind shift in understanding the importance of education, there are still communities that do not place a high value on education. Thirty-three percent of the child respondents stated that their parents had a negative attitude towards education.

“... when children go to school they forget about home and go to distant lands. There are some people in this village who sent their children to school that have never returned. Some of them have gone to America and only speak to them through telephone. Who will look after their homes when they die? Our parents did not send us to English school but I have built a house from my farm. I am doing well...I have 7 children, I have no intention to send them to English school...” (55-year-old male from Kailahun)

There are parents and children who said they found education “meaningless and irrelevant.” This is especially true for rural areas where only classes 1 to 4 are available and children are expected to move to towns for the last years of primary school. In Bonthe, this would mean a two-hour boat ride to get to the nearest community that has class 5 and class 6. Families in abject poverty find it “useless” to send their children to school since the children would “never finish (primary school) anyway.” Further probing led interviewees to identify that the lack of schools, qualified teachers and other school related concerns as other inhibiting factors of why parents do not prioritise education. These barriers are discussed in more detail under “School related aspects.”

Parent’s low literacy level

At just 39%, Sierra Leone has one of the lowest literacy⁵⁷ rates in the world.⁵⁸ Men have a 49% literacy rate while women have just a 29% literacy rate.⁵⁹ This statistic was confirmed during

⁵⁶ Also described as “negative attitudes towards education.”

⁵⁷ Literacy is defined as being able to read and write in any language.

⁵⁸ Statistics refers to those 10 years and older.

⁵⁹ Statistics Sierra Leone. (2004). *Statistics Sierra Leone Population Census*. Freetown, Sierra Leone

visits to (remote) rural areas where only a handful of people can read and write. Seventy percent of the women interviewed were unable to read or write in any language. Studies have shown that literate women provide better care for their children and are more likely to send their children to school. During focus group discussions, a number of girls who have never been to school indicated that their mothers also never attended school and were unable to read or write.

Focus group discussion results exemplify a trend seen in many areas of the country, explaining the low literacy of women and girls. Fifty-three percent of children in all FGDs stated they have never been to school. While 46% of the girls aged 6 to 10 never attended school, between the ages of 11 to 14 years, a significant increase is seen in the number of girls who never had the opportunity to attend school (68%). Amongst the children who dropped out of school, girls aged 6 to 10 registered a 69% drop out rate.⁶⁰ This pattern shows the preference afforded to boys in accessing schooling. It is evident that the cycle of poverty continues for girls and women in communities due to the low premium put on educating girls. Lack of education curtails women's participation in the decision making process within their families and in the community, leaving young girls a dearth of positive role models to look up to.

Family or Community related factors

Family or community related factors are further divided into cultural traditional/religious beliefs and practices and law enforcement.

Cultural, traditional and religious beliefs and practices

1. Polygamous marriages

Multiple marriages or polygamy was found in all parts of the country. This phenomenon is not only common within Muslim dominated communities but is ingrained as a traditional practice. There are Christians who also reportedly had more than one wife. One-third (29%) of the men interviewed reported having one wife; another third (33%) of the respondents indicated having two wives while the remaining third (37%) stated they had between 3 to 6 wives. The reasons given for many marriages varied according to locality. Amongst the most common are that men who have more than one wife have greater stature within their community. As customarily practiced more in rural areas, when a man dies, his brother⁶¹ marries his wife. For the women, it is both a blessing and a curse. If the woman marries her brother-in-law, she may then continue to cultivate the parcel of land left behind by her deceased husband and safeguard her source of income. On the other hand, women marrying a man with two or more wives with an average of three children per wife would find themselves in a worse situation. Although the husband is present, he does not necessarily provide financial support to all his wives. It is believed that a woman's stature within a polygamous family increases with the number of children she bears.⁶² Preference or favouritism between wives and children usually occurs. Stepchildren are sometimes openly resented. The study shows that children from previous marriages are known to suffer from unfair treatment with lesser access to food and education. In contrast, more evident

60 Drop out rate for children aged 10-14 years is 41 percent for girls and 59 percent for boys.

61 If the husband has no brother, the family will choose from within their clan who to marry the wife to.

62 Human Rights Watch. (2003). *We'll Kill You If You Cry*.

along border communities and areas where seasonal work exists, women are often found to have between 2 and 3 husbands.

“My stepfather said...”a nor de man dog for govment.” (I can’t take on someone else’s responsibility; to care for children who are not mine.) (Recounted by a 15-year-old male stepchild.)

2. High number of children per family

Thirty-nine percent of the interviewed children reported their father as having between 6 to 10 children, 33% were found to have an average of 1 to 5 children, whilst 17% had 11 to 15 children. In one tenth of the entire sample, fathers were reported to have between 16 and 25 children. The increase in the number of children fathered by a single man unsurprisingly reduces the probability of sending (all) the children to school. This is true for women as well; 34% of women respondents were found to have 5 to 6 children, whilst 19% had 7 to 8 children. Only 12% of the respondents had just 1 to 2 children.

“Father said he does not have enough money for me to continue schooling, because the money is not sufficient for me and my elder brother who is now in form two...so he stopped supporting me to keep my brother in school.” (13-year-old boy from Tombo.)

Focus group discussions and interview results show a common pattern in families with high numbers of children. Not all children go to school. The father selects children who are given the chance to attend school. These children are commonly called “the loved ones.” For obvious reasons, the father usually favours his own biological children rather than his stepson or stepdaughter.

“My (step)father and my (biological) mother support them (half siblings) in school...My mother says she has no money to send me to school because my step father has forbidden her...he said, his money is not enough to support his biological children.” (14-year-old female from Tombo.)

Though mothers struggle to financially support their children’s schooling, the low literacy level of women in rural areas coupled with a narrow range of work opportunities⁶³ and strong traditional values of “doing as the men say,” often leave their own biological children from a previous marriage discriminated and exploited.

Interviews with communities indicated differing ways of choosing which children to send to school. A common trend observed, was the father picking one to two children from each wife to send to school. In some cases, the eldest children are chosen to attend school with the hopes of eventually helping their younger siblings. In other cases, older children are the ones chosen to

⁶³ The study shows that 52 percent of women are involved in petty traders while 31 percent are farmers.

work on the farm and help their parents since they are considered to be “strong enough” for farm work, while younger children are chosen for schooling. In a rare case in Hamilton, a father of eight decided not to send even one of his children to school since he cannot afford to send everyone.

“I don’t want to be accused of having a favourite.” (Father of eight from Hamilton.)

Almost two-thirds (64%), of the families interviewed reportedly had “some” of their children going to school, 19% of the families stated that none of their children attends or has attended primary school. In addition just 17% said that all their children attended school.

3. Preference given to Qur’anic schools or madrassas

“...my stepfather said that school is not good and has no eternal value so I was forced to learn the Marabu⁶⁴...he also said if children go to (an English) school they will be disobedient to their parents.” (17-year-old male from Kabala.)

“..not every child in the family should go to English school...the family believes in Islam and that the eldest son should stay to take care of the family land...because most of the time children sent to English school leave the home and go to other places...some don’t come back to their home...” Imam, Sinkunia town.

Attending Qur’anic school or madrassa is important in all Islamic communities. Interviews with Muslim respondents from the North indicated the belief that sending their children to the madrassa would “ensure eternal salvation since it is the language spoken in the afterlife.” In Kabala town, both girls and boys have the privilege of attending madrassas, whilst for more rural communities in various districts, attendance to madrassas are limited to boys. More progressive Muslim communities send their children both to the madrassas and to the English school. The schedule may vary, but madrassa classes usually begin by 6:00 in the morning and ends around 7:30 giving the children enough time to go to their English school.⁶⁵ All madrassa classes resume for an hour in the evening, then children leave for home. Although there is a slow growing positive acceptance of English schools, many Muslim families still prefer to send their children solely to madrassas. Aside from eternal salvation, parents also said that one reason they send their children to madrassas is because it costs less than sending their child to the English school. Those living with their imam reportedly spend an average of 2.5 to 4 hours a day learning about the Qur’an. The rest of the day is spent working on their imam’s farms. Farm work may start from 8 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon. Though some madrassas may be free, many charge a small fee or a “token.” Farm work and other domestic chores are expected forms payment to the imam for those children living with the imam.

⁶⁴ Translates as Qur’anic education in children’s language.

⁶⁵ “English school” refers to all schools, government-supported and government- run schools, all missionary or community based schools except for the madrassa.

“...some people send their children to Qur’anic schools known (here) as Marabu schools...to them the marabu school is less expensive...the child is handed over to the karamokoh (imam)...they do not pay anything again until the child has completed his learning...” (55-year-old male from Koinadugu)

4. Participation in secret society activities

Unless an individual is initiated, he/she is neither considered a true tribal member nor an adult ready for marriage and responsibilities.⁶⁶ Partaking in secret society initiations as an initiate, drummer and/or a dancer has affected the class participation of many young girls and boys, which eventually resulted to school drop out. Initiation periods vary according to the society from two to three times in one school year. A child may miss least 2 weeks of schooling even if initiation time is conducted during long holidays. In some areas of the country, initiations coincide with the National Primary School Examination (NPSE), resulting in girls missing the examination, even if they have reached class 6. A passing grade in the NPSE examination is required to advance to secondary school. This means the child, usually a girl, needs to wait until the end of the next school year to take the exam. Girls and boys who are involved in secret society activities as drummers or dancers travel to different locations at various times during initiation periods within one school year, which causes them to miss school for longer periods of time. Frequent absenteeism causes children to fall behind on their schoolwork, which may result in a loss of interest in schooling and/or poor grades, which eventually leads to either repetition or worse still, dropping out of school.

5. Early/forced marriages

More than 80% of marriages in rural areas are contracted through customary law.⁶⁷ Several ethnic tribes practice child betrothal where a bride price is paid at birth to the family in addition to labour, other services in cash and in kind on a regular basis until the child grows up.⁶⁸ The higher education level of women and girls in the capital region and other larger cities, may have led to recent alterations in the practice of early marriage.⁶⁹ However, this change appears to have been much slower in rural communities, particularly where it is traditionally ingrained. Pre-arranged customary marriages are linked to secret society initiation ceremonies where young girls are “claimed” by their grooms after the initiation rights. High incidences of dropouts between classes 4 to class 6 may partly be attributed to this. For some families this may also be the reason why some girls are discriminated against when it comes to accessing education.

“I was not ready to marry but my parents forced me...because my husband paid a big sum of money for my ‘kola’.”⁷⁰ My parents harassed and threatened to disown me if I did

66 Alterman, O., Binienda, O., Rodella, S. and Varzi, K. (2002). *The Law People See: The Status of Dispute Resolution in the Provinces of Sierra Leone in 2002*. Freetown: National Forum for Human Rights.

67 United Nations Population Fund. (2005). *Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone: A case study*. New York, New York: UNPF.

68 Ibid.

69 United Nations Population Fund. (2005). *Gender Based Violence in Sierra Leone: A case study*. New York, New York: UNPF.

70 Pertain to a token payment. In this statement it pertains to what is commonly referred to as “bride money”.

not marry the man they chose for me...I have never been to school...my young brother and two sisters are in school...my father is paying their school fees...when I asked my father (before getting married) to send me to school he refused and said that he was only going to send the younger ones to school.” (16-year-old female from Kambia).

Participation in initiation ceremonies signals the transition of a girl into adulthood. It symbolized the girl's readiness for a married life. For some parents, initiating their girl child into secret societies has been a justification to forgo parental responsibilities. Marrying their children early would reportedly mean extra support for the entire family from the new son-in-law.

“Early marriage is a major reason why girls are out-of-school. In Sattieh Chiefdom where children don't have access to schooling, girls marry as young as 12 years old. They are initiated into secret societies then parents force them to marry. This is one easy way of taking the burden of caring for the girl child ...parents believe girls are more difficult to care for than boys.” (Woman leader from Bonthe Island.)

It was also reported that during the initiation season, one girl from every batch is “offered” to the paramount chief. It is considered a family honour if the paramount chief takes a person's child as his “bride.” This increases the stature of the entire family within their community.

Early sexual activity and sexual relationships with older and more experienced men also increase the vulnerability of young girls to contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Early marriage curtails the child's opportunities to further pursue education, become financially secure and independent. In this respect, Education is vital in breaking this cycle of poverty and promoting independence.

School related factors

Accessibility

All in-depth interview respondents ranked school distance, or the lack of a nearby school second⁷¹ under “school related factors” as to why school-aged children were not in school. A common problem in remote rural communities is the lack of a nearby school. Schools are sometimes located between 4 to 10 miles away where children walk through secluded and isolated areas. The number of young children accessing school decreases as the distance of the school increases. Twenty percent of children interviewed aged 6 to 10 years stated they were not in school either due to the distance or lack of school within their locality, unsurprisingly 14% of children aged 11 to 15 years old also stated the same factor for not being in school. For security and economic purposes, girls are normally held back from schooling until they reach aged 8 to 10 years and are able to walk long distances. For boys in Islamic communities, the preferences of families to send their boys to madrassas delay their participation in the regular school system until around the same age. Parents are afraid to send their girls and boys to distant schools due to the dangers they may face along the way such as abduction, rape or snakebites.

⁷¹ High direct and indirect costs associated with schooling ranked first.

“Some communities don’t have schools. Children have to walk long distances to get to the next village where there is a school. Parents are afraid to send their children for fear of dangers along the way... (like) snakebite, rape or kidnapping. This is why children go to school between 8 -10 years old. Parents can only send their children when they are sure that they would be able to cover the distance to school.” (60-year-old male from Kailahun.)

High rate of teenage pregnancy

“It is very painful for the parents when girls are sent to school and they come home pregnant. So, they are discouraged to send the younger girls to school for fear of them getting pregnant.” (Paramount chief, Koinadugu.)

The high rate of teenage pregnancy, both in primary and secondary school, has had a discouraging effect on many families when it comes to education. For poor families who are “taking a chance” on sending their girl child to school, their untimely pregnancy led to younger siblings being denied access to school. Forty-three percent of girls between the ages of 11 to 14 years old who participated in the focus group discussion in Tombo,⁷² stated that they had to drop out-of-school when their parent/s refused to support their schooling after learning about the pregnancy of a school-going sister(s).

Puberty years are known as the years of sexual experimentation. Early sexual activity and consensual sexual relations between peers in primary school and older men in the community, frequently lead to unwanted pregnancies. The lack of credible information on sexual and reproductive health issues for adolescents, contributes to the increasing number of unplanned pregnancies. It is uncommon in Sierra Leone for parents to discuss sexual concerns with their children.

“I am not happy that I am pregnant and I am regretting it now... I don’t think I will make the same mistake again... They (parents) do not approve of my pregnancy nor are they happy. I stopped in class 6... I am hoping to go back to school (after giving birth).” (13-year-old female from Bonthe.)

Data gathered revealed various rationales for children’s unwanted pregnancies. The most common reason given by adults is the children’s lack of parental supervision, especially for those who are not living with their parents.⁷³ Young girls⁷⁴ reportedly engage in transactional sex or prostitution with their peers and/or older men in the community to supplement their school or living expenses. In many farming communities, girls are reportedly “encouraged” by their

72 Tombo is a Western Rural community.

73 Pertains to children who are sent to neighbouring villages or towns for schooling, since their own village does not have a school or lacks higher elementary classes. These children usually stay in the town or village with a relative or friend and only come home on weekends.

74 Refers to girls “as young as 11 or 12 years old with grown breasts,” as described by community members.

parent/s to have a “boyfriend.” Having a boyfriend would mean an “extra hand in farm work...sometimes the girl gets pregnant” explained a focus group discussion participant in Bafodia.

Interviews in Kailahun and Makeni suggests a backlash in the present girls’ scholarship programmes where girls are (forcibly) impregnated by their peers as a “punishment” for receiving opportunities to further their schooling, whilst boys are left with no option. Field researchers noted boys’ underlying resentment manifested through their side comments when discussions about girls’ scholarship programmes or discussions with girls were conducted. NGOs working in Kailahun communities have apparently recorded cases, where girls were raped by their male classmates (resulting to pregnancies) because of the “unfair” benefits the girls received from the scholarship programmes.⁷⁵ With the prevailing belief in Sierra Leone that “family problems should only be discussed within the family,”⁷⁶ nobody has been held accountable for this sexual assault, even if the girl can identify the perpetrator. Recognizing that this is a very sensitive issue, a clear distinction between consensual relationships and forced sexual practices must be made.

Teacher’s sexual advances

Case Study 2: A teacher’s spurned sexual advances

“My father sent us all to school but I stopped attending school in the middle of the second term in class 4...I was 11 years old but I looked like a 15 years old...as you see my body is big...at the time, I had full grown breasts and looked like a ‘big girl’...my class teacher kept making “love advances” to me...he asked me to have sex with him...he did not say it directly but told me he loved me and that I should be his ‘girl friend.’ He was around 40 years old and had 2 wives and he said he was going to marry me. He was a very wicked man. Because I refused, he beat me every morning when I was late for school and also whenever he asked questions in class that I cannot answer – he would punish me. He would give me 24 lashes and say to me ‘fool man.’⁷⁷ He would verbally abuse me in front of the whole class...I started missing classes whenever I am late for school and followed other girls to the river...it was not possible for me to tell anyone such a story...people think that teachers are good at discipline...the teacher told me I was not going to pass...so why should I waste my time (for school)... I feel bad because it wasn’t that I was not making an effort to learn...I was “unlucky”...this is why I am suffering today...my other siblings are in foreign lands...I am a farmer.” (25-year-old female from Koinadugu)

75 Coinco, E. (2007). *Primary education for all...still a dream for many children*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Save the Children UK – Sierra Leone Office.

76 Physicians for Human Rights. (2000). *War-Related Sexual Violence*.

77 Translates into “You’re a fool.”

The incident above still occurs in many primary schools today. Sexual advances made by male teachers on primary school-aged students are known to happen, though in the majority of cases, it still remains unreported and unrecorded.

“People are afraid to report teachers...anybody that prosecutes a teacher who ends up losing his job will be considered a wicked person by the community. That person will be accused of depriving the teacher his livelihood. It will create hostility between the clan of the teacher and the one who reported. Nobody wants to be accused of depriving another of his livelihood. Reporting the culprit of a crime that one is acquainted with is considered to be a hateful act in community...sometimes teachers plead with the girls not to expose them...they bribe the girls and the girls accuse an innocent school boy for her pregnancy...due to lack of evidence against the teacher, parents do not report it...even if they know that the teacher is responsible for the pregnancy.” (Adult female community member from Koinadugu.)

In most cases, children are afraid to report cases of violence committed against them, especially if the perpetrator is a powerful community member. Teachers are considered such people, more so in communities where only a handful of literate people exist. In spite of the high number of unwanted pregnancies and “talk” of sexual assault or coercion by teachers involving young girls, there are no reports of a teacher ever being apprehended. More often than not, families reportedly settle things quietly amongst themselves to avoid further scandal, talk and stigmatization within their community. Repeatedly, family honour and fear of social isolation is deemed more essential than a child’s safety and well-being.

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment is an acceptable form of “school discipline” in Sierra Leone. The use of corporal punishment on children is culturally entrenched in many Sierra Leonean families.⁷⁸ Caning, flogging or hitting a child to “discipline” them is an acceptable form of punishment within the home environment. The majority of parents “expect” their children to be flogged at school. In some cases, parents even request their child to be flogged so that they will learn better.⁷⁹ Constant and early exposure to various forms of corporal punishment since childhood has produced a “normalised behaviour” of violence, resulting in a general acceptance of caning and/or flogging for a large number of Sierra Leoneans. It is therefore not surprising that the only 5% of the total respondents identified corporal punishment as a grounds for a student dropping out. The present educational system condones the use of corporal punishment in schools, giving teachers and other school staff the “legitimacy” to use it as a form of school discipline. It is unfortunate that corporal punishment and other humiliating and degrading forms of chastisement are used in the guise of discipline. Children gave (excessive) caning or flogging, the use of verbally abusive and degrading words, and the cleaning of filthy latrines as common practices of school discipline.⁸⁰ In a study conducted by Save the Children UK,⁸¹ majority of school going

78 Bambrick, K. (2004). *Silent Victims, Young Girls at Risk*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Campaign for Good Governance.

79 Information shared by Save the Children UK staff based on their field experience.

80 Children from Pujehun commonly mentioned the cleaning of filthy latrines as a humiliating punishment.

children and those that dropped out of school agreed that, “punishments given are occasionally not commensurate to their offence.” For children who are on the verge of dropping out school due to social and/or economic stigmatisation and discrimination, further humiliation in the name of discipline is likely to ultimately push them to drop out-of-school completely.

“...I was ashamed of putting on a torn and short uniform...I was always being flogged in school...my father always delayed in paying my school fees...I dropped out a year ago...I got fed up.” (15-year-old female from Susan’s Bay, Freetown.)

The use of corporal punishment and other humiliating and degrading forms of discipline creates a learning environment of fear and anxiety, which may eventually squelch a student’s desire to take risks, to critically use their thinking skills and ultimately to think outside the box. Furthermore, the use of demeaning forms of discipline actively promotes aggressive behaviour and violence over values such as tolerance, patience and understanding.

Poor quality of education

The quality of primary education varies considerably from school to school and from region to region;

“We only have up until Class 4 in our village...village schools and big town schools are not the same. I was always first in my class in our village school... when I came here, I started back from Class 1...I was not able to measure up (academically) with the boys I met in Class 4 so my uncle asked me to start over.” (17-year-old male from Bonthe.)

The purpose of sending a child to school is to provide meaningful learning and preparation for a better future. A meaningful quality education is not only about “what” children learn in school or “how” children learn; it is measured by the successful application of learned concepts in children’s daily lives. Adult community members lamented during informal conversations that, “some children in school don’t even know how to write their names.” Parents or caretakers do a cost analysis of a child’s schooling, if children do not learn as much as parents hope they would whilst in school, parents or caretakers become disappointed and lose their interest in continuing the schooling of the child. Parents or caretakers were quoted stating, “the child is not serious about school...and I don’t have money to waste (on him or her).”

Poorly resourced schools, a weak teaching force, a teacher centred approach and high teacher absenteeism are only a few of the many challenges plaguing the existing education system. All of these issues have a direct impact on the quality of teaching in schools. There is strong indication that school quality is emerging as an important factor affecting parent’s decision on whether to

81 Coinco, E. (2007). *Primary education for all...still a dream for many children*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Save the Children UK – Sierra Leone Office.

send their child to school or have them work.^{82 83} This is true especially for the most disadvantaged children.

1. Shortage of (qualified) teachers

The decline in teacher number and quality are remnants of the last civil war. The displacement of people during the war and the fluid mobility of people thereafter left many schools in remote rural areas, with a small presence of qualified teachers. Teachers in rural areas are mostly men. This has led to the alleged increase of protection issues such as gender-based violence in schools. The lack of educated and qualified female teachers in remote rural areas has resulted in a dearth of positive role models for young girls in villages.

In a village in Koinadugu, the village school has one qualified teacher and one unqualified⁸⁴ teacher for class 1 to 4. A similar scenario is seen in a school in Jenemba where one qualified teacher and two unqualified teachers were teaching classes 1 to 6. Often, the unqualified teachers are the ones who are most present in the school. This scenario is repeated in many more rural schools. The ratio of unqualified teachers to qualified teachers is high. Although there is a concerted GOSL and NGO effort in training unqualified teachers, these trainings have been located in selected target areas and have not covered the entire country.

2. Low motivation for qualified teachers

“...the Government should pay the teachers on time...when they are paid on time they will work...they will come to school...” (14-year-old school going female.)

Delayed teacher salary for qualified teachers, is the reported cause of frequent teacher absenteeism, leading to poor motivation.

Disability

People with disabilities are amongst the poorest of the poor. The two distinct problems related to disability are:

Children with disabled parent/s or caretaker

Children with disabilities

82 Buonomo Zabaleta, M. (2007). *A Dynamic Analysis of the Effects of Child Labor on Educational Attainments in Nicaragua*. Doctoral dissertation, The George Washington University, Washington, DC.

83 Guarcello, L. and Rosati, F. C. (2007). *Does School Quality Matter for Working Children?* Rome, ILO/UNICEF/World Bank, Understanding Children's Work. (Draft.)

84 An unqualified teacher is a person who is not a certified teacher but “teaches” in school. Qualifications for unqualified teachers range from those who finished junior secondary level to people who only lack a few units to finish their teacher-training course. Training received by unqualified teachers also vary. Majority of unqualified teachers have not received proper training on teaching.

Children with disabled parent/s or caretaker

Able-bodied⁸⁵ children of disabled people take on adult responsibilities at an early age. At times, this may mean never having the opportunity to go to school leaving them little prospect of improving their future.

Case Study 3: Education and disability

“I am the eldest of 3 sons in my family; I have to feed them by “dregging.”⁸⁶ Both my parents are blind; my younger brothers walk around with them. I was going to school...but I stopped in class 6. My mother sent me to school. Even though she was blind she was determined that I go to school. I used to take them (mother and father) to the park in the morning before going. Whatever she had, she used to pay my school charges, uniform and other materials. We were asked to pay for photographs, extra classes and other items...my mother could not get the 20,000 leones required. Raising the money was difficult through begging alone and my mother could not pay the fees...I stopped attending (class 6) because I could not pay.” (17-year-old male from Makeni.)

Children with disabilities

Children who are physically challenged, especially those with problems with their extremities such as their legs, are more likely to access school, if given the proper assistive devices, compared to children who are blind or deaf. Most schools visited in rural communities still lag behind on the accessibility of buildings, classroom and latrines for physically challenged children. Teachers who are already overwhelmed with the high number of students per class or the number of classes to teach, are ill equipped to teach and provide the necessary support for disabled children. There are strong negative perceptions associated with disability in rural communities, which prevents disabled people from accessing basic health and education services. Low literacy levels and strong superstitious beliefs further fuels the discrimination of disabled children and adults alike.

Case Study 4: Alpha’s life with epilepsy

“I sleep anywhere...I stay with my people⁸⁷...my mother doesn’t want me because of my condition...nobody wants me in school...I want to go to school but they won’t allow me in school (Alpha⁸⁸ is epileptic).” (13-year-old male from Kambia.)

⁸⁵ The term is also used by disability rights activists and their supporters to refer to those who function "normally" in society and do not have an outward physical disability...; available from <http://www.answers.com/topic/able-bodied-3>; Internet; accessed July 30, 2008.

⁸⁶ Carrying loads for people.

⁸⁷ The child is homeless.

“Alpha roams the streets of Kambia...his mother abandoned him here without saying goodbye to anybody or putting him in the care of someone...she left him over two years ago...she (the mother) spent lots of money on herbalists to cure him (the child)...we thought his condition was due to the “debul”⁸⁹....a demonic spell...he attended school until class 5 but the teachers are afraid that his condition is contagious and might spread to other kids if they stepped on the saliva he released during his epileptic attack...so we stopped him from going to school...his condition is an embarrassment to us...each time he falls, we are sent to collect him from the school or in the streets...because nobody at school wants to touch him...or his saliva...we never deprive him of food when he is around...I can not care for him...his father is a nurse in Freetown.” (Alpha’s 60-year-old blind “grandfather”.)

As emphasised by the case study above, there are various forms of disability: sensory disability (blind, visually impaired, deaf, hard of hearing, deaf/blind) or mentally disadvantaged (which may include children that have been deeply traumatised by the war), children who are developmentally delayed or children with speech impairment to mention a few. Children with mild forms sensory disability that do not receive the extra support they need for their special needs whilst at school.

Children’s values and attitudes

“Daily survival needs”

“Pondo,” “jagaja,” “kankele” or “kere” are the various names given to a communal group of children aged 8 years and above, who are hired for seasonal farm work and other odd jobs. A number of children who are members of these groups cited their preference to work and receive financial remuneration as opposed to “sitting in a classroom hungry.” There are a number of children who find education unimportant due to the need for daily survival. Children involved in communal work may receive between 2,000 to 3,000 leones a day.⁹⁰ Many of these children support themselves and their families; a hard days work would provides them with money, with which they can buy food and clothing. In contrast, the benefits of education tend to be experienced more in the long-term. Many children cannot afford to wait so long. Families in abject poverty rely heavily on their children’s economic contribution. Sending a child to school means losing an added family income or farm help. Education is a long-term investment that families and/or caretakers cannot afford, especially when it means not only losing supplementary family income but also having to cover the continuous payment of school expenses or hidden school fees to send a child to school.

88 Not his real name.

89 Translates into “devil.”

90 Salary varies depending on the kind of work children do. Children involved in brushing the land and clearing off the land for planting receive more money since this is considered harder work. The amount paid to children and terms of payment also vary depending on the village. Children earn between 6,000 to 9000 leones per week. Since this is a communal working group, work is distributed amongst all members.

Peer pressure and rebellion

Peer pressure is a strong influential factor for most children during their pre-teenage and teenage years. More common in towns and cities, dropout children aged 13 years old and above reportedly frequent dances or nightclubs, as they are called in Freetown.⁹¹ Parents, during group discussions identified this as one of the main problems that their youths face. Children from villages who have dropped out of school apparently frequent these dances.⁹² Adult community members associate the dances and nightclubs with promiscuity, poor school grades, early pregnancies and school drop out, in spite of parental advice.

Small villages are now starting to experience similar problems;

“Whenever visiting musical bands from Kabala or Makeni come, the children and youths make it a point to attend, even if the dance lasts for a whole week. Some children in this village even tour with the band from one village to the other...they want to enjoy their lives but the result is pregnancy...my eldest daughter...now 15 years old...is not a serious girl...she wanted to make babies, now she is a mother...she is content with her life...I am an uneducated woman but I spend my time in the farm to pay for all her school charges and all I got in return is a grandchild I am not ready for...there are other children in this village who are not attending school because their parent could not provide for them but for her it was different.” (36-year-old female from Bafodia.)

Law enforcement

Disconnection between legislative and field implementation

High levels of poverty are present and apparent in many rural communities across Sierra Leone. Adults’ pre-occupation with sustaining family income has at times taken priority over children’s nurturing and protection. As a result, out-of-school children are often deprived of access to education, health services and protection. There are currently no systemic mechanisms in place within communities to help children, yet at the national level, legal frameworks are in place to ensure child survival, participation, protection and holistic well being as stipulated in the Child Right’s Act (2007). The Education Act (2004) mandates all children to complete primary basic education. Yet in spite of these two legislations, little or no meaningful community implementation has taken place. Passing legislation is just the first step. Equally important are proper enforcement mechanisms, community sensitisation campaigns and community initiated support for poor and marginalised children.

“We try to set by-laws that mandate parents to send their children to school and take proper care of them but they prove ineffective...there is no legislation on children going to school, so there is no enforcement of such by-laws.” (Paramount Chief, Makeni.)

⁹¹ Anecdotal record. Derived from informal discussions with parents and other community members.

⁹² Interviews reveal that it is common to see children aged 13 and above who have dropped out of school, refusing to further participate in farm work. These children would rather go to town and find odd jobs. Frequently, these are the same people who are found at the dances.

The quote above is a clear indication of the need to disseminate vital information for enforcement at the community level. Knowledge is power. If those people in key positions in small, rural communities are aware of important bills and understand the long-term benefits for their communities, they can make necessary changes and ultimately be a source of change. There is a clear disconnection between the legislated bills, information dissemination and community-driven solutions.

Ranked by all	Reasons given for dropping out	Ranked by 6-10 year olds	Ranked by 11-15 year olds	Overall Ranking
1	Direct and indirect school expenses	2	1	1
2	Distance/lack of school	1	3	2
3	Time (in relation to work)	-	2	3
5	War	-	6	6
6	Forced Marriage	-	-	7

5.3 When do children drop out-of-school?

As indicated earlier in this study, the underlying factor of why children drop out-of-school is poverty. It is the lack of or insufficient family income to support children’s education. Interviewed children also identified life-changing events such as parental death, divorce or parental separation as reasons why they had to drop out-of-school. The traditional practice of “giving” a child to a childless relative or sibling to assist him or her, may also result in a child dropping out-of-school or never attending in the first place.

“My parents gave me to my aunt when I was 4 or 5 because she has no daughter. She needed somebody to assist⁹³ her with domestic chores and the foo foo trade.”⁹⁴ (14-year-old girl from Tombo has never been to school.

93 She assists her aunt with the cooking, selling, water collection and washing dishes for her foo-foo business.

94 Foo-foo – Sierra Leonean food made of fermented cassava eaten with vegetable or okra soup. It is sometimes cooked with beans, cassava and/or potato leaves. Meat and/or fish may also be added to the dish

Case Study 5: Living with my (step)sister

“Since we moved to Jendema two years ago, my (step)sister keeps promising me that she was going to send me to school but up ‘til now she has not done that. I was attending school at Gofor Village but since I relocated here, I have not gone to school. I really don’t feel good about it especially when my twin (who lives with another sister in a different village) is going to school. I fetch water, go to the bush to collect wood, cook and care for her baby. I sell cosmetics around town for my (step)sister...My twin and I have not seen each other since they separated us.” (10-year-old female from Jendema.)

A customary practice of sending or “offering” a child to a person⁹⁵ to bring them to town or the city for better (education) opportunities results in internal movements and migrations which cause school children to drop out. Though it is important to recognize the existence of extended family members or caretakers who care for and support children under their charge, the majority of the out-of-school children interviewed, who have been “offered” or trafficked in the guise of sending them to school, ended up being exploited for free. This is something which ultimately crushed their prospects of schooling.

Three girls between the ages of 11 to 14 who participated in the Tombo FGD, live in a small house with their “aunty” and three other girls around the same age as them. Informal discussions with the three children revealed that two of them have never been to school and one dropped out of school. One 14 year-old girl stated, she came from Lungi and was reportedly sent to live with the “aunty” by her family, with the promise of sending her to school. All three children were involved in petty trade, selling fish for their “aunty.” As stated by the children, none of them has been in touch with their families since they left for the city. Although the girls’ situation is common knowledge amongst the community, no action has been taken to provide assistance to the girls. It seems that people simply dismiss this scenario as a common occurrence and part of their daily community lives.

The dropout rate throughout class 1 to 6 is high, only half of the entrants to class 1 are expected to reach class 6.⁹⁶ The following information was gathered to provide data on which class children dropped out from and their target re-entry grades. FGD reports show that 44% of children aged 6 to 10 dropped out in class 2, followed closely by a 38% drop out rate in class 3. In-depth interview transcripts indicated a 33% drop out rate in class 2 as the highest number of dropouts, supporting FGD findings; Class 4, at 21%, logged the second highest drop out rate with class 1 also being high at 20%. Children aged 11 to 14 years who took part in the FGDs also recorded the highest drop out rate for both girls and boys in class 3 (41%). The transcripts from

⁹⁵ May pertain to an extended family member or a person coming from the same village or clan, which the family may personally know or not know. There are also recorded cases of sending children with an “aunty” or a friend of a friend’s.

⁹⁶ World Bank. (2007). *Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

this age group however, indicated the highest drop out rate occurred in class 4 (28%) closely followed by class 3 (23%) and class 5 (21%). (See *Table 7 and Table 8* in the next page.)

Eighty percent of children aged 6 to 10 have been out-of-school for a year, while 52% of respondents aged 11 to 15 years reported the same. This signifies that even with the introduction of free primary education and compulsory education, there is still a very high drop out rate, which hits the most vulnerable families the hardest. In spite of the high enrolment figures, the retention and completion rate at primary school is relatively low for the impoverished families who desperately require assistance to educate their children and keep them in school until the end of the primary school cycle.

Table 7: FGD – the class children dropped out from

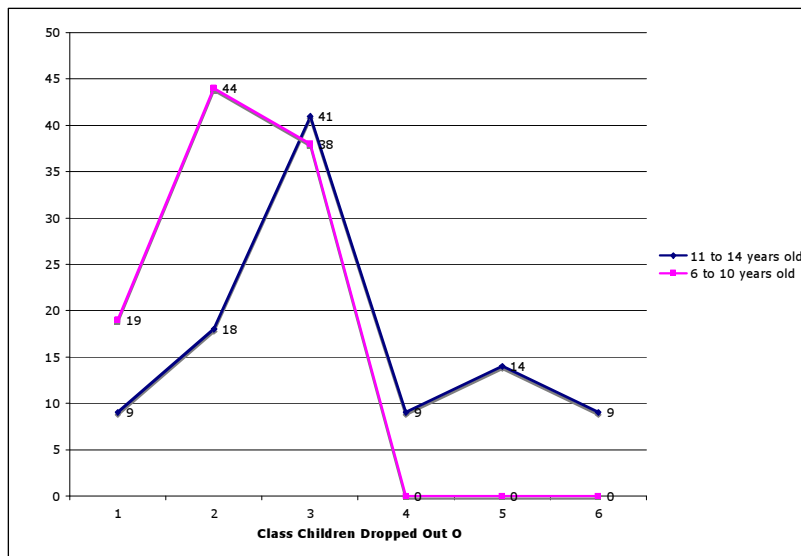
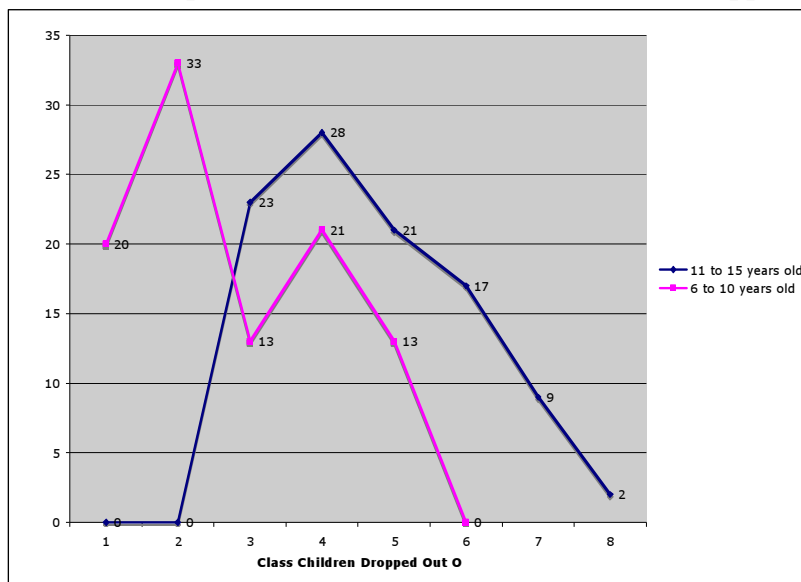


Table 8: In-depth interview result – the class children dropped out from



Where are the out-of-school children?

What are they doing?

5.4 Where are the out-of-school children? How (in)visible are they?

Whilst data on school-going children exists, information on out-of-school children remains scarce. There is presently no existing consolidated data on out-of-school children; these are the “invisible” children. With this invisibility comes the lack of services afforded to out-of-school children and with this comes increased vulnerability, abuse and desperation.

Out-of-school children are less invisible to members of the community. During school hours, these children are normally conducting their own business for the day. In many of the communities visited there are a large number of young mothers, or mothers-to-be, aged between 13 to 15 years old who are out-of-school and involved in various forms of petty trading. A high number of children may be found in markets, either selling or carrying loads for people, children are also highly visible in the streets, hawking goods, carrying out petty trading or working on the farms. A real issue facing the Eastern region in particular, is that children as young as seven years old, may be found in deep land craters searching for diamonds or handing water to diamond miners.⁹⁷ In seaside communities, many children can be found fishing, mending nets, helping haul in the catch, fishing in the open sea with fishermen, perhaps for days on end.⁹⁸ In rural communities, children help in the preparation of farmland throughout the harvest season; shoeing monkeys from ground nut farms or shoeing birds from plants is specifically considered as a “child’s task.” A small number of children were reportedly involved in informal apprentice programmes to learn a trade; kola or token money is given to the “teacher” to enter this kind of “work.” Although difficult to “see” due to their seclusion in houses, people in the community are aware of the high numbers of child domestic workers, both in rural and urban areas. Even if out-of-school children are not well-documented, they are highly visible wherever one may go.

5.5 What are out-of-school children doing?

Sierra Leone is presently the lowest ranked county in the Human Development Index.⁹⁹ Families living in absolute poverty urgently require the assistance of their children to supplement the family income;

“My mother requested that I joined her (and stop school) in order to assist with the domestic chores...we also fish in the sea at night...I bail the water out of the boat while

⁹⁷ The International Rescue Committee runs a programme in selected districts, which targets children involved in various forms child labour, and attempts to bringing these children back to schools. Though significant improvement may be seen within IRC’s target sites, there are still many children involved in the mining trade in other mining communities.

⁹⁸ Coinco, E. (2007). *Daily Realities and Hidden Truths Children Face in Slum Communities*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Save the Children, UK-Sierra Leone Office.

⁹⁹ UNDP. (2007). *Human Development Index*. Sierra Leone currently ranks 177/177.

the adults fish. I also carry the fish from the boat to land for the fishermen...I pack fish on the banda¹⁰⁰ to dry them.” (13-year-old male from Bo/Tombo.)

Child Labour

Both school-going and out-of-school children discussed the phenomenon of children working in income generating activities. Eighty-seven percent of children who participated in the study indicated that they were involved in at least one form of income generating activity, which could fall under the definition of child labour. An earlier child labour assessment further underscores that 80% of people surveyed could not distinguish between working conditions that are appropriate for adults, but harmful for children.¹⁰¹ Families living in extreme poverty tend to put a higher value on financial stability than on a child’s education. The lack of mechanisms to offset the opportunity costs of the vulnerable and marginalised has resulted in children combining work and education.

School going children are mostly involved in petty trading or other economic activities after school hours. In rural areas however, school going children are often found to be working on market days, meaning they may miss between five to fifteen school days a month.¹⁰² Children working during market days are either engaged in petty trading or help carry loads for people. Every school-aged child who is out-of-school is a potential full time worker. Out-of-school children spend most of their time performing at least two to three different tasks a day involving domestic work and/or two different types of economic activities. Children who lack access to education are constantly searching for economic opportunities.

“I wash dishes, I fetch water then I go up the hill to our farm to gather wood...then come back down town to sell the wood.” (7-year-old boy male Tombo.)

“I fetch water and wash the dishes for (my aunt’s) “cookery”,¹⁰³.... I (also) cut and sell wood.” (10-year-old male from Hamilton.)

“I go to the bush to fetch wood, go to the market to buy the cooking ingredients and wake up very early in the morning to help my aunt cook (she sells cooked food) ...(then) I collect the plates from the customers and wash them....” (12-year-old female from Tombo.)

The study shows that 79% of the children aged 6 to 10 are involved in petty trading while 21% help transport loads or carry goods for people, locally known as “dregging.” Sixty percent of

100 “Banda” is a grille that is used to dry or smoke fish on.

101 The International Rescue Committee. (2006). *Child Labour and Education in Sierra Leone: Needs and Resource Assessment in Targeted Communities*.

102 More common in rural areas where there is a weekly market day, in some cases these “markets” move from one community to another resulting to longer absences for school-going children.

103 “Daniel’s” mother has a mobile food stand that sells cooked food.

children aged 11 to 15 are involved in petty trading, followed by farm work at 14%, dregging at 9% and domestic work at 7%.

Economic activities away from home increases a child's exposure and vulnerability to abuse and violence. Children working in the streets as petty traders etc are constantly exposed to verbal and sexual abuse.¹⁰⁴

Domestic child workers

A domestic child worker is culturally acceptable in Sierra Leone. Parents believe that sending their children to cities or towns would provide their children better opportunities. Parents and/or relatives are led to believe that if they send their child to the city he/she will have improved access to formal education; often these children end up working instead of attending school. It is considered charitable for children to be "hired" as domestic workers. They are provided shelter, food and possibly access to education. The scenario illustrated above, falls under the definition of child trafficking in Sierra Leone. Child trafficking is a newly recognised phenomenon in Sierra Leone, although it is something which has been commonly practiced for decades.

Children who work excessively tend to be those living with extended family members/caretakers or those children who are living by themselves or supporting themselves due to adult neglect. Children living with extended family members or caretakers are twice more likely to be involved in domestic child labour. These children perform all the housework. Whilst a large number of children spoke of performing domestic chores in the houses they lived in, others reportedly engaged in domestic work for other households and receive food as a form of payment for their work.

"They (out-of-school children) do domestic work like laundry, dish washing and fetching water ...they get food in exchange." (12-year-old school going male from Jendema.)

A huge number of out-of-school children living with extended family members or caretakers have mentioned "waiting" for someone or something, as promised by their caretaker, before they would be allowed to go back to school. In the meantime, these children are involved in domestic and economic work, some for over two years.

Where does the money go?¹⁰⁵

In spite of children's high involvement in economic activities, 47% of the total respondents interviewed indicated that though they received money for their services, they passed on their earnings to their parent or caretaker to "help put food on the table." Only 7% of children aged 6 to 10 stated that they received payment for their work, whilst 17% of children aged 11 to 15 years

104 Coinco, E. (2007). *Daily Realities and Hidden Truths Children Face in the Slums*. Freetown, Sierra Leone: Save the Children UK – Sierra Leone Office.

105 Though initial quantitative data analysis made a distinction between children working in the house and those outside their own house, further qualitative analysis showed that majority of the children did not make such distinction, especially those who were internally trafficked. There were children who specifically said they worked for other people in their houses, for food, but all responses were combined thus leading to an unreliable result.

old received any money. Children that did not get to keep their salary were sometimes rewarded with food, but often they received nothing at all. Thirty-eight percent of all the interviewees indicated that they were able to keep “a little amount.” Twenty-five percent of children aged 6 to 10 years and 25% of children aged 11 -15 years reportedly kept a little of their wages, in the form of a “tip” or were alternatively given a small amount of money if they needed to buy something. The boys and girls who mentioned that they were given a “small tip” for their services, also stated that this was done on irregularly and could not be relied upon. Fifteen percent of all respondents indicated they were able to keep all their earnings; all of these children belonged to the 11 to 15 year age range.

Rest and playtime?

“...children in school have time to play...children who are not in school work all day...they don’t have time to play.” (9-year-old male from Tombo.)

Interviews with out-of-school children reveal that the majority of children work long, excessive hours with little or no rest at all. When asked if out-of-school children had time to play; a large number of respondents mentioned that they had very little time to play, if any. A small number of boys indicated that they still had (some) time to play soccer; girls on the other hand were constantly busy with either domestic work, petty trading or other forms of economic activity.

“Playing is out of the question ‘ay mi anti go kill mi’¹⁰⁶ if she sees me playing...she will beat me like a snake.” (14-year-old female from Kono.)

Play is an integral part of childhood. Children learn about basic rules, giving, taking turns, tolerance and respect for others during play time. Play is important for a child’s development and learning process, it is a safe avenue through which children process both positive and negative experiences. Sadly, only a handful of out-of-school children have the luxury of playing.

Study time

Work has led many in-school children to be regularly absent from education. It has also given children little time to rest and study for their lessons, resulting in a low active class participation. Children aged 11 to 15 years old indicated the “lack of time” as the second¹⁰⁷ most important reason for dropping out-of-school. Children who initially combined school and work complained about the lack of time to rest, let alone study. Children are often exhausted by the time they finish all their chores. The lack of flexible work and/or study time has led a number of children to drop out-of-school.

¹⁰⁶ Translates to “My aunty will kill me.”

¹⁰⁷ The main reason given for drop out was the high cost of schooling.

Selected community based responses & children's views

5.6 *Bringing children back to school*

Joint efforts by the NGO community, civil society and Government has led to various community sensitisation campaigns, aimed at highlighting the importance of education and more recently “the Child Right’s Act,”¹⁰⁸ has played a crucial role in raising people’s awareness on the long-term benefits of education. Through community-initiated responses, progress has been achieved in bringing back children and retaining them in school. Paramount chiefs, community elders and customary leaders have the authority to make changes through by-laws in their communities. By-laws created locally, range from discouraging early sexual activity, all the way through to providing young mothers with assistance, so that they can go back to school.

In Kailahun, Koinadugu Kambia, Bombali and in other parts of country, chiefs in small villages have passed a by-law stating that for every girl that drops out-of-school due to pregnancy, the “father of the child” is equally required to sit-out for the same amount of time the girl is out-of-school. A number of communities have set up by-laws where the boy’s family is expected to care for the baby while the girl goes back to school and pick the baby up on her way home. In some communities, the parents of the boy were also expected to pay for the girl’s school fees after birth.

Child welfare committees (CWCs) composed of teachers, youths, community elders and other key members of the community have assisted greatly in implementing by-laws. In certain parts of Kono for example, volunteer groups and members of the CWC patrol mining areas, during school hours, identifying primary school aged children, whilst people employing these children are also fined. In parts of Pujehun, Kailahun, Western rural, urban and slum communities, CWC and school management committee member representatives talk to out-of-school children’s parents or caregivers in order to personally encourage them to send their children to school.

A successful businessman in Makeni contributes to this cause by not hiring children younger than 18 years old, instead he has a handful of children he is supporting to attend school. His acts of kindness are well known in his community, which he hopes would provide an affirmative model to other business people. A recent by-law was passed by the local council in Freetown, stipulating that school aged children were not permitted to be involved in petty trading during school hours. As reported, goods seized from children would be impounded and parents/caretakers fined.

A slow paradigm shift is gradually taking place; the importance of education is being heard. Still, community based initiatives are not enough to ensure the active and continuous participation of children in education. Higher community involvement in addition to a stronger understanding and enforcement of supportive by-laws, are necessary in bringing children back to school and ensure

108 Although the Child Right’s Act was passed in 2007, the date of commencement for actual implementation is not yet signed at the time of writing.

that they remain in school. School related expenses will always be a burden to vulnerable families, thus a targeted socio-economic and educational assistance programme is needed for those children living in the most vulnerable families.

5.7 Children's Views

Non-schooling children are aware of the many possibilities they are missing from not being able to attend school. Eighty-five percent of out-of-school children interviewed indicated their wish to continue their education. Seventy-six percent of the total respondents believe that education would ensure ones financial independence through securing a good job, resulting to a poverty-free life. Their dreams are simple; to be self-reliant and to have a better life for themselves and their families.

“I want to be educated... get money and take my mother her out of the bush¹⁰⁹ ...I am her only hope.” (15-year-old male from Kono.)

“I would like to be a police woman. I want to be writing whatever people say.” (12-year-old female from Tombo.)

For many people living in the rural areas, understanding the importance of education is associated with learning how to read and write, a skill held by only a handful of people in villages. Out-of-school children between the ages of 6 to 10 overwhelmingly indicated their strong desire to go back to school and start again from where they left off. For those that had never attended school in this age group, going to school for the first time is not seen as a barrier, since this is a normal age range for children to begin school in many cases.

Though interviews with girls who dropped out of school early due to early pregnancy initially revealed their desire to resume schooling after birth, the stigma and difficulties associated to supporting and caring for their new born baby often deterred them from beginning or staying in school. A high percentage of youths who are in situations where there have additional pressures (for example young mothers, children of disabled parents and those that have never been to school) indicated a desire to be involved in skills/vocational training and literacy programmes. With the exception of children interviewed in Kono, where the Complimentary Rapid Education Programmes for Schools (CREPS) initiative has been implemented, or in the selected areas where the International Red Cross runs adult literacy and vocational programmes,¹¹⁰ a high number of children from this group believed there was no other option bur to learn literacy and numeracy outside from the regular school system. Yet these children expressed a willingness to learn if they ever had the opportunity; most have never heard of any form of accelerated learning programme in their communities. Older children who have been exposed to vocational and literacy programmes through friends but have not personally had any opportunity to part of it also believed that it was the best option for them.

109 The child's mother processes palm oil away from the village. The word bush in this statement pertains to the location where she works.

110 Though other organisations such as GTZ and Ibis run similar programmes to CREPS; the names of these organisations were not mentioned during the interviews. This may be attributed to the sites selected where programmes of the mentioned organisations were present.

Where do we go from here?

6 Conclusion

“Education is a human right with an immense power to transform. On its foundation rest the cornerstones of freedom, democracy and sustainable human development.” Kofi Annan. Seventh secretary-general of the United Nations, 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.

This study has shown that poverty is the leading factor in excluding children from education, something which perpetuates the cycle of marginalisation and hardship. Innovative ways of reaching out to the last 30% of primary school aged, out-of-school children, must be a major priority for all stakeholders. A two-pronged approach, providing immediate and long-term solutions is necessary to assist the most vulnerable families. The overlapping and complex problems associated with the dropping out of primary school aged children, may in reality require a combination of various approaches. Inter-sectoral cooperation from key actors, community ownership and the promotion of social responsibility through the creation of social protection schemes are all vital in ensuring education reaches the most marginalised households. This is something, which if performed correctly, will enable those living below the poverty line to send their children to school and fully participate in the education process for the duration of the primary school education cycle. Below are listed some recommendations to help support these efforts.

7 Recommendations

A more holistic approach is urgently needed to allow those families living in extreme poverty, to send and maintain their children at school for the duration of their primary education. A multi-sectoral, integrated strategy must be used to target the core issue of poverty, whilst also emphasising the importance and long-term benefits of education. A combination of livelihood strategies through micro-credit and skills training programmes, coupled with social protection safety nets linked to child protection and supported by sound policy initiatives, will improve access to education for marginalised families and vulnerable children.

The recommendations below have been divided into six categories:

Data/Information/Monitoring and evaluation

Legislation and Policy

Partnerships and Inter-sectoral Approach

Access to Quality Education/Protection

Advocacy

Further research

7.1 Data/Information/Monitoring and evaluation

Disseminate study to generate discussion and aid out-of-school children

It is recommended that workshops are used to disseminate the out-of-school study findings. Participants should include those from the Donor community, NGOs, civil society actors working with children (including school management committees), child welfare committees and other important social and traditional structures in communities. This will generate discussions on the plight of primary-aged out school children and promote the creation of locally owned, realistic

and achievable action plans. Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) officials together with the local council members, must conduct an out-of-school study within their districts and develop strategies to address the challenges faced by primary-aged girls and boys who are currently out-of-school in their districts. It is also vital to hold yearly forum sessions to track progress against these action plans.

Bottom up data collection system for out-of-school-children

The importance of gathering disaggregated qualitative data is vital in developing effective policies and programming activities for out-of-school children. A bottom up approach in gathering information on out-of-school children would additionally mobilise communities and raise awareness on the plight of out-of-school children in communities. The process must involve inter-sectoral and inter-agency cooperation from various actors including Government agencies, NGOs, administrative, traditional and customary leaders, Child Welfare Committees, School Management Committee and the children themselves. Information gathered must be translated into forms that would be useful for the different actors to assist them in planning and decision-making. Data gathered from all districts must then be compiled at the national level, integrating the results into the Education Management Information System (EMIS) to provide useful information for policy makers.

Inter-sectoral development of criteria, guidelines, monitoring and evaluation system for out-of-school children

The complex and interwoven factors associated with the non-schooling of children, requires a multi-sectoral approach involving all key players. Government agencies and NGOs involved in education, children protection and social protection¹¹¹ must have an improved level of coordination; holding joint planning/decision-making meetings will result in a more holistic programming and reduce the risk of overlapping responses. Joint indicators for the monitoring and evaluation of overlapping programmes must be identified in relation to out-of-school children.

Installation of a knowledge-based management system

Data collection and information dissemination of best practices and innovative approaches for ensuring high retention rates and increased access to quality education for out-of-school children, is vital for responsive programming. There are various successful examples of community-initiated programmes and activities across Sierra Leone which support mandatory primary education turnout. Special attention must be given to successful local by-laws in various regions of the country, which help bring children back to schools.

7.2 Legislation and Policy

Strong Government commitment

Strong leadership and transparent, equitable and accountable resource allocation systems are pre-requisites for addressing economic disparities throughout the country. The GOSL's recognition

¹¹¹ "Social protection is a set of public measures that support society's poorest and most vulnerable members and help individuals, households and communities better manage risks." (World Bank.)

and efforts in bringing children back to school and ensuring that children remain in school, must be conducted in a sustainable and replicable fashion. Adequate financial resources must be allocated to the education sector in order to ensure access to free¹¹² quality education and assist marginalised families in affording the direct and indirect costs associated to education. The Government's possible involvement in setting up social protection schemes is vital if families are to offset the opportunity costs families with children who are working or "at risk" of dropping out face.

Transparent and equitable allocation and distribution of national resources

Poverty is the main reason why children from marginalised households drop out-of-school. Eighty percent of the poor in Sierra Leone live in rural areas. A transparent process of equitable allocation and distribution of national resources and a stronger implementation and enforcement of poverty reduction programmes, targeting the most marginalised families, should be put in place to address economic disparities nationwide. National and regional plans and other resource allocation frameworks must include specific programmes for out-of-school children, linked simultaneously with poverty reduction programmes and improved job opportunities for youths and adults. Efforts should be made to reach out to the most marginalised children and ensure that social support/child protection systems are in place to help them access and remain in quality education until they finish primary school.

Allocation of sufficient financial resources

The decentralization process provides local councils with the opportunity to make decisions and allocate sufficient financial resources to projects deemed important within their district. If the GOSL is serious about attaining the UPE goals, the plight and needs of marginalised out-of-school primary school aged children must be a top priority at both the national and district level. Allocation of financial resources for school aged out-of-school children is the first step in supporting "free primary education" and addressing the direct and indirect costs of education. Thus, the GOSL must ensure that 20% of its budget is continuously allocated to the education sector. Part of the budget may be used to set up a community safety net by providing financial school assistance through waiving the school charges associated with uniform,¹¹³ text books, school feeding and other indirect costs.

Targeting the most vulnerable families and children for assistance

Most of the children interviewed in this research belong to the most impoverished families; the poorest 30% of the population. This study clearly shows a strong maternal interest and investment in children's education. Women in marginalised families must be specifically targeted for a combination of a literacy, skill/vocational and micro-credit programmes. Skills/vocational training would provide women a tool with which to increase their knowledge and skills base, providing them with better and broader economic options; providing a small start up money or linking these women to micro-credit groups would give them and their families a

112 Informal discussions with community members have indicated that the delay in teacher salary and school subsidies may have direct links to "informal" and compulsory school collections.

113 A relaxed policy on wearing school uniform as practiced by a small number of schools serving impoverished communities has encouraged many vulnerable children to continue attending school.

realistic chance of sending their children to school. This strategy may be considered a long-term family assistance programme since financial stability takes a long time to build-up. This is something which must be run alongside long-term aid; immediate assistance (similar to the girls' scholarship programmes) must be provided to marginalised, vulnerable, non-schooling girls and boys, including those who are on the verge of dropping out-of-school. A holistic approach would include financial support for school meals, since hunger is a common problem mentioned by marginalised children. This is also something which would be likely to improve their performance at school, perhaps helping to reduce the gap themselves and those from more financially stable backgrounds.

Mainstreaming child labour into the Education Sector Plan

Every primary school aged child who is not in school is a potential worker. Child labour must be integrated into the education sector plan. Achieving "education for all" must not only focus on the right of every child to education, it must be extended to working children's right to protection, survival, development and participation. Local governments and communities must provide assistance to children withdrawing from the worst forms of child labour.¹¹⁴ Mainstreaming child labour into the Education Sector Plan (ESP) would allow the problem of child labour to be addressed in relation to education. As part of the ESP, money would be allocated for specific activities supporting the reduction of child labour. Specific activities and yearly reports would help encourage different actors to look at various protection issues surrounding child labour and the need for children to be in schools.

Mainstreaming child protection issues into the Education Sector Plan

Recognising and addressing violence against children in schools is vital in improving the present educational system in Sierra Leone. Unofficial reports of (sexual) harassment in schools are rampant in all the sites visited yet there are noticeably no reporting mechanisms or referral systems in place for victims of abuse and/or harassment within the school structures. More so, there are no punitive measures in place for sex offenders and/or perpetrators of violence against children in schools. Child protection issues and school-based violence associated with student abuse and exploitation must be recognized and addressed to truly have a safe, child friendly and girl friendly school environment. A joint training for school management committees, school personnel, teachers and local education council members on the recently passed Child Rights Act and how this translates into safe and child friendly school environments is essential. Mainstreaming child protection into the ESP as a specific objective, similar to that of child labour (as mentioned above), would further ensure an awareness and compliance to child protection measures in schools.

Increasing the appointment of female teachers in remote and rural areas

The most vulnerable girls are usually found in the slums and rural areas of Sierra Leone. As mentioned previously, there is a dearth of positive female role models in many remote, rural communities. Women teachers in these areas are mostly community volunteers with little or no training in teaching; they are also poorly paid. Appointing qualified female teachers in remote rural schools would not only provide role models to young girls and encourage girls to attend

¹¹⁴ See the "Bridge programme."

school, it may also address protection issues. The difficulties and challenges that teachers and their families face in moving to rural areas must be recognized. Security, free housing and other incentive packages are critical in encouraging qualified teachers to take up “hardship” assignments. Male teachers must also undergo gender sensitization training and training on “girl-friendly” educational methodologies.

7.3 Partnerships and Inter-sectoral approach

Broader United Nations Agency involvement

All UN agencies are actively assisting the Government of Sierra Leone in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), of which education is an integral part. Since basic education (with emphasis on girls’ education) is one of the priorities of the current United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in Sierra Leone, sharing the out-of-school study with the UN Country Team for a special discussion on possible contributions from each UN agency, according to their respective mandates, would prove to be a mutually-reinforcing strategy.

Providing Assistance and referral programmes for vulnerable out-of-school children

A holistic approach is needed to assist the families of out-of-school children who continue to be mired in poverty. The recent decentralisation process provides more autonomy to local councils in terms of decision-making and budget allocations. Prioritising the importance of reinforcing “education for all,” through community safety nets is vital. For example, the provision of catalytic or revolving funds to school management committees which are specifically earmarked to support children on the verge of dropping out and/or bringing non-schooling children back to school. Funding may also be utilised to start small income generating activities such as school gardens. Proceeds of sales may be used to offset the direct and indirect educational costs of families living in dire poverty, within their districts. A referral and assistance programme between the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children, Ministry of Education (MSWGC), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Finance and other Government agencies, NGOs, school management committees and social/traditional structures in communities must be developed at both the community and district levels to identify and assist vulnerable children, especially orphans, who are missing out on schooling and other basic services.

Tapping religious leaders and the business sector into education-based sensitisation programmes

Religious leaders are important figures in (rural) communities. The informal business sector regularly hires children and is a major factor in keeping children away from school. Involving religious leaders and the business sector in education sensitisation campaigns would provide a wider audience and legitimacy in advocating for education and the stop of child labour. Tapping the business community for material or scholarship support of marginalised children in terms of linking scholarships with good school performance and continued school attendance for both boys and girls, would provide a good incentive for vulnerable children to remain in school. Radio is also a powerful tool which could be used to broadcast these message to remote communities.

7.4 Access to Quality Primary Education/Protection

Access to education

A free school feeding programme

School feeding is one of the most effective ways of bringing children back to school. Unfortunately, the present school feeding programmes does not reach the most vulnerable

children. Children are expected to supply and/or “pay” for extra ingredients¹¹⁵ and fuel for the food provided by the World Food Programme (WFP); as a result the most vulnerable end up not receiving any food due to their inability to pay. Some children reportedly did not attend school during feeding days if they were unable to pay the cooking fee; others went to farms or into the bush to gather groundnuts while others enjoyed the ration. Hunger was seen as a huge problem in some of the sites visited. There is an obvious and urgent need for school feeding programmes in selected, extremely poor communities across the country, but systems need to be in place to ensure that the most vulnerable children truly benefit from the feeding programmes and it is not an extra expense on their part. Food for work programmes must also be considered for unqualified teachers in rural communities.

A complete primary education for all schools

Efforts should be made by the Government of Sierra Leone to make a complete primary education accessible to all children. This is particularly important in rural areas which currently lag behind their urban counterparts in terms of enrolment and retention rates. Currently many rural schools stop primary education at class 4.¹¹⁶ Having a complete set of primary classes (1 through to 6) with qualified staff in villages may encourage lower income families to invest in their child’s education, knowing that they could at least complete primary education without going to far away towns or cities.

Satellite schools for lower primary school classes

The lack of primary schools in remote rural communities deters young children from schooling. Creating primary school structures or satellite schools for class 1 and 2 in small villages would provide younger children and their families with an opportunity to send their children to school at the Government prescribed school age of 6 years old for class 1. Easier access to lower primary education would address protection issues raised by parents in sending their children to the “next village” for school.

Quality Primary Education

Review of the present curriculum

The present curriculum in primary schools emphasises communication competence and the ability to manipulate numbers.¹¹⁷ To have a suitable curriculum for the present days, it must reflect present realities and issues affecting children’s lives in their own communities: GBV, HIV/AIDS, age appropriate sexual and reproductive health education, human rights, child rights, conflict and early marriage to name a few. Providing a forum for discussions of key topics in schools will not only provide children with vital information, but will also allow children to learn to respect others opinions.

115 Most common examples given were cassava leaves, potato leaves, onion and garlic.

116 As plainly illustrated earlier in the report, in Bonthe, remote rural schools may only offer classes 1 -3/4. To complete primary education, children must travel 2 hours by boat (one-way) to get to the main island. Living in the main island poses increased financial burdens and protection concerns for marginalised families, especially if the families have no relatives in the mainland.

117 World Bank. (2007). Education in Sierra Leone: Present Challenges, Future Opportunities. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

Increasing the availability of distance learning programmes

A large number of teachers in rural communities are unqualified. These teachers are poorly trained or in most cases lack training completely. Though the provision of basic pedagogical training has been provided to some, for many this remains a dream.¹¹⁸ A nationwide distance-learning programme for unqualified teachers is essential for improving the quality of education in primary schools by promoting interactive and participatory modes of learning, alternative or non-violent forms of school discipline and recent innovative pedagogical approaches. Positive discrimination should be exercised for women to help create role models in rural communities for young girls. Although mainly meant for unqualified teachers, qualified teachers may also benefit from a similar less rigorous refresher or in-service training programme on the more recent innovative pedagogical methodologies.¹¹⁹

Protection

Girls' Advisory Clubs (GACs)

Girls' advisory clubs have proven to be an effective way of addressing girls' access to education, negative cultural practices such as early/forced marriage, female genital cutting (FGC) and other protection issues related to education in Ethiopia. In this case, the success of GACs was due to the networks established between law enforcement, community leaders, and other stakeholders around girls' education. A similar approach may be adopted in Sierra Leone by organising girls' advisory clubs in schools, composed of girls, boys, teachers and parents who are dedicated to promoting equal educational opportunities for both girls and boys in safe school environments. GACs may assist in the identification of children at risk of dropping out of schools, providing counselling, interventions and assistance before they drop out and encouraging families to send their girls to school. Home-grown girls' advisory clubs may be piloted in selected areas addressing local priorities and evaluated for possible scale-up.

Ensure that children have access to a child and girl friendly school environment with relevant quality education

It is vital that an improved access to education corresponds with a highest quality of education. "Child-friendly" and "girl-friendly" school environments with quality education would not only promote pupil retention, it would also provide a safer school environment for girls and boys alike. A pre-service and in-service training package of child-centred methodologies with classroom management techniques and alternative options for school discipline for example, would equip teachers with the tools to provide a quality, participative and inclusive education in a healthier learning environment. The training packages should not only stop at the provision of training but also include close supervision, constructive feedback on the application of the "new" pedagogy

118 Sababu is a programme funded by the World Bank and the African Development Bank implemented by UNESCO since the end of the war to assist in the rehabilitation of the basic education programme. Though initially focused on the provision of teaching and learning materials, it has also been involved in providing distance-training programmes to unqualified teachers.

119 Various modes of distance learning programmes are available in Freetown Teacher Training College and its satellite schools in various districts. Unqualified teachers are unable to avail to this due to financial constraints. Higher funding is necessary to increase unqualified teachers' access to distance learning programmes.

and an overall performance evaluation. A meaningful and relevant education could be a source of encouragement for lower income families to invest in their children's education.

Education and Literacy programmes

Create “bridge programmes”^{120 121}

Children involved in the worst forms of child labour, those that have never been to school or have dropped out for less than two years, would greatly benefit from a bridging programme. These are children between 8 to 13 years of age who wish to continue and complete primary education in the formal school system. “Bridge” programmes will assist children who have never been to school, by preparing and familiarizing them with a school environment whilst at the same time, allow them to catch up with schoolwork, for a subsequent reintegration into the formal education system. The “bridge” programme will support working children or those in the process of withdrawing from the worst forms of child labour. Children are enrolled in the bridge programme for a year with the knowledge that after the allotted timeframe they will be reintegrated into the formal school system.

Revive the accelerated learning programme (ALP)

It is important to provide the youth who have missed out on formal schooling with an opportunity to take part in “catch up” education programmes. Sierra Leone's successful experience with the (CREPS) programme¹²² must be revisited and adapted into present-day realities. Input of various organisations working in this area would also prove valuable. A key component in having an accelerated learning programme is a transparent criterion for student's qualifications, and equally important is the integration of the ALP into the existing educational system.¹²³ Having an accelerated learning program for youth, which is integrated into the regular school, would provide them access to further their education into secondary school if they wish to do so.

Functional literacy programmes and livelihoods/vocational training

Addressing the low literacy level in rural communities may be tackled through functional literacy programmes. Improving the lives of vulnerable families must involve providing opportunities for livelihood and vocational training programmes for women and youths. Functional literacy programmes linked to livelihoods/vocational training also needs to be made more meaningful for participants. Successful and sustainable livelihood or vocational training programmes involving extremely vulnerable participants must also include start up kits and/or a capital.

120 Bridge programmes have been effectively used in Bangladesh where the use of child labour has been a chronic problem.

121 Lyon, S. and Rosati, F. C. (2006). *Non-Formal Education Approaches for Child Labourers: An Issue Paper*. Rome, ILO/UNICEF/World Bank, Understanding Children's Work.

122 Interviews with education ministry officials in both the central and local levels showed that there was in strong belief that the CREPS programme has met the needs of over-aged, unschooled children and children who have dropped out from school. Education ministry officials did however state that a lack of provision for programme extension and the lack of funders for the programme in 2009 could ultimately inhibit the programme. (Interview conducted by Anna Obura.) Interviews with out-of-school children shows an overwhelming need to provide accelerated learning programmes for over-aged children. An evaluation conducted by the CREPS programme provides important information and recommendations on specific areas for improvement, which may prove helpful for future ALP programming.

123 Based on the final evaluation of the CREPS programme, this is said to be one of its downfalls.

7.5 Advocacy

Increased donor funding for initiatives targeting out-of-school children and the education sector

Recommendations provided in this study require financial support. Bringing out-of-school children back to education would not only require human resources, but financial resources also. Varied and flexible funding mechanisms are crucial to help address the complex problems faced by marginalised children and their families. Sector funds earmarked for social protection programmes and the provision of social funds will provide financial viability to community safety net programmes through community based stakeholders. This approach will provide both immediate and long-term assistance to vulnerable children and their families.

National “Responsible Parenthood” campaign

Multiple marriages and a large number of children per family have made life economically difficult for many parents. This has led many vulnerable families from keeping their children away from school; formal education is not seen as a priority. There is a need for a national campaign for planned “Responsible Parenthood” with an emphasis on family planning. The “Responsible Parenthood” campaign must be linked with children’s rights; focusing on education as a fundamental right and that parents are the main duty bearers. National parenthood campaigns would be more meaningful, especially for women, if this were linked as well to adult literacy classes.

Age appropriate sexual and reproductive health information campaigns

Age appropriate sexual and reproductive health information must be accessible and available to children and youth to combat high rates of teenage pregnancies. Discussions about topics on HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, protection and assertiveness for young girls must be deemed meaningful and relevant to their daily lives.

Increase children’s participation and involvement

Children’s participation and involvement in gathering information and soliciting possible solutions to out-of-school children is an approach often overlooked, though it has long been proven that a “child to child” methodology is an effective way of working with children. Both schooling and non-schooling children have provided vital information during this study. Though working with children may provide challenges, especially if there are no set parameters and clear expectations, the result of a well-defined work environment and clear expectations may present crucial results. Child participation may be integrated into community-based data collection systems. Children can be part of the solution for problems directly affecting them.

Focal group on children’s issues

Sites visited that had a community based focal group on children’s issues, such as child welfare committees, proved to be an effective ally in promoting children’s rights and ensuring the protection and participation of children. A focal group known to champion the rights of children could provide community sensitisation workshops on children’s rights and how this translates in the daily lives of the people in their community. The focal group could also serve as a “watch dog” to help prevent the abuse and neglect of children and assist abused and neglected children through referrals to appropriate actors in their own community.

Engage traditional, social and religious leaders in changing the views on harmful traditional practices

It is also vital to engage traditional, social and religious leaders in changing community attitudes towards harmful traditional practices. Community sensitisation campaigns and educating men, women, boys and girls on the long-term negative medical implications of teenage pregnancy and female genital mutilation (FGM) is vital in changing people's perceptions. The education of girls is the long-term solution for addressing harmful traditional practices. Educated girls and those who have had first hand experience of early pregnancy and FGM, understand its harmful consequences and will thus be in the best position to discuss and resist such harmful traditional practices and articulate their rights.

7.6 Further research

Comprehensive quantitative study on out-of-school children in selected geographic areas

An important follow up would be to conduct a comprehensive quantitative study in selected geographic areas, which focuses on out-of-school children and will serve as a catalyst for the mapping of critical areas for targeted responses and programming purposes. This study should focus on various categories of "at risk" and "drop out" children, making specific recommendations where necessary.

National labour market study

There is a growing need for a national labour market study in Sierra Leone, to develop a better understanding on the present and emerging needs, relevant to various local contexts. Results of this study may feed into planning and the better implementation of livelihood and vocational training courses to diversify local markets.

Impact of girls' scholarship programmes

Thousands of girls have already benefited from scholarship programmes. However, this study has shown that parallel to the success of the programme, is also an alleged backlash in certain areas where girls are "punished" for the opportunities and benefits they receive. An assessment of the girls' scholarship programme would shed light on the benefits, challenges and impact of the programme both on girls, boys and their communities. A more positive promotion of the girls' scholarship programmes with the inclusion and support of boys and other male community members is essential in the ultimate success of any programme in communities.

Positive Deviance Study

Poverty is a common problem in Sierra Leone and is the most common factor attributed to student drop out in this report. A positive deviance study will look into practices, attitudes and behaviours of poor families (or children), who find solutions to these problems and successfully manage to send their children to school. This study may provide vital information in designing behavioural change strategies and programmes in promoting children's education.

Effects of disability on educational opportunities

It would be useful to carry out a baseline study, covering the effects of disability on accessing educational access for disabled children and able-bodied children with disabled parents. This is vital in order to facilitate understanding on the barriers preventing these children from accessing educational services and actively contributing to the economic development of their communities.

The move towards more inclusive educational opportunities in many countries has opened doors for children with less-serious disabilities, allowing them to be mainstreamed into the regular

school system. Mainstreaming of disabled children has been supported with specific teacher training on disability, identification of disabled children and the provision of necessary support. Given the realities and restrictions of the present teaching force in the country, the study could provide vital information on how to best address disability within the existing educational context and expand educational and/or vocational training opportunities for the disabled and their children.

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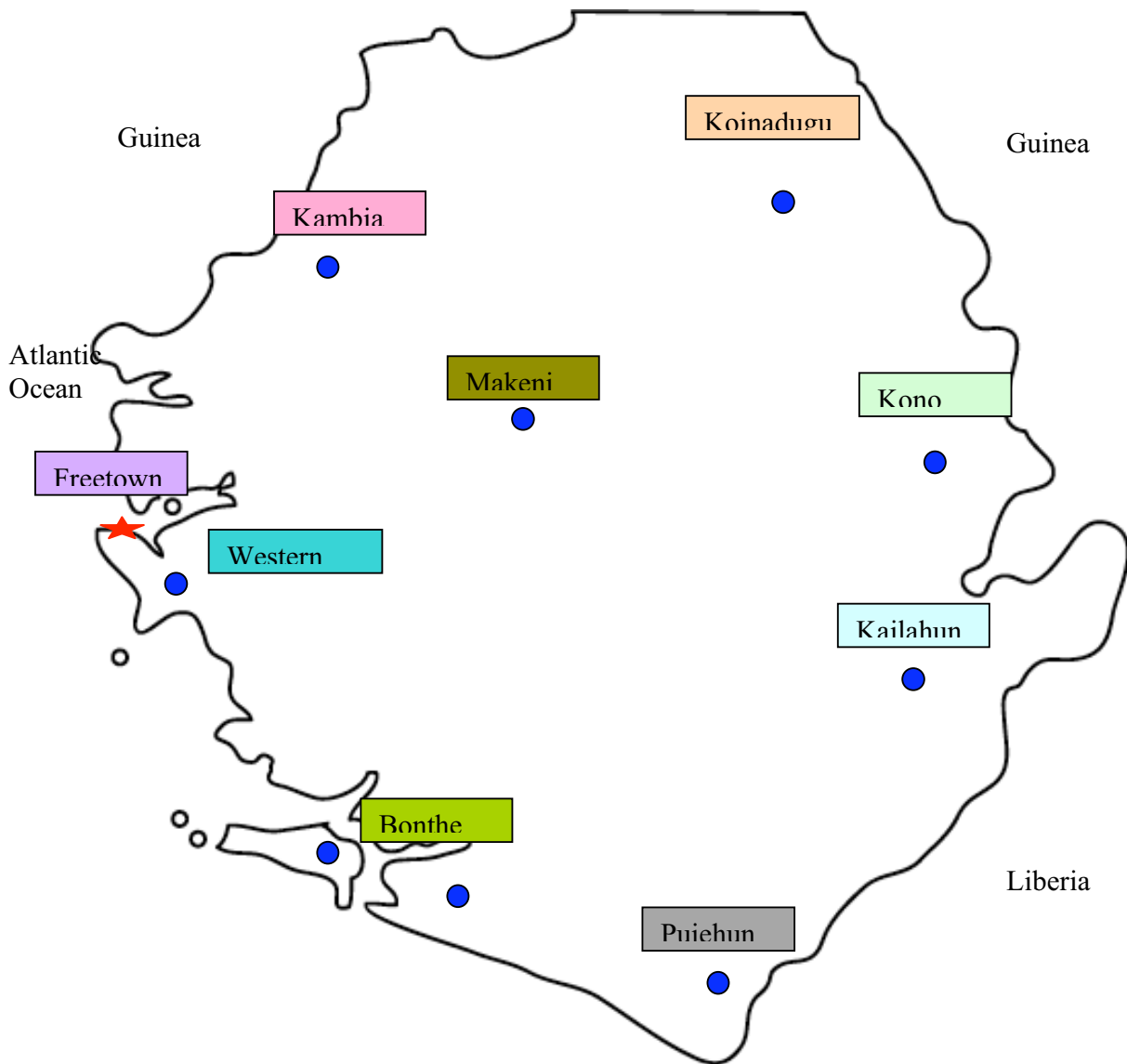
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Annex 1: Map of Sierra Leone - Research Sites



Annex 2: Research Team

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Frederick Farley Kamara

Annex 3: List of People Consulted¹

NGOs

Zokor, Augustin -CAUSE Canada

Mansaray, Brima – Christian Children’s Fund Area Manager, Kabala
Dawo, Bai S.

Hanciles, Eileen - FAWE National Coordinator
Foday, Martin

Nouir, Dr. Salua – GTZ

Higbie, James - Ibis, Koidu
Jenkins, Marg

Brusati, Annalisa – The International Rescue Committee
Buckland, Stephanie
Tappis, Hannah,
Blake, Mariama - Koidu Social Worker

Mansaray, Mohamed - Red Cross Spain, Social Welfare Coordinator. Freetown.
Marah, Sori - Kabala
Bali, Ibrahim - Skills Officer
Rabah, Amadu - Community Project Supervisor

Cummings, Dr. Prince - RIGHT TO PLAY Country Manager
Johnson, Moses J. – Programme Manager (Vocational/Technical Training Center)
Bassie, Moses M. - Manager, Koidu
Navo, Alfred T.M. Mark – Koidu

Van der Wijk, Dienneke - Save Children the Children UK Country Director
Graham, Sandra – education coordinator
Boak, Erika - education programme manager, kailahun
Bangura, Mohamed – child protection manager, kailahun

Barraud, Sebastien - SPW Student Partnership Worldwide

Governement & others

Her Excellency Alice Sia Koroma - The First Lady of Sierra Leone
Thorpe, Dr. Christiana – Chair, Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone
Hamming, Leo – EMIS UNESCO/MEYS
Nelson – Williams, Horation – Education For All National Coordinator

Meetings were also held with the Director General Mr. Jala, the Head of Planning Mr. Renner, the Curriculum Director Mr. Momoh; the DDDs of Koinadugu and Kono and their district teams of Inspectors and Supervisors; District Councils (the Chairs, CA and their teams) and SDOs; heads of schools, teachers; SMC/CTA; members of the same district communities (religious leaders, women leaders), local businessmen and women; parents and children.

¹ The list of people consulted was provided by Ana Obura who conducted the interviews.

Annex 4: Figures from In-depth Interviews

Figure 1: Age Range of Respondents

Figure 2: Schooling of children of age 6 – 10 years

Figure 3: Schooling of children of age 11 – 15 years

Figure 4: Factors Excluding Children from School: School related factors

Figure 5: Factors Excluding Children from School: Factors External to School

Figure 6: Number of Years Since Dropping Out

Figure 7: Out-of-School Children's Occupations and Income Generation Activities

Figure 8: Preferred Skills Training Course

Figure 9: The Aspirations of Out-of-School Children

Figure 10: Profile of the Adult Respondents

Figure 11: Education Level of the Adult Respondents

Figure 12: Men's Educational Level

Figure 13: Women's Educational Level

Figure 14: Fathers' Occupation

Figure 15: Mothers' Occupation

Figure 1: Age Range of Respondents¹²⁶

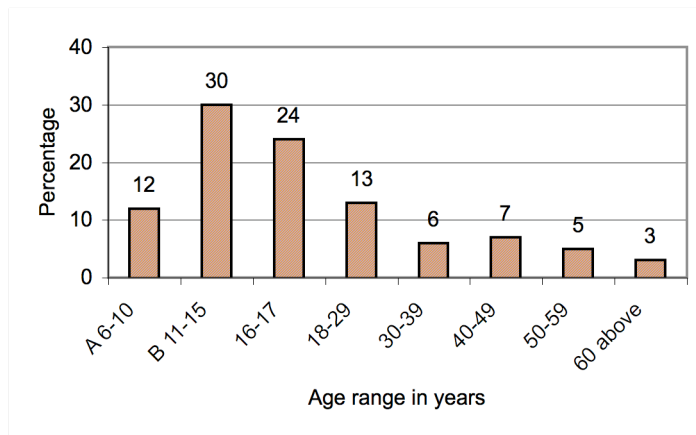


Figure 2: Schooling of children of age 6 – 10 years

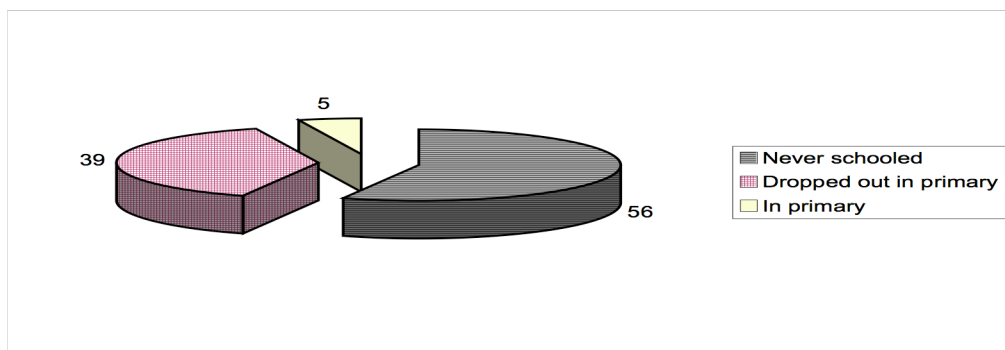
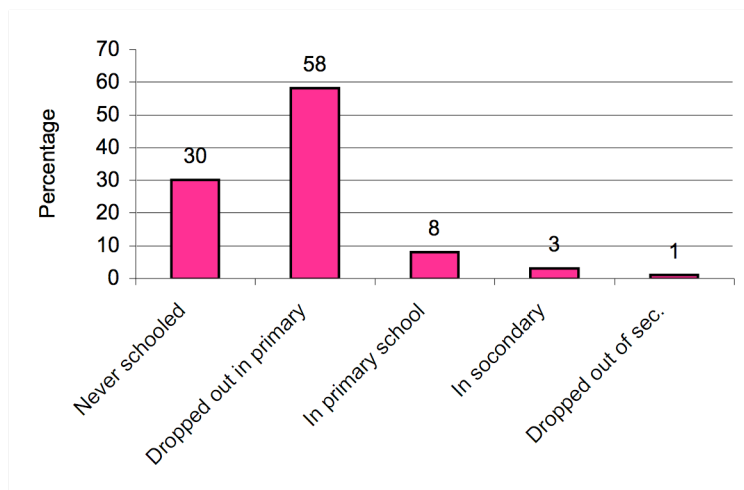


Figure 3: Schooling of children of age 11 – 15 years



¹²⁶ The figures in each graph represent the total number participants who responded to the said question.

Figure 4: Factors Excluding Children from School: School related factors

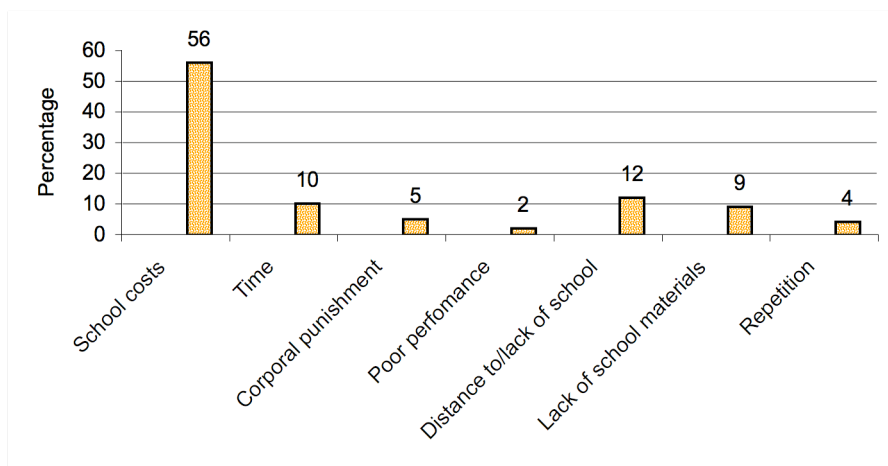


Figure 5: Factors Excluding Children from School: Factors External to School

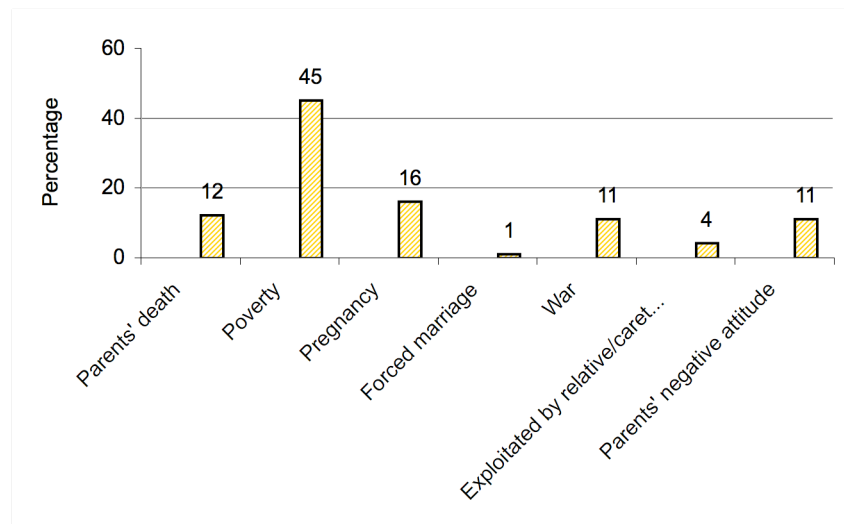


Figure 6: Number of Years Since Dropping Out

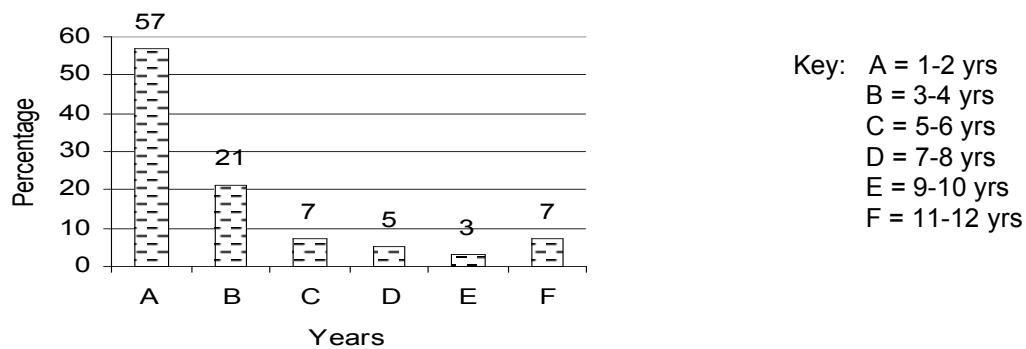


Figure 7: Out-of-School Children's Occupations and Income Generation Activities

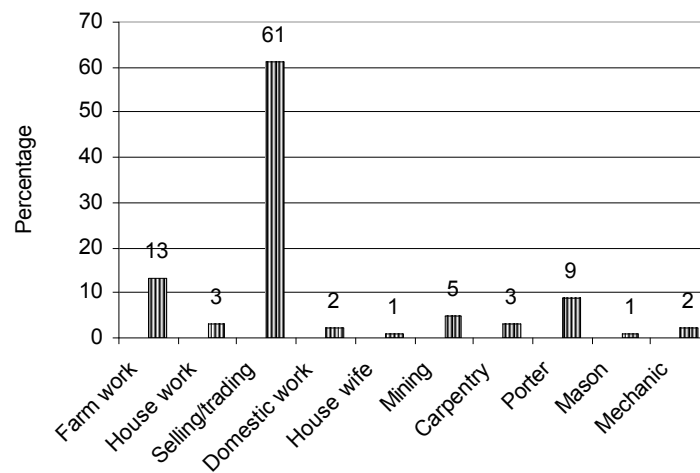


Figure 8: Preferred Skills Training Course

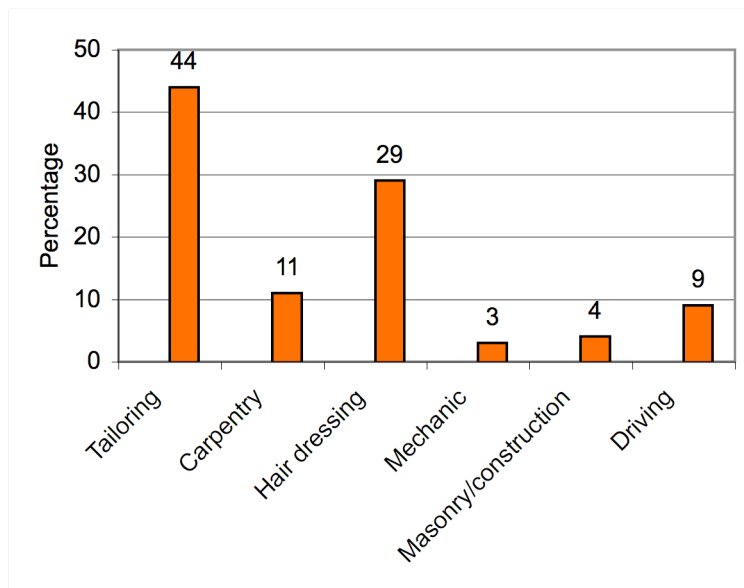


Figure 9: The Aspirations of Out-of-School Children

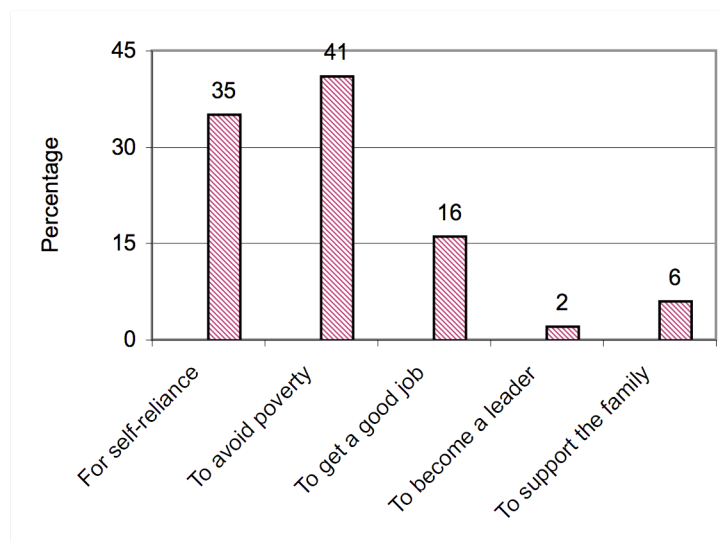


Figure 10: Profile of the Adult Respondents

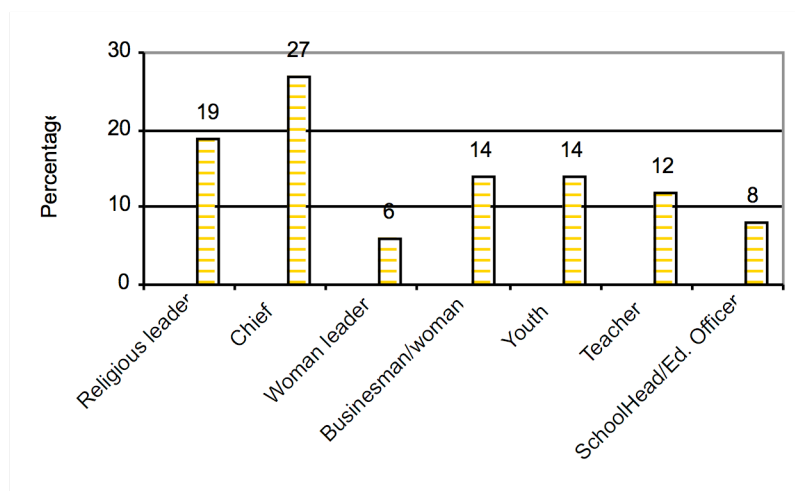


Figure 11: Education Level of the Adult Respondents

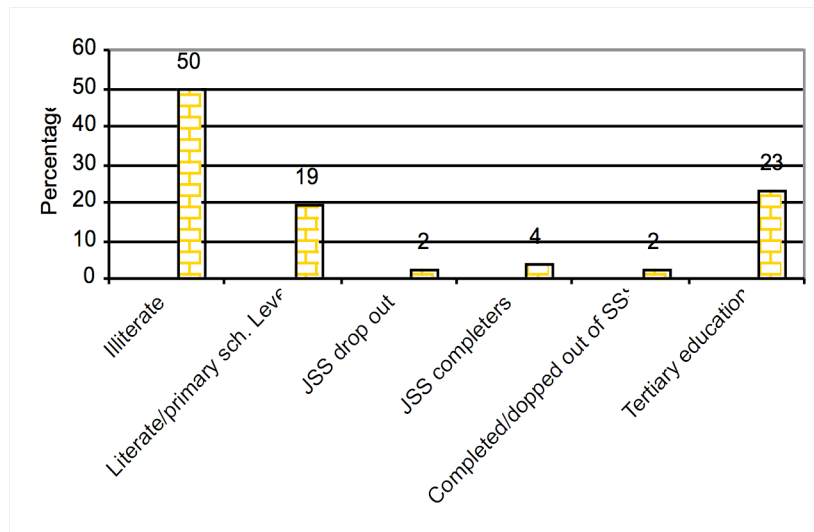


Figure 12: Men's Educational Level

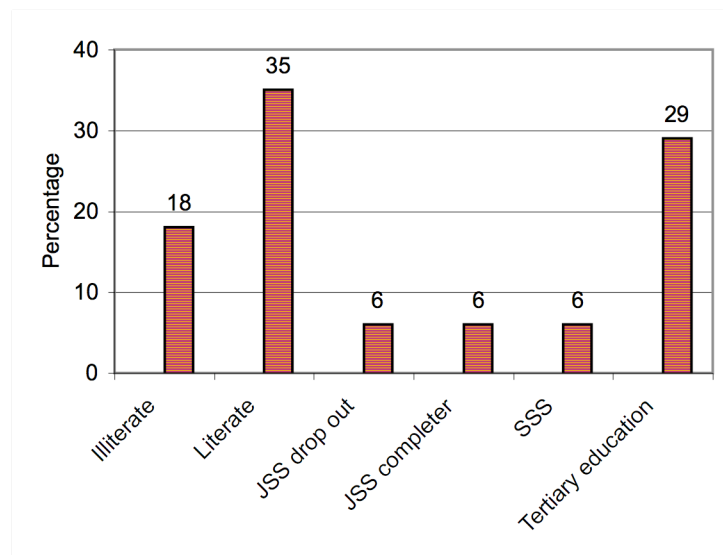


Figure 13: Women's Educational Level

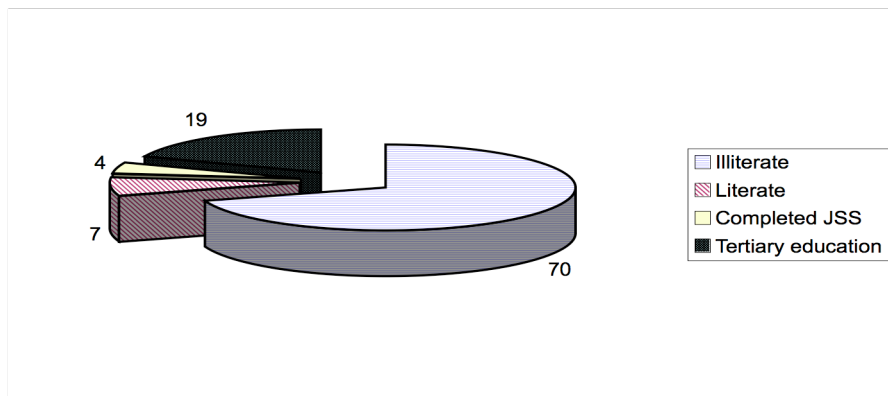


Figure 14: Fathers' Occupation

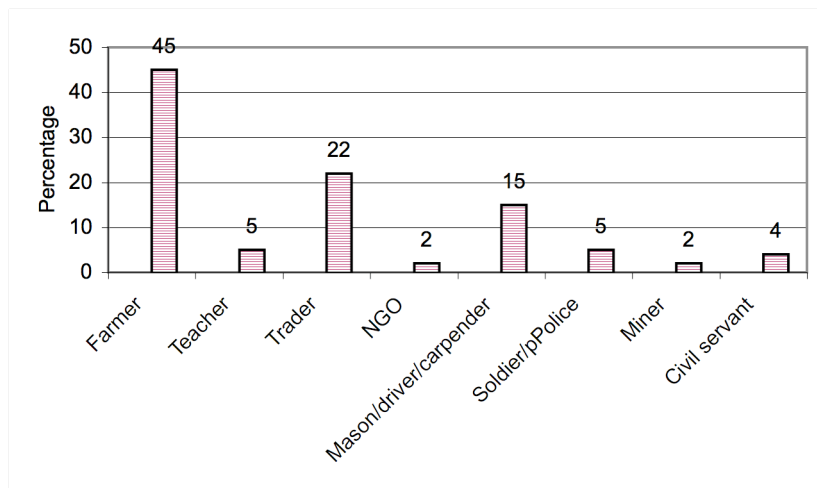


Figure 15: Mothers' Occupation

