System Capacity Grant Annual Progress Report Template

Status: Accepted

Country	Grant ID	Grant Agent	Grant Effectiveness/Start Date
Sierra Leone	GPE0000957	SCG	07/05/2023

Grant Amount	Timeframe Examined in this Report		Date of Report Submission
2,600,000 (USD)	From Date	To Date	10/31/2025
	07/31/2024	07/30/2025	

Area(s) and activity group(s) covered by grant

Window 3: Strengthen capacity, adapt, and learn, to implement and drive results at scale

- Strengthening data systems, including on improving the availability and use of sex-disaggregated data, and data on children with disabilities
- Training and support for government staff and central and decentralized levels, including on the uptake and use of data and evidence
- Support for implementation capacity, including sector plan implementation monitoring, gender responsiveness of the sector and evaluation of sector plans and policies/programs in priority areas; assess monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity, including use of evidence in policy process

Implementation Progress

Overall Project Progress this Reporting Period

Overall progress this reporting period [1]	Previous Rating
Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

Detailed Description including factors that lead to an upgrade/downgrade in the rating

In Year 2 of SCG implementation, the focus shifted from foundational setup to full-scale delivery. UNICEF, as Grant Agent, continued to work closely with MBSSE, MTHE and TSC to strengthen system capacity and ensure coordinated implementation. Key coordination structures, including the FLN Steering Committee and the Education Data Working Group, were operationalised. The GPE Component 3 Technical Workgroup, chaired by MBSSE and co-chaired by UNICEF, provided guidance on data systems, governance and institutional reform. Close alignment with World Bank and FCDO-supported initiatives was maintained to avoid duplication and promote synergy.

Substantial progress was made across all core components. The 220 FLN School Quality Assurance Officers recruited in the previous year were fully inducted through national and district-level trainings and deployed across districts. They have played a critical role in supporting classroom observations, providing in-school teacher support through Community of Practice sessions, and conducting school monitoring, including the use of Teaching and Learning Materials and piloting of classroom observation tools. Their collaboration with the 160 existing SQAOs has improved coordination and strengthened programme delivery.

UNICEF and MBSSE also completed the procurement of 1,000 tablets, which were distributed to SQAOs and district IT officers. These tablets are now being used for real-time data collection, including teacher verification, classroom monitoring, and reporting on foundational learning indicators. The shift to digital tools has improved the accuracy, timeliness, and use of data for decision-making at all levels.

Three technical experts were successfully recruited and embedded within MBSSE to support data systems, gender and inclusion, and public finance management. They are providing strategic and technical support for the implementation of the EMIS policy, piloting of the Unique Learner ID, operationalisation of the Radical Inclusion Policy and financial tracking for foundational learning. Their work is directly contributing to improved institutional leadership and evidence-based decision-making.

A key challenge was the need to strengthen internal coordination and participation across MBSSE departments and with sector stakeholders. Gaps in timely communication and collaboration sometimes delayed decision-making and slowed programme responsiveness. To mitigate this, UNICEF and MBSSE agreed to institutionalize biweekly coordination meetings involving senior management and technical leads, while also reinforcing joint planning through the FLN Steering Committee and Component 3 Technical Workgroup. These mechanisms are improving programme oversight, enabling faster resolution of bottlenecks, and fostering stronger alignment across government and partners in support of SCG implementation.

Grant Implementation Progress, by Grant Window

Grant Window	Level of Progress this Reporting Period [2]	Previous Rating
Window 3: Strengthen capacity, adapt, and learn, to implement and drive results at scale	Highly Satisfactory (HS)	Moderately Satisfactory (MS)

Detailed Description:

Significant progress was made during the reporting period in strengthening data systems and institutional capacity through the SCG. Key achievements included the deployment of tablets, operationalization of 220 School SQAOs and onboarding of technical experts in data, inclusion and finance. Adjustments to timelines ensured alignment with national priorities and effective cross-sectoral coordination. These efforts are now driving more responsive, data-informed and inclusive foundational learning delivery.

Procurement of Tablets to Enhance Data Collection and Use

UNICEF and MBSSE have completed the procurement of 1,000 tablets out of the 3,000 planned under the initiative. From this total, 220 tablets were allocated to FLN School Quality Assurance Officers (FLN SQAOs) and 33 to District IT Officers. These devices are being used to support real-time data collection and school-level monitoring of foundational learning. Key uses include classroom observations, identifying teachers for participation in P0 and P2 numeracy trainings, and collecting routine school monitoring data.

The tablets have significantly enhanced the accuracy, timeliness and reliability of data on classroom practices, pupil performance and instructional support. They will also serve as the primary platform for piloting the Unique Learner ID (ULID) system and integrating with the national Education Management Information System (EMIS). The procurement was strategically aligned with the Teaching Service Commission’s One Tablet Per School initiative to ensure system compatibility and prevent duplication of efforts.

Recruitment and Preparation of 220 School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs)

Following the recruitment of 220 FLN SQAOs reported in 2024, efforts in 2025 focused on equipping this new cadre to effectively support foundational learning activities. Two major trainings were conducted to strengthen their capacity for implementation, data use and coordination at the school and district levels.

The first training, a regional-level induction and orientation, was conducted in November 2024 in Bo and Makeni cities. The objective was to introduce the newly recruited SQAOs to the FLN Strategy, their roles and responsibilities, the education policy environment and core principles of school monitoring. Sessions covered the MBSSE mission and ESP priorities, the SQAO competency framework, safeguarding and PSEA, community of practice approaches, and data ethics. Existing SQAOs were deliberately included in the orientation to ensure effective collaboration and alignment between the new and existing cadres, with sessions specifically dedicated to coordination mechanisms and shared accountability to avoid duplication of efforts.

The second training was held in Bo City in June 2025 and focused on the technical application of data tools, tablets and field-based school monitoring instruments. The objective was to equip SQAOs with the practical skills needed to carry out classroom ions, use the Tangerine and SurveyCTO apps on tablets, verify teacher participation in national trainings and conduct school-level monitoring of TLM availability and usage. Key sessions included orientation on the FLN Scorecards, real-time data collection using Tangerine, walkthroughs of school monitoring tools, simulation exercises and pilot visits to nearby schools. Additional modules covered gender, disability inclusion, school safety and protocols for reporting SRGBV data.

Following these capacity-building efforts, the FLN SQAOs have become instrumental in strengthening the efficiency and effectiveness of programme delivery. They have actively supported national teacher trainings, verified teacher data for P0 and P2 participation, led classroom observations using tablets and ensured the consistent monitoring of foundational learning indicators. Working closely with the 160 existing SQAOs, they have increased the coverage and quality of school visits, strengthened the use of data in district planning and performance reviews, and supported the operationalisation of the FLN Strategy through improved feedback loops and real-time data collection.

Recruitment of Technical Experts to Strengthen Data, Gender and Finance Capacity

The three embedded technical experts focused on data systems, gender and radical inclusion and public finance management were successfully recruited and deployed in early 2025. Hosted within MBSSE, these experts have played a critical role in strengthening the Ministry's institutional capacity and advancing priority areas under the GPE-supported foundational learning programme.

The Data Systems Expert has provided technical leadership on EMIS policy implementation, supported the development of ToR for piloting the Unique Learner ID (ULID) system, and contributed to improving the quality, use, and integration of foundational learning data into national systems and decision-making tools. The expert has also facilitated district-level capacity building on tablet-based data collection, contributed to the design of school and district scorecards and supported the revitalisation of the Education Data Working Group (EDWG).

The Gender and Inclusion Expert has led efforts to operationalise the Radical Inclusion policy by conducting institutional assessments, developing implementation roadmaps, and building MBSSE capacity to mainstream gender, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) in policy and data systems. This includes drafting guidance notes, delivering training modules for Ministry staff, and contributing to inclusive data strategies aligned with foundational learning objectives.

The Public Finance Management Expert has worked to strengthen financial transparency, adequacy and efficiency in foundational learning. This includes analysing education financing at pre-primary and primary levels, supporting expenditure tracking, and advising on the development of results-based budgeting tools. The expert has also built the capacity of MBSSE officials to interpret financial data and generate evidence for informed resource allocation.

Together, the embedded experts are enhancing MBSSE's ability to make data-informed, equity-focused, and financially sound decisions, fully aligned with the GPE programme's goals of system strengthening and improved learning outcomes.

Lessons, innovative/promising practices

Year 2 implementation reinforced the importance of strong coordination and joint accountability mechanisms in driving system-level reforms. The FLN Steering Committee and the reactivated Education Data Working Group (EDWG) have served as effective platforms for cross-sectoral planning, fostering alignment between MBSSE, TSC, UNICEF and development partners. These structures have been critical in reducing fragmentation, accelerating decision-making and ensuring government ownership. The GPE Component 3 Technical Workgroup has enabled focused leadership on data systems, governance and institutional capacity, key enablers for long-term sustainability.

A key lesson from the tablet procurement process is the value of early alignment with other partner-led initiatives. UNICEF's close collaboration with MBSSE, TSC and the World Bank ensured that the 1,000 tablets procured under the SCG matched the technical specifications of the 6,000 tablets funded through the One Tablet Per School initiative. This alignment has simplified deployment, enhanced system compatibility and reduced the risk of duplication. Additionally, the inclusion of solar chargers and power banks was critical to ensuring uninterrupted use in schools with limited electricity. The tablets now serve multiple functions, including real-time data collection for classroom observations, Community of Practice sessions, school performance tracking, the Unique Learner ID pilot and foundational learning scorecards.

Impact stories

https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/stories/supporting-teachers-strengthen-foundational-learning-children-sierra-leone

Tangible Outputs, Knowledge Products, Results Framework and other Supporting Documentation

#	File Name	Document Type	Description

The documents listed were submitted with the progress report. If you'd like access to them, please contact the grant operations officer for your country.

Financial Reporting & Grant Management

Financial Reporting on GPE Grant

Cumulative Financial Absorption Rate

Approved Budget to Date	Cumulative Expenditure	Cumulative Financial Absorption Rate	Level of Financial Absorption
1,997,738	825,498.42	41.32	Off Track

Since the financial absorption is not rated as 'on track', please provide an explanation that identifies the main activities that have been delayed and their corresponding unspent amounts, as well as reasons for the delay and steps taken to ensure that expenditure absorption gets on track in the next reporting period.

Activity 3.2.1 – Tablets for foundational learning - $1,221,752. 1,000 tablets, power banks, and solar chargers have been procured as part of an initial procurement. The full budget amount corresponds to 3,000 tablets, or one tablet per primary school. Due to the World Bank-supported project's previous commitment to procure one tablet per school, discussions are ongoing with the Ministry as to whether the World Bank procurement is still going ahead (as it is more than 2 years delayed) and whether additional tablets should be purchased using the GPE grant funds, as this would represent a duplication.

Activity 3.2.5 - Technical experts embedded in MBSSE - $151,200. The three experts in data, gender/inclusion and education financing were onboarded in November 2024 and are now receiving their regular salary payments.

Budget Variance Analysis for the Current Reporting Period

Total Approved Budget for the Current Reporting Period	Total Expenditure for the Current Reporting Period
260,720	825,498.25

Explanation for underspending or overspending in excess of 10%

The expenditure for Year 2 has far surpassed the approved budget for the reporting period. However, this is due to the delay in spending under the first year of the grant and therefore the over-expenditure represents steady progress toward meeting the cumulative budget amount to be spent.

Management Performance

Level of management performance
Satisfactory (S)

Detailed Description
The GPE SCG is implemented and managed by the MBSSE, with oversight and support from UNICEF as the Grant Agent. Technical decisions related to SCG activities are initiated by the Component 3 team and, where relevant, endorsed by the Education Data Working Group (EDWG) before being approved by the FLN Steering Committee. To guide procurement processes, the GPE Procurement Committee, comprising senior leadership and procurement specialists from MBSSE and UNICEF, has met regularly on procurement issues. During the reporting period, it was agreed that UNICEF would lead the procurement of 1,000 tablets through its global supply chain while simultaneously building the capacity of MBSSE to take on future similar procurement responsibilities.

To support the management of the SCG, UNICEF provided targeted training for officials from MBSSE, MTHE and TSC on global procurement standards, the Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers (HACT), fraud and risk management, financial documentation and accounting best practices. This capacity-strengthening initiative enhanced accountability and equipped government counterparts to manage large-scale procurement and recruitments under the SCG. An additional training on procurement and financial management is planned for Year 3 of the grant through the System Transformation Grant funding window.

The FLN Steering Committee has continued to play a central role in providing strategic direction, ensuring that SCG interventions are well aligned with national education priorities and the broader GPE programme objectives. It also helped foster cross-sectoral coordination and coherence across programme components. The reactivation of the EDWG under the SCG has been instrumental in guiding system-level data reforms, improving alignment among partners, minimising duplication of efforts, and advancing harmonised approaches to data management across the education sector.

Revisions to the grant

This period, have there been any revisions to the grant other than those submitted to the Secretariat for their approval?
No

How likely is that the grant agent will submit a request for revision to the Secretariat in the next 12 months for their approval?
Moderately Likely

Detailed Description
Discussion on the number of tablets required is ongoing. The World Bank is working with the Ministry on the One School, One Tablet program which has already begun the procurement process. It has come to the GPE programme’s attention that some of the same stakeholders are targeted for provision of tablets. Since the tablets as outlined in the GPE programme are meant to be used mainly for the implementation of the Community of Practice (COP) model, which has yet to be developed, a final decision on the number of tablets required will be made in line with the COP model. If it is determined that fewer tablets are required, the decision will be discussed with the LEG, and if approved, shared with GPE for approval. According to GPE guidelines, if more than 10% change is made in the SCG activities, it will require a non-minor revision. These guidelines will be followed as necessary.

It is "moderately likely" since the World Bank programme has already initiated its procurement process for the tablets, so there is no need to procure multiple tablets for the same stakeholders. A final decision will be made in line with the COP model development, which will take place in the last quarter of 2025.

Annexes

Annex 1: List of Acronyms

Acronym	Description
CoP	Community of Practice
EDTWG	Education Data Technical Work Group
EMIS	Education Monitoring and Information System
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
FLN	Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HACT	Harmonised Approach to Cash Transfers
LEG	Local Education Group
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MTHE	Ministry of Technical and Higher Education
PIU	Programme Implementation Unit
SQAOs	School Quality Assurance Officers
SCG	System Capacity Grants
TLM	Teaching Learning Material
TSC	Teaching Service Commission

1 Highly Unsatisfactory- The grant has major shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is unlikely. Unsatisfactory - The grant has significant shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is uncertain. Moderately Unsatisfactory - The grant has moderate shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs but a resolution is likely. Moderately Satisfactory - The grant is expected to achieve most of its major outputs efficiently with moderate shortcomings or delays. Satisfactory – The grant is expected to achieve almost all of its major outputs efficiently with only minor shortcomings or delays. Highly Satisfactory - The grant is expected to achieve or exceed all of the major outputs efficiently without significant shortcomings or delays.

2 Highly Unsatisfactory – The window has major shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is unlikely. Unsatisfactory – The window has significant shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs and a resolution is uncertain. Moderately Unsatisfactory – The window has moderate shortcomings or delays that limit or jeopardize the achievement of one or more outputs but a resolution is likely. Moderately Satisfactory – The window is expected to achieve most of its major outputs efficiently with moderate shortcomings. Satisfactory – The window is expected to achieve almost all of its major outputs efficiently with only minor shortcomings or delays. Highly Satisfactory – The window is expected to achieve or exceed all of the major outputs efficiently without significant shortcomings or delays.

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