APPRAISAL REPORT

OF THE EDUCATION SECTOR PLAN 2018-2020

IN SIERRA LEONE

Overall recommendation: The Education Strategic Plan 2018-2020 will be ready for endorsement by the Education Development Partners only after some substantial changes recommended in this appraisal report are made. These are mainly related to the financial framework, the need to prioritize, and the inclusion of a consolidated M&E Framework.

Commissioned by UNICEF, on behalf of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Sierra Leone, and the Education Development Partners.

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Executive Summary

After a period of successful economic growth and improvement on development indicators, in May 2014 Sierra Leone suffered a virulent outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease that, together with the reduction of the price of commodities in the international markets, collapsed the fragile economy of the country. The devastating Ebola epidemic put schools to a close for a period of nine months, which heavily disrupting an entire school year and seriously compromised the implementation of the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2014-2018. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) decided to update, review and expand the ESP. Together with education partners and under the technical guidance of local and international consultants, they started the elaboration of a new ESP for the period 2018-2020. The process was somewhat rushed, as the GoSL does not want to lose the chance of receiving a new Global Partnership for Education (GPE) Grant in November 2017, and it fears that the election in March 2018 could cause disruptions in normal government processes.

In order to have access to the GPE funds, the ESP must be endorsed by the Education Development Partners in Sierra Leone. As a first step, an appraisal of the Plan must be conducted, as part of the GPE Quality Assurance Review. This is done by an independent consultant who assesses the 5 criteria of the GPE/IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal. The main findings are as follows:

1. **Leadership and Participation**: The process to update the ESP 2014-2018 started around December 2016 and involved a wide consultation process at the national and district level. The ESP 2018-2020 includes a vision and a mission, aligned with the Agenda for Prosperity. The MEST has shown leadership throughout the process of elaborating this ESP. The Education Development Partners group has been instrumental. Because of the short timeframe, a full Education sector analysis was not conducted. Instead, a Mid-Term Review of the current ESP was conducted as a sort of Joint Sector Review. The strong collaboration among MEST and partners during the implementation of the President's Recovery Priorities (PRP) program continued during the process to update the ESP. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development was involved in the process, but it seems that the costing process was completely left in their hands without the involvement of the MEST. While staff of MEST actively participated in the elaboration of the ESP, it appears that the process was not oriented to enhancing the installed capacities at the MEST, probably due to the short timeframe to elaborate the ESP.

2. **Soundness and Relevance**: The ESP covers the entire education sector, from pre-primary to higher education, including non-formal education and quality and system strengthening aspects. Only pre-primary, primary and secondary programs feature a comprehensive analysis. TVET and Higher Education are inadequately described. The

education sector challenges were identified as: 1) high number of out-of-school children, 2) 40% of children start grade one aged 7 or above, 3) high repetition rates, 4) low completion rates, especially for girls, 5) low quality education at all levels, 6) inadequate educational infrastructure to effectively and efficiently deliver education, 7) few instructional hours, and not used efficiently, 8) mismatch between skills supply and labor-market demands (mining, agriculture, etc.), 9) high illiteracy rate among youths and adults, and 10) lack of governance and management capacity for education service delivery. Moreover, low or inadequate funding is also a major challenge.

The ESP proposes to achieve these targets through interventions in four areas: 1) Access, equity and completion, 2) Quality, relevance and integrity, 3) System strengthening, 4) Emergency preparedness and response. The new ESP includes some emerging issues that were not in the current ESP, e.g. school feeding, integrity (fight against corruption) and emergency preparedness.

The proposed interventions and targets are not always informed by empirical evidence. Rather, in many cases, the interventions or targets are guided by a political vision, as is the case for enrolment, completion, unapproved schools, and quality. The risks and mitigation measures are identified, but in a scattered way, and several risks were not identified or not sufficiently highlighted.

The financial framework is the weakest part of the ESP. The figures contained in the simulation model do not match the figures and targets on the ESP, and information is severely lacking on TVET, Higher Education, and Teachers. The proposed budget goes up by 59% in 2019 compared to 2018, and it is then reduced by 22% in 2020. Considering that the GDP and the revenues are expected to grow by almost 7% and 9% respectively in 2020, it is difficult to understand why the education budget will be reduced. Many of the budget lines included in the implementation plan are not consistent with the targets to be achieved. As for the level of expenditures in education, over the past decade the MEST's spending has declined from 16.68% in 2013 to 11.88% in 2017, and it is expected to be reduced to 11.02% in 2020. Moreover, the MEST often receives less than 70% of the approved annual budget. The lack of resources can seriously jeopardize the success of the new ESP. The distribution of the recurrent budget by sub-sector includes 1.83% allocated to pre-primary, 49.95% allocated to primary education, 26.52% to secondary education, 1.81% to TVET, and 17.30% to tertiary education.

The Implementation Plan was drafted in a rush just before the finalization of this report. The structure is consistent with the main document of the ESP and it includes a detailed budget for each intervention and activity.

3. **Equity, Efficiency and Learning**: The Annual School Census 2015 (ASC) and the Mid-Term Review (MTR) 2014-2016 are the main references regarding the sector analysis. Unfortunately, the new ESP does not reflect the sensitivity of previous sector analysis documents on equity and efficiency. Some equity issues are mentioned in a generic way, except for children with disabilities, for whom specific actions are included. Gender is not mainstreamed in the ESP. Regarding efficiency, the three main dimensions (repetition, drop out, and transition) are analyzed in detail in the ASC 2015, but the MTR and the ESP mention these dimensions only in a generic way. Some relevant learning issues are addressed throughout the entire ESP, but others are left out and concrete figures are not included. Overall, the analysis of the three dimensions is weak, with insufficient data and no detailed causal explanations. We think that the planned interventions and activities could have some impact on improving efficiency, but a limited one on equity and learning.

4. **Coherence**: The strategic outcomes and interventions are well structured, and the activities presented in the Implementation Plan are consistent with them. However, as recognized by several directors and partners, in several cases the proposed interventions and activities do not seem to be sufficient to achieve the expected target. The quantitative scenario is not consistent with the strategic outcome and the activities proposed. There is a clear disconnection between the narrative and the budget. The cost estimates are a purely mathematical exercise with no connection to the proposed activities and targets.

5. **Feasibility, Implementability, Monitorability**: The funding gap is very low, mainly because the budget was drafted by the MoFED considering the availability of funds rather than the needs of the sector. Domestic resources are focused on recurrent expenditures, covering 87% of the needs for the period 2018-2020, while 97% of the development budget for education is currently funded by development partners. Development partners have expressed their willingness to align all their support to the priorities of the ESP. Several directors recognized that “we have a capacity problem.” A capacity assessment was conducted prior to the commencement of the preceding ESP and a Capacity Development Strategy was produced.

   The MEST is clearly understaffed, with more than 200 vacancies, including several key positions such as the heads of TVET, ECD, Curriculum and Textbooks units. The GoS does not have a date to end the moratorium on new recruitment declared by the State House in 2016.

   The ESP does not list specific mechanisms to strengthen accountability to beneficiaries. The ESP analyzes the risks and the mitigation factors for each intervention, which are grouped in a table for each theme, but most of the risks focus only on financing aspects,

insufficiently mentioning important issues related to MEST staff, capacities, and coordination.

The ESP contains many scattered elements related to monitoring and evaluation, but there is no consolidated monitoring and evaluation framework that encompasses all the necessary information.

As a **Conclusion**, the main strengths and areas of improvement are signaled. The main **strengths of the Plan** are:

- The ESP is linked to strategic documents such as the Agenda for Prosperity and the President's Recovery Priorities program.
- It acknowledges the insufficient human resources at the MEST.
- It includes positive elements such as the re-entry policy for pregnant female students, the school feeding program, and the section on emergency preparedness.
- It includes a section on integrity, an element very much appreciated by education partners.

Some **areas of improvement** are:

- There is a significant disconnection between the narrative and the budget. The budget lines in the implementation plan are merely mathematical calculations.
- The proposed education budget entails a progressive reduction from 16% when the previous ESP was prepared to 11.88% now and to 11.02% by 2020. With these figures, the commitment of the GoSL to education may be in question.
- A consistent M&E Framework is lacking.
- The ESP displays inconsistencies in the figures, in that they are not the same in different parts of the ESP and between the ESP and the Simulation model.
- Some targets seem too ambitious to be achieved by the end of the Plan.
- The Plan lacks a proper M&E mechanism. Monitoring elements are scattered throughout the document, but a consistent framework is missing. Relying on Paramount Chiefs as the basis for the monitoring process is not ideal.
- The scheme proposed for the School Feeding Program does not seem realistic for a short period of 3 years.

The overall recommendation is that the Education Strategic Plan 2018-2020 will be ready for endorsement by the Education Development Partners only after some substantial changes recommended in this appraisal report are made. These are mainly related to the financial framework, the need to prioritize, and the inclusion of a consolidated M&E Framework.

The main recommendations are as follows:

1. The MEST should make it explicit that the ESP 2018-2020 is a **transition document** that sets the foundation for an ESP 2021-2025. This has significant implications in terms of the need to make a clear **prioritization** of the interventions and activities, focusing on fewer activities so that results can be achieved by the end of the ESP. This is particularly important if we consider the scarce domestic resources allocated to education.

2. The share of the national budget allocated to education is currently 11.88% and the ESP foresees a reduction to 11.02% in 2020. These are some of the recommendations that I strongly suggest incorporating in the final ESP:
    a. A **clear explanation for the rationale** for this reduction, especially considering that the GDP is growing at 6-7% per year and the revenues are also increasing by more than 10% annually in the period of the ESP.
    b. An **explicit commitment** that the Government of Sierra Leone will strive to increase the education budget over the next few years. This will be especially important if applying for a new GPE grant.
    c. The GoSL should **explore new funding mechanisms related to increasing taxation**.
    d. Donors can try to **leverage additional resources** by including "conditions" on their budget support.
    e. Considering the scarce domestic resources allocated to the education sector, it is recommended to include in the ESP a study of how to **improve the efficiency** in the use of the scarce resources in the education sector. In this regard, there seems to be a dispersion of **subsidies to private schools** at different education levels. It is recommended that an assessment be conducted on how to rationalize those funds to maximize results.
    f. As the ESP recognizes, the current **dependence on external aid** is extremely high (41.5% in the overall education budget, and 86% in the development budget). The ESP should include specific steps to reduce this dependence.

3. Regarding the **specific budget lines**:
    a. The **Simulation Model** ought to be revised and corrected to eliminate the numerous inconsistencies and to use it as a basis for the ESP. It must inform the ESP and be aligned with it. If this cannot be done before the endorsement of the ESP, it should be done in the coming months, before the implementation of the Plan.
    b. The ESP must clarify which **targets of the SM-Scenario 4** are included in the ESP and explain why some targets were changed on the ESP.
    c. The **budget lines on the Implementation Plan** must be consistent with the proposed targets. The budget cannot be a purely mathematical exercise.
    d. In a sector with many weaknesses, it does not seem logical that the **funding gap** is so low ($16.9M), to the point that it is lower than the funds that Sierra Leone

can expect to receive from the GPE ($17.2M). The funding gap should be reviewed, including the real needs of the different education sub-sectors and the funding requirements to achieve the proposed targets.

4. **Implementation Plan:** all targets ought to be set and quantified in the final version before endorsement of the ESP.

5. The MEST ought to fill in the **senior key positions**, such as the heads of the Units on TVET, ECD and Curriculum, during the first months of the implementation of the new ESP. Moreover, the relevant Directorates for the implementation of this ESP, such as Policy and Planning, or Inspectorate, ought to have a minimum number of qualified technical staff. Otherwise, the implementation of the ESP is at a serious risk of failure because of the lack of adequate human resources.

6. The MEST should set up a **clear organogram**, with clear roles and responsibilities for each Directorate, Unit and Commissions, so that duplications are avoided.

7. The start-up of the **Teacher Service Commission** (TSC) is taking longer than expected and there is still uncertainty about its timeline. Therefore, as the TSC is still not fully functional, I would recommend devising a plan B, an alternative scheme to implement all the interventions related to teachers.

8. The MEST should ensure that the **Teaching Service Commission** is fully operational in the short term. Key staff must be hired and key responsibilities transferred from MEST to the TSC.

9. A **Result Framework** that compiles in a table all the interventions organized by themes in the same way that they appear in the ESP should be included.

10. Regarding **data and indicators** in the ESP:
    a. **Improve accuracy**: figures must be the same for the same indicators, and thus several existing discrepancies on the ESP ought to be settled.

    b. Some **targets** seem to be unrealistic and we recommend re-evaluating them:
        i. A reduction to zero of unapproved schools (p. 56) is unrealistic, as has been recognized by several directors. Moreover, the approval of schools has financial implications in the medium-term, as approved schools are eligible to receive subsidies from the government after a 3-year period.
        ii. The ESP proposes to reach universal primary education and at the same time it foresees 15% of out-of-school children by 2020. These figures should match in the ESP.

iii. An increase of the GER for SSS from 28% to 30% seems very conservative and should be revised upwards.

c. Regarding the EMIS:
   i. It is necessary to ensure that the collection of data will disaggregate indicators by gender, district, and inclusion factors.
   ii. The decentralization process of EMIS should be concluded.

11. The ESP should emphasize more clearly the need to develop **programs to train trainers**, the weakest link in the chain of needed trainings at the different education levels.

12. It is recommended that the World Food Programme be included in the **school feeding program** in the ESP. Their expertise and capacities would be a significant asset for the success and sustainability of the program.

13. **Sustainable Development Goals** are not only related to funding (box 6.1.). Therefore, I recommend placing them at the beginning of the document, where the national and international references of the ESP are mentioned (vision, mission, and Agenda for Prosperity).

14. The ESP should be reviewed to incorporate more information and proposals regarding **Equity** (in particular children with disabilities, children orphaned by the Ebola epidemic, and Ebola survivors). Along the same lines, the document should be reviewed to ensure that **Gender** is mainstreamed throughout the entire ESP, starting with the disaggregation of all the indicators by sex on the ESP and on the Implementation Plan.

15. Aspects related to **efficiency and learning outcomes** should be addressed in more depth, including data and more detailed information about how to improve them.

16. The **ESP should be disseminated** among all stakeholders, including at the district and community levels. The publication of a summary in Krio may be useful.

1. Introduction

After a period of successful economic growth and improvement on development indicators, in May 2014 Sierra Leone suffered a virulent outbreak of the Ebola Virus Disease that, together with the reduction of the price of commodities in the international markets, collapsed the fragile economy of the country. In the words of the government, the Ebola crisis "almost brought the nation to its knees." Sierra Leone is still struggling to recover from the effects of the Ebola crisis and the economic crisis.

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the planet, ranked 179th out of 188 countries in the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2016: 200). It was ranked 176th in 2014. Over half of the population live in poverty. The population annual growth rate is 2.5%.

In 2007, the Government approved the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2007-2015, and in 2013 the ESP 2014-2018. The devastating Ebola epidemic in 2014-2015 put schools to a close for a period of nine months, which heavily disrupting an entire school year and seriously compromised the implementation of the ESP 2014-2018. At the end of 2016, in consultation with the GPE and partners, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) decided to update, review and expand the ESP. It was agreed to develop a 3-year plan. Together with education partners and under the technical guidance of local and international consultants, they started the elaboration of a new ESP for the period 2018-2020.

A Mid-Term Review was carried out in the first quarter of 2017. It is an assessment of the achievements of the ESP 2014-2018 and it includes recommendations for the new ESP.

The process was somewhat rushed, as the GoSL does not want to lose the chance of receiving a new GPE Grant in November 2017. Another important factor is the general election that will take place in Sierra Leone in March 2018 and that could cause disruptions in normal government processes.

Sierra Leone joined the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) in 2007, and it has received two GPE grants: a first grant of $11.7 million for the period 2008-2012 and a second grant of $17.9 million for 2014-2017, both managed by the World Bank. The four components of the second grant are:

1. Improve the learning environment and opportunities in targeted areas through performance-based school grants, piloting approaches to increase school readiness, and strengthening reading outcomes in the early grades and improvements in teacher management.
2. Strengthen education service delivery through building a better system for measuring learning outcomes, supporting consistent school data collection and establishing a system for effective delivery on the Education Sector Strategy.
3. Support project management and supervision.

4. Support the implementation of the Ebola response Plan through emergency radio and television programs and establishing safe and secure learning environments.

In order to have access to GPE funds, the ESP must be endorsed by the Education Development Partners in Sierra Leone. As a first step, an appraisal of the Plan must be conducted. The appraisal of both the ESP and the Implementation Plan is part of the GPE Quality Assurance Review, and it is done by an independent consultant in order to assess, among other criteria, the soundness, relevance, feasibility, equity, and efficiency of the ESP. Sierra Leone is presently eligible for an additional allocation of US$17.2 million, which will be managed by UNICEF. As the country relies on international partners to implement the new ESP, a new GPE Grant would be highly valuable for the education sector in Sierra Leone.

2. Context of the Education Sector in Sierra Leone

All education subsectors are under the purview of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology of Sierra Leone. The current Minister, Dr. Minkailu Bah, has been in that position for almost 10 years, thus providing institutional stability to the education sector.

The main policy documents guiding the education sector are the 2004 Education Act and the 2010 Education Policy. The education system includes 3 years of pre-primary education (for 3-5 year olds), 9 years of basic education (6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary school), and 4 years of senior secondary school. Basic education is compulsory and free by law, but the reality is far from this.

The current situation in the education sector may be summarized as follows (Annual School Census 2015):

- The GER for pre-primary education for children aged 3-5 years old is 11%, and the pre-primary education is generally fee-based and varies in quality due to lack of quality standards, resources, and capacity building.
- The GIR for primary level is very high at 151.6%, indicating that there are many children either above or below the official age of entering class 1.
- The GER value for the primary level is at 125.5%, 60.8% for the junior secondary level, and 27.6% for the senior secondary level. The GER decreases as the school level rises.
- At the primary level, the GER for females is greater than that of males, whereas at the secondary level the GER for males is greater than that of females.
- The GCR for the primary level is 75.3%, for the junior secondary level it is 40.6%, and for the senior secondary level it is 22.2%.
- Teaching in Sierra Leone has been dominated by men – only 25% of teachers are female.

- Almost one-third of the teachers reported no teaching qualification for the level they are teaching.
- Government assisted mission and community schools accounted for the greatest percentage of enrolments at 45% and 29% of total enrolment, respectively. GOSL schools accounted for 19%, private schools accounted for 6%, and other agencies accounted for 1% of total enrolment.
- Only 4,777 out of 8,907 schools are approved in Sierra Leone.
- Only 71.1% of schools in Sierra Leone have water facilities.
- 70.8% of the schools have functioning toilets, of which 35.9% are in need of repairs. 55.9% of the schools do not have a separate latrine for pupils with disability.
- Half of the population above 15 years of age is illiterate.

3. Methodology

The purpose of the appraisal phase, or independent assessment, is to assist education stakeholders in appraising the soundness, relevance, and coherence that lend credibility to an Education Sector Plan.

The methodology to collect the necessary information for the appraisal comprises:

- **Desk Review**. This appraisal includes a review of the Education Sector Plan, the Implementation Plan, the Education Country Status Report, the Simulation Model, the Mid-Term Review and other relevant documents related to the education sector in Sierra Leone (see Annex 3).

- **Online Interviews** with authorities and education partners. A list of the people interviewed can be found in Annex 2.

- **Analysis of the Education Sector Plan and Implementation Plan**, employing the GPE/IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal, and the GPE/IIEP Appraisal Matrix (used as a checklist during the appraisal process as a quality assurance tool to ensure all pertinent questions were addressed in the analysis). It is agreed at the GPE that the appraisal guidelines must be sensitive to the context. Given a situation of institutional vulnerability, poor education indicators, scarce resources, and insufficient capacities, I deemed it necessary to focus on the aspects of the guidelines that can have more impact in the near future. Thus, I have adapted the tool to the specific context of Sierra Leone, grouping some of the questions. For instance, all the questions related to monitoring and evaluation have been grouped under the heading “Robustness of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework”.

- Presentation of **Preliminary Findings** to Education Development Partners.
- Elaboration of the **Draft Appraisal Report**, for comments by the MEST and partners.
- Presentation of the **Final Appraisal Report**, the Memo for the MEST, and the draft letter of endorsement.
- Elaboration of **Memo** for the MEST and **Draft letter of endorsement** for EDP.

4. Technical Appraisal: Analysis of the Criteria

This section will follow the 5 criteria of the GPE/IIEP Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal. As mentioned above, these criteria have been adapted to the specific context of Sierra Leone.

4.1. Leadership and Participation

Leadership and Ownership

The Education Sector Plan 2018-2020 (ESP) lists the Sustainable Development Goal #4 and Targets as an international reference, with a table in the costing chapter instead of at the beginning of the document, where it would be more appropriate. The Agenda 2030 is not mentioned.

At the national level, the Agenda for Prosperity (equivalent to a Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper) is a guide to convert Sierra Leone into a middle-income country by 2035. Socio-economic features such as “Free and compulsory education for every child” and “Over 90% of the population able to read and write” are presented as part of this vision. Education objectives are detailed in Pillar 3 of Accelerating Human Development. The document also includes lessons learned in the implementation of Agenda for Change, e.g., insufficient inter-ministerial collaboration and coordination, weak monitoring and implementation framework, untimely disbursement of funds (from development partners), weak implementation capacity, and the importance of prioritizing. Some of these elements will be described in this appraisal report.

According to the GPE/IIEP guidelines for education sector plan preparation, one of the features of a credible plan is that it must be guided by an overall vision. The ESP 2018-2020 includes a vision and a mission, aligned with the Agenda for Prosperity, and it is clearly stated at the beginning of the document.

Moreover, the 2004 Education Act and the 2010 Education Policy are the policy framework of the education sector. In this framework, basic education is free and compulsory.

The MEST has shown leadership throughout the process of elaborating this ESP. The Education Development Partners (the local name of the Local Education Group) has been instrumental.

Participatory Process

The MEST has elaborated the Education Sector Plan with the support of GPE, UNICEF, DFID, EU and the World Bank. The process to update the ESP 2014-2018 started around December 2016 and it involved a wide consultation process at the national and district level. A working group was formed in mid-January with representatives of MEST, development partners, NGOs and civil society, teacher union, and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED). Consultations were done in the 14 districts with a wide range of stakeholders, including the DEOs, community representatives, teachers, students, market women, bike riders, and children with disabilities.

In February and March, the Mid-Term Review of the current ESP was conducted as a sort of Joint Sector Review. Six teams were created for the discussions, following the structure of the ESP (access, quality, emergency preparedness, system strengthening, institutional arrangements, and finances). A drafting team was formed with members of the MEST as well as national and international consultants. According to the MEST, partners were regularly updated on the progress of the writing of the document. The MEST hosted a retreat in May 2017, and committees were formed to discuss and finalize the different chapters of the ESP.

Some of the MEST directors and some of the partners reported that they did not participate actively in the final stages and in the drafting process. Most of the informants interviewed did not read and/or did not provide comments on the second draft, the version submitted for appraisal.

There is a general sense of ownership in the Ministry. Dr. Albert Dupigny, a former MEST staff and now senior consultant, has been the coordinator of the entire process. Despite an active participation in several stages of the process, some stakeholders feel that the Chief Education Officer and the Director of Policy and Planning should have had a more prominent role in the elaboration of the ESP.

The strong collaboration among MEST and partners during the implementation of the President's Recovery Priorities (PRP) program continued during the process to update the ESP.[1] For the PRP, an Inclusive Management Team and an Executive Management Team were created, and met on a weekly basis. This structure was also instrumental during the elaboration of the new ESP. According to a donor representative, there was "a total shifting towards a process with openness, leadership and ownership".

[1] The PRP ended on June 30, with an extension of one month to bring the program to a close.

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development was involved in the process, but it seems that the costing process was completely left in their hands without the involvement of the MEST. This is particularly evident in the budget of the Implementation Plan, which uses the same formula for most of the budget lines. For example, for strategic outcome 1, in 19 out of 22 budget lines the value for 2019 was calculated by multiplying the 2018 value by 1.52, and in 17 out of 22 budget lines, the value for 2020 was calculated by multiplying the 2019 value by 0.53. For strategic outcome 2, 14 out of 14 budget lines were built following the same pattern. This is clear evidence that the budget was not elaborated following the needs of each intervention to achieve the proposed targets/results.

Overall, informants agreed that the planning process was highly participatory and inclusive.

Capacity Development

The elaboration of the ESP benefited from the support of several consultants, funded by donors, who provided technical inputs and facilitated some discussions with the MEST team. The role of the technical support was instrumental and the MEST always kept the leadership. However, it appears that the process was not oriented to enhancing the installed capacities at the MEST, probably due to the short timeframe to elaborate the ESP.

4.2. Soundness and Relevance

Evidence-based Education Sector Analysis

The ESP covers the entire education sector, from pre-primary to higher education, including non-formal education and quality and system strengthening aspects. Only some of the programs feature a comprehensive analysis of the sub-sectors. TVET and Higher Education are inadequately described.

As mentioned above, it was agreed with the GPE that the updated ESP would not need a full Education Sector Analysis, as it would have taken many months to do it. The ESP 2018-2020 is based on evidences collected at the Annual Census Report 2015 and the Mid-Term Review 2014-2016. However, only partial information from these two documents was used and, for instance, many indicators on the ESP are not disaggregated by sex and quality indicators are not included, whereas they are on the MTR.

The education sector challenges were identified as: 1) high number of out-of-school children, 2) 40% of children start grade one aged 7 or above, 3) high repetition rates, 4) low completion rates, especially for girls, 5) low quality education at all levels, 6) inadequate educational infrastructure to effectively and efficiently deliver education, 7) few instructional hours, and not used efficiently, 8) mismatch between skills supply and labor-market demands (mining, agriculture, etc.), 9) high illiteracy rate among youths and adults, and 10) lack of governance

and management capacity for education service delivery. Moreover, low and inadequate funding is also a major challenge.

Some analysis and thematic studies done by education partners were provided for the elaboration of this appraisal, including a capacity development strategy, a study on out-of-school children, and a report on EGRA/EGMA. No vulnerability analysis has been conducted.

Relevance of Policies and Programs

The ESP has 3 overarching targets:

1. Tangible improvement in education service delivery
2. Improved systems integrity
3. Improved learning

The ESP proposes to achieve these targets through interventions in four areas: 1) Access, equity and completion, 2) Quality, relevance and integrity, 3) System strengthening, 4) Emergency preparedness and response. The new ESP includes some emerging issues that were not in the current ESP, e.g. school feeding, integrity (fight against corruption) and emergency preparedness.

The proposed interventions and targets are not always informed by empirical evidence. Rather, in many cases, the interventions or targets are guided by a political vision, as is the case for enrolment, completion, unapproved schools, and quality.

The causal chains are often weak. For instance, the improvement in learning assessment in primary education is based on the distribution of learning materials, textbooks, annual learning assessments, a curriculum revision, and a generic teacher training. There is no mention of the medium of instruction[2], the number of instructional hours, or of the methodologies to teach how to read and write.

The risks and mitigation measures are identified, but in a scattered way, and several risks were not identified or not sufficiently highlighted, e.g. the general election in 2018, the lack of staff in key positions, and the high risk that the MoFED will decide to substantially reduce the budget in 2020.

Soundness of the Financial Framework

The financial framework is the weakest part of the ESP. The Simulation Model (SM) is an update of the one done in 2013 for the ESP 2014-2018. It includes all the sub-sectors, but the data is

[2] The language policy allows teachers to teach in the students' mother tongue, but materials are only available in English, a language spoken by a small proportion of the population outside of Freetown.

severely lacking on TVET, Higher Education, and Teachers. It appears to be a mathematical exercise rather than a projection based on recent baseline data, as it is calculated by multiplying the 2013 figures by certain constants. Moreover, many of the figures in the SM are not the same as those in the ESP.

The model contains four scenarios, the fourth of which was retained and utilized to elaborate the Education Sector Plan. Regarding the macro-economic assumptions, the Sierra Leonean economy has experimented an erratic evolution, with annual growth rates above 10% in 2012-2014, and -7.5% and -10.1% in the two years that followed. The expected economic annual growth rates for the period of the ESP are very modest: 2.8% for 2017-2018, 1.4% for 2018-2019, and 2.1% for 2019-2020. The assumption in the simulation model is a more modest annual growth rate of 5% for three years and then 5.5% for two years.

The proposed budget goes up by 59% in 2019 compared to 2018, and it is then reduced by 22% in 2020. Considering that the GDP is expected to grow by almost 7% in 2020, it is difficult to understand why the education budget will be reduced. The expected evolution of the revenues is also very positive: 11% in 2018, 12% in 2019, and 9% in 2020 (Simulation Model).

Some hypotheses are inconsistent with a Plan that intends to increase the enrolment rates and the quality of education. For instance, the number of years of pre-service training is reduced from 3 to 1, and the number of teachers on all sub-sectors is dramatically reduced, e.g. from 2,793 in 2015-2016 on primary education to 1,621 in 2019-2020 or from 1,287 on SSS in 2013-2014 to 65 on 2019-2020.

Another inconsistency: according to the SM, the number of untrained teachers in primary education goes from 5,419 in 2015 to 0 in 2016. However, on page IV of the ESP, it is said “with 75% of teachers being trained and qualified for their employment, inspected and evaluated by the year 2020”. On the SM, there are no untrained teachers in JSS and SSS, which it is clearly not the case in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, according to the donors, the simulation model is not up-to-date regarding the cost of school construction, with the cost of a unit listed at $7,500 when in the reality that cost is around $10,000.

Many of the budget lines included in the implementation plan are not consistent with the targets to be achieved. For instance, in many cases the targets are growing from 2018 to 2020, but the budget is increased in 2019 and then reduced in 2020. These changes in the budget are mere mathematical calculations that do not take into consideration the proposed target.

As for the level of expenditures in education, UNESCO has long called for governments to allocate at least 20% of the national budget to education. Over the past decade, the MEST's spending has declined, from 16.68% in 2013 to 11.88% in 2017, and it is expected to be reduced to 11.02% in 2020. Moreover, as the Permanent Secretary mentioned in the debrief meeting in

Freetown on July 6, very often the MEST receives less than 70% of the approved annual budget[3].

According to the simulation model, the growth rates in the recurrent budget are 20% in 2018, 18% in 2019 and 18% in 2020. However, the development budget is slightly declining over the three years. As declared by a Senior Director at the MEST, the government concentrates its efforts on the recurrent budget and relies on the donors for the development budget (in a proportion of 9 to 1). Therefore, the share of the recurrent expenses allocated to education is 30.11%. However, it must be pointed out that the UNESCO recommendation to spend at least 20% of the national budget in education refers to the entire education budget.

The distribution of the recurrent budget by sub-sector includes 1.83% allocated to pre-primary, 49.95% allocated to primary education, 26.52% to secondary education, 1.81% to TVET, and 17.30% to tertiary education.

As a final note, the exchange rate USD/Leone used on the simulation model is 1 to 4,300 and 1 to 3,988 (on the same excel spreadsheet), but the rate used at the ESP is 7,500. This can explain the lack of match in some figures between the simulation model and the ESP.

Soundness of the Action Plan

The Action Plan, called Implementation Plan (IP), includes the detailed activities and budget lines for the 4 areas of intervention during the 3 years of the ESP. It has been done in a rushed process just before the finalization of this report. The structure is consistent with the main document of the ESP and it includes a detailed budget for each intervention and activity. However, there are many inconsistencies in the targets and figures. Many activities are not quantified, and many targets are not set or clearly quantified. For instance, at the IP, textbooks, teachers to be trained, studies to be conducted, workshops, and many other activities are not quantified.

As indicated above, most of the budget lines are calculated as a mere mathematical calculation, and therefore it is difficult to know if the different departments will have the absorptive capacity to spend the money. Moreover, several directorates and units are understaffed (e.g. Inspectorate, and Policy and Planning) or have no staff at all (TVET, ECD, Curriculum).

The current version of the IP does not include information on sources of verification, departments in charge of collection of the data for each indicator, nor the frequency to collect it. Given the lack of a clear monitoring and evaluation framework in the current version of the ESP it would be difficult to monitor and evaluate the action plan.

[3] Unfortunately, the executed budget for previous years was not provided by the MoFED.

Further comments are provided in the Implementation Plan document itself using Track Changes.

4.3. Equity, Efficiency and Learning

Robustness and Relevance of the Strategies

The Annual School Census 2015 (ASC) and the Mid-Term Review 2014-2016 are the main references regarding the sector analysis. Unfortunately, the new ESP does not reflect the sensitivity of previous sector analysis documents on equity and efficiency[4].

Regarding equity, the MTR includes several references to children with disabilities, e.g. newly constructed classrooms should be disability friendly, with ramps for motor impaired children, and financial support will be provided to students with disabilities. The fact that disability issues were not adequately featured in the Curriculum Framework document is also mentioned. The ASC contains plenty of references to children with disabilities. However, the new ESP mentions children with disabilities in a very generic way and there is only one concrete reference to action in Strategic outcome 1.5.

There are still gender inequalities in the Sierra Leonean education system, especially in secondary education. Pregnant girls are barred from attending school. A re-entry policy for teenage mothers is included in the ESP, and there will be special centers for pregnant school girls. However, gender is not mainstreamed in the ESP.

Regarding geographical disparities, the ASC and the MTR include key issues and recommendations gathered from consultations at the district level.

Regarding efficiency, the three main dimensions (repetition, drop out, and transition) are analyzed in detail in the ASC 2015, with many tables and figures, including a distribution by grades and local council. However, the MTR, the most recent document regarding the sector analysis, mentions these dimensions only in a generic way, providing only some data and not much analysis.

Learning issues are addressed throughout the entire ESP, include references to the need to improve learning outcomes, the need for conducive learning environments for the learners, and the barriers related to the low qualifications among the existing teacher workforce. However, as mentioned above, there is no mention of the medium of instruction or of the methodologies to teach how to read and write. Moreover, the ESP does not include concrete figures on learning outcomes, not even those available on the UNICEF assessment of November 2014.

[4] Please note that the ESP must be a complete document, and sufficient information on the three dimensions has to be provided on it. Complementary information can be found in other documents, but the MEST cannot rely on the fact that core information is included in other documents.

Overall, the analysis on the three dimensions is weak, with insufficient data and not detailed causal explanations.

Change Strategies

The four themes include strategic outcomes and interventions derived from an analysis of the situation in the education sector (mainly the Annual School Census and the Mid-Term Review). However, quality aspects are scarce in the situation analysis of the ESP (but they are present in the MTR).

The planned strategies and activities are expected to improve the sector performance, but there is no explicit results chain.

The introduction of the ESP states that "this ESP focuses on new and innovative solutions to the challenges that plague the system." A few interventions can be considered innovative, compared to the current ESP, such as the school feeding program, the measures to reduce malpractices, and the introduction of a section on emergency preparedness. However, the solutions proposed to increase enrolment, retention, or completion are the standard ones.

Overall, the planned interventions and activities could have some impact on improving efficiency, but a limited one on equity and learning.

Results Framework

There is no result framework as such in the document, but most of the information needed to monitor improvements in the ESP is included in the Implementation Plan.

More information on the indicators can be found in the last section of criteria #5.

4.4. Coherence

Coherence among Strategies, Programs, and Interventions

The strategic outcomes and interventions are well structured, and the activities in the Implementation Plan are consistent with them. However, the GPE/IIEP Guidelines specify that a credible ESP must be achievable. As recognized by several directors and partners, in several cases in the ESP, the proposed interventions and activities do not seem to be sufficient to achieve the expected targets. Some examples of ambitious targets in the ESP are:

- Unapproved schools would be 0% in 2020 (page 39). Currently, more than half of the schools are unapproved (4,777 out of 8,907) and the PRP managed to approve only 362 schools in one year.
- The ESP includes the commitment of the GoSL to attain Universal Primary Education by 2020 (page II). This is not realistic, as there aren't enough classrooms, qualified teachers, and resources. At the same time, the strategic outcome expects 15% on out-of-school children by 2020 (page14).

However, there are also some indicators that seem very conservative:

- GER SSS, increasing only from 28% to 30% in 3 years.
- The literacy rate for youth and adults would be 56% even if the Agenda for Prosperity is proposing "Over 90% of the population able to read and write".

Comprehensive Costing Aligned with the Budget

As explained in detail in this report in the section analyzing the financial framework, the quantitative scenario is not consistent with the strategic outcome and the activities proposed. There is a clear disconnection between the narrative and the budget. The cost estimates are a purely mathematical exercise with no connection to the proposed activities and targets. The costing for TVET and Higher Education are inadequately done.

Note: The coherence section on Monitoring and Evaluation indicators is discussed in the section on Monitoring and Evaluation-M&E Framework.

4.5. Feasibility, Implementability and Monitorability

Financial Feasibility

The funding gap is very low, mainly because the budget was drafted by the MoFED considering the availability of funds rather than the needs of the sector, but the availability of funds. It has to be noted that the financial gap ($16.91M) is lower than the indicative amount that Sierra Leone can expect to receive from the GPE ($17.2M). Moreover, the expected financing by donors exceeds by $48.48M the needs of the sector in development expenses.

Domestic resources are focused on recurrent expenditures, covering 87% of the needs for the period 2018-2020. However, 97% of the development budget for education is currently funded by development partners. The expectation of the MEST is that this level will be maintained during the new ESP period (8 out of 9 dollars on the development budget will come from donors) and therefore the sector remains highly dependent on external resources.

Development partners have expressed their willingness to align all their support to the priorities of the ESP.

System Capacity

Several directors recognized that "we have a capacity problem." A capacity assessment was conducted prior to the commencement of the preceding ESP and a Capacity Development Strategy (CDS) was produced. The deficiencies in the capacities of the MEST were related mainly to insufficient human resources, legislation issues, and quality assurance issues. Those remain valid for the new ESP, and the CDS could be a good guide for action.

The MEST organigram is not clear and an updated version does not seem to exist. The MEST is clearly understaffed, with more than 200 vacancies, including several key positions as the heads of TVET, ECD, Curriculum and Textbooks units. Some directorates are understaffed. For example, the Directorate of Inspectorate is composed solely by the Director, and the Directorate of Policy and Planning is severely understaffed and the existing staff is apparently not well qualified. The Permanent Secretary expressed that "this is a very serious issue" and it is agreed at the MEST that this factor could be harmful to the implementation of the ESP.

In a press release issued on 3rd October 2016, following the negative impact of Ebola and the plummeting of the global price of commodities, the State House declared a moratorium on new recruitment in the public and civil service, except for essential and critical vacancies.[5] The MoFED continues to apply an austere financial policy, not even authorizing the recruitment of essential vacancies in any ministry. No decision was made in terms of a date to lift the moratorium.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are considered throughout the ESP as an important actor in the education sector. The support from civil society, and NGOs is not sufficiently taken into account for the implementation of the ESP. The EDP is considered as a forum where in which partners can voice issues and provide inputs on the implementation of the ESP.

Governance and Accountability

Despite a vague reference to "improving the communication and information sharing," the ESP does not mention a communication strategy to disseminate the new plan and to engage the stakeholders. As an exercise of devolution, workshops could be organized with each district to explain the ESP and to discuss the involvement of the different stakeholders in the

[5] http://cocorioko.net/government-adopts-austerity-measures/

implementation and monitoring of the activities and interventions proposed in the ESP. A summary of the ESP could be translated into Krio.

One of the main problems in the Sierra Leonean education system is the lack of timely transfer of the subsidies to the schools. Because of this fact, head teachers "are obliged" to ask parents for contributions so they can run the schools. The new ESP includes subsidies, but not in a sufficient quantity.

Gender imbalance in educational management has been identified, but no particular strategy has been included in the ESP. As mentioned above, gender aspects are not considered in most of the Plan.

A higher involvement of the communities is desirable, as expressed by one Deputy Director of a District Education Office: "We can only succeed if we involve the communities and the students". To do so, ownership must be created at the school and community levels. The ESP does not list specific mechanisms to strengthen accountability to beneficiaries.

As a mechanism to increase accountability, the ESP proposes to elaborate a Medium-Term Expenditure Framework/Budget. The ESP also includes a significant new component on "Integrity" in the section on quality. The purpose is to reduce the cases of malpractices, especially those related to the examination processes and to sexual harassment. A national strategy and action plan will be developed to ensure that "100% of schools implement measures to prevent school related economic and sexual related offences by sensitising learners on their rights and referral channels at JSS, SSS, TVET, HEIs and learning centres" (page IV).

Risks to Implementation and the Mitigation of Risks

The ESP analyzes the risks and the mitigation factors for each intervention, which are grouped in a table for each theme. Most of the risks focus on financing aspects, and it is true that the apparent lack of control of the MEST over the education budget is a serious concern for the success of the ESP, especially because of the lack of mitigation measures for that risk.

There are also other important risks linked to 1) the vacancies at key position at the MEST, 2) the low capacity at the MEST level (both central and district), 3) the potential lack of coordination among all the Directorates and Units, especially considering that many of them are understaffed[6], and 4) the lack of political will to unblock the situation of the Teaching Service Commission. In its Implementation Status & Results Report of April 30, 2017, the World Bank states that the risk for the implementation of the GPE Grant is "substantial."

[6] Despite the existing coordination mechanisms, the vacancies in senior relevant positions multiply the risk of lack of coordination in the implementation of the ESP.

The MEST relies heavily on donors for the implementation of crucial elements such as inspectorate, curriculum, construction, and training. This means that any improvement in the quality of education in Sierra Leone depends on external partners. This is unsustainable and risky, as partners can change their priorities, and the number of donors in country is already very limited.

Robustness of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

It is always important for a Ministry of Education to be able to track the progress of the implementation of a plan. It is also important for donors, who will contribute to more than 90% of the development expenses.

The ESP contains many scattered elements related to monitoring and evaluation, but there is no consolidated monitoring and evaluation framework that encompasses all the necessary information, such as sources of verification, mechanisms to collect the information, who will collect and process the data, how often, with which tools, etc.

There is agreement among the interviewees that the ESP is a living document whose targets will need to be reviewed annually. This is particularly important because, as already pointed out above, some of the targets are quite ambitious or even unrealistic. Annual Education Sector Reviews (AESR) were completed for several years. However, the new ESP does not propose to conduct these reviews in the future. If they were included, they would give the Ministry and all the education actors the valuable opportunity to analyze the progress of the education sector jointly, and to take the appropriate measures to get back on the right track if needed. Those reviews would be key to assess and readjust policies, activities, and especially the targets.

The ESP includes both output and outcomes indicators. However, most of the outcome targets seem to be out of the reach of the MEST in the next 3 years.

Paramount Chiefs (traditional leaders) played a key role in bringing children back to school during the Ebola crisis in 2014-2015. In the new ESP, the MEST relies on Paramount Chiefs to support monitoring in their chiefdoms. There are concerns about their capacity and understanding of the technical aspects of data collection and monitoring processes.

The ESP is not clear on the participation that EDP members will have on monitoring progress in ESP implementation. Some NGOs expressed their frustration for not having been included.

5. Conclusions

The Education Sector Plan is a comprehensive document that fulfills its role of reviewing and updating the ESP 2014-2018. The new Plan includes interventions in 4 relevant areas: 1) Access,

equity and completion, 2) Quality, Relevance and Integrity, 3) System Strengthening, and 4) Emergency Preparedness and Response.

The Government of Sierra Leone, and the MEST in particular, must be commended for their commitment and efforts for putting together an Education Sector Plan in such a short period of time. At the same time, we have to recognize that some of the weaknesses of the ESP are precisely due to this "fast tracking." Moreover, the ESP will be implemented in a period of constrained fiscal environment, which will make it difficult to obtain sufficient resources to achieve the proposed targets.

The main **strengths of the Plan** are:

- The ESP is linked to strategic documents such as the Agenda for Prosperity and the President's Recovery Priorities program.
- It acknowledges the insufficient human resources at the MEST.
- It includes positive elements such as the re-entry policy for pregnant female students, the school feeding program, and the section on emergency preparedness.
- It includes a section on integrity, an element very much appreciated by education partners.

Some **areas of improvement** are:

- There is a significant disconnection between the narrative and the budget. The budget lines in the implementation plan are merely mathematical calculations.
- The proposed education budget entails a progressive reduction from 16% when the previous ESP was prepared to 11.88% now and to 11.02% by 2020. With these figures, the commitment of the GoSL to education may be in question.
- A consistent M&E Framework is lacking.
- The ESP displays inconsistencies in the figures, in that are not the same in different parts of the ESP and between the ESP and the Simulation model.
- Some targets seem too ambitious to be achieved by the end of the Plan.
- The Plan lacks a proper M&E mechanism. Monitoring elements are scattered throughout the document, but a consistent framework is missing. Relying on Paramount Chiefs as the basis for the monitoring process is not ideal.
- The scheme proposed for the School Feeding Program does not seem realistic for a short period of 3 years.

Despite some inconsistencies and some arguably unrealistic targets, the ESP offers a much-needed general roadmap, and both MEST Directors and partners agree that an updated ESP was needed and that it will help Sierra Leone to transition to a more exhaustive ESP to be done for the period 2021-2025.

6. Recommendations

Overall recommendation: The Education Strategic Plan 2018-2020 will be ready for endorsement by the Education Development Partners only after some substantial changes recommended in this appraisal report are made. These are mainly related to the financial framework, the need to prioritize, and the inclusion of a consolidated M&E Framework.

Main recommendations:

1. The MEST should make it explicit that the ESP 2018-2020 is a **transition document** that sets the foundation for an ESP 2021-2025. This has significant implications in terms of the need to make a clear **prioritization** of the interventions and activities, focusing on fewer activities so that results can be achieved by the end of the ESP. This is particularly important if we consider the scarce domestic resources allocated to education.

2. The share of the national budget allocated to education is currently 11.88% and the ESP foresees a reduction to 11.02% in 2020. These are some of the recommendations that I strongly suggest incorporating in the final ESP:
    a. A **clear explanation for the rationale** for this reduction, especially considering that the GDP is growing at 6-7% per year and the revenues are also increasing by more than 10% annually in the period of the ESP.
    b. An **explicit commitment** that the Government of Sierra Leone will strive to increase the education budget over the next few years. This will be especially important if applying for a new GPE grant.
    c. The GoSL should **explore new funding mechanisms related to increasing taxation**.
    d. Donors can try to **leverage additional resources** by including "conditions" on their budget support.
    e. Considering the scarce domestic resources allocated to the education sector, it is recommended to include in the ESP a study of how to **improve the efficiency** in the use of the scarce resources in the education sector. In this regard, there seems to be a dispersion of **subsidies to private schools** at different education levels. It is recommended that an assessment be conducted on how to rationalize those funds to maximize results.
    f. As the ESP recognizes, the current **dependence on external aid** is extremely high (41.5% in the overall education budget, and 86% in the development budget). The ESP should include specific steps to reduce this dependence.

3. Regarding the **specific budget lines**:
    a. The **Simulation Model** ought to be revised and corrected to eliminate the numerous inconsistencies and to use it as a basis for the ESP. It must inform the ESP and be aligned with it. If this cannot be done before the endorsement of the ESP, it should be done in the coming months, before the implementation of the Plan.
    b. The ESP must clarify which **targets of the SM-Scenario 4** are included in the ESP and explain why some targets were changed on the ESP.
    c. The **budget lines on the Implementation Plan** must be consistent with the proposed targets. The budget cannot be a purely mathematical exercise.
    d. In a sector with many weaknesses, it does not seem logical that the **funding gap** is so low ($16.9M), to the point that it is lower than the funds that Sierra Leone can expect to receive from the GPE ($17.2M). The funding gap should be reviewed, including the real needs of the different education sub-sectors and the funding requirements to achieve the proposed targets.

4. **Implementation Plan:** all targets ought to be set and quantified in the final version before endorsement of the ESP.

5. The MEST ought to fill in the **senior key positions**, such as the heads of the Units on TVET, ECD and Curriculum, during the first months of the implementation of the new ESP. Moreover, relevant Directorates for the implementation of this ESP, such as Policy and Planning, or Inspectorate, ought to have a minimum number of qualified technical staff. Otherwise, the implementation of the ESP is at a serious risk of failure because lack of adequate human resources.

6. The MEST should set up a **clear organogram**, with clear roles and responsibilities for each Directorate, Unit and Commissions, so that duplications are avoided.

7. The start-up of the **Teacher Service Commission** (TSC) is taking longer than expected and there is still uncertainty about the timeline. Therefore, as the TSC is still not fully functional, I would recommend devising a plan B, an alternative scheme to implement all the interventions related to teachers.

8. The MEST should ensure the **Teaching Service Commission** is fully operational in the short term. Key staff must be hired and key responsibilities transferred from MEST to the TSC.

9. A **Result Framework** that compiles in a table all the interventions organized by themes in the same way that they appear in the ESP should be included.

10. Regarding **data and indicators** in the ESP:

a. **Improve accuracy**: figures must be the same for the same indicators, and thus several existing discrepancies on the ESP ought to be settled.

b. Some **targets** seem to be unrealistic and we recommend re-evaluating them:
   i. A reduction to zero of unapproved schools (p. 56) is unrealistic, as has been recognized by several directors. Moreover, the approval of schools has financial implications in the medium-term, as approved schools are eligible to receive subsidies from the government after a 3-year period.
   ii. The ESP proposes to reach universal primary education and at the same time it foresees 15% of out-of-school children by 2020. These figures should match in the ESP.
   iii. An increase of the GER for SSS from 28% to 30% seems very conservative and should be revised upwards.

c. Regarding the EMIS:
   i. It is necessary to ensure that the collection of data will disaggregate indicators by gender, district, and inclusion factors.
   ii. The decentralization process of EMIS should be concluded.

11. The ESP should emphasize more clearly the need to develop **programs to train trainers**, the weakest link in the chain of needed trainings at the different education levels.

12. It is recommended that the World Food Programme be included in the **school feeding program** in the ESP. Their expertise and capacities would be a significant asset for the success and sustainability of the program.

13. Sustainable Development Goals are not only related to funding (box 6.1.). Therefore, I recommend placing them at the beginning of the document, where the national and international references of the ESP are mentioned (vision, mission, and Agenda for Prosperity).

14. The ESP should be reviewed to incorporate more information and proposals regarding **Equity** (in particular children with disabilities, children orphaned by the Ebola epidemic, and Ebola survivors). Along the same lines, the document should be reviewed to ensure that **Gender** is mainstreamed throughout the entire ESP, starting with the disaggregation of all the indicators by sex on the ESP and on the Implementation Plan.

15. Aspects related to **efficiency and learning outcomes** should be addressed in more depth, including data and more detailed information about how to improve them.

16. The **ESP should be disseminated** among all stakeholders, including at the district and community levels. The publication of a summary in Krio may be useful.

Annexes

- Annex 1: Acronyms and Abbreviations.
- Annex 2: List of People Interviewed.
- Annex 3: List of Documents Reviewed.

Annex 1: Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CDS	Capacity Development Strategy
CSR	Country Status Report
DG	Director General
EFA	Education for All
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
EMIS	Education Management Information System
ESA	Education Sector Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GIR	Gross Intake Rate
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GPI	Gender Parity Index
IIEP	International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO)
IP	Implementation Plan
MDA	Ministries, Departments, Agencies.
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MoFED	Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
NFE	Non-formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PTA	Parent-Teacher association
PTR	Pupil-Teacher Ratio
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UPE	Universal primary education

Annex 2: List of People Interviewed

Organization	Name	Position
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	Umaru Conteh	Permanent Secretary
	Adama Momoh	Director of Policy and Planning
	Mohamed S. Sesay	Director of Inspectorate
	Pearce Mansary	Director of Programs and Services
	Salimatu Koroma	Assistant Director of JSS and SSS
	Albert Dupigny	Head of Change Unit
	Horatio Nelson Williams	Executive Secretary of Basic Education Secretariat
	Umaru Sesay	TVET Project Director and Focal Point for GPE
	Samuel Johnson	Development Partners´ Coordination Desk
	John Swaray	Deputy Director DEO Bo
	Frances Kamara	Deputy Director DEO Kenema
	Joseph Sesay	Deputy Director DEO Port Loko
	Agnes Kamara	Deputy Director DEO Bombali
Teaching Service Commission	Staneala Beckely	Chairperson
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development	Sheka Bangura	Director of Central Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
UNICEF	Geoff Wiffin	Country Representative
	Wongani Grace Taulo	Chief of Education
DFID	Chris Berry	Advisor
	Jordan Martindale	Advisor
European Union	Giuseppe Paglione	Education Programme Manager
	Pierre Henri Helleputte	Team Leader Economic and Social Sectors
GIZ	Sigfrid Berg	TVET Project
	Sebastian Wenz	TVET Project
World Bank	Andy Alam	Education Advisor
World Food Programme	Kinday Samba	Deputy Director
	Brian Ross	Compliance and Risk Advisor
EFA National Coalition	Joseph Kobinah	National Coordinator
	Charles Kamara	Project Officer
	Jonathan Pearce	Financial Monitoring Officer
International Rescue Committee	Dennis Zimunya	Acting Education Consortium Coordinator
Oxfam IBIS	Nuru Deen	Programme Support and Partnership Lead
Save the Children	Lydia Kpana	Education Advisor
World Vision	Alfred Kamara	Education Advisor

Note: The Chief Education Officer and the Director of Higher Education were not in the country at the time of my visit. The Units on TVET, ECD and Curriculum are currently vacant.

Annex 3: List of Documents Reviewed

- **Government of Sierra Leone**
  - The President's Recovery Priorities, Power point presentation, April 2017.
  - Government's Budget and Statement of Economic Financial Policies for the Financial Year 2017, November 2016.
  - Agenda for Prosperity. Road to Middle Income Status, Sierra Leone' Third Generation of Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (2013-2018), 2012.
  - Sierra Leone Education Sector Capacity Development Strategy 2012-2016, November 2011.
  - Teaching Service Commission Act, Supplement of the Sierra Leone Gazette, vol. CXLII, No. 11, March 2011.

- **Ministry of Education, Science and Technology**
  - Education Sector Plan 2018-2020, 2017.
  - Mid-Term Review of the Education Sector Plan 2014-2018, 2017, March.
  - Implementation Plan 2018-2020.
  - Simulation Model, 2017.
  - Teaching Service Commission, Plan to Transfer Functions, 2017.
  - Annual School Census 2015, August 2016.
  - Teaching Service Commission, Revised Operation Framework, 2016, February.
  - Annual Education Sector Review, Report of Proceedings and Recommendations, 2015.
  - Education Country Status Report, September 2013.
  - Education Sector Plan 2014-2018, 2013.
  - Education Policy 2010.
  - Education Sector Plan 2007-2015, 2007.
  - Education Act 2004.

- **Global Partnership for Education**
  - GPE Funding Model Requirements Matrix-Sierra Leone, 2017.
  - Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Preparation, 2015.
  - Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal, 2015.
  - Strategic Plan 2016-2020: Improving Learning and Equity through stronger education systems, 2015.
  - Country-level process guide: a step-by-step guide to GPE membership, grant procedures, and education sector coordination, 2015.
  - Equity and Inclusion in Education: A Guide to Support Education Sector Plan Preparation, Revision, and Appraisal, 2010.

- **Other sources**
  - The World Bank, Implementation Status & Results Report of the Revitalizing Education Development in Sierra Leone, 2015.

- The World Bank, Revitalizing Education Development in Sierra Leone (REDiSL), Project Appraisal Document, July 2014.
- UNICEF, A national assessment of the situation of out-of-school children in Sierra Leone, July 2016.
- Situational Analysis Study of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Sierra Leone, Submitted to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, Islamic Development Bank Technical and Vocational Project by Sahr Tamba Nyalloma, November 2015.
- UNICEF, Consultancy for the Design and Conduct of National Early Grade Assessments in Literacy and Numeracy (EGRA/EGMA) for Primary School Pupils in Sierra Leone, Final Assessment Report, November 2014.