

Global Partnership for Education

Thematic and Country-level Evaluation

Sierra Leone Case Study (2024)

Transformation potential of the priority reforms, country's position to implement these reforms, and GPE support to the reform process up to the compact

Introduction

This report is a part of the Thematic and Country-Level Evaluation (TCLE)¹ of the Global Partnership for Education (GPE)'s global and country-level support to its partner countries as part of its [Strategic Plan for 2021–2025](#) (GPE 2025). To operationalize this strategy, GPE's operating model seeks to support governments to transform their education systems. Sierra Leone was selected as one of eight country cases for study as part of Phase 1 of the evaluation,² which explores Sierra Leone's potential for transformative reform by closely examining the process of the partnership compact development, selection of its priority reform, and potential for implementation. This case study uses evidence from primary data (interviews with key country-level stakeholders with fieldwork conducted between July 31 and August 4, 2023, in Freetown, Sierra Leone) and a secondary document review. The stakeholder map, a list of respondents interviewed, and a full list of documents reviewed can be found as annexes.

Background

Current education situation

Following a civil war between 1991 and 2002, and the outbreak of Ebola between 2014 – 2015 and COVID-19 in 2020, Sierra Leone has faced stalled economic growth and an increase in poverty levels. Despite these challenges, there has been strong political support for the education sector since 2018, with government committing to increase spending on education. Education spending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) increased from 15.67% in 2020, to 17.56% in 2021, and is believed to stand at 22% in 2023.³

Political commitment to increasing access to quality basic education is demonstrated by the adoption of the **Free Quality School Education** (FQSE) program in 2018, dedicated to the promotion of quality education in Sierra Leone. Through FQSE, the government recognized the importance of early childhood education (ECE) to enhance later learning outcomes. The country lacks state-funded provision for ECE, with only one in four children attending ECE schooling. FQSE seeks to open access to ECE to all children and embodies the government's willingness to invest in the development of high quality ECE education. This was taken forward with the development of the 2022-2026 Education Sector Plan (ESP), 'Transforming Learning for All', which includes provisions to provide ECE for children aged 3 to 5, for which enrolment remains low at 24%.⁴ The **Radical Inclusion Policy**, passed in 2021, was the first of its kind in Sierra Leone and aims to ensure that all children have access to

¹ The TCLE seeks to assess how GPE's operating model and 2025 strategy support partner countries to select and implement a chosen transformative reform. The evaluation involves longitudinal country-level case studies using a mixed-methods approach for data collection, analysis, and synthesis. The evaluation is being conducted by a consortium, led by Triple Line with partners Learn More and Technopolis.

² The other seven partner countries sampled include Cambodia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Nepal, Tajikistan, Tanzania – Mainland, and Uganda.

³ GPE Sierra Leone Results Framework (2023) <https://www.globalpartnership.org/content/gpe-2025-results-framework-sierra-leone>; however, as noted in an interview with development partners, this figure has not been confirmed by the World Bank as the financial data is completed in written form and may contain inconsistencies.

⁴ Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan, 2022-2026

quality education, regardless of their gender, disability, socio-economic status, or any other factor. Despite these efforts, there are still significant challenges to securing long-lasting gains in education in Sierra Leone, including poverty, lack of infrastructure in remote areas and districts, and teacher shortages.

GPE partnership in Sierra Leone

Since joining GPE in 2007, Sierra Leone has received a total of US\$99,891,906 in grant support through 11 grants.⁵ The current coordinating agency is Irish Aid. Previous grants include three education sector program implementation grants (ESPIG) and one COVID-19 grant totaling \$53,547,561 between 2007 and 2023. Through the education sector plan development grant (ESPDG), Sierra Leone received a total of \$1,060,961 between 2012 and 2024.⁶

In addition, GPE's Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) supports four grants in Sierra Leone, which include knowledge generation around the following topics: Integrating early childhood education into sectoral planning; Using data to improve education quality and inclusion; Teacher capacity building for play-based early learning; and increasing access to quality education for rural and marginalized children in West Africa.

GPE's Education Out Loud (EOL) supports Education for All Sierra Leone (EFA-SL), a member of Sierra Leone's local education group, with a 2019-2021 grant of \$269,000 for advocacy work on accountability and transparency on the delivery of the FQSE policy, early childhood development, quality education and the school feeding program. EFA SLE also participates in the ESP Committee and the Sector Plan Review Committee.

Sierra Leone's engagement with GPE 2025

Sierra Leone joined the second cohort of the rollout of GPE's 2025 operating model in October 2021. Having completed its enabling factors analysis in May 2022 and the ITAP assessment in July 2022, the GPE Board approved the strategic parameters of support in November 2022, when Sierra Leone became eligible for a system transformation grant (STG), system capacity grant (SCG), and multiplier grant. All three grants were active as of August 2023 with UNICEF as grant agent.

Under GPE 2025, the priority reform which Sierra Leone is pursuing, "**Foundations of Learning for All**," aims to improve children's school readiness and foundational learning (from primary grade 1 through primary grade 4), including closing learning disparities for girls and boys and for vulnerable groups. It targets pre-primary and primary education levels with interventions such as increasing access to pre-school education; improving the instructional core at the primary level through the revision and development of materials and training; and broader systemic strengthening of coordination, monitoring, and oversight between national and local authorities. With an emphasis on inclusion, the priority reform aims for every child to have achieved basic attainments by their fourth year of schooling (P4), with fluency in reading with comprehension, fundamental mathematics competencies, and ongoing development of resilient socio-emotional skills.

1. Did the GPE model help with policy dialogue, identification of system bottlenecks, and solutions to address these bottlenecks for better education outcomes?

How inclusive is the policy dialogue in Sierra Leone?

Policy dialogue was government-led and inclusive of a wide range of stakeholders. Broader dialogue was led by high-level government representatives, convened through a GPE Coordinator based at the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and small delivery team consisting of seven individuals, representing different organizations. This team included the Deputy Chief for Higher Education, Director for Policy and Planning, chair of the Teaching Standards Commission (TSC) (subsequently appointed education minister) and external advisors seconded to the ministry. Policy dialogue informing the compact development process was perceived to be inclusive, involving consultations with a range of stakeholders from Sierra Leone local education group (SL-LEG),

⁵ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/sierra-leone>

⁶ All but one ESPIG grant have now closed, with the final grant of \$31,500 expected to close in December 2024.

including CSOs, schoolteachers, school administrators, students at teacher training institutes, and teachers' unions.

The compact development process was government-led and delivered by the local education group task team. Much of the development of the compact was delivered by the MBSSE delivery team under the leadership of the then-minister of education, with oversight and inputs from the SL-LEG task team which included the main donor agencies (EU; USAID, FCDO) and EFA-SL, UNICEF, the World Bank, and Irish Aid. The task team was formed to support the efficiency of the compact development process, due to the large size of the SL-LEG (over 80 members) and a lack of clarity on the terms of reference for the SL-LEG mandate. FCDO offered resources to clarify the scope and mandate of the SL-LEG, and the task team was formed to lead the compact development process more efficiently. The task team collaborated with the delivery team at MBSSE, a small team where consultants were reported to play a leading role. Stakeholders indicated that there were some difficulties in coordination between the MBSSE and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE), which may have been exacerbated by a lack of resource capacity of the latter. The role played by the coordinating agency, Irish Aid, in guiding dialogue was mostly limited to the administration and logistics of LEG meetings.

Key stakeholders were engaged through the compact development process, although gaps were identified, particularly the engagement of the Ministry of Finance and civil society organizations. Most stakeholders interviewed participated in all or some stages of the compact development, but the extent that they had clear understanding of the results of the process varied. Stakeholders interviewed expressed that the SL-LEG task team was a consultative rather than deliberative platform in which stakeholders were effectively consulted and informed about decisions, rather than actively engaged in the decision-making process itself. There were gaps in engagement of some key governmental players, particularly the Ministry of Finance, which may have limited the robustness of funding plans and the domestic financing actions. Crucially, the SL-LEG task team had limited CSO representation beyond the EFA-SL coalition, who appeared less familiar with the overall compact development process and consultations around the revisions to the different drafts of the priority reform. A final gap in inclusion appears to be faith-based organizations, who were not mapped or identified in the country. Nonetheless, the case study team did not explicitly identify any concerns of stakeholder voices not being included in the compact development process, other than the lack of engagement of the Ministry of Finance.

What enabling factors bottlenecks were identified and what policy actions/interventions were chosen to address the bottlenecks in Sierra Leone?

Through the GPE 2025 operating model, Sierra Leone was able to clearly identify bottlenecks to system transformation through the well-evidenced and thorough enabling factors analysis process. Bottlenecks were identified in all four of the enabling factors, and both the enabling factors assessment and the ITAP review were concordant in their rating of priorities. Actions are proposed to address bottlenecks for higher priority areas, although these were not always clearly defined or evidenced (see Annex 4 for further details of the identified bottlenecks and corresponding actions).

Data and evidence (high priority): Sierra Leone demonstrates a strong appetite for generating evidence demonstrated by the existence of multiple sources of education data, including the annual school census, education sector analysis, joint sector reviews, and learning assessment studies. However, the enabling factors assessment acknowledges that data is incomplete and there are challenges that limit the effective use of data. Limitations affecting the country's ability to effectively use and learn from evidence, includes a reliance on static data which cannot easily assess trends over time; a lack of consolidation of data sources to support consistent use; data gaps which limit the ability of MBSSE to track expenditure and learning outcomes; limited capacity for data input, analysis, and use; and limited funding for a long-term integrated EMIS system.

The compact presents various actions to address the identified bottlenecks. This includes the development of improved infrastructure for data collection supported through STG funding, and increased capacity and resourcing within the MBSSE supported by SCG funding. These actions are promising efforts to improve the robustness, timeliness, and accessibility of data, but there is some continued uncertainty about the capacity of the state bureaucratic apparatus to collect data efficiently and ensure prompt access to data from all the 16 districts in the country, particularly where

connectivity issues and compliance levels with monitoring procedures pose an obstacle at the district level.

Domestic Financing (high priority): Government commitment to increasing the share of domestic resources for education is strong and reported to exceed the target of 20 percent of total expenditure, but challenges in the equitable and efficient distribution of spending persist. Bottlenecks include low capital expenditure and related feasibility of the FQSE policy; equity challenges relating to the distribution of resources, in particular the lack of targeted allocation of teachers (and teacher salaries) and resources across districts according to the greatest need (such as remote areas), and limited funding for pre-primary; and inefficiencies in expenditure and wastage indicated by high levels of repetition and drop out.

The compact outlined actions to address the identified bottlenecks, focusing on improving the ability of government to assess and realign resources based on stronger budget analysis to inform the redistribution and allocation of funds. SCG funds will support Sierra Leone to access and build the technical capacity needed to conduct this assessment and use findings to inform reform efforts. The STG aims to incentivize political support for improved equity and efficiency of financing by linking additional top-up funds to the achievement of two indicators linked to efficiency and equity (described further in section 4). Sierra Leone planned to harmonize STG with additional fundraising from other donor agencies and multilateral organizations; however, at the time of data collection and analysis, it was not clear if additional funding had been secured.

The actions set out in the compact present a starting point for addressing the bottlenecks in the volume, equity, and efficiency of domestic financing, although these actions remain vague and undefined. This is likely to be better defined once the reform enters its implementation phase and progresses with planned assessments of current expenditure; this is expected to inform decision-making and reform efforts. An additional challenge identified in stakeholder interviews was the availability of accurate and reliable data on public expenditures on education. The reported data rely on a paper-based system which is cumbersome, unreliable, and difficult to access. This was not identified in the EFA process, and there do not appear to be plans to address this.

Sector coordination (medium priority): Both the EFA and ITAP assessments noted the well-established mechanisms for inclusive dialogue and coordinated action, with identified areas for improvements (such as the limited representation of local faith-based organizations, and more regular engagement between government and development partners) unlikely to impede implementation. This enabling factor was rated as medium priority due to identified bottlenecks in coordinated financing and funding, in particular the lack of comprehensive data on donor financing in education, challenges in the predictability of external financing, and the need for mechanisms to improve mutual accountability. We did not find any examples of clear actions to address the identified bottlenecks, which may reflect the need to focus on the high priority areas of data and evidence and domestic financing. During stakeholder interviews, some examples of improvements in coordinated funding were described, including improved communication and division of funds across sections. For example, FCDO funding focuses on secondary schooling, while the Education Outcomes Fund focuses on ECE, therefore improving efficiency in funding.

Gender-responsive planning, monitoring, and coordination (medium priority): The EFA and ITAP assessment recognized that Sierra Leone has developed ESPs and national policies and laws to support gender-responsive planning, although at the time of the assessment, many of these policies were still in draft form. ITAP identified a need to better align the ESP and Radical Inclusion Policy activities and actions to achieve gender mainstreaming. Identified bottlenecks included a lack of clarity around the cost of implementing the ESP, and concerns over the feasibility of delivering it with limited funds. Persistent challenges of gendered disparities within the system in terms of learning outcomes, and deeply entrenched social norms, values, and attitudes continue to promote gender inequalities. These suggest addressing gender equality issues remains an important priority. We did not find clear examples of activities to address bottlenecks in this enabling factor. The reform efforts to address gaps in data and evidence include plans for data disaggregation by sex, and the integration of gender-sensitive modules into the teacher training curriculum; however, these efforts are not clearly linked to the identified bottlenecks.

How useful were the enabling factors analysis and ITAP processes?

The enabling factors self-assessment was generally seen as innovative and informative in the Sierra Leone context, leading to an evidence-based process of problem identification. However, several steps of the process were perceived as redundant, and a repetition of the contextual assessment process followed for the development of the ESP 2022-2026 in the previous year. Some issues identified in the enabling factors self-assessment seem not to have been addressed comprehensively in the compact, suggesting that while the assessment supported the identification of bottlenecks, it did not necessarily support efforts to identify actionable solutions. Actions may become more clearly defined as the reform enters its implementation phase.

Generally, respondents found the ITAP report useful and valued its evidence-based content. The ITAP assessment provided a neutral and evidence-based assessment of Sierra Leone's status. However, the ITAP review was considered to have taken too much time, approximately 5-6 weeks which added to the overall length of the grant application period.

The enabling factors process was largely led by external consultants rather than civil servants, which may have limited opportunities for the capacity development of resources within government.

2. Do the priority reforms demonstrate potential for transformation?

What is Sierra Leone's understanding of system transformation and the need for transformation?

There was no single shared interpretation of system transformation across partners in Sierra Leone. The most common conceptualization is the need to identify and address the root causes of system dysfunctions, and to coordinate actions to address the root causes of the most pressing challenges within the education system in Sierra Leone.

Several interviewees regarded the concept of systems transformation as abstract and difficult to define. An influential and coherent conceptualization of system change is, however, held within the ministerial delivery team. This is strongly shaped by former minister David Sengh's formulation of systems transformation as entailing a 'fresh review of the goals of a system' and constant attention paid to relevance of interventions and system goals, over simply prioritizing actions to improve efficiency.

Despite limited shared interpretations of system transformation, stakeholders demonstrated a common and deep comprehension of the pressing challenges facing the education system and the need to understand causality within systems to prioritize actions in the context of Sierra Leone.

What is Sierra Leone's priority reform?

The priority reform, "**Foundations of Learning for All**," focuses on pre-primary and primary level schooling to improve children's school readiness and foundational learning, and closing the gap in learning outcomes for girls and boys, and for vulnerable groups. It incorporates five 'pillars': 1) Raise children's readiness to learn through targeted pre-primary; 2) Strengthen the institutional core for foundational learning; 3) Recruit, retain and support excellent educators for foundational learning, 4) Increase the use of data and technology to support foundational learning and education service delivery; and 5) Strengthen governance, management, and accountability for performance on foundational learning.

Sierra Leone's selected priority reform fits within the broader education plans and policies of the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). All stakeholders agreed the reform was aligned with ESP 2018-2022, the ESP 2022-2026, and the National Development Plan 2019-2023. The priority reform incorporates flagship policies such as the FQSE, the Radical Inclusion Policy and Launching the New Curricula. While drawing on previous reforms and education sector planning efforts, the priority reform presents a more specific and targeted approach to one key impact area (quality learning in ECE) that, if addressed, has transformative potential on the education system as a whole. Improved early and primary education can unlock children's learning potential in later stages of education.

The identification of the priority reform took place within the framework of the ESP 2022-26, which formed a starting point of discussion. The GPE operating model fostered a dialogue that valued the identification of a priority reform, and it received the general buy-of internal and external stakeholders

who were confident about its transformative potential. The priority reform incorporated lessons from previous reform efforts: to value a more focused approach, rather than “trying to tackle everything all at once,” and a more targeted approach on literacy and numeracy following the discouraging early-grade literacy and numeracy assessments. In addition, the process of identification of the policy reform was facilitated through regional meetings facilitated by the GPE with other Western African countries.

With the starting point of ESP 2022-2026, the SL-LEG identified possible priority reforms against a list of seven criteria. The two other short-listed options included: 1) Reduce gender and other disparities in educational access, experience, and outcomes for girls and marginalized children (groups targeted in the Radical Inclusion policy); 2) Train, recruit, retain and support excellent educators. The priority reform was chosen because it incorporated aspects of the two other options, and therefore was perceived as being more holistic.

Does the priority reform meet the criteria of system transformation?⁷

The criteria of **speed, scale and inclusion** are referenced implicitly in the case of speed, and both implicitly and explicitly in the case of scale and inclusion. The compact makes explicit reference to **scale** through its ambitions to achieve learning for all students, from all backgrounds across the country. The intention to achieve scale is also somewhat evident in indicators with baselines of zero and targets of 100%, scaling one tablet per school to all primary schools, and indicators seeking to achieve ratio scores of 1 (material to pupil ratio, gender parity index). **Speed** is implied in the need to identify a reform which can “accelerate progress across multiple other policy areas,” and references to how other countries have used interventions to support ‘rapid gains’ in early-grade learning/literacy. However, there are no details on how accelerated impact will be achieved, and the compact does not include target values to infer if there are ambitions for speed. **Inclusion** is featured prominently in the compact, with targets and activities clearly proposed in the compact, including a target of achieving 1:1 gender parity; developing a gender-based teaching curriculum; embedding radical inclusion policy targets into the priority reform; and improving foundational skills for girls and marginalized groups.

The compact contains little evidence of a **multi-faceted approach to change**. Explicit analysis of the **multiple system constraints** is included relating to ECE and the priority reform, and references are made to multi-faceted activities such as in-service teacher training and revised teaching and learning materials, development of gender-based teaching curricula to standardize quality teaching across the 16 districts through the TSC.

There is extensive evidence, from consultations and documentation reviewed, that the priority reform aims to **align relevant subsystems, policies, and practices**, such as teacher professional development, curriculum, assessment systems, and EMIS to achieve the intended outcomes. The significant challenges to achieve the different aspects of the reform are recognized. The government faces considerable constraints in ensuring quality education at the district-level, with activities obstructed by a shortage of staff, absence of infrastructure – transportation and school buildings – and connectivity problems. The priority reform asserts that greater alignment will be beneficial for the harmonization of pre-service and in-service teacher training, which requires the cooperation and coordination among the existing TTIs, TSC, MTHE and MBSSE.

⁷ These criteria are set out in our inception report. The criteria include:

- Whether the reform endeavors to achieve improvements to learning with greater speed, scale, and inclusion than past and/or business-as-usual reforms.
- The reform addresses multiple system constraints through a multi-faceted approach to change.
- Whether the reform aligns relevant subsystems, policies as well as practices such as those related to teacher professional development, curriculum, assessment systems, EMIS and more, to achieve the intended outcomes.
- Whether the reform aligns the incentives of actors from all relevant levels and aspects of the education system (e.g., national, regional and district).

One further criterion (whether the reform endeavors to achieve learning improvements through approaches that are evidence-based) is set out in the section below. In addition to these five criteria to define a transformative reform, there are three additional transformative reform criteria which examine the implementation of a transformative reform as well as five criteria which define the process required to design a transformative reform.

Finally, with regards to the **alignment of actor incentives**, much of the priority reform focuses on strengthening local governments to support the education system with funding and capacity building. However, it is unclear if local governments are adequately supported to manage and administer teacher payrolls, data collection, and the planning, implementation, and monitoring of gender policies.

Is the priority reform evidence-based?

The problem identification process which informed the priority reform appears to have been well evidenced. The SL-LEG engaged in an extensive process of document review and discussions to identify priority areas, which was facilitated by the delivery team sitting within the MBSSE. A review of country documents including the partnership compact found explicit references to national-level data to inform the design, including national studies and data from EMIS. The priority reform theme was selected following a regional meeting facilitated by GPE in which emerging evidence of harnessing foundational learning to strengthen the system was discussed.

There is some evidence to suggest that Sierra Leone considered lessons learned from previous reform efforts, particularly the recognition of the need to take a more focused and prioritized approach compared to the education sector plans. Evidence of discouraging Early Grade Reading Assessment / Early Grade Mathematics Assessment (EGRA/EGMA) results, despite investments in education, led to a more targeted approach on literacy and numeracy within the priority reform.

Finally, the compact includes some references to the globally recognized and evidence-based best practices⁸, for example, identifying and trialing data collection methods and analysis to inform the delivery of established methods such as teaching at the right level, and the provision of updated and improved teaching and learning materials.

Is there a credible theory of change?

The pathways in the priority reform theory of change are clearly identified but may require further adaptation to be suitable to guide joint monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL). Although the theory of change pathways is not explicitly formulated using specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound (SMART) criteria, for the most part it is amenable to be further developed and articulated to provide a basis for robust joint MEL. In particular the temporality of expected change (and how timings differ), and some intermediate outcomes would need further refinement to be amenable to SMART metrics.

3. What is Sierra Leone's readiness to implement its priority reform?

To what extent are implementation plans for the priority reform in place and how credible or feasible are the plans?

At the time of data collection and analysis, there were no implementation plans in place outlining clear roles, responsibilities and timelines, and there was no strategy for the inclusion of CSOs and non-government schools to support the implementation in schools that were not government approved. Consequently, there was a need to clarify the implementation strategy, timelines and roles of all actors involved before it would be possible for the reform to progress against its targets. Stakeholders were themselves unclear about their role in implementation, and particularly reported capacity challenges at local level. However, MBSSE and MTHE hosted a 3-day event in October 2023 to launch the implementation of the GPE grants, which aimed to steer stakeholders' actions towards the pursuit of the priority reform outcomes as well as clarifying roles and responsibilities. The MBSSE recognizes that inclusive sector dialogue and coordinated action will require continuous engagement and strengthening of mechanisms at the sub-national level over the course of the grants' implementation.

Interviews with country stakeholders highlighted some of the potential risks and challenges to implementing the priority reform. This includes coordination challenges between MBSSE and MTHE following recent structural changes which divided education sector responsibilities between the two

⁸ Approaches were selected from GEEAP's 'smart buys,' looking at approaches that were rated as having a strong evidence-base of their effectiveness and cost-effectiveness (e.g., those rated 'great' or 'good' buys).

separate ministries, creating challenges with efficient coordination between them, leading to stalled or delayed policy processes and difficulties aligning towards shared objectives. Country capacity was also highlighted as a potential challenge. One development partner raised concerns around limited institutional absorption capacity in Sierra Leone of the significant financial resources stemming from GPE grants and encouraged the SL-LEG to consider lessons learnt from other ongoing interventions in the sector.⁹ Gaps in MBSSE capacity to lead the compact development process may also impact its ability to adaptively lead the reform itself.

Some provisions are in place, via the SCGs, to improve technical capacity in data and evidence – this includes the in-sourcing of expertise as well as the development of systems for learning. The SCG also addresses gaps in domestic finance and financial management, through establishing a unit within the MBSSE to administer this. However, known capacity gaps at the local administrative level appear largely unaddressed. Within schools, some activities around training headteachers to support staff are mentioned, but how school administration will be more materially supported may be a gap.

To what extent are priority reforms costed or resourced?

At the time of data collection and analysis, there was no clear budget in place to assess whether the priority reform was adequately funded. It was noted that the Ministry of Finance was not involved in the development of the reform. Stakeholders from MBSSE explained that the financing of the reform would be addressed following grant approval.

Are stakeholders aligned around the priority reform?

There is high level of consensus among education stakeholders on the selected priority reform, and education stakeholders felt that they were strongly aligned to working jointly towards the implementation of the reform, although the specific roles and responsibilities of stakeholders to deliver the reform was less clear, as outlined above. The priority reform enjoys strong political commitment, reflecting the focus on education in President Bio's first election campaign. In addition, Minister Sengeh's efforts during his time at MBSSE contributed to putting Sierra Leone on the global spotlight for education, also attracting a range of talented international consultants to work as advisors. As such, there is widespread optimism amongst the interviewed stakeholders that the government will be able to uphold its 22% target for its education budget in the incoming five years. This is reflected in the ESP, which touts the country's economic growth prospects and demographic increase as two factors that contribute to a positive forecast for the government budget.

At present there is a lack of clarity regarding the precise alignment of education development partner activities and resources. A complementary division of effort is emerging, but this is not yet explicitly based on the interventions identified in the compact. The compact details plans to draw resources from donors in alignment with projects contributing to the attainment of the five pillars of the priority reform. Endorsement of this commitment by development partners is formally included in the compact. Plans for new donor-funded programs aligned to the priority reform are, however, still underway. At the time of the data collection, new donor initiatives were stalling due to the summer holidays and because of uncertainty around the transparency of the electoral process during the last general elections.¹⁰ According to the most recent consultations with personnel in country, the situation seems to have gone back now to "business as usual."¹¹

To what extent are monitoring, evaluation, and learning frameworks in place to support the priority reform?

The compact and interviews with stakeholders both reflected a strong awareness of the need for quality MEL to guide the implementation of and adaptations to the priority reform over time, as well as to support an improved learning culture within MBSSE and MTHE.¹² At the time of data collection and analysis, detailed MEL plans had not been developed, but the intention has been to formulate this as part of implementation of the priority reform, in which policy actions have been proposed to strengthen data systems. While current documentation (such as of the compact and grant documents

⁹ Interview with development partner.

¹⁰ Interview with two development partners.

¹¹ Interview with Advisor to MBSSE.

¹² Sierra Leone 2022-26 Partnership Compact: Foundations of Learning for All, 19 October 2022.

available) confirm planned activities to unify data and monitoring systems, we did not find evidence of plans that describe processes for iteration and adaptation.

As part of the priority reform, MBSSE, MTHE and TSC will introduce a unified a data collection system across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone to lead and inform decision making. These EMIS reforms are intended to collect reliable and time-sensitive data on teachers' attendance, student attendance, and teachers' use of teaching and learning materials. According to the TSC Chairman and as outlined in the compact, Sierra Leone will introduce unique student IDs to support the identification and tracking of students through their education journeys. This data collected through improved data systems is intended to complement and not duplicate data collected through the Annual School Census.

The reform aims to provide all schools of tablets to ensure connectivity to the internet to improve data collection by 2026. The 'One Tablet Per School' program aims to equip schools with a tool for direct communication with the TSC about teachers' attendance, annual leave, and sick leave. This also allows the TSC to collect data about the gender composition of its teacher workforce. This aims to address problems with the existing electronic register for teachers used by TSC at the central level in Freetown. That system does not capture real time data, as connectivity issues and compliance levels with monitoring procedures pose an obstacle at the district level.

Connectivity remains a challenge to both the current system and the success of the policy actions to strengthen EMIS. The ESP 2022-26 does plan for school connectivity to be achieved by 2026, although stakeholders reported that there are a number of logistical challenges to achieving this, especially in the more remote districts. A further challenge is the limited ability of TSC district level staff (which is in shortage) to conduct random checks across schools to verify and validate the information uploaded.

The importance of the completion of EMIS reforms to Sierra Leone's ability to monitor and evaluate its priority reform are critical, given that currently, the timeliness of school-level data and the government's current scope of coverage of monitoring teachers is limited. As the MEL framework is developed, building on what was included in the compact, it will need to provide clear indicators and timeframes, a plan for reliable and timely data collection, a plan for how data will be analyzed (including addressing capacity limitations), clear plans for reporting and data dissemination to support learning, as well as clear roles and responsibilities for the implementation of the MEL framework and support to the capacity of the government to coordinate the MEL framework.

4. Domestic financing

What is the status of Domestic Financing in Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone has faced recent economic crises, hampering economic growth. The country's limited ability to increase its tax base and/or tax collection places severe strain on the government's capacity to provide adequate funding for the priority reform. In spite of this, Sierra Leone's fiscal policy is considered sustainable, although the country remains at high risk of debt distress. A study led by the Ministry of Finance analyzing Sierra Leone's fiscal policy between 1980 and 2015 found that the ratio between government revenue and expenditure has been constant over time, and that the country's fiscal reaction function is responsive to changes in the debt-to-GDP ratio.¹³ This hints at the capacity of the government to finance current spending without needing to resort to excessive borrowing, and indicates space for the government to pursue its social and economic objectives without long-term risks.

Government expenditure on education as a percentage of total government expenditure rose from 15.67% in 2020 to 17.56% in 2021 according to the GPE 2025 results framework for Sierra Leone.¹⁴ In 2022, Sierra Leone has reportedly hit 22% spending for education, thus meeting the 20% benchmark recommended by GPE.¹⁵ MBSSE staff are confident that the country will continue

¹³ Duramany-Lakkoh, 2020, The Effect of Fiscal Policy on Financial Sector Development in Sierra Leone: A Time Series Approach

¹⁴ GPE 2023 Results Framework for Sierra Leone, September 2022. Accessible at: <https://assets.globalpartnership.org/s3fs-public/document/file/2022-12-GPE-results-framework-sierra-leone.pdf?VersionId=D19NJ.XEAR2VHggXWD510dswb1kmzDj>

¹⁵ UNICEF Country Office Annual Report 2023; Interview with senior government staff and GPE staff.

to maintain the 20% target on education spending. However, government documentation on public financing is largely paper based, hence prone to human error and difficult to check for data quality. Exact budgeting figures are unknown even to government staff. For this reason, some stakeholders questioned the reliability of GoSL data and claims regarding the 22% spending target.

Domestic resources are not equitably distributed across districts and there remain disparities in the allocation of teachers (and their salaries) as well as in the allocation of capital resources across districts. Due to limited public finances, only 26,000 teachers out of a total of 85,000 teachers (approximately one third) working in government schools receive a government salary, while others are either community teachers or volunteer teachers, who are officially unpaid but may receive a small income either through the schools' budget or fees from parents. It is estimated that increases in this figure will be limited to a few thousand additional teachers every year.

Do the domestic financing-related policy actions have the potential to support the enabling conditions for transformation?

Domestic finance was identified as a high priority enabling factor and will be supported by the STG with associated top-up triggers. Actions to address bottlenecks (as presented in section 1 and annex 4) are set out in the compact and have informed the implementation of reforms for more equitable and efficient public expenditure on education.

The two top-up triggers are designed to incentivize political reforms in domestic finance: 1) (Efficiency): Increase the budget execution rate by the MBSSE (\$2.247m); 2) (Equity): Incorporate learning outcomes and learner disadvantages in teacher allocation mechanisms (\$2.247m). These appear to be both relevant and ambitious and framed in the context of recent significant increases in the Sierra Leone allocation of spend on education. Following this achievement, reform efforts have pivoted to equitable allocation and efficiency in achieving the priority focus.

The government will invest resources from the System Capacity Grant (SCG) to: a) hire staff based at MBSSE that will be responsible for conducting budget analyses and to liaise with the Ministry of Finance; b) subcontract Sierra Leonean expertise and experts from international organizations to provide feedback and inputs to proposed budgetary reforms.

These actions appear to be evidence-based and follow the recommendations from the World Bank's Public Expenditure Review. They are aligned with the anticipated (second order) challenges following the reported increase in the proportion of public financing for education to 20%, namely, ensuring that this additional budget is spent equitably and efficiently. However, since Sierra Leone has the third lowest GDP per capita globally (per IMF), even the increased share of the budget for the education sector may not be sufficient to achieve transformation.

A strong concern is raised around the urgency to develop a budget sharing software and/or mechanism given that current financials at MBSSE, MTHE and Ministry of Finance levels are reported to be still recorded in written form. At the time of data collection, there was no plan to develop such a software in time for the priority reform. Weaknesses in the accuracy of paper-based documentation on public financing raises concerns about the accuracy of budget figures.

Sierra Leone relied heavily on external analysis, including that of the World Bank. The lack of close involvement of the Ministry of Finance in the compact development process may have exacerbated a relative lack of grounding of the compact in an accurate domestic financing picture. Actions focused on building technical capacity and expertise in this area may go some way to addressing these constraints.

To what extent did the GPE operating model help Sierra Leone identify and address system bottlenecks in domestic finance?

The GPE operating model helped identify bottlenecks through the enabling factors analysis, but the bottlenecks in domestic finance were not fully addressed. Its main contribution consisted in harmonizing funding intentions by other donor partners around the objectives of the priority reform. Development partners operating in Sierra Leone are thus likely to fund initiatives in line with addressing bottlenecks and contributing to the attainment of the pillars of the reform. The identification of further actions may emerge more clearly as the priority reform moved into its implementation.

The compact sets out the following two triggers to unlock an additional 10% of funding through the GPE's STG top-up mechanism:

1. Improve the budget execution rate: The GoSL will work to improve MBSSE budget execution rate from a baseline of 78% in 2019 to a mid-term target of 85% in 2023, and to review the allocation of spend across education levels based on a robust analysis of education expenditures. This will unlock the 10% top-up funding mechanism laid out by the GPE, which is around US \$2.2m of a total of US \$22.47m).
2. Incorporate learning outcomes and learner disadvantages in teacher allocation mechanisms. This will entail allocating newly qualified teachers to disadvantaged districts and contribute to equity objectives. This will also contribute to unlocking the 10% top-up funding mechanism.

Stakeholder interviews indicated that the top-up mechanism was not well-understood and was likely insufficient to incentivize reforms that are politically sensitive and complex to implement. Sierra Leone's compact stands out as having more granular top-up triggers.

The SCG will fund increased technical staffing for budgeting within MBSSE to support analysis, coordination with the Ministry of Finance, reform processes, and engagement with international organizations. The specific uses of the SCG were not yet designated to specific activities. The need for increased technical capacity was evident and implicitly acknowledges the reliance of the ministry on external consultants and seconded expertise during the compact development process. There may be a risk to effectiveness and alignment of needs specifically identified in the compact if there is not further definition of activities, and the grant essentially functions as core funding.

Some gaps in volume are implicitly acknowledged, particularly around the lack of clarity over the exact size of the budget, making it difficult to hold this pledge to account. It is also unclear, within the education budget, whether the intention is to retain a fixed amount of resources dedicated to the reform, and to ensure that an appropriate proportion of the budget is designated for the priority level of the system (that is, early childhood education).

5. Gender Equality

What is the status of gender equality in Sierra Leone?

Sierra Leone is among the 75% of GPE partner countries that reached gender equity in terms of access to education in 2021.¹⁶ However, girls' learning outcomes lag behind boys in Sierra Leone, and girls in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged. Completion rates for girls have remained largely stagnant over the last decade at all levels, albeit maintaining gender parity with boys at most education levels except at the secondary level.¹⁷ Youth literacy rates for girls between the ages of 15-24 continue to lag significantly behind boys' literacy rates, maintaining a gap of roughly 15% over the last ten years.

Another critical gap continues to exist in the gender ratio of teachers, while female teachers have seen fast progress in meeting minimum qualification standards and have outpaced male teachers in this aspect, they remain significantly underrepresented in the classroom, with only a third of teachers at the primary level being women and even lower rates in secondary education.¹⁸

In 2021, Sierra Leone introduced the Radical Inclusion Policy which focuses on the inclusion of the most marginalized groups in education: pregnant girls, rural poor, and children with disabilities. Additionally, the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act (2022) addresses gender imbalances by making provisions to encourage the increased representation of women in decision making positions and structures.

Do the gender equality-related policy actions have the potential to support the enabling conditions for transformation?

¹⁶ Interview with GPE staff. See also:

https://www.globalpartnership.org/node/document/download?file=document/file/2022-12-How-GPE-drives-gender-equality_0.pdf

¹⁷ UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), <https://sdg4-data.uis.unesco.org>, 29 May 2024.

¹⁸ Ibid.

As set out in Section 2, gender and inclusion features prominently in the compact, with gender-focused targets and activities set out in the compact. There are two clear policy actions related to gender-specific issues in the partnership compact. These include 1) supporting gender-disaggregated data collection in the education sector; and 2) integrating gender-sensitivity modules into the curriculum of teacher training.

These actions will help to develop a supportive framework for front-line actions aimed at addressing gender inequality among school children but they are unlikely to be sufficient to achieve transformative change. They also do not address some of the substantive gender gaps in outcomes for students that the compact development process identified. Gender mainstreaming in the priority reform is explicitly stated to be ‘along the lines of the Radical Inclusion Policy.’ However, this policy prioritizes access to education, with a specific emphasis on pregnant girls and expectant mothers. The policy is unclear about how this aligns to the priority reform, which is aimed at foundational learning outcomes at the early grade level and building the administrative and pedagogical infrastructure to support this.

In addition, there is a mismatch between acknowledged gender inequalities in early childhood education and a lack of identification of specific actions to address them. The compact development team drew on a report on an early grade reading assessment and early grade mathematics assessment which show the clear outperformance of girls by boys at all levels and at all specific tasks. These findings represent a significant challenge that is not addressed in the priority reform. The disparities are attributed to social factors, but there was no analysis of social factors to inform a comprehensive gender strategy as part of the priority reform. If actions were formulated based on such an analysis, they might well fall under the broader umbrella of the Radical Inclusion Policy, but in that case, the connection and what measures are appropriate were not articulated.

To what extent did the GPE operating model help and incentivize Sierra Leone to identify and address challenges in gender equality and hardwire gender equality into its priority reform?

There is limited evidence that the GPE 2025 operating model incentivized Sierra Leone to identify and address gaps in gender equality, or of gender equality being hardwired into the reform. Gender equality is understood primarily by stakeholders in terms of girls accessing the same opportunities as boys and quotas for interventions. However, there seems to be very little understanding of concepts such as gender mainstreaming/hardwiring and, more generally, the country seems to lack a gender-specific approach that looks at deconstructing societal norms, interpersonal dynamics, or structural issues that prevent the full participation of girls and women in society. Understanding of Sierra Leone’s approach to gender equality in and through education instead has been subsumed into the innovative Radical Inclusion Policy. Interviewees were generally not aware of approaches or policies independent from the Radical Inclusion Policy. This was also the case in the description of the priority reform which does not call for an independent gender analysis or statement of needs.

There is an absence of a gender strategy at government level. This may reflect the limited funding and human resourcing for gender expertise, and the lack of a strong EMIS in place. Similarly, there also appears to be a lack of gender expertise and resources in MBSSE. MTHE has a gender resource person, but that person did not report having sufficient resources and was not substantially involved in the development of the compact. Evidence used in the compact was typically from external agencies and stakeholders such as UNICEF. Gender-oriented reporting does not appear to have fed into prioritization and formulation of the reform.

Although the compact places a strong emphasis on the importance of an inclusive education system and learning outcomes, as highlighted in the previous section, the priority reform itself does not include strong gender equality-focused interventions or grant activities. One of the two STG top-up trigger mechanisms for domestic financing relates to equitable funding focused on addressing geographical disparities in marginalized and rural areas but does not specifically address gender disparities. The STG top-up trigger for data and evidence contains no mention of gender or gender disaggregation. Similarly, we did not find evidence that the SCG plans to contribute to improved capacity to address gender equality challenges.

Annex 1. Summary background tables

What is the priority reform that Sierra Leone is planning to undertake? ¹⁹

Summary description of the priority reform in Sierra Leone	
Focus area and strategic parameters for GPE funding	Improving children’s school readiness and foundational learning (from primary grade 1 through primary grade 4), including closing learning disparities between girls and boys and for vulnerable groups
Levels targeted	Pre-primary, primary
Thematic areas covered	Early Learning, Quality Teaching, Gender Equality, Inclusion
Description	<p>Sierra Leone selected as the priority reform “Foundations of Learning for All” focused on improving learning outcomes during early education. The reform has an emphasis on inclusion, aiming for every child to have achieved basic attainments by their fourth year of schooling (P4), namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency in reading with comprehension, • Fundamental mathematics competencies, • Ongoing development of resilient socio-emotional skills. <p>These are to be achieved through interventions starting at pre-primary level (increasing access to pre-school education); improving the instructional core at primary level through the revision and development of materials and training; and broader systemic strengthening of coordination, monitoring, and oversight between national and local authorities.</p>
Priority reform intended outcomes	Higher learning outcomes expected to support this goal are for children to enter primary school ready to learn; for structured teaching with alignment of teaching practice and learning materials to be embedded in Early Childhood Education; and for children to see consistent progress in learning and literacy against benchmarks at levels P1-3. A further high-level outcome identified is to strengthen and harmonize the system of support, through instituting mutual accountability between governmental and other stakeholders for delivery and financing of the reform.
Priority reform main activities and pathways of change	<p>The theory of change is based upon five distinct pillars, which could be considered pathways of change; each with a corresponding Intermediate Outcome (IO) representing their contribution to the broader transformational reform.</p> <p>Pillar A: Raise children’s readiness to learn through targeted pre-primary education.</p> <p><i>IO: Increased number of learners, especially from Radical Inclusion groups, in quality pre-primary.</i></p> <p>The focus of this pillar is on access and inclusion for pre-primary, which includes training of new teachers to a consistent standard; it also contains provisions for the construction of schools.</p> <p>Pillar B: Strengthen the institutional core for foundational learning</p> <p><i>IO: Consistent use of updated instructional core for foundational learning</i></p> <p>The focus of this pillar is on development and dissemination of new teacher learning material, as well as establishing an assessment mechanism.</p> <p>Pillar C: Recruit, retain and support excellent educators for foundational learning</p> <p><i>IO: Continuous support for teachers and school heads to deliver foundational learning</i></p> <p>The main workstreams for this pillar are (a) in-service training of teachers in foundational learning and (b) establishing support and oversight mechanisms, including through the use of digital technology solutions and school visits.</p>

¹⁹ The source for this table is the partnership compact.

Pillar D: Increase the use of data and technology to support foundational learning and education service delivery

IO: District Education Officers and Teaching Service Commission staff use timely data to improve delivery of foundational learning

This workstream focuses on strengthening functions at the national level in the system supporting teachers: improving data flows for decision-making and training of personnel including within schools to make use of this data.

Pillar E: Strengthen governance, management, and accountability for performance on foundational learning

IO: Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and LEG meet regularly to guarantee funding for foundational learning

This workstream focuses on improving coordination, resourcing, and sustainability of the reform, through building capacity of technical staff at the central and local level, as well as improving communication and information on financing in particular.

The reform implementation strategy also contains provisions for supportive research and learning functions, as well as an intention to see how complementary interventions (particularly approaches to increase access) can be integrated with reform activities.

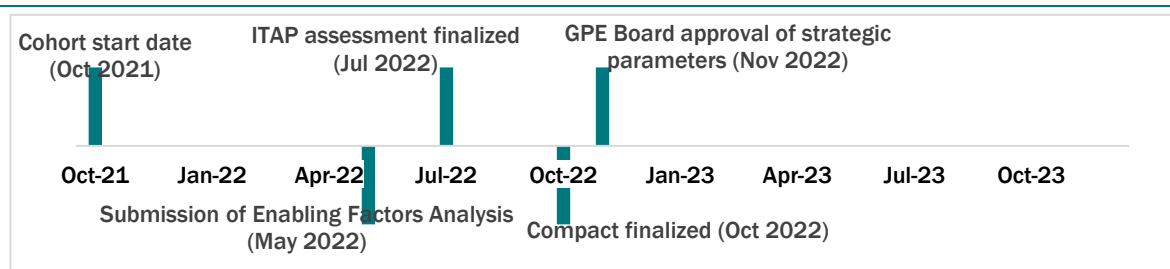
What GPE support has Sierra Leone received to identify transformative priority reforms and align partners and resources to them?²⁰

GPE engagement

Year joined GPE	2007
Coordinating Agency	Irish Aid
Total grant support received	US\$99,891,906 ²¹

Key GPE 2025 timelines and grants

Cohort Cohort 2 (October 2021)



Status of GPE grants to support the priority reform

GPE grants	Grant agent	Maximum allocation	Current status	Expected start date	Duration
System Transformation Grant	UNICEF	US \$22.47m	Approved by GPE Board in July 2023	August 1st, 2023	4 years. 2023-2027
System Capacity Grant	UNICEF	US \$2.6m	For use to strengthen capacity, adapt and	August 1st, 2023	4 years. 2023-2027

²⁰ The sources for this table are: GPE Secretariat Operating Model Pipeline for key GPE 2025 information and timelines (updated February 2024), GPE website on Sierra Leone (see: <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/Sierra-Leone>)

²¹ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/sierra-leone>

			learn, to implement and drive results at scale (with a focus on addressing bottlenecks to data and equitable finance).		
Multiplier Grant	UNICEF	US \$15m	Approved with co-funding from the LEGO Foundation in support of the Delivering the Foundations of Learning for All program.	August 1st, 2023	4 years. 2023-2027

Priority ratings from the enabling factors analysis

Enabling factor type	Self-analysis	ITAP
Data and evidence	High	High
Gender responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring	Medium	Medium
Sector coordination	Medium	Medium
Domestic financing	High	High

Other GPE programs and support

Knowledge and Innovation Exchange (KIX) KIX has three active grants in Sierra Leone²²:





1. Implemented by UNICEF, the World Bank, and the Early Childhood Development Action Network, Integrating early child education in sectoral planning supports education systems in mainstreaming early childhood education using a global toolkit;
2. Using data for improving education equity and inclusion led by UNICEF enhances the use of gender, equity, and inclusion data from existing household surveys to inform policy decisions on the most marginalized children; and
3. Increasing access to quality education for rural and marginalized children in West Africa led by Associates for Change scales accelerated learning programs for out-of-school children, especially in areas lacking trained teachers due to security issues.

A fourth grant on enhancing early learning through play-based approaches was announced in Feb 2022²³. The KIX National Delegation of Sierra Leone is comprised of three ministry officials (2xMBSSE and 1x MTHE), UNICEF, the EU, and IGA, and is active in the Africa 19 regional Hub. The KIX COVID Observatory for Africa, led by ADEA and AU/CIEFFA, features analysis on Sierra Leone in its policy trackers and reports.

Education Out Loud (EOL) EOL funds Education For All Sierra Leone (EFA SL) with a 2019-2021 grant of US\$ 269,000 for advocacy work on accountability and transparency on the delivery of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy, early childhood development, quality education and the school feeding program. EFA SL is a member of the LEG and participates in the ESP Committee and the Sector Plan Review Committee. The coalition has been invited to apply for an additional 2 years of support for 2022-23 conditional to the Grant Agent's assessment on strength of implementation capacity.

²² Sierra Leone - Country Analytics
²³ <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/playful-beginnings-new-kix-research-collaborations-better-early-learning>

Annex 2. Strength of Evidence Ratings for the Sierra Leone Study

Question	Rating	Description of sources of evidence
1. Did the GPE model help with policy dialog, identification of system bottlenecks, and solutions to address these bottlenecks for better education outcomes?	 High	<p>Sources include stakeholders' interviews with government officials, donor partners, INGOs and NGOs, CSOs and the review of key documents such as the ITAP review, the Enabling Factors for SLE, and the partnership compact, as well as minutes from the SLE-LEG meetings.</p> <p>Evidence for this question is complete and it includes multiple, credible sources of data.</p>
2. Do the priority reforms demonstrate potential for transformation?	 High	<p>Sources include stakeholder interviews with government officials (MBSSE, MTHE, TSC), international donor partners (World Bank, FCDO, the EU Delegation and UNICEF), development partners and members of the SL-LEG committee, civil society (NGOs, INGOs and CSOs), and GPE Secretariat staff.</p> <p>We also reviewed the partnership compact, written outputs authored by the former Minister of Education in Sierra Leone on system transformation, minutes from the SLE-LEG meetings, and secondary documents including the Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, and the Enabling Factors Assessment.</p> <p>Evidence for this question is complete and it includes multiple, credible sources that have been triangulated.</p>
3. Is there readiness for reform implementation?	 High-Moderate	<p>Sources include stakeholders' interviews with government officials, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), donor partners, INGOs and NGOs, CSOs and the review of key documents such as the partnership compact. Secondary documents include the Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, the partnership compact and the Enabling Factors and ITAP assessment report, and minutes from the SLE-LEG meetings.</p> <p>It was not possible to gain access to other government documents on internal policies and planning to corroborate data gathered through primary data collection and review of GPE documentation.</p>
4. Domestic Financing	 Low	<p>Sources include stakeholders' interviews with government officials and members of the SL-LEG such as donor partners, INGOs and NGOs, CSOs and the review of key documents such as the partnership compact, the Education Sector Plan 2022-2026, the partnership compact and the Enabling Factors, and the ITAP assessment. It was not possible to access any government document on domestic finance to triangulate and corroborate findings. While it was possible to gather evidence on the identification of bottlenecks, little</p>

information could be gathered concerning solutions to address such bottlenecks.

5. Gender Equality



Sources include an interview with the Gender Expert based at the Ministry for Technical and Higher Education and semi-structured interviews with other stakeholders. However, many interviewees showed limited awareness of gender interventions. No official government policy or gender policy guidelines were available for the research team to review. The only documentation available concerned the Radical Inclusion Policy. We were therefore unable to triangulate findings with external documents.

Annex 3. Depiction of Sierra Leone’s priority reform theory of change

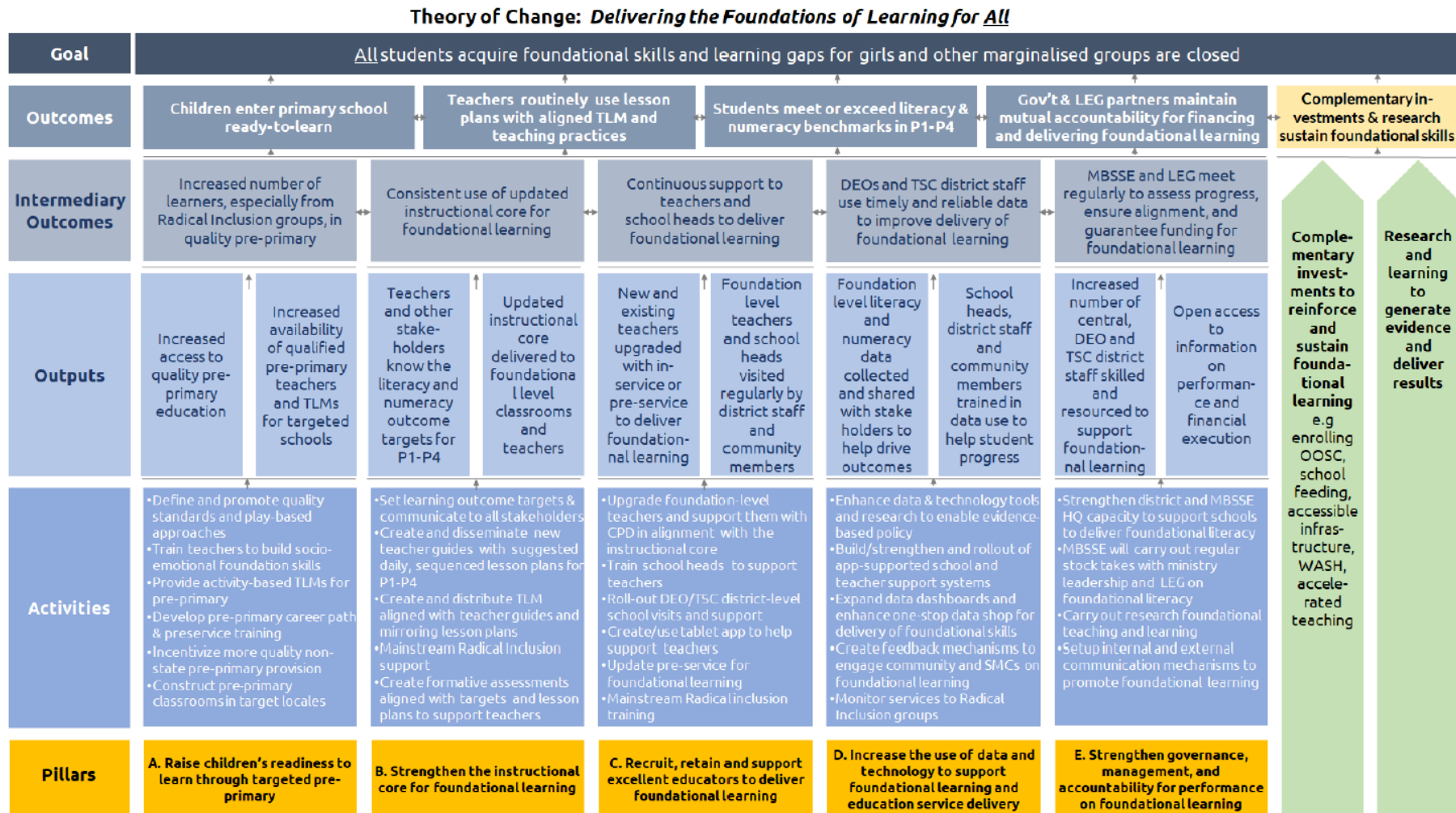


Figure 1: Theory of Change: *Delivering the Foundations of Learning for All*

Annex 4. Summary of Sierra Leone’s enabling factors

Enabling Factor	Priority Level	Identified bottlenecks	Planned activities to address bottlenecks in the PC	How the priority reform will address bottlenecks within enabling factors	Remaining gaps
Data and evidence	High	<p>Lack of integration and consolidation of available data sources.</p> <p>Dependency on Annual School Census, a static and labor-intensive source lacking access to real-time data.</p> <p>Incomplete data and inconsistent use of data.</p>	<p>Creation of a unified database or ‘one stop shop’ for education data.</p> <p>Build data collection infrastructure to support the collection and sharing of quality data.</p> <p>Increase technical capacity and resources for data collection and analysis within the MBSSE</p>	<p>MBSSE, MTHE and TSC are introducing a unified data collection system across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone to lead and inform decision making by collecting reliable and time-sensitive data on teachers’ attendance, student attendance, and teachers’ and use of teaching and learning materials. Plans are also to introduce unique student IDs to trace student journeys through the education system.</p> <p>The ESP sets out the establishment of an Education Data working group and there is a commitment to data harmonization. Data infrastructure needs are also addressed in the priority reform and through FCDO and EU projects.</p> <p>The STG will be used to support data system strengthening and infrastructure, including tools for collecting and sharing data.</p> <p>The SCG will be used to address capacity gaps in terms of resourcing and expertise, including hiring technical experts embedded in the MBSSE.</p>	<p>Some uncertainty remains around the capacity of the state bureaucratic apparatus to collect data efficiently and ensure prompt access to data from all the 16 districts in the country.</p>
Volume, Equity, and efficiency of domestic public expenditure on education	High	<p>Volume: Low budget for capital expenditure raises concerns about the feasibility of FQSE; evidence of challenges in absorption capacity.</p> <p>Equity: disparities in the distributing of resources, allocation of teachers (and their salaries), and allocation of capital resources across districts; Limited funding of pre-primary education</p> <p>Efficiency: Weak links between school-level expenditure and increases in enrolment; double shifts reduced learning time; high drop-out rates and</p>	<p>Conduct an assessment of the distribution of current spend.</p> <p>Redistribution of the existing education budget in favor of greater allocation to primary education</p> <p>Incorporation of criteria on learning disadvantages in teacher allocation mechanisms</p> <p>Build capacity and expertise within MBSSE to analyze budget spend and allocation.</p>	<p>The compact places an emphasis improved assessment of the distribution of spending to identify areas for improvement and increased alignment with ESP priorities. The ESP and compact sets out plans for the establishment of a working group including the MBSSE, Ministry of Finance and Planning and Economic Development, alongside other education finance stakeholders to review recommendations surfaced from relevant analysis, and to develop implementation plans and timetables to implement key recommendations.</p> <p>The SCG will support government capacity by employing technical staff and specialists embedded in MBSSE responsible for budgets and liaising with the MoF as well as additional expertise from international organizations.</p> <p>The STG is linked to two top-up triggers associated with efficiency and equity of budget spending to support political incentive to enact improvements,</p>	<p>Sierra Leone plans to harmonize STG with additional fundraising from other donor agencies and multilateral organizations, however additional funds are not yet clear.</p> <p>Challenges with data accuracy on spending figures using a paper-based system does not appear to have been identified by the EFA process or addressed as a bottleneck.</p>

		repetition; limited alignment between annual budgets and ESP.			
Sector coordination	Medium	<p>Lack of comprehensive data on donor financing in education, and challenges in predictability of external financing.</p> <p>Limited mechanisms to promote mutual accountability between government and aid agencies</p> <p>Limited coordination capacity within the MBSSE</p>	No specific activities identified.	<p>Although no specific activities were identified to address bottlenecks, the EFA and ITAP assessments both recognized the existing established coordination mechanisms within Sierra Leone to support policy formulation and strong foundations for coordinated financing.</p> <p>The SL-LEG task team represents a smaller pool of actors from the broader SL-LEG, and regularly engaged with the government, demonstrating improvement in the level of communication and coordination between development partners and the government. Development partners interviewed expressed willingness to coordinate funding streams to contribute to separate objectives of the priority reform and the overarching commitment to the attainment of the foundational learning objectives in the country.</p> <p>The system has been evolving over recent years following a division of labor approach when it comes to funding with the aim of improving efficiency and coordinated financing, e.g., FCDO focuses on secondary schooling, while the Education Outcomes Fund focuses on ECE.</p>	Unclear if or how Sierra Leone will address the need for strengthened mutual accountability and predictability of aid for education.
Gender-responsive sector planning, policy, and monitoring	Medium	<p>Costs for implementing the ESP are unclear and may not be feasible to fund in practice.</p> <p>Deeply entrenched social norms, values, and attitudes promote gender inequalities.</p>	No specific activities identified.	<p>It is not clear how the priority reform will address bottlenecks. The EFA and ITAP assessments highlight that ESPs, national policies and laws, and international commitments to protect the rights of children, women, and person with disabilities are in place, and operational planning instruments are in place to guide ESP implementation. The ESP 2022-2026 was devised and based on a gender-focused education sector analysis. Many policies existed in draft form at the time of the ITAP assessment.</p> <p>The Radical Inclusion Policy aims to address continued significant gender disparities in the system is addressed in the Radical Inclusion Policy, however ITAP identified a need to align ESP and Radical Inclusion Policy activities and actions to ensure gender mainstreaming is achieved.</p>	<p>Bottlenecks not clearly addressed in the priority reform or compact.</p> <p>Financial and capacity constraints related to the limited availability of gender expertise and resources within MBSSE and MTHE was identified during the case study analysis, which does not appear to have been identified in the EFA process.</p>

Annex 5. Stakeholder map and list of respondents

Table 1. Stakeholder map

Type/ group of stakeholders	Stakeholder (Names, specific titles, and roles)	Role played in system (Including role played in the compact development process, if applicable)
Government	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)	MBSSE is the primary institutions responsible for education in Sierra Leone. It has an oversight of primary and secondary education in the country. It is responsible for formulating education policies and plans and managing and implementing them across the country.
	Ministry for Technical and Higher Education (MTHE)	This ministry focuses on higher education and technical training in Sierra Leone. It works to improve the quality of higher education and align it with the needs of the job market, encouraging research and innovation.
	Teaching Service Commission (TSC)	The Teaching Service Commission is an independent body in Sierra Leone responsible for recruitment, in-service training, career progression and retirement of teachers in Sierra Leone.
	Teacher Training Institutions (TTIs)	TTIs are based at six universities in Sierra Leone and the
	Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)	TEC is a body established to regulate Tertiary Education in Sierra Leone.
	Community Schools	These are schools that are not formally recognized in the country.
	Ministry of Finance (MoF)	Responsible for budget allocations to the education sector and for the financial management of pooled government and donor funds
	District Level Authorities (local authorities)	District Level Authorities are responsible for the implementation of national policies across the 16 districts in Sierra Leone. Responsibilities include: implementation of educational policies, school supervision and management, teacher management, monitoring and evaluation, budget and resource allocation and infrastructure development.
	Community ECD Centres	Community ECD Centres are responsible for early education learning activities throughout the country with children under the age of 6.
	School Management Committees	Oversees: (a) readiness of the budget plan supported through government awards and school pay, and its endorsement and execution; (b) asset age including pay age exercises; (c) instructor the board including recruiting of instructors; (d) grant dissemination; (e) arranging and execution of scholastic schedule; (f) leading school

Type/ group of stakeholders	Stakeholder (Names, specific titles, and roles)	Role played in system (Including role played in the compact development process, if applicable)
		<p>assessments; and (g) intermittent answering to guardians' get together.</p> <p>Responsible for activities such as (i) school improvement planning, maintenance, and rehabilitation of school infrastructure and construction of new infrastructure; (ii) addition of higher grades; and (iii) teachers' training.</p> <p>Reports to the parents' assembly.</p>
Sierra Leone Local Education Group (SL-LEG)	Local Education Group	<p>Led by the Government through the MBSSE:</p> <p>Includes over 80 organizations: CSOs, INGOs, development partners, teacher associations, and international institutions operating in the education ecosystem in Sierra Leone.</p>
Sierra Leone Local Education Group Task Team	Local Education Group – Task Team	<p>The SL-LEG Task Team was established to facilitate the coordination and discussion among a selected range of partners as the large size of the SL-LEG resulted in diminished efficiency of the body,</p> <p>The SL-LEG Task Team includes: the MBSSE delivery team, MTHE, UNICEF, the WB, the EU, Irish Aid, and EFA in representation of CSOs.</p>
Grant Agent	UNICEF	Key role in ensuring that GPE support is adequately managed and aligned with broader education sector developments
Coordinating Agency	Irish Aid	Key role in facilitating and ensuring harmonized support in the education sector
Other Development Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • World Bank • EU • FCDO • USAID • The LEGO Foundation • Education Outcomes Fund 	<p>Participate and contribute to SL-LEG meetings</p> <p>Implement GPE-funded or other activities in the education sector, in alignment with ESP priorities</p>
Civil Society Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education for All Coalition • EducAid • Concern Worldwide • Teach for Sierra Leone • Save the Children • SightSavers 	<p>CSOs are part of the SL-LEG meetings.</p> <p>The CSOs operate in education in Sierra Leone mostly through activities in community schools in the country.</p>

Table 2. List of respondents

#	Stakeholder's Name	Role	Organisation
1	Conrad Sackey	Minister	MBSSE
2	Mathias Esmann	Advisor to the Minister	Tony Blair Institute (Secondment to MBSSE)
3	Adam Kreimeia	Advisor to the Ministry, ODI Fellow	Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (Secondment to MBSSE)
4	Albert Dupigny	Advisor to the Minister	MBSSE
5	Emily Kadie Gogra	Deputy Minister I	MBSSE
6	Lans Keifala	National Coordinator, FQSE	MBSSE
7	Emmanuel Allie	GPE Coordinator	MBSSE
8	Aminata Sannoh	Deputy Secretary	MBSSE
9	Adama Jean Momoh	Director, Planning and Policy + Deputy CEO	MBSSE
10	Sorie I. Turay	Secretary	Teaching Service Commission
11	Mrs. Musu Gorvie	Deputy Chief Higher Education Officer	MTHE
12	Emmanuel J. Momoh	Director of Higher Education	MTHE
13	Christiana Samu	Director M&E	MTHE
14	Carol Hannon	Development Specialist	Irish Aid (Coordinating Agency)
15	Cecilia Browne	Senior Education Programme Advisor	Irish Aid
16	Suman Sachdeva	Education Specialist, acting Chief of Education	UNICEF
17	Mari Shojo	Senior Education Specialist	World Bank
18	Mario Caivano	Head of Economic & Social sectors	EU Country Office
19	Abdul Deen-Sesay	Programme Officer	EU Country Office
20	Stephen Harvey	Education Adviser	FCDO
21	Juanita Peñuela	Program Associate	The Education Outcomes Fund
22	Cory Richardson	Program Analyst	The Education Outcomes Fund
23	Deepa Srikantiah	Senior Education Advisor	USAID
24	Plamen Danchev	Country Team Leader	GPE
25	Joseph Cobinah	National Coordinator	Education for All in Sierra Leone

#	Stakeholder's Name	Role	Organisation
26	Austin Kennan	Country Director	Concern Worldwide
27	Kelfa Kargbo	Head	Street Child
28	Miriam Mason-Sesay	Country Director	EducAid
29	Cecilia Ochoa	Senior Programme Specialist	The LEGO Foundation

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