

Leh Wi Lan

Improving Secondary Education in Sierra Leone



National Policy for Radical Inclusion

Baseline Report for Implementation (2021-26)

June 2022



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This report has been written by Sadashiv Nayanpally, Joy Oballum, Dr. Reginald Allen, and Helen Pinnock, and designed by Terry Nightingale.

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ACRONYMS

ARR	Apparent Retention Rate	PPL	Pregnant or Parent Learners
ASC	Annual School Census	PTR	Pupil Teacher Ratio
BECE	Basic Education Certification Examination	RUA	Rural and Underserved Area Pupils
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 2019	SGLA	Secondary Grade Learning Assessment
CTA	Community Teacher Association	SIP	School Improvement Plan
CWD	Children with Disabilities	SL	Sierra Leone
DDE	Deputy Director of Education	SLUDI	Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey	SMC	School Management Committee
EGMA	Early Grade Mathematics Assessment	SQAO	School Quality Assurance Officer
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment	SQARM	Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management
EMIS	Educational Management Information System	SSS	Senior Secondary School
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	TSC	Teaching Service Commission
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation	UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
FQSE	Free Quality School Education programme	WAEC	West African Examination Council
GCR	Gross Completion Rate	WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone	WASSCE	West African Senior School Certification Examination
HQ	Headquarters		
IHS	Integrated Household Survey		
JSS	Junior Secondary School		
KII	Key Informant Interview		
LIH	Low-income Household pupils		
LWL	Leh Wi Lan		
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education		
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning		
NASU	National Assessment Standards Unit		
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation		
NPSE	National Primary School Examination		
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) is developing a five-year implementation plan for the roll-out of the new National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools (2021-2026). In early 2022, the Leh Wi Lan programme was asked to produce a comprehensive study and analysis for MBSSE to guide implementation and monitoring of the new policy.

The Radical Inclusion Policy

On 8th April 2021, the Sierra Leone Cabinet approved the '**National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools**'. The policy seeks to ensure that schools throughout Sierra Leone are accessible to, and inclusive of, all children – especially those groups that are historically marginalised or excluded from formal schooling. It focuses on four marginalised groups:

- Girls, especially girls who are pregnant or have been pregnant and are parent learners;
- Children with disabilities;
- Children in rural and underserved areas; and
- Children from low-income families.

These groups are considered marginalised because they face especially high barriers in education. Being a 'marginalised learner' does not assume being a minority: a high proportion of children and young people in Sierra Leone are estimated to experience these challenges.

The goal of the Radical Inclusion Policy is to remove all infrastructural and systemic policies and practices that limit learning for any child, as well as provide a roadmap to education stakeholders to ensure that all children, regardless of their status in society, have access to an inclusive and positive schooling experience.

The policy has four broad objectives aimed at improving the learning experience of marginalised groups in the country:

- **Policy Statement 1:** Create inclusive learning environments.
- **Policy Statement 2:** Target support to vulnerable learners.
- **Policy Statement 3:** Engage families and communities.
- **Policy Statement 4:** Enable policy environment and effective implementation.

The baseline study

The study was carried out by Leh Wi Lan's research consortium partner OPM, with support from the programme. This report provides a baseline assessment of the education system's readiness to implement the new policy; one year after it was officially approved.

Given the strong political will and high level backing that the policy received, MBSSE was keen to ensure that implementation was guided by a cohesive, evidence-based framework. While relevant research had previously been conducted, it was useful to create a single baseline to help MBSSE shape its priorities for both driving, and overseeing the impact of the new policy. The baseline draws on all available documentary evidence, and adds new data from analysis of Educational Management Information System (EMIS) and consultation with secondary school learners and educators.

To capture starting conditions for the new policy, the research team was asked to track and describe current status on the inclusion of the four priority groups of children in secondary schools. The team was also asked to report on the availability and strength of various types of data in establishing useful baseline figures. They identified areas where data was unavailable or not strong enough, and suggested methods to collect stronger and more representative data in future.

This report is a synthesis of three components:

- (i) an analysis of secondary data available on inclusion of marginalised pupils, from the ASC and other relevant datasets. The study asked, ‘Who are our marginalised learners, and what do we know about them in the education system?’
- (ii) a review of literature on research, key policies, and practices aimed at promoting inclusion in schools in Sierra Leone. This relates to the research question, ‘To what extent do current policies and practices in Sierra Leone promote inclusion in schools?’
- (iii) a qualitative study conducted to identify key constraints and support for implementing the policy of Radical Inclusion in secondary schools. This addresses the question, ‘What are the key constraints and support for implementing the policy of Radical Inclusion?’

Design and reporting of the baseline study are intended to assist replication of the qualitative study. Full information and tools for data collection and analysis are contained in the report, to support data collection in other sectors, such as primary education.

This report is structured to present findings aligned with Radical Inclusion Policy priorities. The final chapter provides priority recommendations for MBSSE in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policy, including a suggested monitoring protocol.

Conceptual framework

UNESCO’s inclusion principles (2005) were adapted into three dimensions of **Access, Connectedness, and Achievement**, against which data on marginalised students were assessed.

Under ‘**Access**’, the key factors enabling or blocking children from attending school regularly were investigated, rather than relying on narrower measures such as attendance. In school, learners’ experiences were assessed on **Connectedness** (how well-supported they felt to participate in learning) and **Achievement**, reviewing learning outcomes across the curriculum, as well as examination results.

Data were collected to investigate barriers to experiencing Access, Connectedness, and Achievement for the four groups targeted in the policy. Educational institutions and processes were assessed to see how well they were positioned to deliver Access, Connectedness, and Achievement for these learners.

The report’s findings have been organised to comment on each of the three dimensions of inclusion separately. The research team produced a monitoring protocol for collection and analysis of data around these dimensions, with detailed analysis of how the current draft policy implementation plan could be monitored.

In line with experience from Sierra Leone and other countries, it is expected that reducing barriers to Access, Connectedness, and Achievement will raise the effectiveness of education for everyone.

Recommendations focus on systemic and supportive action which MBSSE could immediately take on to strengthen the education system. These actions would help give schools the best chance of retaining marginalised children in the short-term, and enable scaling-up of effective models of inclusion in the longer-term.

Research process

In early 2022, a mixed-methods review was undertaken to capture the educational challenges and support for the four groups of children prioritised in the new policy. After a literature review, secondary data analysis assessed a range of datasets, including ASC and household surveys.

To produce primary data, a qualitative study was carried out in nine secondary schools across three districts. Purposive sampling identified one high-performing and two low-performing districts. Within districts, schools were selected if they were distant from district centres or otherwise under-served, and if marginalised students attended. A mix of ownership models was selected for. Schools with a functional Community Teacher Association (CTAs) were selected, so that the CTA could organise participation from a range of respondents.

Participatory tools were used to carry out focus group discussions and key informant interviews (KIIs). A detailed questionnaire matrix was used to help respondents identify how these constraints limited presence, connectedness, and learning for marginalised children. The study also asked stakeholders to identify supportive factors in the education system, local government, and communities.

Selected findings

1 Overview

The research found good acceptance of inclusive education principles at grassroots level, with strong political will to implement the new policy.

Collaborative culture between government and development partners has strengthened the institutional environment; both of which are a force for positive change.

However, some system weaknesses, especially unpredictable government funds and limited district level capacity and resourcing, leave questions as to how the policy can be implemented to achieve nationwide impact.

2 How ready is the education system for Radical Inclusion?

Sierra Leone has several essential supports in place to foster inclusive education. These were found at school, community, district and national levels, and across government and development partners.

Attitudes on disability were often positive among teachers, communities, and education authorities. This suggests that capacity building may be able to focus on the 'how' of disability-inclusive teaching rather than the 'why'. Indications of grassroots support for inclusion suggests that the Radical Inclusion Policy has a good chance of acceptance and ownership. Communities may be willing to hold schools accountable for including marginalised children, and teachers may be likely to expect inclusive practice from each other.

Sierra Leone has also made significant progress in improving grade progression and transition for boys and girls, although some gaps remain for girls. Attitudes around gender, safeguarding, and student pregnancy were found to be more complex, requiring more focus on awareness raising and behaviour change. In addition to this baseline, multiple studies have shown that school-based harassment and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone are extensive and have been normalised in schools.

Another supportive factor is the variety of successful models of inclusive school development being demonstrated in Sierra Leone. Review of the draft implementation plan for the Radical Inclusion Policy revealed a large number of gender and disability-focused inclusive education initiatives, often supported by development partners. Several of these offer opportunities for communities to promote inclusion and hold schools and parents accountable (see Annex B).

The research also found that schools are relatively well positioned to produce useful data on marginalised pupils. While not everything needed to track policy impact is in place, many schools have the capacity to identify, discuss, and report on challenges faced by children. This a foundational asset to an inclusive education system, and has historically been rare in low-income countries.

However, the core functioning of schools in Sierra Leone was found to be weakened by poor coordination, monitoring, and resourcing, and unpredictable funding flows to schools. Low funding can keep learning environments below the quality needed for inclusion: this will take time to correct. But unpredictable funding patterns, combined with poor local monitoring, add further risk. These factors encourage not only informal fee requests but also corruption. Fee requests while schools were waiting for funding were identified by vulnerable pupils as causing them huge pressure, making them feel unwelcome and likely to drop out. Pressure for transactional sex in place of fees becomes more likely.

Other major constraints on pupils' ability to take part in education included lack of available secondary schools close to home; lack of healthcare; lack of food; gender discrimination; and safeguarding gaps. Outdated and inflexible examination procedures were reported to undermine achievement for disabled pupils, especially those with visual impairment.

Table 1: Supports and gaps for including children in school







	What works	Gaps
 <p>Access</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong community-school engagement and advocacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor medical care affects attendance • Distance to school is an issue, buses welcome provision in some areas • Safety concerns on way to school and in school
 <p>Connectedness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some upgrades to school infrastructure to make it more inclusive • Engaging community on issues related to attendance, achievement, welfare, safeguarding • High awareness of policies from school staff, especially Radical Inclusion • Strong leadership and school ethos for inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma, bullying, harassment, poor attitudes from teachers, especially for pregnant girls • Additional costs of schooling • Inadequate financial resources at school level • School safety structures not working as intended • Discordance to policies on a) pregnant girls being in schools and b) no corporal punishment
 <p>Achievement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers use their own money to support pupils with food or books • Evidence of using flexible seating and being aware of need to adapt style to meet additional learning needs • Development partner organisations recognised for providing support on inclusion, especially for children with disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poorer pupils unable to purchase textbooks • Illegal fees and charges to pupils • High pupil-teacher ratio • Teacher absenteeism • Lack of food • Limited individualised teaching and inclusive methods, limited reporting and referral from teachers on pupils' needs

Table 2: Engaging communities to support inclusive education: what has been going well and where are the gaps?

	What works	Gaps
 Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demand for education in some places sees communities setting up schools or parents ensuring their children can re-locate to a place where there is a school • Community laws issuing fines for parents who do not send pupils to school or shop owners with pupils in premises during school hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secret societies, FGM, initiation rituals • Economic activity takes pupils out of school especially for low-income families • Local festivals and events • Drugs, substance abuse
 Connectedness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong school-community outreach support • Positive examples of including children with disabilities, and perceptions that they can learn well and should be in school • Development partner organisations promote access to contraception and address stigma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma and discrimination within society including abandonment (even if pupils do not face it in school) • Harassment, violence, discrimination in homes pupils live in to attend nearby school (away from family home) • Transactional sex for education costs, with stigmatisation of girls rather than perpetrators
 Achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents value higher education, more than basic and therefore high engagement for senior secondary • Development partners engaged in Radical Inclusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of electricity means pupils are unable to study at home • Household chores reduce learning time



3 To what extent can EMIS provide reliable data on marginalised children in education?

The research team aimed to understand the type of data and indicators available on marginalisation across EMIS, in order to produce relevant baseline estimates. Direct access to EMIS was not possible, so the research team focused on datasets from the ASC. This data was placed against other relevant datasets to assess how much can be learned about marginalised pupils from the available information.

Although it was not possible to get a comprehensive, triangulated set of baseline figures, the research managed to produce detailed assessment of the potential of various data systems to produce accurate information on marginalised pupils in future. The research found that the ASC has good potential to produce policy monitoring data, especially if pupil information can be set against other datasets, and validation can be improved.

The tables below identify which areas the research team concluded were useful for monitoring the impact of the policy on marginalised pupils. Table 5 outlines which types of data are easiest to collect and most reliable.

The tables indicate that a large minority of schools are in underserved areas, and that the majority of children live in rural households. A significant minority of girls aged 15-19 years are mothers: 18%. Only 0.08% of girls enrolled in schools were identified as pregnant. 1.5% of children enrolled were identified as disabled, suggesting a significant number of children with disabilities are not in school, or are not identified by teachers.¹

Access to pre-primary education is low, and there are still significant challenges for students to complete primary education and transition to secondary. Very few sexual or gender-based violence cases have been recorded.

Table 3: Number of pupils in marginalised groups

Indicator	Baseline value	Data source
1 Number of children with disabilities enrolled in schools	41,544 (1.5% of all enrolments)	ASC, 2020
2 Number of pregnant girls enrolled in schools	1,047 (0.08% of all girls enrolled)	ASC, 2020
3 Number of teenage parents	18% of girls aged 15-19 years are mothers	DHS, 2019
4 Number of low-income households	56.8% of households (73.9% in Rural v 34.8% in Urban)	SLIHS, 2018
5 Number of rural households	63.1% of all households	SLIHS, 2018
6 Number of schools in underserved areas	(i) 33.8% schools are not easily accessible (ii) 41.5% schools are more than 10Km away from district HQ	ASC, 2020

1 UNICE estimates that around 4% of children under 15 are disabled. <https://www.unicef.org/disabilities#:~:text=Fifteen%20per%20cent%20of%20the%20world%E2%80%99s%20population%20%E2%80%93,life.%20Nearly%20240%20million%20of%20them%20are%20children.>

Table 4: Extent of inclusion in Sierra Leone

Indicator	Baseline value				Data source	
	Pre-Primary	Primary	JSS	SSS		
Access						
1	Gross intake rate	23.40%	196%	79.50%	74.90%	ASC, 2020
2	Gross enrolment rate	21.60%	139%	78.50%	57.50%	ASC, 2020
School Connectedness						
3	School-related SRGBV cases recorded	141 cases				ASC, 2020
4	Gross completion rates	17.20%	83.80%	73.90%	49.30%	ASC, 2020
5	Retention rates	–	38%	87%	60%	ASC, 2020
6	Transition rates	–	–	97.60%	109.20%	ASC, 2020
Achievement						
7	Pass rates in national exams (NPSE, BECE, WASSCE)	–	77.00%	78.61%	63.57%	NPSE, 2021; BECE, 2021; WASSCE, 2021
8	8. Grade repetition rate	–	2.54%	1.60%	1.60%	ASC, 2020

Table 5: Data collection strengths and weaknesses for priority learner groups

Priority learner group	Availability of data in ASC	Reliability of data	Difficulty of collecting accurate pupil level data
Girls	●	●	Straightforward
Children with disabilities	●	●	Difficult due to stigma and unidentified disabilities
Pregnant girls	●	●	Difficult due to stigma
Rural/underserved	●	●	Straightforward
Teenage parent	●	N/A	Straightforward despite potential stigma
Low income	●	N/A	Difficult

Key: ● Available/Reliable ● Indirectly available/Moderately reliable ● Unavailable/Unreliable

In addition to the desirable data elements detailed above, an additional seven data sets would be required for a thorough quantitative exploration of the Radical Inclusion Policy’s intervention strands. These data sets been detailed in Table 6 below (see Section 7 with more information on possible sources).

Table 6: Additional datasets for monitoring Radical Inclusion

Additional Data Elements Required
Data about post-school destinations for pupils from marginalised groups
Data on household incomes
Data about school and classroom practices
Data about school funding and additional costs
Data about teacher qualifications and training
Measures of quality of school facilities
Measures of transport provision
Views of out-of-school/marginalised children and parents/prospective parents

The best opportunity to produce data to monitor the Radical Inclusion Policy at present was found in schools’ capacity to produce pupil data for the ASC. The ASC identifies girls, children with disabilities (as identified by teachers), and pregnant learners, although stigma makes this likely to be under-reported. Disability information is broken down by types of impairment and includes learning disabilities. The ASC reports on school accessibility and distance from district headquarters, although application of definitions is variable. It does not yet report at school-level on parent learners, children from rural areas, or children from low-income households.

Schools are able to submit school-level ASC estimates directly to MBSSE, particularly using school tablets through the ‘One tablet per school’ programme. Secondary schools already have tablets and are submitting data regularly. This capacity of schools to enter and transmit their own census data means that cost savings could be made on census enumerators. However, ASC data is not currently validated, making it difficult to use with confidence at national-level, particularly as an evidence base for resource allocation.

Spotting overlaps for students in multiple categories is essential, to avoid double-counting of learners for impact tracking. Establishing which learners have multiple types of marginalisation is also necessary for targeting support. At present, these factors make using standard measures from the ASC, such as Apparent Retention Rate and Transition Rates, inappropriate for tracking policy impact.

Recommendations

A. Make schools safer and more welcoming for marginalised pupils

1. Prioritise collaboration between MBSSE and development partners to make schools safer, especially for girls. Sensitisation on recognising and reporting physical abuse, strengthening of reporting and referral mechanisms, and improving capacity at the frontline to support survivors of abuse could be explored in line with implementation of the new National Referral Protocol. Some areas for action include:
 - Campaigns to address negative attitudes around pregnant learners, using lessons from previous efforts to promote inclusion of children with disability.²
 - Starting with teachers employed by Sierra Leone Teaching Services Commission (TSC), develop and test measures to enforce the Teacher Code of Conduct as a starting point to reduce violence in and around schools.
 - Map pupils who live outside the family home in order to attend school, and the risks they face, to increase understanding for developing safeguarding measures.
2. End exclusionary examination methods for visually impaired pupils. This could be addressed with technical support from partners for a revised marking scheme. It would be a relatively easy issue to address and report on in a short timeframe.
3. Undertake a feasibility study to explore options to increase marginalised learners' access to schools, such as providing buses, bicycles, or organising 'walking buses'.
4. Direct Free Quality School Education programme (FQSE) funds to marginalised groups, to help these families cover the costs of attending school.

B. Strengthen school functioning as the foundation for quality, inclusive education

1. While resources for schools are likely to remain relatively low for some time, reducing the unpredictability of funding to schools would reduce pressure on pupils to find informal fees, and would limit corruption. Development partners could be asked to support a process review of school funding mechanisms, and to help MBSSE test efficiency improvements at national and district levels.
2. Focus teacher professional development around Radical Inclusion. Many teachers know the key messages but more is needed to change negative attitudes and behaviours in schools, as well as given the tools and enabling environment to deliver inclusive practices. Gather evidence of good practice between schools and communities. Showcase good practice, linking with TSC to ensure that standardised professional development modules on learner-centred and inclusive teaching are developed and delivered.
3. With support from partners, adopt data-driven decision-making for new school placement which prioritises lower time-to-school from marginalised pupils' homes (as opposed to say, investing in larger central schools).

² Rose, R., Garner, P., Farrow, B., Yu, Z., (2017) Report on Research to Inform the Development and Production of a Policy document and a Strategy on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in the Republic of Sierra Leone. University of Northampton, UK.

C. Strengthen district education offices to support and monitor inclusion in schools

The biggest institutional challenge hampering policy implementation was the resource constraints and lack of coordination faced by district offices. There are multiple district offices undertaking school-level monitoring and response, each having limited monitoring capacities and resources.

1. Unify the mandate and financial resources of school-level monitoring to the office of Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management (SQARM).;
2. In the medium term, increase budgets for SQARM to support inclusive teaching practices, school safety, and inclusive school leadership. MBSSE should consider increasing the cadre of School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs) and providing resources for them to visit schools regularly, based on proof of concept from Leh Wi Lan (LWL). Inclusion indicators can be included explicitly within SQAOs existing school monitoring tools. These can be adapted for primary as well as secondary education.

D. Prioritise data collection on realistic and desirable indicators

1. A major challenge on Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) for Radical Inclusion is collecting data elements for all intervention strands and activities comprehensively. At present, MEL capacities at district-level are extremely limited, and it would be unrealistic to expect routine collection of performance data on the 239 activities in the implementation plan. It is recommended to collect only the most essential and practicable data for measuring Radical Inclusion, instead of spreading MEL resources too thin on activity-level reporting. See Tables 3-6 above for areas where improving data collection was found to be realistic and desirable.
2. Developing accurate pupil-level profiling and tracking is the most effective approach to gather more accurate information on marginalised pupils. This is done best by collecting and sharing data at school-level, with district support, using teachers' and pupils' contextual knowledge to identify overlaps in marginalisation and prevent double-counting. The ASC is a good starting point to generate these types of data. Data validation, disaggregation, and contextual analysis will need to be supported to strengthen ASC accuracy.
3. Analysing school-level information from the ASC and supplementary research against larger demographic and institutional datasets will provide valuable information for targeting resources, such as which schools are both underserved and have high proportions of multiply-marginalised students.



01

INTRODUCTION

On 8th April 2021, the Sierra Leone Cabinet approved the ‘National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools’ (henceforth referred to as “the policy”). The policy seeks to ensure that schools throughout Sierra Leone are accessible to, and inclusive of, all children – especially those groups that are historically marginalised or excluded from formal schooling.

It focuses on four specific marginalised groups:

- Girls, especially girls who are pregnant or have been pregnant and are parent learners;
- Children with disabilities;
- Children in rural and underserved areas; and
- Children from low-income families.

The goal of the Radical Inclusion Policy – and therefore of the Government – is to remove all infrastructural and systemic policies and practices that limit learning for any child, as well as provide a roadmap to education stakeholders to ensure that all children, regardless of their status in society, have access to an inclusive and positive schooling experience.

The policy has four broad objectives aimed at improving the learning experience of marginalised groups in the country:

- **Policy Statement 1:** Create inclusive learning environments.
- **Policy Statement 2:** Target support to vulnerable learners.
- **Policy Statement 3:** Engage families and communities.
- **Policy Statement 4:** Enable policy environment and effective implementation.

The MBSSE is currently developing an implementation plan for the roll-out of the policy over the next five years (2021-2026). Whilst research has been conducted and data collected by many different studies on the marginalised groups targeted by the Radical Inclusion Policy, it was important to have a comprehensive baseline that will enable MBSSE to track the impact of this new policy over time. Given the strong political will and backing from the highest offices that this policy has received, it is important for MBSSE to ensure the implementation of the policy is evidence-based.

This report is a synthesis of three components of the baseline research:

- (i) an analysis of secondary data available on inclusion of marginalised pupils in school, from the ASC and other relevant datasets. The study asked, ‘Who are our marginalised learners, and what do we know about them in the education system?’
- (ii) a review of literature on research, key policies, and practices aimed at promoting inclusion in schools in Sierra Leone. This related to the research question, ‘To what extent do current policies and practices in Sierra Leone promote inclusion in schools?’
- (iii) a qualitative study conducted to identify key constraints and supports for implementing the policy of Radical Inclusion. This addresses the question, ‘What are the key constraints and supports for implementing the policy of Radical Inclusion?’

The study also reviewed the underlying question of what data are available on marginalised learners in Sierra Leone, and how it can be strengthened to monitor progress against Radical Inclusion Policy aims.

It seeks to provide a baseline assessment of the education system’s readiness to implement the policy one year after it was officially approved. The findings and recommendations of this study aim to inform the effective implementation and monitoring of the National Policy on Radical Inclusion.

The report is structured to present findings broadly aligned with the four policy statements of the national policy on Radical Inclusion. It comprises of eight chapters, including this introductory first chapter. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework used in the study and outlines the methodology used and its key limitations. Chapter 3 provides an account of existing secondary data indicators available on marginalisation in Sierra Leone and reports on its present values, where available. It also highlights certain reliability challenges of this data on using it for education budgeting and planning purposes. Chapters 4 through 6 report on the findings from the qualitative study undertaken to validate the implementation plan. Chapter 4 reports on the key constraints and support for creating an inclusive environment for learners, and providing targeted support for marginalised children at the school level. It aligns with the first two policy statements of the Radical Inclusion Policy. Chapter 5 reports on community-level constraints and support, while Chapter 6 looks at the overall systemic and policy environment for Radical Inclusion. Chapters 5 and 6 align with the third and fourth policy statements respectively. Chapter 7 undertakes a systematic assessment of validity of the theories of change behind the constituent intervention strands of the implementation plan by linking it with the current reality and synthesising findings from the three components of this study. It also provides an account of additional data elements required to monitor different aspects of the policy, and suggests a monitoring protocol to enable evidence-based policy implementation. The final chapter provides concluding remarks and key recommendations for improving the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policy.



02

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the detailed methodology used in the baseline assessment study. It outlines the theoretical framework of Access, Connectedness, and Achievement used in the study to assess the policy’s implementation plan and guide reporting on findings. It details the methodology used to systematically assess the policy’s implementation plan in order to identify data elements needed to monitor policy implementation. It also gives an overview of how data were analysed and organised in this report. Finally, it also gives certain key limitations of this study.

2.1 Theoretical framework

To establish a picture of starting conditions for the new policy, the research team was asked to track and describe current status on the inclusion of the four priority groups of children in schools. The team was also asked to report on the availability and strength of various types of data in establishing useful baseline figures. They identified areas where data were unavailable or not strong enough, and suggested methods to collect stronger and more representative data in future.

To generate the research questions and analytical criteria needed for these tasks, a conceptual framework was developed to provide standards against which to assess the education system. Sierra Leone already has a broadly inclusive education policy framework, and many elements of an inclusive education system are in place, despite significant resource constraints. What standards of inclusion should current and future educational efforts be judged by? How far has Sierra Leone already got towards these standards? Where are the opportunities to make more progress under the new policy?

The UNESCO Guidelines for Inclusion framework was adapted for this purpose. The National Policy on Radical Inclusion uses UNESCO’s definition of inclusion:

“Inclusion is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures, and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education. It involves changes and modifications in content, approaches, structures, and strategies, with a common vision which covers all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children.”³

3 UNESCO (2005) “Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All” cited in MBSSE (2021) “National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools”.

In order to assess the quality of inclusion, we used an adapted form of the analytical framework recommended by UNESCO, namely, the “Presence, Participation and Achievement” framework.⁴ Specifically, the report uses the framework of Access, School Connectedness, and Achievement. The key differences between the two have been highlighted below:

- **Access, instead of Presence** – according to UNESCO, presence refers to factors on where children are educated and how punctually they attend, i.e., factors of access and attendance. However, factors influencing attendance are not just related to reaching schools. Often, children have experiences within schools that discourage their regular attendance – certain “push” factors (and has large degree of overlap with the next factor of Connectedness). Thus, for the sake of clearly differentiating between access and attendance factors, this report uses Access instead of Presence.
- **School Connectedness, instead of Participation** – UNESCO defines participation as factors which influence the quality of experiences of children while in school and therefore, incorporates views of learners themselves. The push factors influencing attendance mentioned above are also covered here. However, the literature around measuring participation generally refers to measures of access, such as net enrolment ratios.⁵ In order to prevent this confusion, we use a related concept which measures quality of student experiences in schools, namely School Connectedness (referred to as Connectedness in this report). Connectedness refers to an academic environment in which students believe that adults in the school care about their learning and about them as individuals. These factors influence whether a pupil feels accepted, respected, and safe at school, and if the pupil feels that teachers care about their learning and respond to them as an individual.⁶
- **Achievement** – this report uses UNESCO’s definition of Achievement namely, factors which influence outcomes of learning across the curriculum, and not merely test or examination results

The chapters on findings in this report have each been organised to comment on each of these dimensions separately.

The report focuses on inclusion as a process for improving quality of education for all learners in schools. It means the following elements were used to draw out areas of enquiry in the study.

- **Benefits all learners, not only targeting the marginalised** – inclusion is a process that focuses on improving learning experiences for all learners in schools. It emphasises that inclusive education can happen only over and above a fully functional school, which provides quality education for all children – the marginalised and the rest. It specifically means that inclusive education cannot happen by responding to, or providing specialised support to the learning needs of some learners alone if the schools themselves are unable to perform their basic functions of imparting quality education. This also implies that marginalised pupils tend to be disproportionately impacted in the absence of basic quality in schools.
- **Focus on children in schools who may feel excluded** – the report focuses on children who are presently in school and may be marginalised by the education system. It does not focus on children who are presently out-of-school, who have been covered in other studies,⁷ although the challenges and experiences might be very similar. However, the findings imply that if the education system does not act promptly for marginalised pupils currently in schools, they risk being made out-of-school. Conversely, if education systems act on inclusion, it can also be expected that the schools will be more attractive and able to cater for out-of-school children also.
- **Inclusion is a process and not only an outcome** – inclusion is a continuous process where the means are as important as the goal for inclusive learning for all children. It is important to verify the fidelity of interventions and activities in the policy’s implementation plan to support prioritising its different elements and not just focus on identifying data elements for measuring progress on the activities.

4 UNESCO, “Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All.”

5 UNESCO-UIS, *Measuring Educational Participation: Analysis of Data Quality and Methodology Based on Ten Studies*. (Quebec, Canada: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2010).

6 See Blum (2005), McNeely et. al. (2002).

7 Hannah Graham et al., “Sierra Leone Out-of-School Children Study,” Research Report (CGA Technologies & UNICEF, November 25, 2021).

2.2 Arriving at findings

The findings from the baseline assessment have been arrived at by synthesising three components: (i) A Literature Review; (ii) Secondary data analysis; and, (iii) A primary data analysis (qualitative study).

2.2.1 Literature review

Sierra Leone has multiple development agencies which have undertaken research or implemented programmes targeting different marginalised groups. Moreover, the Government has also instituted multiple policies and programmes aimed at improving access and quality of schooling for the four marginalised groups. The study undertook a brief review of recent literature on policies, programmes, and practices in Sierra Leone for the four groups of marginalised children (See Annex A – Literature Review List) to complement the primary and secondary data analysis undertaken.

2.2.2 Secondary data analysis

The report undertook a comprehensive review of the following datasets which were either publicly available or provided to the research team by MBSSE.

- ASC datasets.
- Other publicly available datasets such as household surveys.

The purpose of the exercise was as follows:

- a) Assess existing indicators from government data to track progress related to the inclusion of the four marginalised groups of children on Access, Connectedness, and Achievement in schools in Sierra Leone.
- b) Report on these data elements to establish baseline figures where data are available and reliable.
- c) Identify data gaps where data are unavailable or unreliable and suggest suitable methods to collect representative data.
- d) Propose a monitoring protocol for the timely collection and analysis of data on the three dimensions of inclusion.

2.2.3 Primary data (qualitative study)

A school-based qualitative study was undertaken to understand school, household, and community level and systemic constraints faced by the four marginalised groups of children which limit their presence, participation, and learning in schools. We used an inclusive methodology by engaging directly with key stakeholders of this policy at all levels to gain insights on constraints and support towards implementing Radical Inclusion in Sierra Leone. This included conducting focus group discussions (FGDs) with grassroots stakeholders – children from all four marginalised groups, parents and caregivers, community – teacher association (CTA) members, teachers and principals of Junior and Senior Secondary schools. We also conducted KIs with Deputy Directors of Education (DDEs) at the district-level, and key officials from MBSSE working on inclusion, as well as inclusive education experts supporting MBSSE.

Research framework

The qualitative study focused on the following key research areas:

- **School- and classroom-level:** To what extent and how do school- and classroom-level constraints and practices limit access and positive schooling experience for these children? What could be done to alleviate these constraints?

- **Community- and household-level:** To what extent and how do household- and community-level constraints and practices limit access and positive schooling experience for these children? What could be done to alleviate these?
- **System- and policy-level:** To what extent and how do infrastructural- and policy-constraints and practices limit access and positive schooling experience for these children? What could be done to alleviate these?

The research themes were identified using a summary review of existing literature on policies and practices in Sierra Leone. The research questions for interviews and focus group discussions were selected based on exploring these themes. The detailed research framework is summarised in Table 7 below.

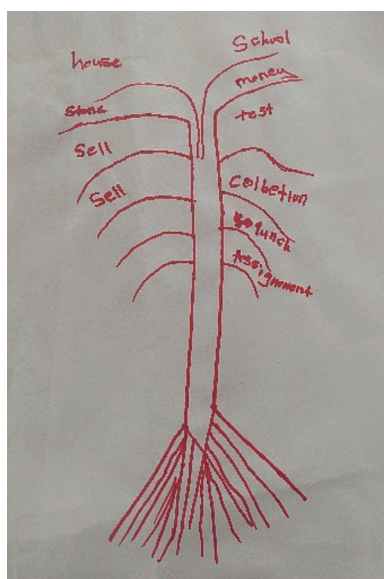
Table 7: Detailed research matrix

	Area of inquiry	Core areas to assess
1	Individual and system constraints to access an inclusive and positive schooling experience for the four marginalised groups of pupils identified	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do stakeholders consider constraints to inclusive and positive schooling experience? • How do these constraints vary across schools/regions? • To what extent and how do infrastructural and policy constraints and practices limit access and positive schooling experience for these children? • To what extent is there a difference in the type of constraints between marginalised boys and girls? • How are marginalised children performing in relation to other pupils? • What type of community norms and practices exist that limit access and positive schooling experience for marginalised pupils? • What factors limit access and positive schooling experience are within and outside the control of the school/government?
2	Teaching and learning practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are inclusive pedagogical practices applied in classrooms for different groups of marginalised children (e.g., Children with Disabilities (CWDs))? How can this be improved? • How does the classroom environment support or impede inclusive and positive experience for children from all background (e.g., class size, student participation, seating arrangement, etc.)? How can this be improved? • Are teaching and learning materials suitable for different groups of marginalised children (e.g., CWDs)? How can this be improved?
3	Supports fostering an inclusive and positive schooling experience for marginalised children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What supports are available in and outside of schools for an inclusive and positive schooling experience for marginalised children? • What additional funding and resources are available for marginalised pupils? • What are schools' leadership, MBSSE, teachers, DDEs, peers doing to ensure inclusive learning for these groups? What support do they receive? • What support have teachers received from school leadership, MBSSE, DDEs, to make school/learning inclusive? • To what extent do schools have adequate infrastructural facilities (e.g., ramps, safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities) for these children? How does this vary across schools? • What support do parents provide to specific groups of marginalised children (e.g., CWD)?

Table 7: Detailed research matrix (continued)

	Area of inquiry	Core areas to assess
4	Pupils' safety in schools, biases and prejudices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the common safety issues (physical, psycho-social, emotional) faced by marginalised children in school? • Are there specific risks faced by certain groups of marginalised pupils (e.g., pregnant/parent learners, CWD, children from poorer backgrounds, etc)? • What actions have been taken to recognise unsafe factors in schools? • How do various school and community initiatives (e.g., Teacher Learning Circles etc.) contribute to addressing school safety issues?
5	Policies and systems Inclusive policies and their implementation, use of data, financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are stakeholders' perceptions (merits/demerits/gaps) to the existing policies on inclusion? (a look at how these policies play out in schools/classrooms) • To what extent are the policy statements in the National Policy on Radical Inclusion comprehensive and relevant to the types and needs of marginalised children? • To what extent are districts and local councils able to monitor implementation of inclusive policies in schools, principals and teachers in a decentralised set up? • What is the degree of autonomy districts and local councils have in taking key decisions around implementation of inclusive policies? • Is there a common understanding across actors on what inclusive education service delivery looks like? If so, what is it? • To what extent does the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL), districts, schools use evidence and data to take action on constraints to access for marginalised children? • Are schools adequately financed to support marginalised children? How does approval status affect funding?

Based on the research framework, the following three research tools were devised:



Challenges Tree drawn by pupils at Falaba

a) **Pupil Focus Group Discussion Tool** – This comprised of activities and FGD questions aimed at identifying insights into the multiple areas of enquiry detailed above. Each Pupil FGD had two parts to the discussion.

In the first part, pupils were asked to draw out challenges faced by marginalised learners at school level and community level. In order to de-personalise the challenges and make the FGDs more focused, the girls were divided into two groups and asked to draw a tree and mark its branches with the different challenges marginalised groups of pupils face in schools on one side and in their homes and communities on the other sides (not necessarily restricted to themselves).

In the second part, facilitators guided discussions centred around the particular challenges they faced and resulted in enriching insights. One pupil FGD was conducted in each school and typically lasted 90 minutes.

- b) **Community – Teacher Association (CTA) FGD Tool** – it focused on identifying comparable and contrasting insights from community and staff members, part of the school’s CTA. These were designed to be administered to a group of members comprising both community and staff members of the CTA.
- c) **Key Informant Interview (KII) Tool** – KIIs were aimed at getting in-depth insights on particular aspects of inclusion outlined in the research matrix above. A common tool was administered to district and national level key informants.

Sampling

This Radical Inclusion baseline study used in-depth school and pupil case studies to explore constraints to access and achieving an inclusive and positive schooling experience. Given the focus on children from rural and underserved areas, we “oversampled” rural schools. And we also purposively sampled only regular schools which had pupils from marginalised groups targeted by the Radical Inclusion Policy enrolled in them, and did not sample special schools. The sub-sections below detail the process of selecting a sample of respondents consulted for the study. This chosen approach to qualitative sampling is theoretically informed and pragmatically designed to generate responses from small numbers of individuals and groups that are representative (though not statistically representative) of groups relevant to the research question, and that allow some identification of heterogeneity, within the constraints of budget and time

Step 1: Selection of districts

As mentioned above, the unit of analysis of this study is a school. These schools were identified from three districts which were purposively sampled based on their learning performance levels. Roughly, the ranking of districts by pupil performance according to the Secondary Grade Learning Assessment (SGLA) conducted in 2019 is as shown below in Table 8.⁸

Table 8: SGLA district rankings, 2019

Ranking	Districts	Ranking	Districts
1	Western Rural	9	Kenema
2	Western Urban	10	Bonthe
3	Kono	11	Bo
4	Bombali	12	Kailahun
5	Moyamba	13	Pujehun
6	Koinadugu	14	Tonkolili
7	Port Loko	15	Falaba
8	Kambia	16	Karene

For the three districts, we picked one top performing and two poor performing districts. Ultimately, based on logistical and other considerations (Karene was already covered in a similar deep-dive study in 2020), Western Rural, Falaba, and Tonkolili were selected as the three districts in this study.

⁸ District rankings vary slightly based on whether we are looking at English or Maths, but Western Rural/Urban and Kono remain steady on top, and Falaba, Pujehun and Karene at the bottom in the SGLA

Step 2: Selection of schools

Once districts were purposively selected, we obtained the list of schools having reported presence of: (i) children with disabilities; (ii) pregnant learners; and, (iii) parent learners in these three districts from Leh Wi Lan district officers. Three schools were selected for each district considering the following factors:

- **Location** – all schools located 10 or more kilometres from the district HQ town, except in Western Rural (purposively selected schools in rural underserved areas).
- **Ownership** – a mix of Government (one school), Mission (six schools) and Community schools (two schools).
- **Financial support status** – both government-assisted (six schools) and unassisted schools (three schools).
- **Enrolment** – only co-educational secondary schools (JSS and SSS) were selected.
- **CTA** – only schools with a functional CTA were selected.

Two additional schools were also selected in each district as replacements.

Once school samples were shortlisted, school principals were contacted to reconfirm presence of four categories of marginalised children, and to check for availability of CTA members. One of the replacement schools was selected for the study in Tonkolili due to scheduling conflicts with an originally sampled school.

Step 3: Selection of pupils and pupils FGD

In each school, 6-8 female pupils were selected for FGDs. The girls were also purposively selected from among the four groups of marginalised children by informing principals in advance to arrange for such groups. However, we did not have FGDs with boys since pregnant and parent learners were an important group of interest and budgetary and logistical limitations meant we could not conduct an additional FGD with marginalised boys in each school. Another category of marginalised pupils we did not engage with in this study were out-of-school children due to similar limitations. The implications and mitigation measures have been addressed in the limitations section below.

Step 4: School staff and community members

The school staff and community members from each school were also consulted in an FGD. The FGD comprised 6-8 members comprising both community and staff members, with a balance of male and female members wherever possible. Members of the CTA represented the community, and the principal, vice principal, and guidance counsellor teacher represented staff members in the FGD.

Step 5: KIIs

KIIs were identified and interviewed at district- and national-levels. District-level KIIs included the Deputy Director of Education and the District Official in charge of Leh Wi Lan. National-level KIIs included senior officials from MBSSE and Leh Wi Lan who were interviewed in Freetown.



The respondents consulted are summarised in Table 9 below:

Table 9: List of stakeholders consulted

District	Marginalised pupils' FGDs		CTA FGDs			Key informants	
	No. of pupils	No. of FGDs	No. of school staff	No. of community members	No. of FGDs	No. of informants	No. of KIs
Western Rural	19	3	8	13	3	2	2
Falaba	21	3	8	12	3	2	2
Tonkolili	21	3	8	11	3	2	2
National	–	–	–	–	–	5	5
Total	61	9	24	36	9	11	11

Safeguarding protocols

The qualitative study involved collecting highly sensitive data from vulnerable participants (pupils and parents/caregivers) and the study ensured rigorous safeguarding protocols were followed. These have been summarised below.

1. Researcher selection and training

All field researchers were recruited from a pool of experienced staff who have worked on similar qualitative studies with Leh Wi Lan and have performed well in their previous engagements. All researchers were also required to read and agree to safeguarding policies and principles for practice at the time of accepting and signing their contracts. Two thirds of the researchers selected were women.

These researchers were then given a detailed three-day training which included modules on research ethics, safeguarding concepts and practices, as well as role-play sessions on responding to different scenarios they may encounter on the field.

2. Informed consent and anonymity

All participants were made to understand their participation was voluntary and that their identities and the information shared would be kept strictly confidential. Pre-defined consent instructions were read out to all participants in their respective languages. All adult participants were also made to sign a consent form. For children, written consent was obtained from the school Principal (or school in-charge, where unavailable) while verbal assent was obtained from each child prior to beginning discussions. A zero-tolerance policy on coercion was instituted to ensure all participation was voluntary. No video recording of interactions was permitted, and all discussions were only audio recorded after seeking a separate consent/assent from respective participants.

3. Safeguarding and reporting mechanisms

The following mechanisms were put in place to prevent and report any safeguarding violations that occur during the research:

- **Safeguarding report in debrief calls** – during the fieldwork phase, daily debrief calls were instituted between field researchers and research leads. As part of these debrief calls, dedicated time was allocated to discuss any safeguarding incidents or concerns observed.
- **Vulnerability-sensitive language** – all researchers were instructed to use sensitive language while referring to vulnerable participants while translating into Krio and other languages used by participants. All instructions were conveyed by reading out pre-defined texts which used gender-neutral and sensitive language while referring to vulnerable participants.
- **School-level protocols** – in order to prevent safeguarding violations from the research staff, all workstations were set up with two field researchers and always in easy sight of adult members of the school. There was a strict prohibition on taking pictures, videos, or personal contacts of pupils.
- **Reporting violations** – a Safeguarding Officer was designated among the research leads and their contact information was shared with other researchers and school principals to report any violations.

4. Data security

In order to mitigate risks related to data breaches and storage issues, such as loss of recording devices, all devices were safely stored and secured in the research office after fieldwork. All researchers were instructed to keep interview recordings and notes securely and within their sight/on them all the time. All recordings and transcripts were stored digitally on encrypted systems with strict access control. A data deletion protocol was also in place once research outputs were submitted.

Data analysis

This sub-section outlines the methodology used for analysing data collected from the qualitative study and presenting findings in subsequent sections of the report.

Step 1: Daily debriefs and preliminary analysis

A key part of the fieldwork was daily debrief calls between the field research teams and lead researchers. The aim was to conduct thorough debriefs and undertake an initial analysis of themes emerging from the field. Detailed debrief reports were also completed by all three sub-teams for each interaction undertaken (Pupil FGD, CTA FGD, and KII). This process helped to discuss any interesting findings and emerging issues.

Step 2: Transcription

The second step was the transcription process. All qualitative interviews were audio recorded and these voice recordings were transcribed to English by professional transcribers.

Step 3: Synthesis of findings

The debrief reports and transcripts from the study were then analysed thematically along an agreed methodological framework, aligned with the policy statements of the Radical Inclusion Policy. It followed an iterative and reflexive process so that the final report could reflect the reality and nuances obtained from the field. These insights were then layered with relevant findings from the literature review and secondary data analysis (wherever available) to anchor the report in the broader literature and policy monitoring context.

The data analysis framework has been summarised in Table 10. Each thematic area was analysed for constraints and supports to policy implementation.

Table 10: Data analysis thematic framework

Level of Inquiry	Primary Theme	Sub-Themes
School	1. Create inclusive learning environments in schools (Policy Statement 1)	1.1. School Access 1.2. School Safety 1.3. Financial support and other financial considerations 1.4. Teaching and Learning
	2. Target support to vulnerable learners in schools (Policy Statement 2)	2.1. Customised support 2.2. Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices on Radical Inclusion Policy 2.3. Comparative experiences among marginalised groups
Community	3. Engage families and communities in inclusion (Policy Statement 3)	3.1. Stigmas, Norms, Customs and Cultural Practices 3.2. CTA/SMC engagement on inclusion
Policy	4. Create an enabling policy environment (Policy Statement 4)	4.1. Institutional structures (National, Regional/District, Local) 4.2. Socio-political environment 4.3. Macroeconomic and financial considerations

Step 5: Report writing

In order to maintain anonymity of respondents, the following codes are used to denote the schools and type of marginalisation group a pupil belongs to.

Table 11: School and pupil codes

Codes	Description	Codes	Description
WR1, WR2, WR3	Three schools in Western Rural District	CWD	Child/Children with Disabilities
FL1, FL2, FL3	Three schools in Falaba District	LIH	Pupil from Low-income Household
TK1, TK2, TK3	Three schools in Tonkolili District	RUA	Pupil from Rural or Underserved Area
PPL	Pregnant or Parent Learner		

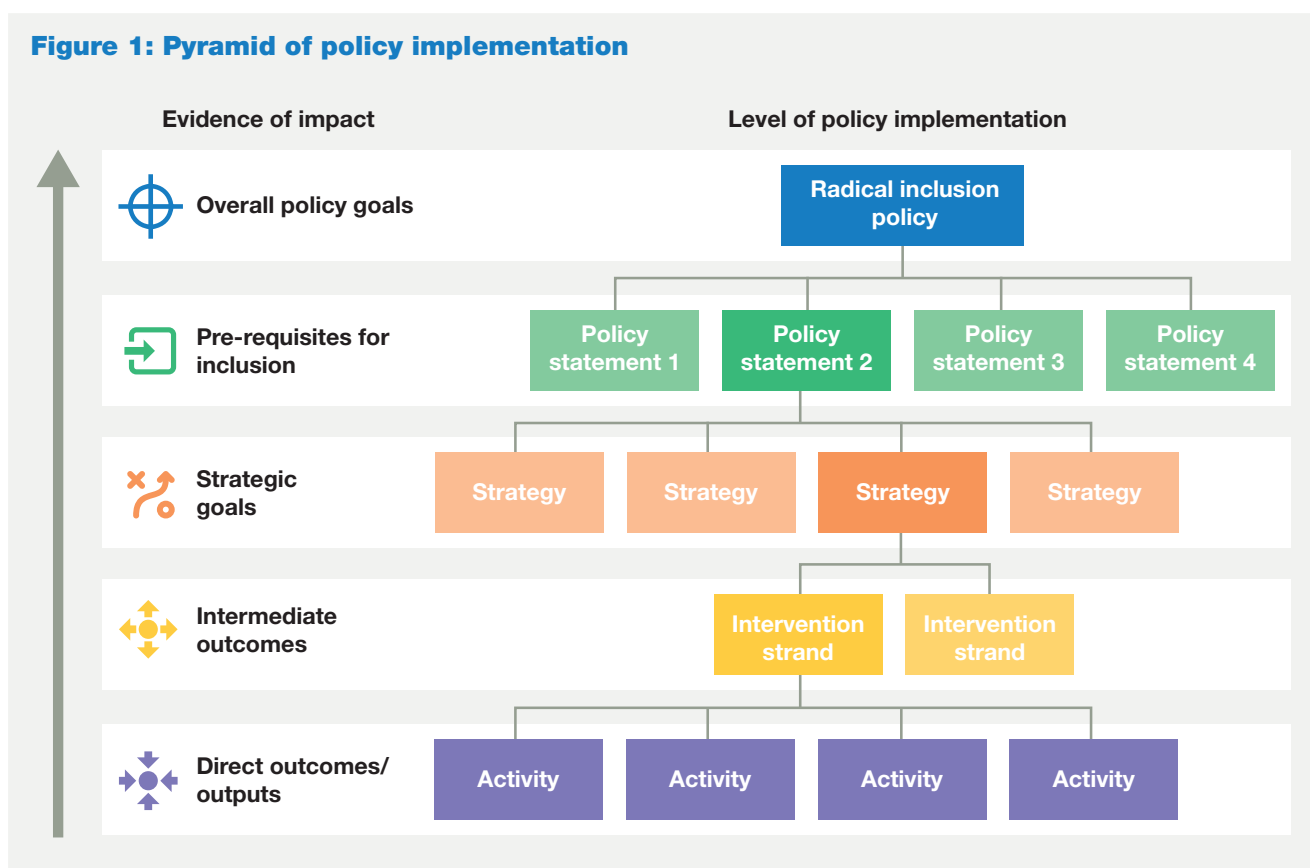
The findings from the qualitative study are organised into three chapters corresponding to the level of inquiry. Thus, findings relevant to policy statements 1 and 2 are combined into a single chapter reporting at the school-level (Chapter 4). Similarly, findings at community (Chapter 5) and policy level (Chapter 6) also are separate chapters of their own.

2.3 Systematic assessment of implementation plan

The baseline study undertook a systematic assessment of the validated final implementation plan⁹ of the policy to verify the validity of its constituent intervention strands and report on data elements needed to monitor their progress. In light of acknowledging inclusion as a process, it was important to validate the constituent elements of the policy's implementation plan on achieving objectives of Radical Inclusion. This was done through a four-step systematic assessment of the intervention strands of the implementation plan. Annex 2 details out this systematic assessment.

Step 1: Delineating intervention strands by the three dimensions of inclusion

The draft implementation plan of the policy has identified 50 intervention strands which comprise a total of 257 activities/interventions which the Government intends to implement over the next five years. These intervention strands map to 16 broad strategies aimed at achieving the four policy objectives of the Radical Inclusion Policy. These comprise the overall theory of change for Radical Inclusion in Sierra Leone, as has been shown in the pyramid of policy implementation in Figure 1 below.



It was decided to focus on the intervention strand as the basic element for assessment since it is the level at which the implementation plan seeks to identify measurement indicators. We then applied our theoretical framework on each intervention strand of the policy implementation plan.

In the first step, we identified 36 intervention strands out of the 50 which had a direct link to the three dimensions of inclusion namely, access, connectedness, and achievement. The remaining intervention strands were mainly administrative in nature and only indirectly linked with dimensions of inclusion, thus were not included in the systematic assessment. Moreover, typical indicators for these intervention strands were primarily binary yes/no in nature or were highly subjective to measure in a systematic way.

9 MBSSE, "National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools: Implementation Plan 2021-26" (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, May 2022), <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/MBSSE-Radical-Inclusion-DIGITAL.pdf>.

Step 2: Inducing underlying hypothesis and assumptions of intervention strands

The next step involved identifying the underlying theory of change of how each intervention strand (and its constituent set of activity outputs/outcomes) would lead towards achieving the overall strategic goals. It involved identifying the implied hypothesis of each intervention strand and its underlying assumptions which need to hold to be successful. This process was undertaken using a theory-based inductive process. It resulted in each intervention strand shortlisted having a relevant implied hypothesis and key assumptions linked to its constituent activities.

Step 3: Mapping relevant findings from baseline study which supports or weakens hypotheses

The third step was to map the relevant findings from the baseline study to each intervention strand which either supports or weakens the implied hypothesis and assumptions. This process supported validating each intervention strand on its ability to affect inclusion.

Step 4: Identifying additional data elements for monitoring progress

The final step involved identifying additional data elements needed to measure progress for each intervention strand. It also suggested relevant data sources, either existing or those which needed to be introduced in order to measure these elements. However, the report has not gone into the details of identifying individual indicators and providing baseline values against them for two reasons:

- a) **Data reliability issues** – the present data in the ASC uses self-reported estimates at school-level, which had certain reliability issues and have been explained further in 3.2 later in the report.
- b) **Data collection capacity constraints** – in light of reliability issues, the existing data collection capacity constraints limit the ability to collect activity and intervention strand-level data. Hence, it was felt that the Government should prioritise certain data elements which could be reliably collected and have been detailed in 3.1 later.

2.4 Limitations

Access to relevant secondary data: The objective of the secondary data analysis was to understand the type of data and indicators available in MBSSE's EMIS on marginalisation in order to report relevant baseline estimates for Radical Inclusion. The ideal situation was to directly access the EMIS to get a first-hand understanding of the data available, as well as its various data analysis and reporting features which could support the MBSSE in tracking and analysing the Radical Inclusion Policy implementation. However, direct access to the EMIS did not materialise and instead, the research team only had access to data sets from the ASC. The datasets did not have data disaggregated on various parameters of interest (such on disabilities, to school-level, distance from district HQ/ Town etc.). Consequently, the analysis has not been more rigorous beyond reporting cumulative estimates which were available in ASC reports and data extracts obtained from secondary sources.

Qualitative study's alignment with Implementation Plan: The draft implementation plan for the Radical Inclusion Policy provides detailed strategies and interventions that the MBSSE intends on undertaking over the next five years. However, the draft implementation plan was not available at the time of designing primary data collection tools and instruments and could not be tailored to its specific strategies. Consequently, the qualitative study was more broadly designed to align with the policy's statements, and focused on understanding the constraints and supports to inclusion of marginalised groups of children at the school, community, and policy/systems level.

Qualitative sampling and generalisability: Due to budgetary constraints, an extensive sample survey to collect quantitative data on key performance indicators could not be undertaken to provide an accurate baseline, and the study was restricted to undertaking desk-based research and a small qualitative study. Given these constraints, like much qualitative research, this study is based on a relatively small sample of schools. Selection of schools was purposive, aimed at including schools with particular characteristics, rather than representative of all schools in the three districts (or the country as a whole). The very purpose of the study was to understand the challenges marginalised pupils face in getting a quality schooling. The risk of visiting atypical schools and gaining an incorrect or incomplete understanding of the relevant processes remained, but was mitigated by visiting several schools in different districts and by paying close attention in the analysis to ways in which the context of each school may be atypical.

Structured and unstructured research instruments: Qualitative research uses instruments (interviews or discussion guides, observational tools, etc.) which are generally less structured than those used in quantitative research, leaving scope for the interviewer and respondent to shape the research. For example, the interviewer can ask further questions that occur to her, in response to an interesting or unexpected response. This helps capture unexpected impacts or explanations but makes qualitative findings hard to reproduce and subject to researcher bias. We managed this limitation by using a mixture of relatively structured methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews and FGDs). While the dialogue may be unstructured, the researchers applied standard methods in recording and analysing the discussion, for example, through application of structured analysis framework organised by thematic categories for notetaking, and use of the research matrix to provide a framework for analysing the research. A reflective approach, with a discussion about findings at the end of each day was intended to reduce bias from individual researchers as much as possible. But qualitative research inevitably involves greater application of the researchers' (and participants') own perspectives, and this more embodied, personal approach compared to quantitative research should be seen as a strength as well as potential limitation.

Language issues: Interviews were mostly conducted in Krio, Temne, and (in some cases in Falaba) Fula and Kuranko. Sierra Leonean researchers were selected on the basis of having extensive experience of working in the study districts. The research team performed preliminary analysis of the findings at the end of each day based on their interview notes and observations, but the bulk of the analysis was conducted by the international analysts after completion of data collection. Conversations were recorded and transcripts translated to aid full analysis. However, there is some risk of inaccurate or incomplete translation in this process. The inclusion in the team of a majority of researchers who were fluent in at least both Krio and English were essential in managing this risk. Researchers were mindful of the need for precision in interpretation in the field and discussed amongst each other to ensure clear shared understanding of emerging findings.

Presence of report authors in the field: Due to travel restrictions and budget limitations, the primary authors of this report could not participate in the fieldwork, and relied extensively on the external research team sub-contracted for the project. While the research team comprised highly experienced researchers who had done exceptional work previously with Leh Wi Lan, the absence of the report authors during the primary data collection process may also limit the necessary contextual and unmeasurable locational understanding that helps enrich qualitative analysis. However, it may also be viewed as a strength since the report authors have wholly relied on transcripts and debrief notes, which reduces any implicit bias.

CTA FGDs with community and staff members held together: It is normal practice to have CTA FGDs in which community members and school staff are interviewed separately. Such separate discussions help both parties speak more freely about issues that are critical of CTA functioning. However, due to the limited number of schools sampled and logistical constraints, it was decided to have combined discussions involving both types of members. In order to mitigate this issue, the co-facilitator/note-taker was instructed to observe participants and note down any particular points they felt certain members were reluctant in sharing and were instructed to follow-up with them informally after the discussion and record relevant points in their debrief notes.

Primary data collected only from girl pupils: Although the Radical Inclusion Policy is aimed at all marginalised pupils, this study only collected primary data from marginalised girls in schools. It did not collect views from marginalised boys in schools nor perspectives of out-of-school children (both boys and girls) due to budgetary and logistical limitations. However, to mitigate the apparent one-sidedness of responses, the research team consciously sought to get the girls' perspectives on barriers and constraints on boys and other out-of-school children during pupil FGDs. Moreover, the CTA FGDs had specific questions on members' perceptions on impact on boys and out-of-school children also.

Baseline undertaken only in secondary schools: This Radical Inclusion study was conducted under Leh Wi Lan only in junior and senior secondary schools in Sierra Leone due to scope limitations of the programme. Consequently, the qualitative findings are centred around marginalisation in secondary schools. However, the baseline assessment methodology and monitoring protocol has been detailed out with the intention that MBSSE and/or its partners may find it easy to replicate in primary schools as well, to get a comprehensive picture of marginalisation and inclusion in all schools of the country.

03

DATA FOR MONITORING
INCLUSION

This chapter provides quantitative perspectives to support the commitment to implement the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools by ensuring it is evidence based. It uses the framework of three dimensions of inclusion in achieving the goal of quality learning for all learners in Sierra Leone namely, access, connectedness, and achievement, with a special focus on the four groups of marginalised learners. It is comprised of two parts:

The first part of this chapter provides an overview of existing data elements available to identify the four marginalised groups and measure their inclusion on its three dimensions namely, access, connectedness, and achievement. It also reports on the baseline values and trends observed on these elements.

The second part highlights certain weaknesses in data reliability from these elements observed presently. It also provides certain recommendations to improve quality and reliability of data which can enable the MBSSE to better plan and monitor inclusion.

3.1 Existing data on inclusion

The Radical inclusion Policy requires data elements from two areas at minimum to monitor effectiveness of the policy: (i) identification of children from four marginalised groups; and, (ii) data on the three aspects of inclusion namely Access, Connectedness and Achievement. This sub-section reports on indicators currently available with the MBSSE, specifically the ASC data extracted from the EMIS. In case this is not available, alternate data sources are referenced to provide indicative ways to estimate values for relevant indicators.

3.1.1 Membership of marginalised groups

The four groups of marginalised pupils according to the policy are: children with disabilities; parent and pregnant learners; children from rural and underserved areas; and, children from low-income households. The ASC data contains data on children with disabilities and pregnant learners while it does not report on parent learners, children from rural/underserved areas, low-income households.

This sub-section provides number of children in the different groups from different data sources; the ASC (where data are available) and other datasets (where data are unavailable). It uses enrolment as the indicator to denote membership of a particular group. It also lists the levels at which disaggregation available in the ASC dataset for reporting group membership numbers. Some typical disaggregated data is also reported below.

A. Children with disabilities

The ASC reports on five types of disabilities: hearing, learning, physical, speech, and visual disability. The estimates on enrolment of pupils by different types and across different years have been reported below.

Source: Annual School Census.

Disaggregation Available: By Disability Type, By School Level, By Gender, By District.¹⁰

1.5% of children enrolled in school are identified with some form of disability. Globally, estimates for childhood disability are around 10%, suggesting that there may be significant numbers of children with disabilities not in school in Sierra Leone, and/or not identified in school (UNICEF, 2021).

Table 12: Enrolment of children with specific types of disabilities by schooling level and gender (2020)

School Level	Visual		Hearing		Speech		Physical		Learning		ALL	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Pre-Primary	86	82	135	126	286	253	135	125	131	129	773	715
Primary	3,191	2,816	3,121	2,921	3,010	2,374	2,486	2,064	2,743	2,884	14,551	13,059
Junior Secondary	1,534	1,543	1,027	824	489	377	800	536	1,023	1,133	4,873	4,413
Senior Secondary	513	415	283	277	98	118	404	275	381	396	1,679	1,481
Total	5,324	4,856	4,566	4,148	3,883	3,122	3,825	3,000	4,278	4,542	21,876	19,668
	10,180		8,714		7,005		6,825		8,820		41,544	

Source: Annual School Census Reports.

¹⁰ UNICEF, "Nearly 240 Million Children with Disabilities around the World," UNICEF UK, November 10, 2021, <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/nearly-240-million-children-with-disabilities-around-the-world-unicefs-most-comprehensive-statistical-analysis-finds/>

Figure 2: Enrolment of children with specific types of disabilities by schooling level in 2020

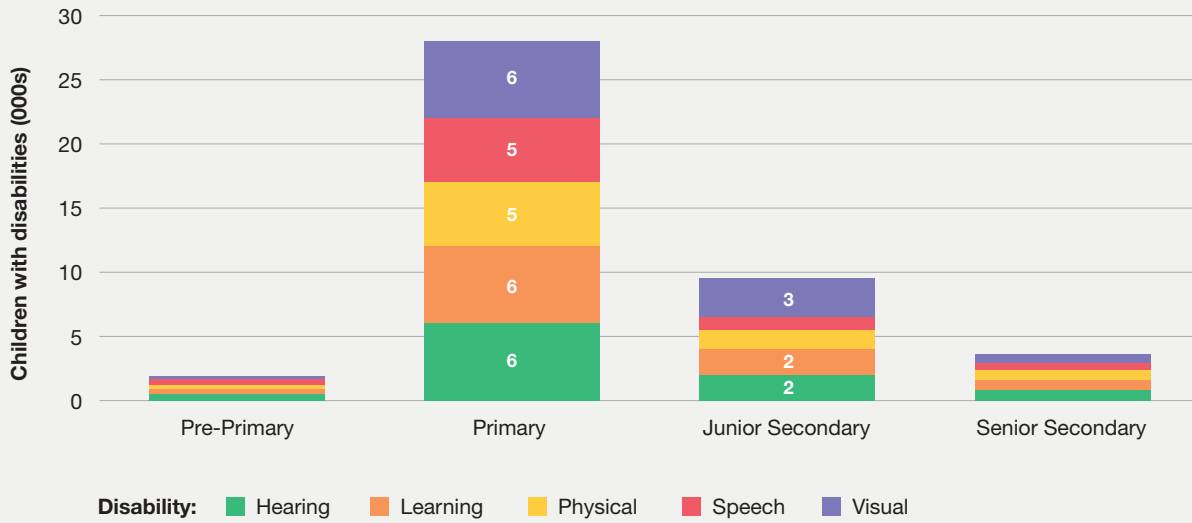


Figure 3: District-wise enrolment of children with disabilities in 2020

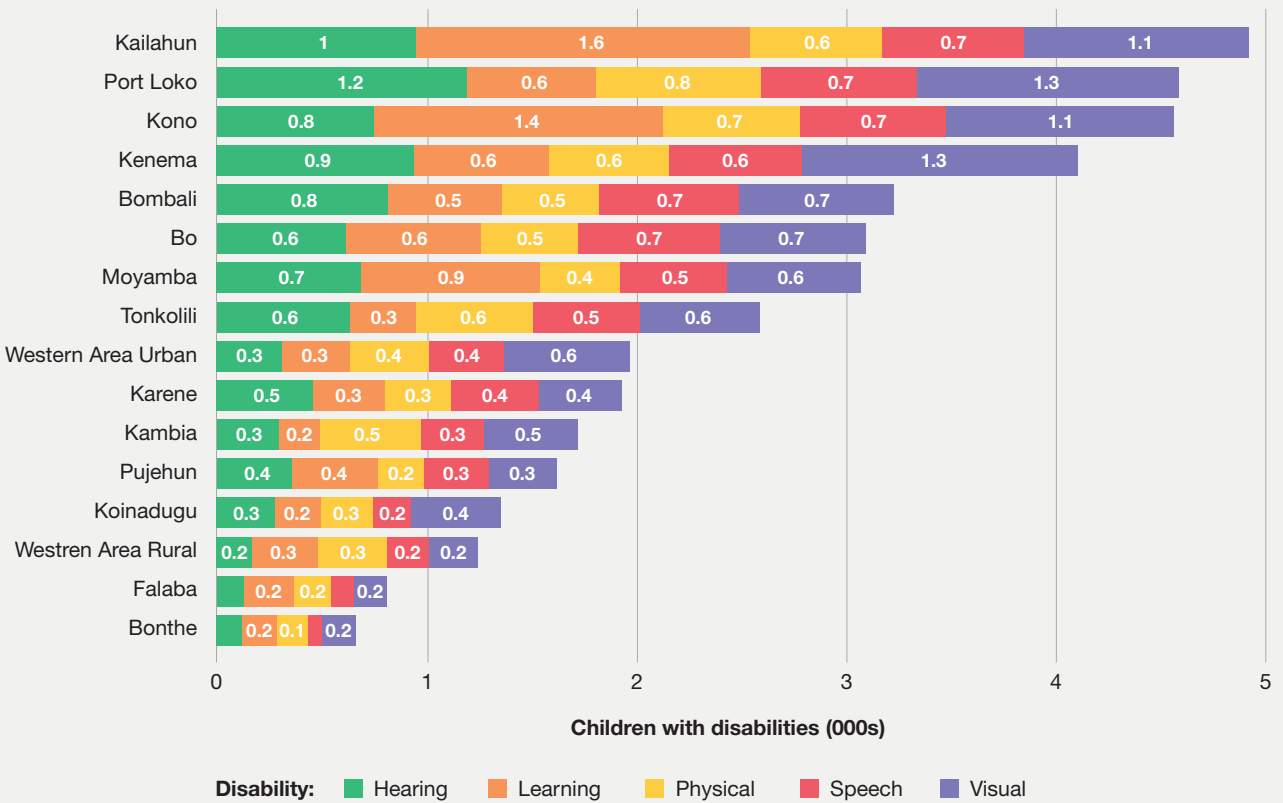
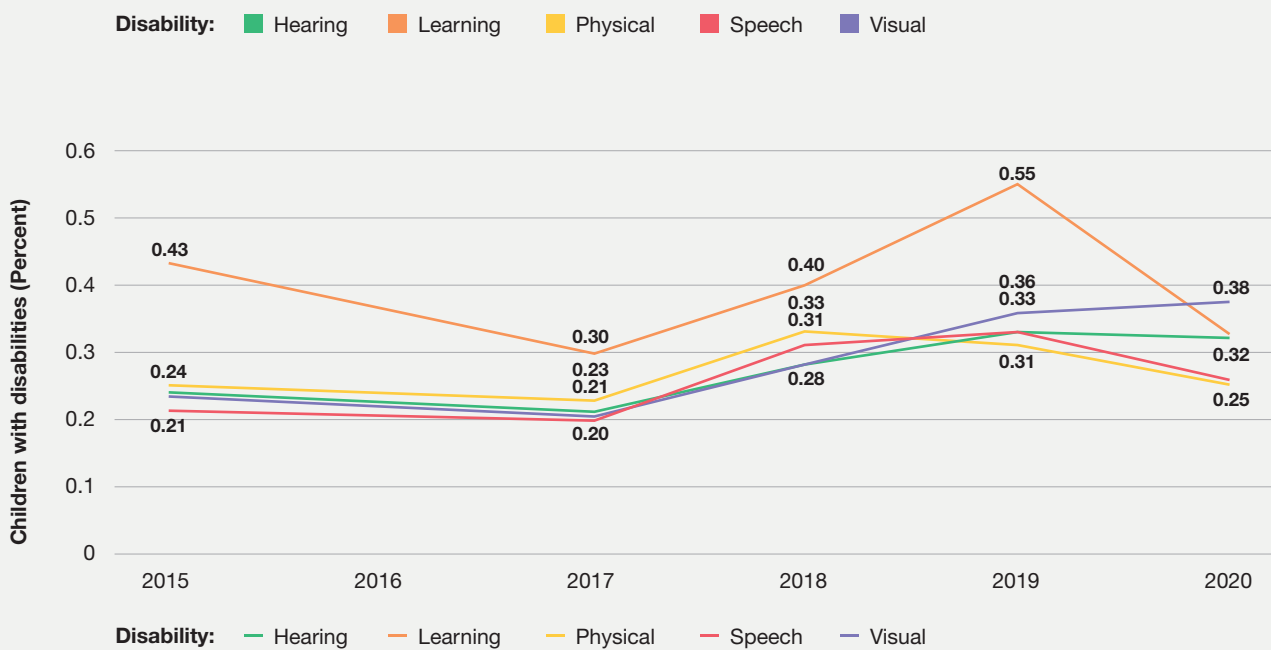
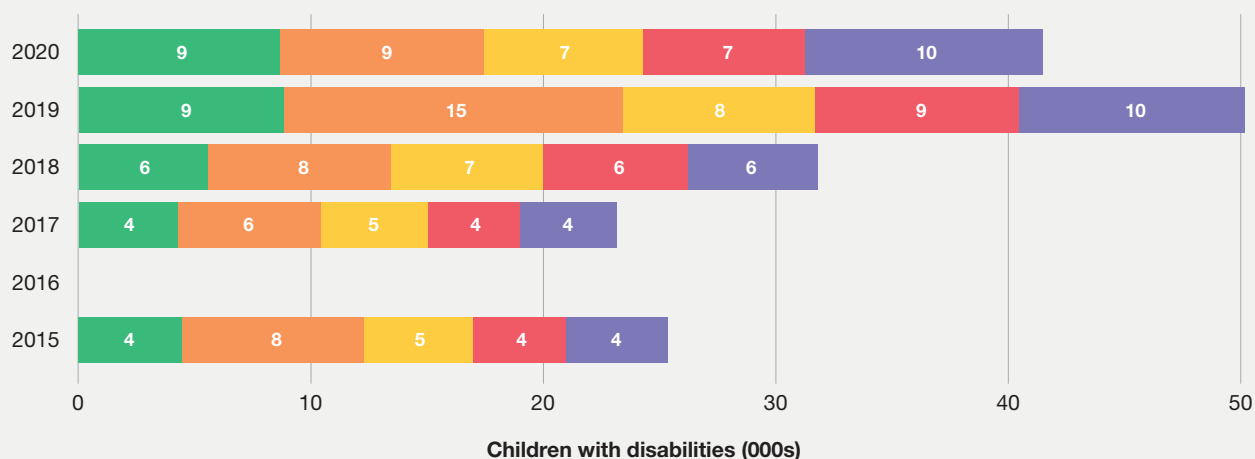


Figure 4: Trends in enrolment of children by type of disabilities (2015-20)



B. Pregnant learners

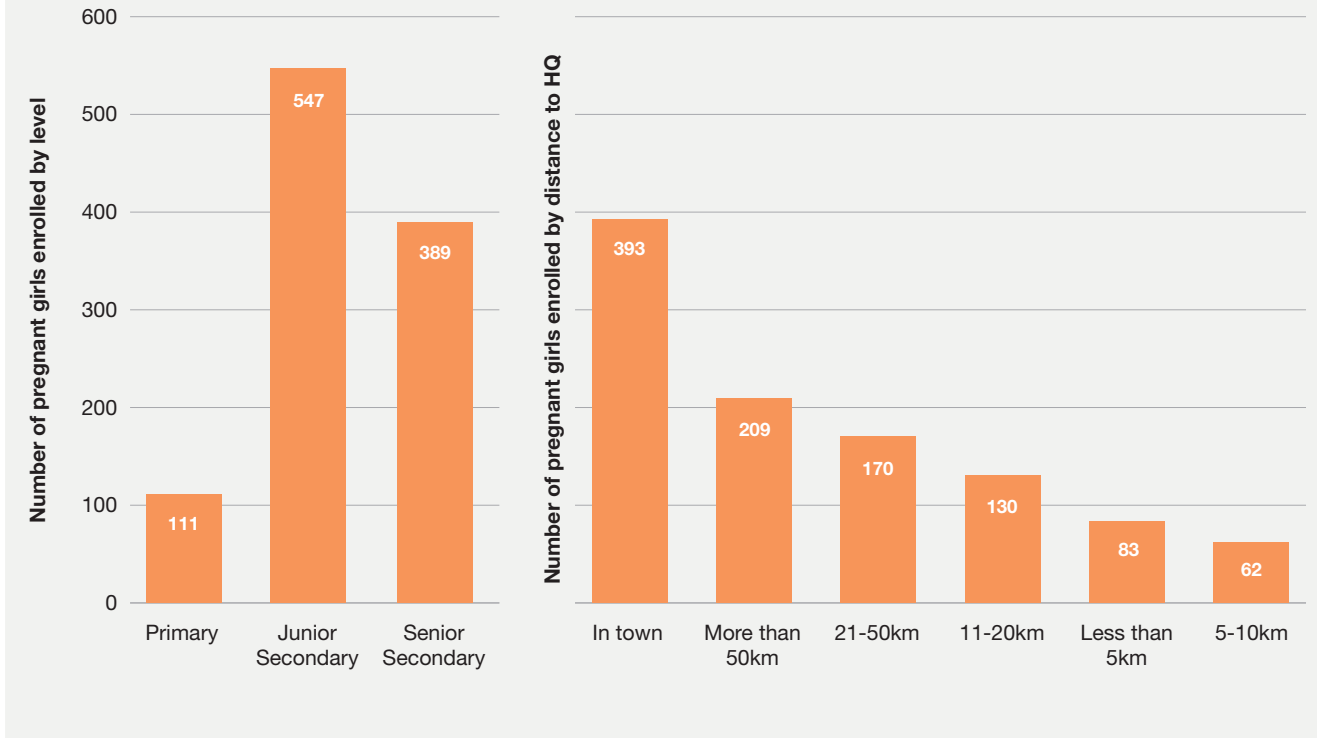
Pregnant learners’ enrolment numbers have been captured in the ASC and are reported below.

Source: Annual School Census.

Disaggregation Available: By School Level, By District.

3.4% of all schools reported presence of pregnant girls.

Figure 5: Pregnant girls enrolled by school level and location (2020)



C. Parent learners

Data on parent learners were not reported in the ASC report and unlikely to be present on the EMIS. Alternative data on parent learners using household surveys and census data are presented below.

Source: Sierra Leone Demographic & Health Survey, 2019 (Representative only at National Level).

Disaggregation: By Age, By District.

In Sierra Leone, **21%** of women aged 15 to 19 years have begun childbearing – 18% have already given birth and 4% are pregnant with their first child.

Proportion of teenagers giving birth rises rapidly with age – from 4% at age 15 to **45%** by age 19.

Rural teenagers are more than **twice as likely** to have started childbearing than urban teenagers (**29%** versus 14%).

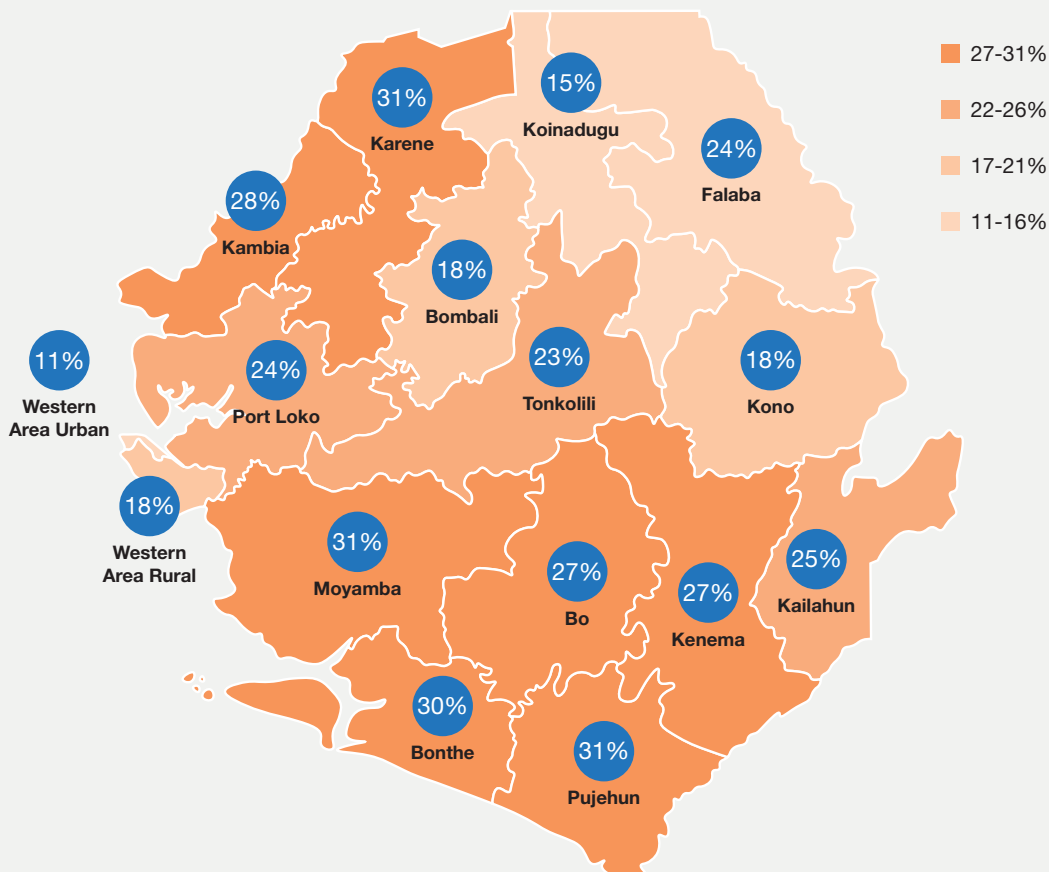
Note: This data does not represent how many teenage mothers were in schools and can be obtained by analysing DHS data (which was not done as part of this assessment, since only the overall sample is nationally representative and additional disaggregated data may not be so).

Table 13: Proportion of teenage mothers in Sierra Leone

Background characteristic	Percentage of women who age 15-19 who:		Percentage who have begun child bearing
	Have had a live birth	Are pregnant with first child	
Age			
15-17	6.6	2.7	9.3
15	2.2	2.2	4.3
16	8.6	2.1	10.7
17	10.8	4.2	15.0
18	28.1	5.3	33.4
19	40.5	4.4	44.9
Residence			
Urban	12.6	1.7	14.4
Rural	23.5	5.6	29.2

Source: Demographic and Health Survey Report, 2019.

Figure 6: District-wise distribution of teenagers (15-19) who have begun childbearing



D. Children from rural and underserved areas

The MBSSE has not categorised any geographic regions as rural or underserved in the ASC. Two proxy indicators are used to interpret underserved areas: (i) Accessibility of Schools; and, (ii) Distance to HQ.

Source: Annual School Census.

Disaggregation: By School Level, By District, By Gender, Pregnant Girls, Children with Disabilities.

Accessibility of schools

66% of schools are easily accessible for people without mobility impairment.

‘Easily Accessible’ schools are defined as schools which can be reached easily by road, cars, bicycles, motorcycles, and by foot. However, it does not explicitly reflect accessibility of these schools for children with disabilities. Island schools are easily accessible by boat. A school can belong to only one category i.e., a school on ‘rough terrains’ cannot also be ‘Not accessible by road’.

Table 14: Distribution of schools by accessibility (2020)

School level	Easily accessible	Island	Not accessible by road	Rough terrains
Pre-Primary	1,486	6	6	258
Primary	4,021	72	37	2,890
Junior Secondary	1,238	10	3	349
Senior Secondary	562	4	4	88
Total	7,307	92	50	3,585

Source: Annual School Census Reports.

Distance to HQ¹¹

44% of all schools are in the District HQ town and comprise 48% of all school enrolments. According to the national census, 59% of the population lives in rural areas and could imply rural populations do not have enough school places.

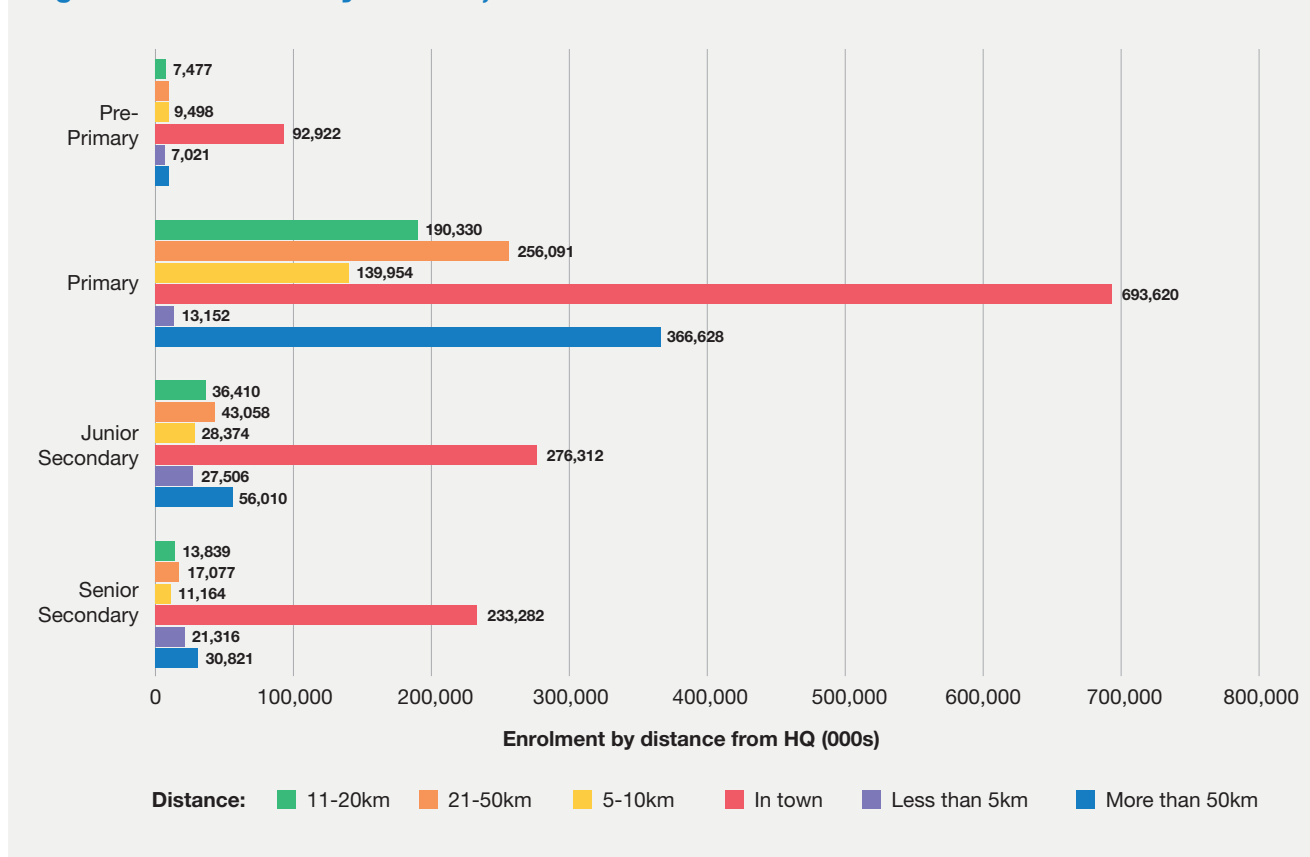
11 Stats SL, “2015 Population and Housing Census: Summary of Final Results,” Census Report (Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone, December 2016), https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/final-results_-2015_population_and_housing_census.pdf

Table 15: Distribution of schools by distance to HQ town

School Level	In town	<5Km	5-10Km	11-20Km	21-50Km	>50Km
Pre-Primary	1,173	95	124	94	125	145
Primary	2,454	472	563	847	1,115	1,569
Junior Secondary	849	97	121	153	177	203
Senior Secondary	434	37	32	46	49	60
Total	4,910	701	840	1,140	1,466	1,977

Source: Annual School Census Reports.

Figure 7: Enrolments by distance, school level



E. Children from low-income households

The ASC does not have data on pupils' household characteristics, such as income. Household survey datasets provide an estimate of proportion of households with low-income and further analysis of the primary data is needed to get estimates of number of children in poverty. Hence, only household level proportions are reported here.

Source: Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey, 2018.

Disaggregation: By District.

56.8% of households in Sierra Leone live in poverty– 73.9% in rural areas versus 34.8% in urban areas.

There is great disparity in **'Extreme Poverty'** – 19.9% in rural areas versus 3.8% in urban areas.

Disparity is lesser in terms of **'Food Poverty'** – 59.5% in rural areas versus 48.0% in urban areas (excluding Western Area, it becomes 59.5% versus 57.1% in other urban areas) – indicating that although rural areas are much poorer overall, they are no worse than urban areas in terms of food consumption.

Figure 8: Poverty rates and numbers by sector

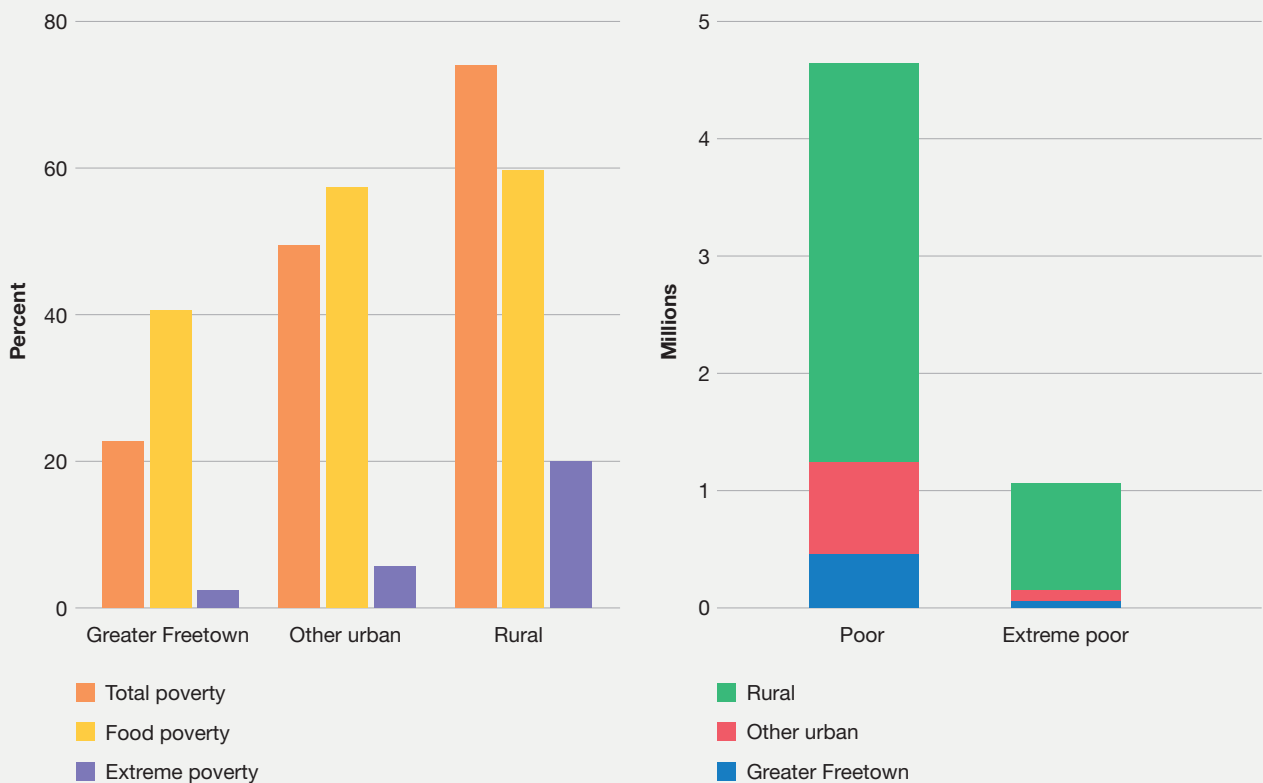


Figure 9: Total poverty rate by district

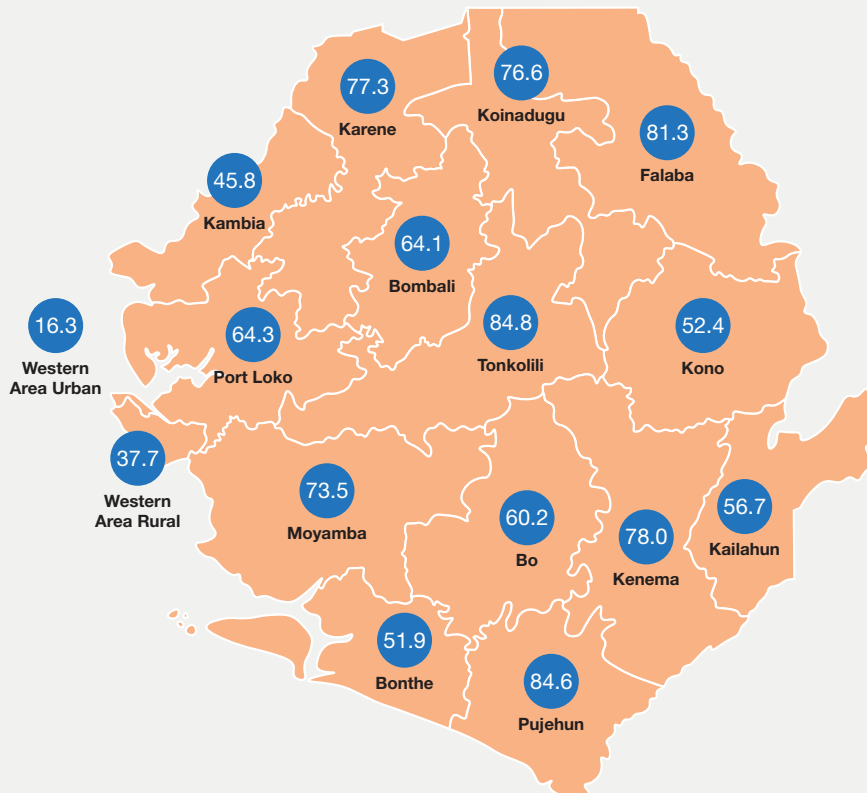
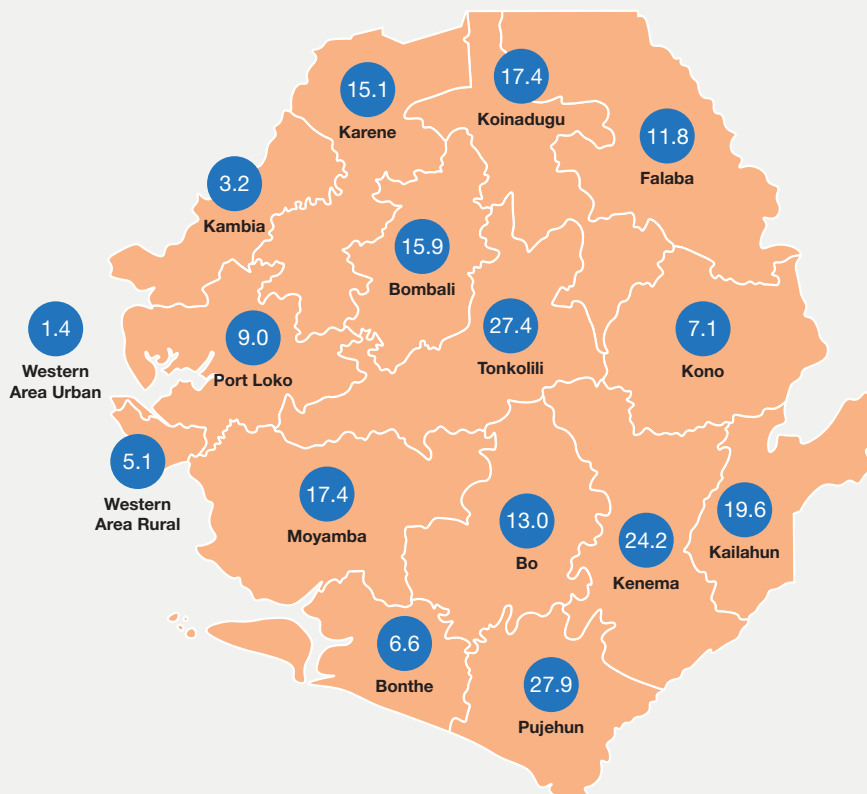


Figure 10: Extreme poverty rate by district



3.1.2 Inclusion of marginalised learners

This sub-section outlines what the data reveals on how inclusive Sierra Leone's education system is for marginalised groups. It focuses on the outcomes along the three dimensions of inclusion namely, Access, School Connectedness, and Achievement.

A. Access

Access refers to how easily marginalised pupils are able to reach schools regularly. It is important to go beyond actual enrolments in schools (which has been covered in the previous sub-section) and focus on enrolment rates that is, proportion of pupils who ought to be enrolled in a given age-group in schools. Enrolment rates are the number enrolled divided by the number who could be enrolled. Low enrolment rates show a low rate of access outcomes.

The ASC provides national level estimates on enrolment rates through two related indicators: (i) Gross Intake Rates; and, (ii) Gross Enrolment Rates.

Source: Annual School Census.

Disaggregation: By Age Group, Gender.

Gross Intake Rate

Gross Intake Rates are used to measure entry into a particular level of education. It is defined as the ratio of total number of new pupils enrolled in the first grade of a level (all pupils minus repeaters) to the projected population of that particular age group. The ASC uses UN Statistics Division's national level population projections to estimate the population for different age groups. Disaggregation by marginalised group members is not available.

Table 16: Gross Intake Rate (%)

School level	Intake age	2018			2019			2020		
		Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Pre-Primary	3 years	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	22.3	24.7	23.4
Primary	6 years	162	171	166	217.1	222.4	219.8	192.3	198.6	196.0
Junior Secondary	12 years	61	60	60	74.8	72.6	73.7	79.8	80.1	79.5
Senior Secondary	15 years	37	34	36	46.6	43.5	45.1	78.5	72.2	74.9

Source: Annual School Census Reports.

Gross Enrolment Rate

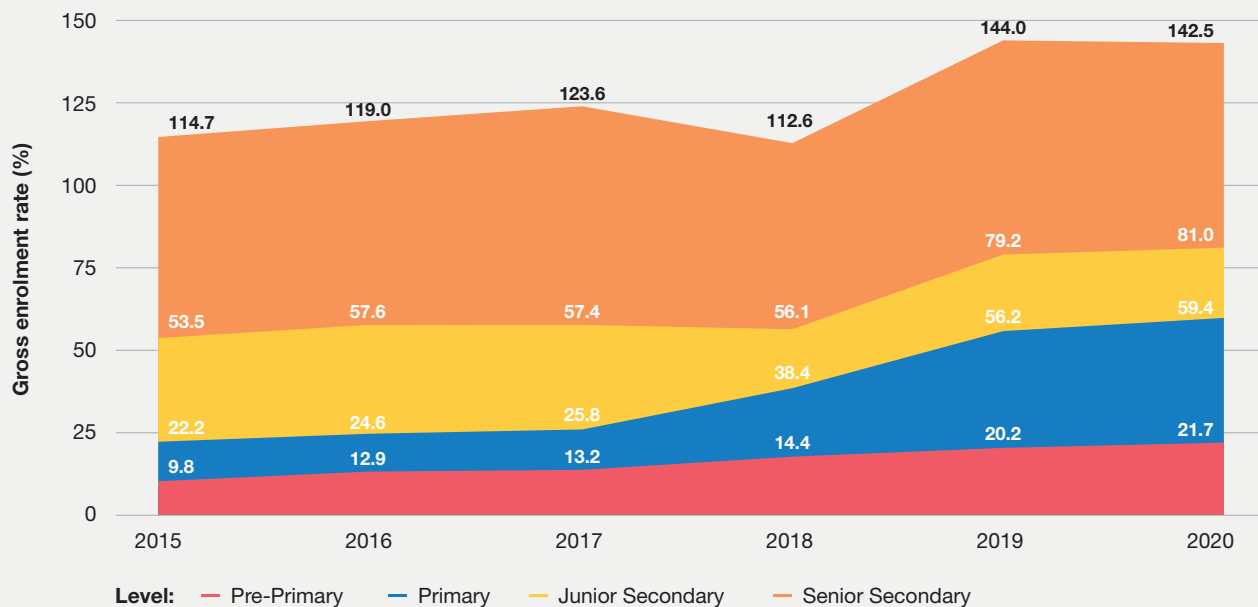
Gross Enrolment Rate refers to the proportion of total pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, to the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. It provides a measure of how many children are in a particular level in relation to the population of that age group. Disaggregation by marginalised group members is not available.

Table 17: Gross Enrolment Rate (%)

School level	Age group	2018		2019		2020	
		Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Pre-Primary	3-6	11.4	12.6	18.3	20.3	19.5	21.6
Primary	6-12	108.2	107.4	137.0	140.2	134.9	139.0
Junior Secondary	12-15	62.6	60.4	77.0	76.7	77.4	78.5
Senior Secondary	15-18	29.4	25.7	58.5	54.5	60.7	57.5

Source: Annual School Census Reports.

Figure 11: Gross enrolment rate trends for girls



B. School connectedness

School Connectedness refers to the idea of a pupil feeling accepted, respected, and safe at school and of the pupil feeling that teachers care about their learning and respond to them as an individual. An outcome indicator on connectedness requires pupil-level data on school experiences. However, the ASC and the EMIS does not collect pupil-level data, thus such a measure is not available. Two related set of indicators which can measure school connectedness are: (i) school-related sexual and gender-based violence; and, (ii) Internal Efficiency indicators like Retention rate, transition rate, and gross completion rate.

School- related sexual and gender-based violence (SRGBV)

SRGBV encompasses psychological, sexual, emotional, and physical violence against pupils in school and on their journey to schools, and extends to include threats or actual acts of physical violence, bullying, non-consensual touching, and even rape. SRGBV can adversely impact a pupil's experience in school and their feeling of being connected with their peers and teachers. ASC started reporting on SRGBV in 2020. However, it only captures information which schools report to have been recorded. It does not have details on perpetrator background either (e.g.,: teacher, pupil, other community member etc.).

Source: Annual School Census.

Disaggregation: By District, By Incident.

A total of 141 schools reported 157 such cases according to the ASC 2020.

Internal efficiency indicators

School retention is an important outcome indicator to verify inclusion. The level of School Connectedness could influence whether a child remains in school throughout their years of schooling and does not drop out. There are three relevant indicators on internal efficiency which are available in the ASC. In all three indicators, the level of disaggregation is only available by gender.

Source: Annual School Census.

Disaggregation: By Gender.

- a) **Gross Completion Rate (GCR)** refers to number of pupils in the last grade of a particular level minus repeaters over the population of the relevant age group. The higher the GCR, the lesser the number of children who drop-out and is thus, a good indication of school connectedness. The GCR uses population projection data from the UN's Statistics Division. GCR has risen significantly, but gaps between boys and girls have remained steady.

Table 18: Gross Completion Rate (%)

School level	2018*			2019			2020		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Pre-Primary	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	16.3	18.1	17.2
Primary	77	79	78	79.6	79.7	79.6	83.0	84.6	83.8
Junior Secondary	49	48	49	68.9	68.1	68.5	73.9	73.8	73.9
Senior Secondary	19	16	18	45.2	41.7	43.5	45.2	43.2	49.3

Source: Annual School Census Reports. *Between 2013-2018, Senior Secondary was from SS1 to SS4 (SS1 to SS3 from 2019 onwards) and so data from 2018 is not strictly comparable.

- b) **Retention Rate** is an indicator used to refer to pupils continuing on at school from one level to the next. The ASC Report specifies retention as the ratio of enrolment of pupils in the last grade of a particular education level to the first grade of that level. It has been reported for Primary (Class 6 over Class 1 enrolments), JSS (JSS3 over JSS1 enrolments) and SSS (SS3 over SS1 enrolments). The higher the retention of pupils, the greater they feel connected with school. Since this indicator is a ratio of two enrolment numbers, it can be disaggregated into sub-national values.

Table 19: Retention rates by school-level (%)

School level	2018*			2019			2020		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary 1 to Primary 6	52	53	53	32.4	32.0	32.2	38	37	38
JS-1 to JS-3	75	72	73	74.7	76.7	75.7	87	86	87
SS1-SS3	50	45	47	81.4	81.2	81.4	59	61	60

Source: Annual School Census Reports. *Between 2013-2018, Senior Secondary was from SS1 to SS4 (SS1 to SS3 from 2019 onwards) and so data from 2018 is not strictly comparable.

- c) **Transition Rate** is an indicator used to identify the rates at which students are moving from one level of education to a higher-level of education (such as from Primary to Junior Secondary or Junior Secondary to Senior Secondary). The ASC calculates it as the ratio of Gross Intake Rate of the higher-level of a particular year and the GCR of the lower-level of the previous year. This indicator needs population-level data and is available only at national-levels. Transition rates improved significantly between 2018 and 2020, but gaps between boys and girls increased slightly.

Table 20: Transition rates by level (%)

School level	2018			2019			2020		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary 6 to JS-1	92	90	91	97.5	92.3	94.9	96.9	98.1	97.6
JS-3 to SS-1	68	67	67	94.3	91.2	93.0	112.2	106.3	109.2

Source: Annual School Census Reports.

C. Achievement

The third dimension of inclusion is Achievement of marginalised pupils in overall improvement of learning outcomes across areas of the curriculum, and not just test scores. A truly inclusive schooling system helps improve their outcomes of the head, hand and heart¹² that is, better cognitive competencies, improved life and vocational skills, and maturity in their socio-emotional development. Presently, the education system measures outcomes on two kinds of outcomes, both of which are related only to cognitive competencies. These are: (i) learning outcomes; and, (ii) learning inefficiencies as measured through repetition rates.

a) Learning outcomes

Sierra Leone has three major examinations administered at the end of a school level – NPSE (Primary), BECE (Junior Secondary) and WASSCE (Senior Secondary) conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC). In all three examinations, the only disaggregation currently available relevant to marginalised groups is by gender.

National Primary School Examination (NPSE)

The number of candidates writing and passing the NPSE examinations have been increasing consistently in the past few years, with boys performing slightly better than girls, on average. Since the examination uses standardised T-scores and an unchanged aggregate pass score, the pass rates have always been around 76%. In NPSE 2021, a total of 124,541 students passed the exams and the overall pass rate was 77% with slightly more boys passing than girls, resulting in a Gender Parity Index (GPI) for exam passes of 0.98.

Figure 12: NPSE candidates, graduates, pass rates and gender parity

Year	NPSE pass rates (%)		GPI
	Boys	Girls	
2014	78	75	0.96
2015	77	74	0.96
2016	76	74	0.97
2017	80	78	0.98
2018	80	78	0.98
2019	76	77	1.02

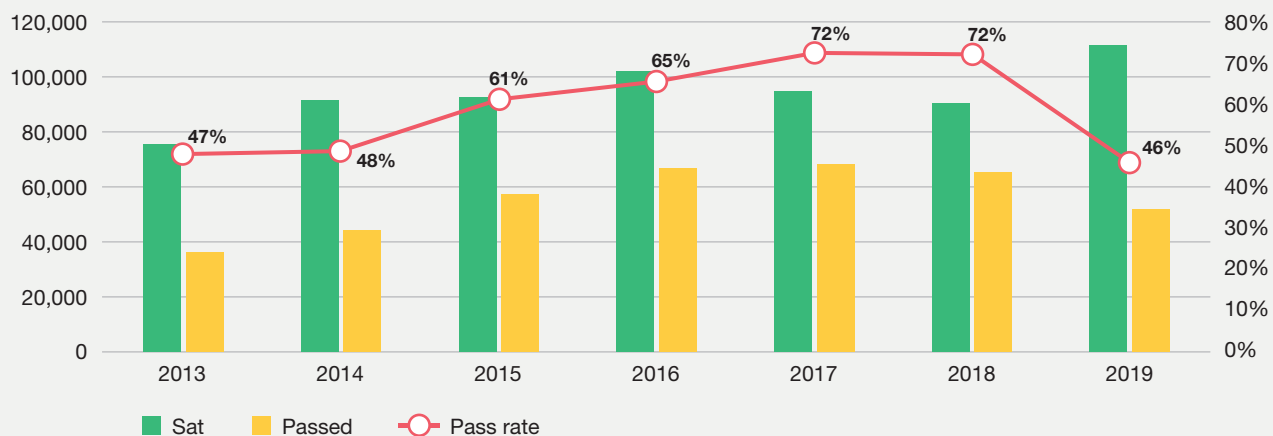
Source: Sierra Leone Education Sector Analysis (UNESCO-IIEP, 2020).

Basic Education Certification Examination (BECE)

BECE is administered at the end of Junior Secondary and signals the completion of basic education. The pass rates drastically came down in 2019 following strict invigilation following reports of examination malpractice. However, in subsequent years this has improved with pass rates of 69.2% in 2020 and 78.61% in 2021. The GPI for BECE shows that boys have consistently performed better than girls at these examinations, although the gap has been narrowing in recent years. The GPI in 2020 was 0.95 and in 2021 it was 0.98.

12 Senka Gazibara, “‘Head, Heart and Hands Learning’ – A Challenge for Contemporary Education,” *Journal of Education Culture and Society* 4, no. 1 (2013): 71–82, <https://doi.org/10.15503/jecs20131.71.82>

Figure 12: NPSE candidates, graduates, pass rates and gender parity (continued)



Year	NPSE pass rates (%)		GPI
	Boys	Girls	
2014	51.4	45.2	0.88
2015	63.6	58.2	0.91
2016	67.8	62.6	0.92
2017	75.0	69.6	0.93
2018	74.2	69.4	0.94
2019	48.0	44.4	0.92

Source: Sierra Leone Education Sector Analysis (UNESCO-IIEP, 2020).

West African Senior Secondary Certification Examination (WASSCE)

WASSCE the senior secondary school certification examination administered at the end of the third year of Senior Secondary school. WASSCE pass rates drastically came down in 2019 following strict invigilation after reports of examination malpractice. In subsequent years this has improved to historic highs, with pass rates of 38% in 2020 and 64% in 2021. In 2021, a record number of candidates scored five or more credit marks in any subjects (the minimum requirement for a degree programme).

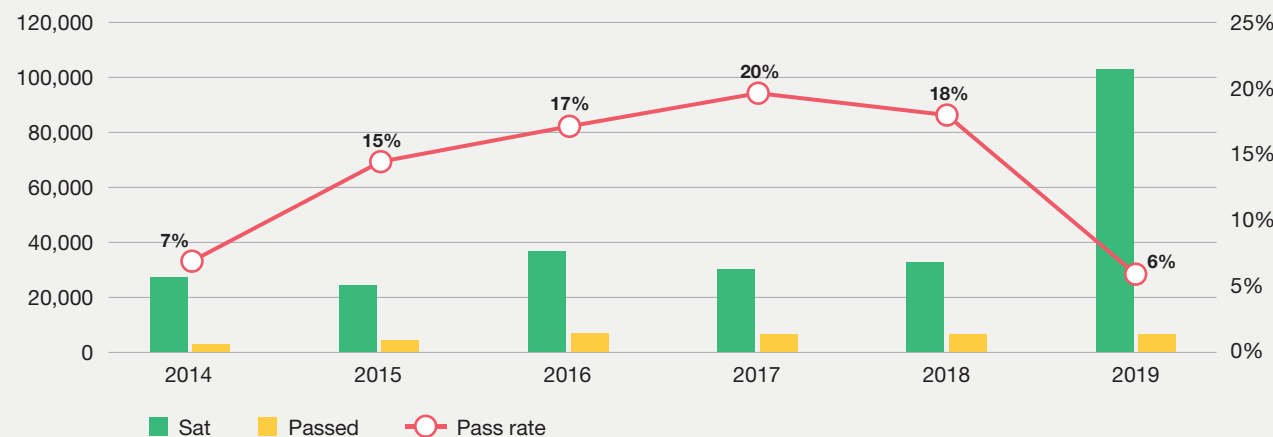
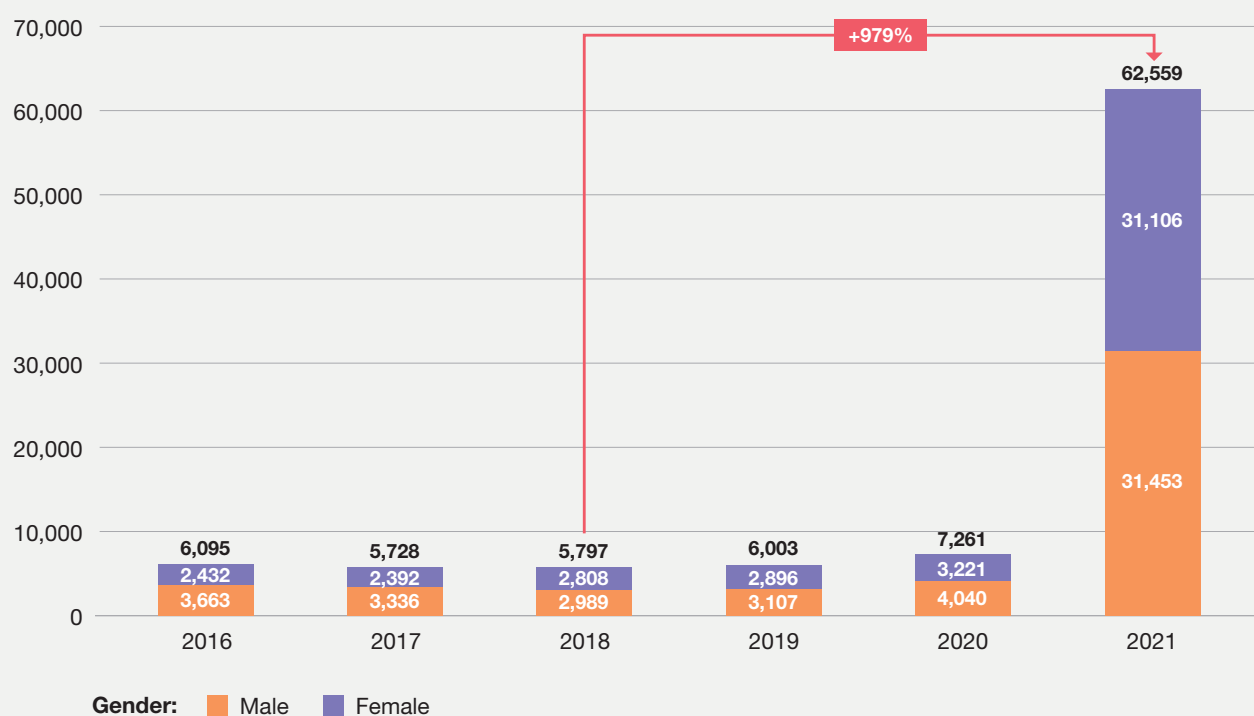


Figure 12: NPSE candidates, graduates, pass rates and gender parity (continued)

Year	NPSE pass rates (%)		GPI
	Boys	Girls	
2014	7.9	6.2	0.8
2015	14.5	14.7	1.0
2016	17.9	15.7	0.9
2017	20.1	19.0	0.9
2018	17.6	18.4	1.0
2019	5.8	5.9	1.0

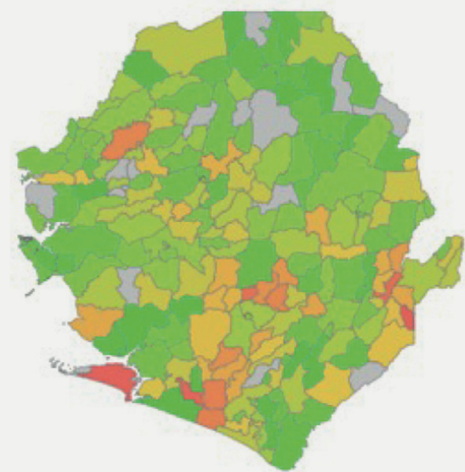
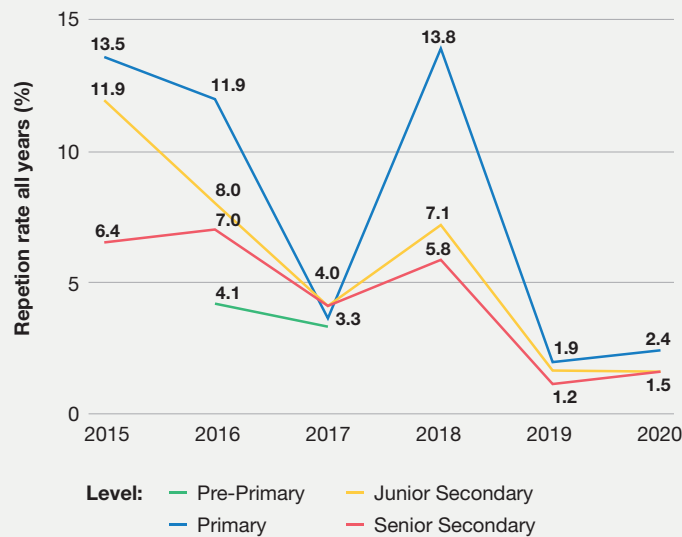
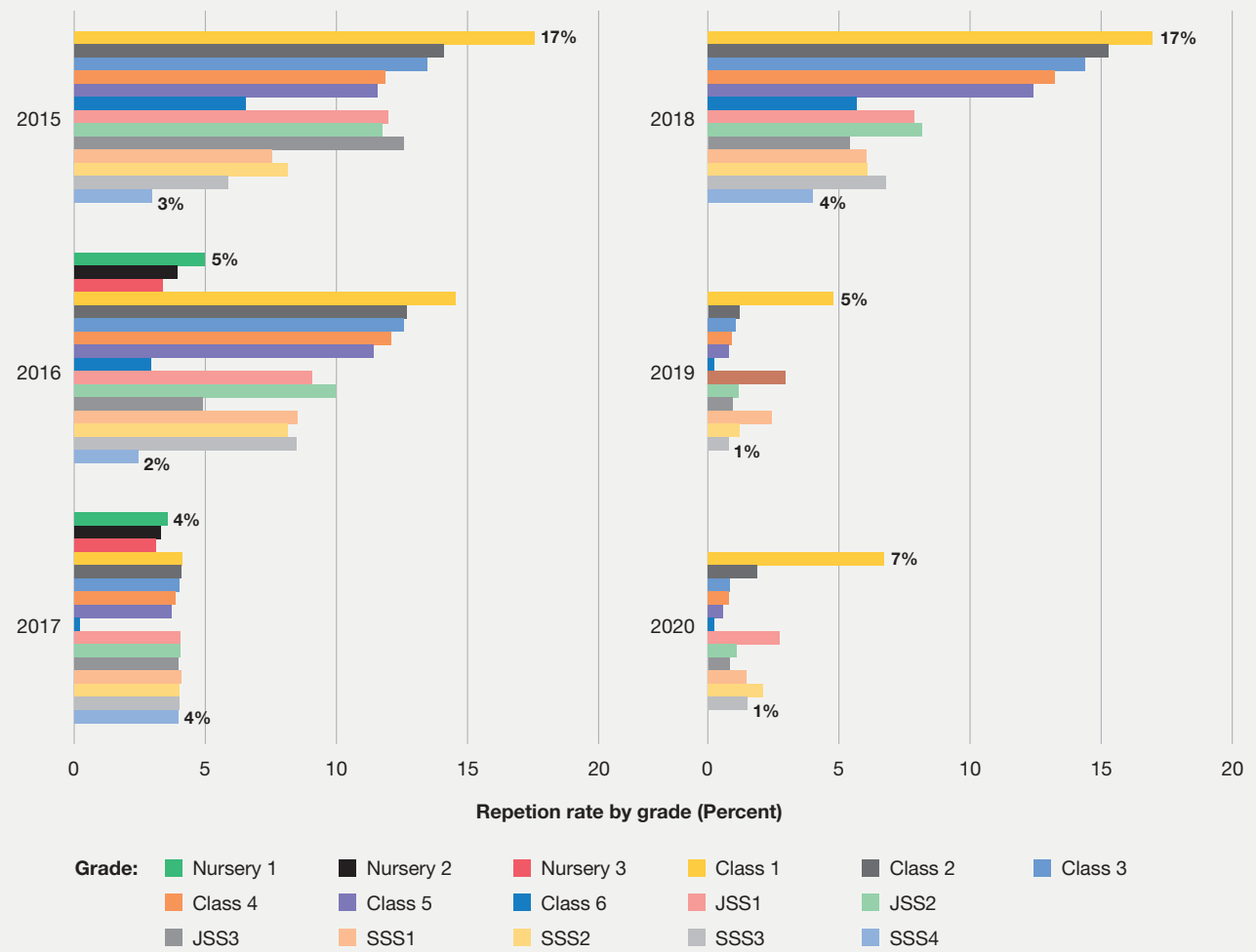
Source: Sierra Leone Education Sector Analysis (UNESCO-IIEP, 2020).

Figure 13: Benchmark score (5 credits or better in any subjects)


b) Learning inefficiencies and Grade repetition rate

Grade repetition negatively affects school connectedness. A child who does not reach the minimum standards expected from a particular grade tends to fall back in their learning and can have a demoralising effect on them that may have long-term consequences. Repetition rates are currently disaggregated only by gender and not available by marginalised groups. Major improvements in grade repetition, especially for primary school girls, were seen in 2019 and 2020.

Figure 14: Grade repetition rates for girls



Repetition rate by Chiefdom (2020)

3.2 Improving government education data

This section highlights the current indicators available from MBSSE data on the areas of: (i) identifying marginalised groups of pupils; and, (ii) measuring their extent of marginalisation. It analyses these indicators on their reliability and relative ease in collecting data and presents the strengths and challenges in these measures for analysis and education planning. It also provides some suggested short-term alternatives to improve measurement accuracy.

The tables below identify which areas the research team concluded were useful for monitoring the impact of the policy on marginalised pupils. Table 23 outlines which types of data are easiest to collect and most reliable. (See additional recommended data in Section 7.)

Table 21: Number of pupils in marginalised groups

Indicator	Baseline value	Data source
1. Number of children with disabilities enrolled in schools	41,544 (1.5% of all enrolments)	ASC, 2020
2. Number of pregnant girls enrolled in schools	1,047 (0.08% of all girls enrolled)	ASC, 2020
3. Number of teenage parents	18% of girls aged 15-19 years are mothers	DHS, 2019
4. Number of low-income households	56.8% of households (73.9% in Rural v 34.8% in Urban)	SLIHS, 2018
5. Number of rural households	63.1% of all households	SLIHS, 2018
6. Number of schools in underserved areas	(i) 33.8% schools are not easily accessible (ii) 41.5% schools are more than 10Km away from district HQ	ASC, 2020



Table 22: Extent of inclusion in Sierra Leone

Indicator	Baseline value				Data source
	Pre-Primary	Primary	JSS	SSS	
Access					
1. Gross intake rate	23.40%	196%	79.50%	74.90%	ASC, 2020
2. Gross enrolment rate	21.60%	139%	78.50%	57.50%	ASC, 2020
School Connectedness					
3. School-related SRGBV cases recorded	141 cases	ASC, 2020			
4. Gross completion rates	17.20%	83.80%	73.90%	49.30%	ASC, 2020
5. Retention rates	–	38%	87%	60%	ASC, 2020
6. Transition rates	–	–	97.60%	109.20%	ASC, 2020
Achievement					
7. Pass rates in national exams (NPSE, BECE, WASSCE)	–	77.00%	78.61%	63.57%	NPSE, 2021; BECE, 2021; WASSCE, 2021
8. Grade repetition rate	–	2.54%	1.60%	1.60%	ASC, 2020

Table 23: Data collection strengths and weaknesses for priority learner groups

Priority learner group	Availability of data in ASC	Reliability of data	Difficulty of collecting accurate pupil level data
Girls	●	●	Straightforward
Children with disabilities	●	●	Difficult due to stigma and unidentified disabilities
Pregnant girls	●	●	Difficult due to stigma
Rural/underserved	●	●	Straightforward
Teenage parent	●	N/A	Straightforward despite potential stigma
Low income	●	N/A	Difficult

Key: ● Available/Reliable ● Indirectly available/Moderately reliable ● Unavailable/Unreliable

3.2.1 Overall reliability of existing data

The existing data collection systems of MBSSE relies almost exclusively on **school-level, self-reported data**. While this provides a quick and cost-efficient means of collecting education data, in the absence of robust data verification mechanisms, they risk being unreliable. The inherent risks of relying on such data is that if an indicator is not considered important, the data collected may have arbitrary values.¹³ However, if the data are used for budgeting school grants and subsidies (such as enrolment headcounts), evidence suggests schools systematically overreport these numbers in order to maximise resources at school level.¹⁴

Another challenge for school-level data collection is that of overlaps in marginalisation, that is **children who are members of one marginalised group will often be members of other marginalised groups**. Children with disabilities often have multiple disabilities. Children from low-income families may have disabilities, be from rural areas, and may, of course, be girls. Children who are parent learners may be from low-income families. Moreover, the study found all estimates to be self-reported by schools and carry the inherent risks outlined above if used for budgeting purposes.¹⁵

Counting marginalised groups separately provides overestimates – counting the number of pupils in each marginalised group targeted by the inclusion policy separately is likely to provide significant overestimates of the total number of children in schools and, more importantly, will reduce understanding of their complex needs and issues.¹⁶ These present challenges in accurately analysing extent of marginalisation in schools for efficiently planning interventions. The issue of multiple membership shows the importance of collecting pupil-level data wherever possible rather than reports of the number of children in each group at school-level.

-
- It is recommended to establish a robust system to verify school-level estimates data to overcome their reliability challenges.
 - The ASC can be used as an opportunity to validate data rather than collect school-reported estimates, which can be done routinely by MBSSE. It is recommended to redirect enumeration budgets to try out validation exercises from a representative sample of schools.
 - Enumerators may be trained to collect sample pupil-level data also to create a quality dataset on inclusion outcomes
 - Schools have the capacity to submit school-level estimates directly to MBSSE – either submitting to District Offices for data entry into the EMIS or in the future, enter directly once they have tablets through the ‘One tablet per school’ programme.
-

¹³ For example, data on CWDs at school level varies drastically year on year, which seem quite unlikely.

¹⁴ See for instance MBSSE (2020) “Positive Deviance among Sierra Leone’s Secondary Schools”, Education Partners Group (2020) “Systems-Level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone”.

¹⁵ At present, the Annual School Census collects data at a school level from school estimates of the counts of pupils in each one of a number of apparently discrete categories – female, pupils with a disability and so on.

¹⁶ Multicollinearity is the technical term when we analyse data sets in which some of the variables correlate with each other. This can lead to results that incorrectly (in magnitude, significance or direction) identify the relationship between one of the variables and the factor of interest. The relatively low frequency of some of these groups (children with disabilities by age, for example) will only add to these difficulties.

3.2.2 Membership of marginalised groups

Identification by gender is available and reliable. The ASC provides for disaggregation by gender for all pupil-related indicators such as enrolment, disability etc.

Identification of disabilities is available but not reliable. Identification of disabilities presents challenges whether through self-identification or observation. As explained later in 6.1.1, given the lack of a standardised way of identifying pupils with disabilities observed presently, this data is often not reliable.

Identification of pregnant learners is available but not reliable. The ASC reports on number of pregnant learners by education-level and by district/local council. The baseline study uncovered issues surrounding its timeliness, added compliance, and stigma faced by learners in reporting, and is also explained in 6.1.1.

Identification of parent learners is unavailable but is straightforward. The ASC does not report on parent learners. However, this is a more straightforward measure to define and collect data on.

Identification by rural or underserved area is not clearly available but is straightforward. The ASC reports on school accessibility and distance from district HQ town. On accessibility, it is unclear how the different categories are defined and are mutually exclusive.¹⁷ While distance from HQ indicator is clear, the implicit assumption that the further away a school the more rural/underserved it is, need not always hold true. Additionally, the ASC also does not report on whether a school is rural or urban.

However, designating areas as rural¹⁸ or underserved (or both) is a straightforward process and can be done centrally, although this has a risk of including small numbers of well-served children in these areas.

Identification of children as being from low-income families is not available and is challenging. Presently, the ASC does not report on pupils belonging to low-income families. The readily available alternative is to use definitions of poverty from Statistics Sierra Leone used in their Integrated Household Surveys¹⁹ or the Multi-Indicator Cluster Surveys.²⁰

However, measuring this indicator presents further challenges since it may require the school, the children, or their parents to be able to compare their situation with that of others.²¹ Moreover, household surveys often rely on an enumerator's judgment of the household income²² and do not provide census-level numbers of the total number of poor households in a school's catchment areas. Furthermore, these surveys do not identify individual households and only provide data representative at the national and/or province levels.

But on the whole, these estimates of low-income households are more accurate and reliable compared to school-level self-reported estimates for education planning purposes. They provide representative data at sub-national levels, offer a reliable benchmark on eligible households, and are less prone to over-reporting as they are collected independent of the MBSSE.

17 Four categories are 'Easily Accessible', 'Island', 'Not accessible by road', 'Rough terrains' and presently, a school can only belong in one category. The ASC provides no definition of each category and how it has ensured these categories are mutually exclusive – it is possible that a school is on rough terrain and does not have road access.

18 Stats SL defines urban areas as regions with more than a certain number of inhabitants (2000 inhabitants in the 2003-04 Household Survey) and areas which are not urban are defined as rural.

19 Stats SL's SLIHS (2019) measures poverty using consumption expenditure estimates and categorises it into three types – (i) Total Poverty (ii) Food Poverty and (iii) Extreme Poverty.

20 Stats SL's MICS (2017) defines a wealth index through information on the household assets, and is intended to produce a ranking of households by wealth, from poorest to richest.

21 In large-scale surveys, children are sometimes asked about the presence of various household assets that are associated with greater or lower income.

22 In some contexts, whether or not a child has some form of government subsidy can be used as an indicator of being from a low-income family. In other contexts, it is possible to use geo-coding of a pupil's address to link with census data about the average household income for houses in the neighbourhood.

- **Disability Certificates for CWD** – It is recommended that GoSL institute and implement a mechanism for screening for children at point of care as mandated by the Disability Act 2011, in collaboration with Ministry of Health, and provide children with disability certificates. These are most credible means of identifying CWDs with lesser subjective biases.
- **Defining and Collecting data on Parent Learners** – MBSSE can define parent learners and collect data on them. This will help in planning for school-based childcare provisions.
- **Designate rural and underserved areas** – MBSSE may adopt definitions of rural and underserved areas centrally. This may be informed by the catchment area planning being undertaken as part of implementation of the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy rather than relying on proxy indicators like ‘Distance from HQ’ and ‘School Accessibility’.
- **Low-income benchmark from household surveys** – rather than identify pupils individually as belonging to low-income households, MBSSE will get a more reliable estimate on regional distribution of children in poverty using Stats SL’s household survey data.

3.2.3 Measuring three aspects of Inclusion

There are three aspects of Radical Inclusion for a child who is a member of one or more marginalised groups:

- Does this child go to school at all or return having dropped out? (**Access** – measured by **enrolment** rates).
- Is school a good place for this child? Does the child remain in school? (**School connectedness and retention** – measured by **School Connectedness-related psychometric indicators** and Retention rates).
- Does this child achieve and learn through attending school? (**Achievement** – measured by Learning Outcomes).

A. Measuring access

Measuring the rate of **Access** for children in marginalised groups through enrolment rates requires good data surrounding:

- the number of children in the marginalised groups in the total population by age and gender; and,
- the number of children enrolled in school who are members of the marginalised groups by age.

Enrolment rates are the number of pupils enrolled in school divided by the population of school children. Low enrolment rates show a low rate of access. In the ASC, enrolment rates are measured in terms of Gross Intake Rates and Gross Enrolment Rates. Gross Intake Rates are used to measure entry into a particular level of education. It is defined as the ratio of total number of new pupils enrolled in the first grade of a level (all pupils minus repeaters) to the projected population of that particular age group. Gross Enrolment Ratio refers to the proportion of total pupils enrolled in a given level of education, regardless of age, to the official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education. The equations below illustrate it for primary grade level.

$$\text{Gross Intake Rate}_{\text{Primary}} = \frac{(\text{Total Primary 1 enrolment} - \text{Number of Primary 1 repeaters})}{(\text{6-year-old population})}$$

$$\text{Gross Enrolment Rate}_{\text{Primary}} = \frac{(\text{Total enrolment of Primary 1 to Primary 6})}{(\text{6-to 11 year-old population})}$$

However, understanding access through measuring enrolment rates require a clear link to be established between EMIS data and the population. The ASC report refers to using projected population estimates of the UN Statistics Division and are estimated only at the national level in the report. Sierra Leone has routinely updated quality population data available to estimate projected numbers to calculate enrolment rates at sub-national levels also.²³ This level of disaggregation will make these estimates more actionable by giving district education officials a picture of intakes and enrolments at their districts. We could not verify any sub-national link between education data and the population since the ASC report nor its datasets we had access to, refers to intake or enrolment rates at local council/district levels.

Calculating enrolment rates by marginalised groups is additionally challenging. Estimating pupils in rural or underserved areas requires highly accurate sub-national levels of population projections to target interventions efficiently. Similarly, identifying pupils with disabilities, adolescents who are pregnant or who are parents, and then projecting it at sub-national levels is complex.

Presently, the ASC reports on enrolment or intake rates only by gender at the national-level and does not include the four marginalised groups. Availability of age-wise projected population estimates, especially of marginalised groups of pupils, at lower-levels (district or ward-level) are important for encouraging their inclusion in schools. At present, Stats Sierra Leone provides population projections at district-level by gender and by rural-urban areas. During the baseline study, it could not be verified whether district officials had access to these population projections (either total population or population of different marginalised groups).

-
- In order to make enrolment and intake rates more action-oriented for local education officials, it is recommended that population data relevant to their district/local authority (from the latest mid-term census data or population projections from a full census) be made available to them.
-

B. Measuring school connectedness and retention

School Connectedness data are not available and are challenging to measure. School Connectedness refers to the idea of a pupil feeling accepted, respected, and safe at school, of the pupil feeling that teachers care about their learning and respond to them as an individual. Presently, since pupil-level data are not collected in the EMIS, such measures are unavailable.

Although there are challenges in measures of school connectedness, there is evidence²⁴ of an association of school connectedness with learning and with health outcomes. There is growing global acceptance on methods of measuring School Connectedness, including in international learning assessments like PISA.²⁵ Such measures are gathered only through pupil surveys.

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- It is recommended that schools or education officials regularly ask a few simple questions about their pupils' experience of school. Large-scale assessments can include aspects of School Connectedness in their associated pupil questionnaire.
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23 Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats SL) undertakes a decennial full population and census (last round done in 2015) while a mid-term census is currently underway (main enumeration work completed in December 2021). For example, see Table 7.8 in Stats SL, "Thematic Report on Population Projections" (Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone, October 2017) https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/Census/2015/sl_2015_phc_thematic_report_on_population_projections.pdf

24 See Hodges A, Cordier R, Joosten A, Bourke-Taylor H, Speyer R (2018) Evaluating the psychometric quality of school connectedness measures: A systematic review. PLoS ONE 13(9): e0203373. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0203373>

25 See Chapter 9: Sense of belonging at school of PISA 2018 Results Vol. III <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/sites/d69dc209-en/index.html?itemId=/content/component/d69dc209-en>

Presently, School Connectedness can be measured by retention which is available but unreliable.

The ASC calculates three inter-related measures: GCR, Retention Rates, and Transition Rates.

- a) **GCR** refers to number of pupils in the last grade of a particular level minus repeaters over the population of the relevant age group. The ASC reports on GCR accurately at the national-level. However, the unavailability of accurate population projections at sub-national levels means that these data are not available at district offices to support education planning.
- b) **Retention Rate** is an indicator used to refer to the idea of pupils continuing on at school from one level to the next. The ASC report specifies retention as the ratio of enrolment of pupils in the last grade of a particular education level to the first grade of that level. It has been reported for Primary (Class 6 over Class 1 enrolments), JSS (JSS3 over JSS1 enrolments) and SSS (SS3 over SS1 enrolments). However, this indicator does not accurately represent retention since ratio of *same year enrolments* at different grade levels does not indicate whether the same group of pupils remained in school across that level of schooling. For instance, the ASC reports on Primary Retention as the ratio of enrolment in Grade 6 in 2020 to the ratio of enrolment in Grade 1 in 2020. This does not provide an accurate measure of retention since it compares two different age cohorts in the same year.

A reasonably better measure of retention in the absence of pupil-level data is **Apparent Retention Rate (ARR)**. It is the ratio of enrolments in Grade 6 in 2020 to the ratio of enrolments in Grade 1 in 2015 (five years earlier i.e., when this cohort was enrolled in Grade 1). Similarly, ARR for Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary would need enrolment details which are two years apart (JSS1 to JSS3 and SS1 to SS3). Thus, ARR requires enrolment details²⁶ of pupils at two points in time.

While ARR is a reasonably useful indicator of retention at national-level, when estimating at sub-national levels (or down to school levels) it will not be able to account for pupils repeating grades or relocating (either coming into the school/district or leaving the school/district). It will become particularly challenging measuring ARR of marginalised pupils due to the smaller numbers in these groups (and hence the erratic nature of results when considered even at district-level) and the need to have good data from previous years. However, ARR is a better indicator to use in the interim to measure retention while MBSSE works to improve data accuracy.

- c) **Transition Rate** is an indicator used to identify the rates at which students are moving from one level of education to a higher-level of education (such as from Primary to Junior Secondary or Junior Secondary to Senior Secondary). The ASC calculates it as the ratio of Gross Intake Rate of the higher-level of a particular year with the GCR of the lower-level of the previous year. At present, ASC provides an accurate estimate of transition at the national-level. However, it also has the same challenges faced by enrolment rates and GCR due to unavailability of sub-national population projection estimates to make this data more actionable for planning purposes.

■ **Calculate ARR:** It is recommended that the ASC report on ARR at different levels to get a more accurate estimate of retention compared to present retention calculations.

■ **Sample longitudinal studies for retention estimation:** The most effective way to measure retention is to track pupil-level data. Since this requires a big change to the current EMIS, instead it is recommended to undertake sample longitudinal studies where individual pupils are tracked over time to get a better understanding of Retention and Transition Rates.

²⁶ If possible, the enrolments should exclude pupils repeating that grade.

C. Measuring achievement

Sierra Leone has three major examinations – NPSE, BECE, and WAEC. The National Assessment Standards Unit (NASU) has also been recently established with an objective to undertake national-level sample learning assessments. These could provide pupil-level data about learning outcomes of those from marginalised groups, *provided that the examination enrolment process collects appropriate background information*:

- Gender.
- Location (rural and underserved areas).
- Disabilities (see discussion below).
- Low-income.
- Parent or pregnant learner.

The overall challenges of collection of data on these background characteristics has been highlighted in 3.2.2 above. However, privacy, data security, and consent issues also arise when capturing this from students and will also need to be considered.

WAEC has an on-line registration process for WASSCE candidates that could be used to capture this information and provide appropriate information about the use of such information. Schools are involved in registration for NPSE and BECE. This may present additional challenges protecting privacy and securing informed consent for the collection of pupil background information.

- **Collection and sharing of de-identified data by marginalisation groups from WAEC:** It is recommended that MBSSE encourage WAEC to collect marginalisation characteristics during its online registration processes. Moreover, the provision by WAEC to MBSSE of (de-identified) pupil-level results data, together with background information, may be mandated and could be linked to the payment of examination fees by MBSSE.
- **Collect background characteristics in sample learning assessments:** It is also recommended that large-scale assessments, such as EGRA/EGMA in lower primary, the NASU assessment in primary 4 planned for 2023 and any successor to Leh Wi Lan's SGLA may include the collection of pupil background information and provide analyses of learning achievement by marginalised group.
- **Review data protection policies:** More generally, it may be necessary to review legislation and regulation in the area of use of personal data for analysis and ensuring privacy and data security concerns are met.



04

CREATING INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND TARGETING SUPPORT TO MARGINALISED PUPILS

This chapter presents findings from the qualitative study on individual and school-level support and constraints to inclusive education for marginalised pupils across secondary schools in Sierra Leone. These findings have been categorised according to the three dimensions of inclusive education used in this study namely, on Access, School Connectedness, and Achievement. These findings influence key education outcomes of marginalised pupils such as their enrolment, attendance, classroom participation, learning achievement, retention, transition, and overall positive school experience.

The study found the three most commonly identified school-level constraints marginalised pupils faced across the three dimensions were: (i) poverty and hunger; (ii) long distance between their homes and schools; and, (iii) inadequate safety in schools. Moreover, the most commonly recognised support the study uncovered was: (i) high awareness on provisions of the Radical Inclusion Policy; (ii) quality assistance provided by development partners, NGOs, and civil society groups in improving school-level outcomes; and, (iii) arranging for school buses, especially in urban areas. Detailed findings are explained below in this chapter.

4.1 Access

This section outlines findings which primarily influence marginalised pupils' ability/inability to attend school regularly. These will also play a role in impacting their school connectedness and achievement levels also.

Constraints

4.1.1 Commuting long distances to reach schools affects access and impacts pupil safety

The proximity of the school to the home is a major factor in how regularly marginalised pupils attend school. Two in every three pupils interviewed reported walking between 5-15 Km to school, including attending schools from distant villages because there is no school situated around their immediate communities. The long walking distances, they say, constitute a major constraint to their school attendance and concentration levels given the fact that by the time they arrive at school, they are exhausted and unable to fully participate in teaching and learning activities. While this is a constraint for all rural and underserved area pupils (RUAs) living far away from the school, it impacts those who are also from low-income (LIHs) or are pregnant or parent learners (PPL), or children with disabilities (CWD) even more due to their added disadvantage.



Where I come from is far. I will not be able to walk from where I stay to the school and even if I decide to walk I will not reach before the end of the school day. If I do not have transport, I will not be able to come to school. Transport is a problem which regularly affects me because my brother, with whom I stay with, he sometimes does not give me transport and I have to fight it to get money before I come to school.

Pupil, Low Income Household (LIH), WR3

The long commutes also made them vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation. Pupils and CTA members acknowledged that many girls, especially those from low-income households, are exploited by okada (motorbike taxi) drivers who provide free or cheaper transport rates to them in exchange for sex. In many such cases, the girls also become pregnant which becomes an added constraint to accessing education.



And all of them who come from those distant places have very poor families, they hardly can afford to take a bike to come to school. The girl children are more vulnerable to the okada guys. Since they cannot afford to pay them they end up becoming their girlfriends, and before you could know it they have been impregnated.

Vice Principal and CTA Member, TK1

4.1.2 Lack of affordable transportation facilities affects pupils from rural and underserved areas

Lack of affordable transportation arrangements for pupils from hard-to-reach areas was reiterated by principals, teachers, and members of the CTA as constituting immense constraint to pupils' school attendance. The staff members remarked that although the MBSSE had provided school buses in urban areas, the vehicles are however inaccessible to pupils from the hard-to-reach jurisdictions due to the remoteness and the inaccessibility of the roads to motor vehicles. Similarly, the stakeholders, including pupils, referenced the high-cost of alternative transportation (use of motor bikes) as adding up to the transportation challenge due to its unaffordability for many marginalised pupils. The issue of unavailability of affordable transportation significantly impacts low-income households much more than other pupils.



The other constraint which I believe is important to be considered here is that of transportation. The transportation that was provided is helping children that are only in the highway and while we have a lot of children coming from far villages and these villages are sparsely located and the bus does not have a place to park the bus, based on this so many pupils are left out. So, basically, the transportation is for children that reside along the highway. So, it is a major challenge.

Male, CTA member, WR3

4.1.3 Perceptions of school safety are also influenced by school infrastructure

Alongside the long walking distance, is the issue of safety, both within and outside the school. While walking long distances poses a security threat to marginalised pupils, especially girls, pupils complained that inadequate school infrastructure, such as the lack of security and school fencing, makes their school vulnerable to external intrusion and influence their feeling of school safety.



Sometimes cows enter the school building and defecate and urinate in our classrooms which made difficult for us to attend on that particular day. Many people from the village also keep coming into our school and commenting about us. I want the government to help the school by constructing a fence around the school compound and to pave the floor of some classrooms and school compound.

LIH, FL2

These findings were also echoed in the recent Leh Wi Lan study on Learning and School Safety, in which pupils, parents, and school representatives said that measures such as installing fences, constructing boundary walls, and posting security personnel outside school gates were reported to physically secure school premises.²⁷ This perception of insecurity due to inadequate infrastructure is likely to be felt more among girl pupils than the boys.

4.1.4 Lack of accessible medical care affects regular attendance of pregnant and parent learners and children with disabilities in schools

Across the regions, marginalised pupils reported that their regular school attendance is routinely interrupted when they are sick and unable to afford proper medical attention. This challenge is embedded within a wider mix of factors including poverty and the overall quality of care available to marginalised pupils across the districts. According to the parents and members of the CTA, many marginalised pupils, especially pregnant girls and children with disabilities, have lost several days of instruction time due to the inability of pupils and/or their caregivers to afford quality medical care when they are sick due to poor health facilities available in most underserved areas.

Although this issue is prevalent elsewhere, it was repeatedly referenced by pupils and CTA members in Tonkolili District, where they mentioned that the lack of quality health services also affected their ability to attend schools regularly. This is typically expected because of the long-established relationship between education and health, where promoting health access within and outside schools has the potential to improve pupils' educational outcomes,²⁸ particularly among some groups of marginalised pupils.



The medical facility here is too poor, so we are asking the government to help us because we are finding it very difficult with our children when they are sick. We have lost so many children in this community because of poor medical services; we are really suffering for good medical services.

CTA Member, TK1



Three weeks ago, I did not attend school because I was sick and asked my mother to take me to the clinic, but she said she had no money. I did not come to school for many days until I got better on my own..

PPL, TK3

²⁷ Leh Wi Lan, "Learning and School Safety Study" (Leh Wi Lan, March 2022).

²⁸ Zimmerman and Woolf "Understanding the Relationship Between Education and Health" June 2014.

Support

4.1.5 Schools proactively reach out to parents through home visits and community engagement activities to encourage enrolment and regular attendance

Through home visits and community engagement, some schools have established trusted relationships with parents and communities to promote access for marginalised children. This is crucial because access, apart from practical considerations of distance to schools, also depends on families having sufficient interest and understanding of the relevance of education for their pupils, particularly girls and children with disabilities.



It was last week when I took notice of one student who has stopped coming to school, she has been absent for over a week in school, so I had to ask her friends why she wasn't coming to school, the replied was she is pregnant and that she is ashamed of coming to school. I went with her friend and talked to her parent that they should allow her to come to school despite been pregnant and they should continue to encourage and support her to come to school.

Acting Principal, TK1

These outreach activities from the teachers will benefit all four categories of marginalised pupils who are at the risk of dropping out.

4.1.6 Provision of school buses in urban areas

The challenge with long walking distance and lack of requisite transportation arrangements for marginalised pupils persist, especially for those from hard-to-reach vicinage. Schools in urban areas reported having school buses for pupils, which were procured when FQSE was launched. Some better funded mission schools have also reported to have arranged for transport facilities for their children.



Yes, the school has provided them with transportation. There is a school bus.

Principal, WR3

Provision of school transport will most benefit pupils in rural and underserved areas who have to commute from far away to reach schools.

4.1.7 Ongoing efforts to improve school infrastructure enhance access to marginalised pupils

While the majority of respondents affirmed the lack of inclusive infrastructure in schools, a minority, mainly from schools in Western Rural, noted having inclusive and supportive atmosphere for learning. This typically ranges from having sufficient classroom chairs and tables, to roofs without leakage to having ramps for support to pupils with a disability, as well as school buses to convey pupils to and from schools across the urban areas.



Our school building is good. It does not affect our studies. Our class does not leak. The benches are sufficient, everything is neat. Once you manage to get to school in your uniform, everything is good.

Pupil, LIH, WR3



Most of the schools I have been to have a ground floor building, and many have ramps, and it is very easy for disabled with wheelchair or motor disabilities to access it. In Sierra Leone you have lots of space and lots of ground floor classrooms, so the infrastructure situation is quite great relatively.

National KII

4.2 Connectedness

School Connectedness refers to the experience pupils have of being respected and cared for in schools. The study found that pupils from all four marginalised groups were discriminated against by teachers and their peers in schools because of their relative marginalisation. Pregnant or parent learners and low-income household students particularly felt they were regularly targeted for harassment which ranged from provocation, corporal punishment, and charging of monetary contributions – all three of which are prohibited by existing staff conduct rules and school safety guidelines. Most marginalised pupils complained that grievance redressal mechanisms were ineffective and they felt unwanted and humiliated, which affected their wellbeing and sense of connectedness with the school.

However, the study also uncovered inclusion efforts at the school-level which sought to address and respond to the diversity of needs of all learners such as adapting infrastructure to meet needs of children with disabilities, instances of school CTAs taking leadership to make marginalised pupils feel welcomed, and teachers doing home visits of pupils absent for a long time. This subsection details some of the issues identified by the stakeholders, particularly the marginalised pupils as inhibitors to their inclusive learning and participation in school.

Constraints

4.2.1 Lack of accessible infrastructure influence Connectedness, especially for children with disabilities

Lack of accessible infrastructure was found to have disproportionate effects on marginalised groups as pupils with disabilities reported difficulty sitting and writing on the regular classroom chairs and tables. This was reported to extend beyond the classroom to other school facilities like the playground, WASH facilities, and the overall school environment as children with disabilities often had difficulty with movements around the school, leading to their subsequent confinement to secluded areas within/outside the classroom due to accessibility challenges in schools.



If you look at our school facilities, they are not disable friendly. If you look at our latrines, only those who are not disabled can access it. Even in the classrooms we are still using chalks and those children with eye defects suffers a lot to identify certain letters. We also have those who have problem with their ears and do not have hearing aids.

Teacher, FL3

There is a consensus amongst stakeholders of recent and ongoing efforts to improve the school infrastructures, demonstrated by sector-wide construction of ramps. However, this recent development is yet to cascade to all schools across the districts.²⁹



Even the terrain or hard to reach areas where these schools are allocated has to be accessible and, in many schools, these ramps are not accessible. For example, there are many schools that have playgrounds but these playgrounds are not accessible to children with disability and the movement of these children from place to place around the school campus is sometimes almost impossible and you see some children with disability when they go to school you see them confined to an area where because of the lack of accessibility in schools.

National KII

4.2.2 Current teacher attitudes towards some marginalised groups are adverse and significantly affect their Connectedness

Across the sampled schools, approximately one-third of teachers disagreed with the policy to permit pregnant girls in schools as well as the bill prohibiting corporal punishment. According to teachers, the policy had potential for unintended consequences (increase in number of teenage pregnancies) while the bill could result in acute disrespect for teachers. Explaining further, the teachers considered the policy as one with a negative connotation and subtle approval for teenage pregnancy. This was an interesting finding that uncovered some deep-seated traditional norms/belief systems which the MBSSE should seek to re-orient because such perspectives could pose challenges to the successful implementation of the policy, and the consequent attainment of gender equality in education in Sierra Leone.



I have no problem per se with the overall policy on Radical Inclusion, but I have a problem with the part that allows pregnant girls to come to school. What this means is that other girls will begin to see this as a positive thing and would also want to get pregnant; that is the only problem I have with it.

Teacher, FL3

Pupils from nearly all schools reported corporal punishment as normal and had internalised it. In fact, some of them had interpreted the ban on corporal punishment as permission to beat a child only up to a certain number of times or without a cane only.



The teachers don't beat us a lot anymore. They 'correct' us by giving us only three lashes. If we are late, we get four lashes. They said you should not beat a child with dozens of lashes. Only up to 6 lashes is what you should always give to the child. Any more than that the teacher will be jailed.

LIH, TK3

²⁹ According to ASC 2020, only 12% of schools have constructed ramps for physically challenged pupils.

4.2.3 Additional charges for school uniform and accessories further marginalise low-income household students from feeling connected in schools

While there is the policy on Free Quality School Education, other indirect costs and charges persist at the school-level which often prevent pupils from feeling connected in schools. An example of such fees includes those charged for school uniforms and shoes. While these charges are levied on all pupils, it is particularly challenging for low-income household pupils because, for the most part, they are unable to bear these charges.



Those children coming from poor homes are at risk of dropping out of school even though education is free. But they still must buy school uniforms, shoe, bag and books and pens or pencils. It is challenging for the poor kids to be regular at school and that is why when schools reopen, it will take them two to three weeks before they will start to attend reason being their parents do not have money to buy them the necessary materials for schooling.

Principal, FL3

Across the schools, this has posed additional responsibility for some principals and teachers who sometimes take up the challenge to pay the fees for certain pupils.

4.2.4 Stigmatisation, bullying, and harassment in schools adversely impacts learning experiences of marginalised pupils

Pregnant or parent learners and children with disabilities fear and sometimes experience provocation from teachers and peers while at school, and this fear leads to absenteeism and eventual drop out. According to pupils, this impacts negatively on their feelings of wellbeing and connectedness to school; and further dissuades them from effective school participation.

It was particularly alarming to note that teachers were perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse in many schools. Nearly all pupils interviewed reported that many of their colleagues faced sexual harassment from male teachers to the extent that it affected their feelings of subjective wellbeing and positive school experience. Students reported that if any pupil rejects a teacher's advances, they become subject to targeted harassment and bullying.



Some of the teachers like girl students. If a teacher says he wants you and you say you don't want him. He is your teacher, because of that he will keep an eye on you in school. He will intimidate you he will make you not to feel good at anytime you set eyes on him in school. In my area there is a teacher who expressed interest in the school girl the girl said she is not interested. So when she comes to school, he beats her. Anytime he will give her assignment and even if she did the assignment and submitted it to him, he will say she did not do it correctly and fail her, just because of the interest he has in her.

LIH, WR3



Sexual harassment occurred when a teachers want to have sex with you, and you denied. That teacher will start to mistreat you in the school. He will lash you for whatever little thing you do. And if you report, it becomes worse and nobody is going to fight for you.

PPL, FL3

More generally, CTA members acknowledged that these adverse teacher attitudes and stigmas towards marginalised pupils, especially pregnant or parent learners and children with disabilities, made them hesitant to remain engaged in schools even if teachers did not actively harass them.



Some pregnant children are afraid to ask questions, they have the perception that if they ask question the teacher will tell her not to ask question, neither partake in class because she is pregnant. Those that have given birth and the pregnant girls are the ones that are afraid to ask question in class. They have the perception that when they ask question the teacher will embarrass them by telling them that they are suckling mother and pregnant girl.

Teacher, WR1

4.2.5 School management unable to make marginalised pupils feel safe in schools impacting their Connectedness

Managing a school efficiently with limited resources requires strong leadership and resource management. The level of financial resources available at the school's disposal plays a critical role in its capacity to respond to special needs of marginalised children. Consequently, the school's approval status³⁰ ought to play a major role in the learning experiences of marginalised groups of children.

Our baseline study finds that school approval status did not seem to influence the experiences of marginalised pupils. While there were obvious difficulties for unapproved schools to operate effectively (such as managing teachers and procuring learning material), the experience of students on school connectedness was not markedly different compared to those which were approved.

The biggest challenge school managements faced was the inability to make marginalised pupils feel safe. The second-most consistent response from marginalised pupils after the issue of school proximity, was how they felt harassed, bullied, and even exploited in school premises. Most schools did not have an effective school safety violation reporting mechanism in place which the pupils trusted. Some schools had suggestion/complaint boxes but the school leadership falls short on acting on complaints received, especially in cases where teachers are perpetrators. On the contrary, **the pupils who raise complaints were further harassed.**



We have a suggestion box you can write a letter without your name and put it there. You write the name of the teacher and do not write your name. But you should be careful while putting letter because if someone sees you, they will tell teachers. The teacher will then provoke you even more. You should not even tell your friend about it. Usually nothing happens if you write a letter.

LIH, WR3

³⁰ Approved schools refers to schools which have received Level 2 approval from MBSSE and get financial assistance from the government such as school subsidies and teacher salaries.

Most pupils also felt that members of the school management were not accessible for raising school issues with them directly.



In any institution we should have SMC (School Management Committee). So, if we experience any of these problems from teachers and principal, we are supposed to tell SMC chairman to have a meeting in order to put a stop to it.

CWD, TK1

4.2.6 School Safety Committees and CTAs unable to keep schools safe

School Safety Committees are school-level institutions comprising staff and community members and are responsible for acting on complaints of school safety violations in secondary schools. Most CTA members interviewed had not heard of a school safety committee in our interactions. Among the few that had heard about it, most felt that school safety committees were not effective enough in redressing school safety violations.



We have what is called the school safety committee. I think they should come together with the parents to ensure that they find out some of the issues affecting these kids. I think if the bylaws in the school are enforced many negative things can be minimised.

Male, CTA Chairperson, FL1

Support

4.2.7 Schools making concerted effort to upgrade infrastructure to make them more inclusive and support marginalised feel connected

Many schools also reported utilising government subsidy grants to enhance their infrastructure and make them more inclusive to all learners. Most school representatives reported construction of ramps for the physically challenged as their main adaptation. Some others (mainly in Western Rural) also reported building accessible toilets.



Government has ensured all new schools have ramps. For inclusivity, most of the schools' administration are constructing ramps for the disabled, even toilet and other facilities we see school authorities constructing these facilities and many schools, at least in urban areas, are providing school buses.

Principal, WR3



In some communities, we now have schools with boreholes for drinking water and good latrine facilities. Also, before now we had only primary school but now we have the primary and the secondary school and we have pumps.

Male CTA Member, FL2

4.2.8 Some CTAs proactively engage to ensure pupils feel welcome and motivated to remain in schools

A common practice across schools is the commitment to, as much as possible, include parents/parent-representatives like the CTA on issues affecting the pupils as well as overall school management. For the most part, efforts are made to ensure that important information, particularly in relation to pupils' progress (attendance/participation and achievement), is shared with representatives from the community who are members of the CTA. These members of the community also conduct routine monitoring to assess teaching and learning activities.



Sometimes people from the Village Development Committee will come round and observe how is teaching and learning going on at school. They are just trying to know if the teachers are doing the right thing while at school.

CTA Member, FL3

The most effective CTAs were found to be those which communicated regularly and in multiple ways with community members. A proactive CTA in WR3 regularly held meetings with the larger community and spoke on increasing attendance, encouraging contraception use, improving menstrual hygiene and discussed school attendance issues.



Yes, the community people too are doing their best to assist these children because, the stakeholders in the community usually called the parents of these children to a meeting, where they will be encouraged to continue supporting their children especially the marginalised children. The community usually tells the parents that these children are our future leaders; therefore, we have to give them all the necessary support they need to get educated because, when that happens, the community also will be developing.

Principal, FL2

They also engage with influential community members, such as community leaders, religious heads, and village elders, and use their influence in spreading their message. For instance, the CTA at FL2 has used religious leaders to motivate parents to send children to secret societies only during the holidays so that they do not miss school. The CTA has played an important role in building awareness on Radical Inclusion Policy, on the prohibition of corporal punishment and generally reduce stigma against marginalised.



Some of the children from the neighbouring communities are staying with care givers and the domestic work on them is too much which will disturb their attendance. If this is made known to the CTA, we will engage with the caregiver and if not settled, we will involve the parent of the child and advise for relocation if possible.

Teacher, CTA Member, WR3

Finally, some CTAs also ask role models to come and talk to marginalised children during the assembly to motivate them to study further. The Principal at WR2 got women who were successful and pregnant in schools to talk to other pregnant and parent learners on how they managed to study, the kind of support they should seek out etc.

4.2.9 Knowledge of policies and laws around Radical Inclusion was high among pupils, school staff, and community members

Schools (including the pupils//CTA members) showed/demonstrated a level of understanding of the policies on inclusive education in Sierra Leone, particularly the Policy on Radical Inclusion, as one that necessitates them as education stakeholders and duty bearers to foster inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all. A significant minority of the teachers, however, maintained discordance with the policy on the issue of pregnant girls being allowed into schools as well as that on no corporal punishment. According to the teachers, such policies had potential for unintended consequences and a resultant lack of accountability on the part of the pupils. Explaining further, the teachers considered such policy as having a negative connotation and subtle approval for teenage pregnancy.



I have no problem per se with the overall policy on Radical Inclusion, but I have a problem with the part that allows pregnant girls to come to school. What this means is that other girls will begin to see this as positive thing and would also want to get pregnant, that is the only problem I have with it.

Teacher, FL3

However, some school administrators argue that such dispositions as above towards pregnant girls in schools are expected as it will take time to gradually re-orient staff and for individual mindsets to change. More-so, it was interesting to note that the challenge with full acceptability of inclusive policies in schools has locational dichotomies. While schools in bigger towns like Kabala are more welcoming, those in traditional rural communities in Falaba are more averse to the idea of having pregnant girls in schools.

4.2.10 Instances of strong leadership and inclusive ethos encouraged connectedness

Some schools expressed positive attitudes towards inclusion to the extent that the overall school ethos can be characterised as inclusive. In some schools visited, there were indications of strong leadership, with an informed appreciation of inclusive policies and demonstrated commitment to ensuring their schools epitomise inclusive ethos. This perceived support for inclusive education is somewhat reflective of a uniform endorsement and willingness to promote the new paradigms outlined by the policy on Radical Inclusion.



You know, we are getting awakened to these things. Before now, our schools were not prepared, teachers were not prepared, not even the principals or district education officers were prepared. But now, we are making a conscious effort, we are even currently doing a pilot program on disability where we have told school principals to locate disabled children, record them in tablets and sync them to what will eventually become a national database on disability in Sierra Leone. So things are changing and we are getting better at it.

District KII

4.2.11 Teachers do home visits and foster school connectedness in some schools

Some schools were observed to employ a range of other strategies to foster inclusive education for marginalised pupils. In these routine inclusion efforts, they conduct home visits and community engagement as well as utilise other inclusive classroom strategies to generate positive understandings for marginalised groups whilst providing ways of tackling prejudice especially those connected to disability issues and those involving pregnant girls/parent learners.



We also have tried to stop provocation at school by punishing those who provoke others because of their disability. For those with disability, we use a strategy that will encourage them to come to school. Also, in the classroom, we put them at the front row to ensure their active participation.

Principal, WR3

4.3 Achievement

Constraints

4.3.1 Lack of adequate teaching and learning material affects low-income household pupils adversely while lack of inclusive Teaching and Learning Materials inhibits children with disabilities from learning

While there is a general lack/inadequacy of teaching and learning materials for all pupils across schools, it significantly affects marginalised pupils more. Under FQSE, the Government is committed to providing learning materials to all basic and senior secondary schools. However, pupils across all districts reported that they are expected to purchase any textbooks or stationery needed for studying since the school does not have enough of these. This requirement disproportionately affects low-income household learners who also reported that they are expelled from their classes if they do not possess textbooks.



We do not have enough textbooks. When they are teaching literature those without the textbook are asked to get out of class while those with the textbooks will remain inside. So they will benefit from the teaching. So not having enough textbooks can make some of us to drop out from school. Another issue we are having is not enough notebooks. Maybe we are offering ten subjects but two or three notebooks are shared for all those ten subjects. When you are ready to study how are you going to study? You will not be able to study because you have mixed up the notes.

PPL, FL3

The lack of adapted and inclusive learning TLM significantly hampers children with disabilities from learning, especially for the blind/visually impaired and those with hearing difficulties.



There is a gap, and duty bearers would tell you 'But we are providing teaching and learning materials for children with disabilities like the blind'. That will be their argument. Yes, I will agree, but if we are 10 in class and one is a disable blind and visually impaired for an example, and you provide all the learning materials for the others, and the blind child has to wait for few weeks and few months before you can provide for him or her. That few weeks that he has to wait, it means you are enlarging the gap between his/her disability and access to education. So, it is not equal opportunity and you do not call that inclusive education.

District KII



School mostly don't teach mathematics for CWDs, especially the visually impaired. The schools are not provided with adequate resources and support for teachers to create suitable learning materials to cater to them effectively.

National KII

4.3.2 Large class sizes impact effective learning

The average Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) in Sierra Leone's secondary schools is 24 and 31 in JSS and SSS respectively and is much better than the MBSSE's norms of 35-40 pupils per teacher.³¹ However, these also include volunteer teachers who were reported to be irregular by CTA members and school principals. Consequently, across schools, both pupils and teachers reported large class sizes as a significant constraint to effective classroom management and inclusive learning, especially one that promotes the active participation of all pupils, including the marginalised. According to teachers, in such overcrowded classrooms, groups activities and participatory learning becomes nearly impossible. Moreover, in such classroom arrangement, pupils with disabilities including those with visual impairment are hardly able to move independently to and from the classroom. This is particularly discomfoting for pregnant girls who might require easy movement across the aisle as much as possible.



The classrooms are sometimes overcrowded. If it happens that you are at backseat you will be straining to hear the teacher, because of overcrowding. Also, the benches in the classroom where I do sit are few in number, so we are three per one seat, and we have to take notes. Look at the distance to the desk, so if three people are going to sit here they will strain to write.

Pupil, WR1



For teachers to specially teach and assess children with special needs, there is a need to have a limit on class sizes. But that would be difficult in a class of 100 students who are quite diverse even if you don't include children with disabilities or other special needs. So it is quite challenging for us.

Teacher, FL3

4.3.3 Teacher absenteeism affects all pupils' learning and disproportionately affects those with special learning needs

Teacher presence in schools plays a critical role in improving learning of all pupils. Its effect on increasing teacher-student ratios impacts marginalised pupils more, as they are more likely to need attention and support from teachers. Secondary evidence suggests that teacher absenteeism is a big issue faced by schools in Sierra Leone. A recent pilot study on teacher attendance found that 25% teachers were absent on any given day, while 43% teachers were reportedly not teaching at the school to which they were assigned on the payroll.³²

These figures also need to be viewed with nuance. Teacher absenteeism numbers generally report on the teacher marking their presence in the school and not necessarily being present in classes and teaching, hence the impact of lost instruction time due to absenteeism could be more.

However, the baseline qualitative study did not reveal teacher absenteeism to be a common issue faced by marginalised pupils: it was reported in one school each in Falaba and Tonkolili.

31 MBSSE, "2020 Annual School Census Report" (Ministry for Basic and Senior Secondary Education, March 2021), 136, <https://www.dsti.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ASC-2020-Report.pdf>

32 CGA, "Sierra Leone Education Attendance Monitoring System (SLEAMS) Pilot," 2020, <https://cgatechnologies.org.uk/projects/sierra-leone-education-attendance-monitoring-system-sleams-pilot>



Our maths teacher comes from far away. He comes just for a few months before the examination and teaches.

RUA, FL1

4.3.4 Illegal fees and charges inhibit learning among marginalised groups

There are pronounced cases of illegal charges levied on pupils for grades. Across the regions, marginalised pupils explained their unique challenges with the illegal fees/charges due to their poor socio-economic status. Even more worrisome is when the non-payment of these charges leads to physical punishment and other gross penalties for the pupil, inducing loss of interest in school/studies and consequential drop-out.



The money you see there means that, our teachers in school are demanding too much money from us by giving an assignment to us which we will go home and do, but when we are to submit this assignment, we have to submit it with money in the sum of Le 5,000 or else, you would not have any mark for your assignment no matter how good you answered your assignment.....also, these teachers will give us test in class, and at the end of the test we are to submit it with money in the sum of Le 3,000 or else you will fail that test no matter how best you answered the questions.

Pupil, LIH, WR1

Similarly, pupils are marginalised and often excluded from active participation in classroom teaching and learning activities based on their socio-economic status and ability to respond to requests for monetary gifts by teachers. This practice is prevalent across all the districts and appears to be a longstanding problem posing significant impediment to effective and participatory learning for marginalised pupils.



If you do not have money in class a teacher will not recognise you. Some teachers he will say everyone should give me Le, 2,000, if you give him the money he will recognise you in class he will make you as friend because you are giving him small thing but if you do not give him the money every day he will say are you in my class I don't know you. If you ask any questions to him, he will not answer because you did not give him any money. Poor students can't give Le, 2,000 daily and so they are not getting good education because teacher doesn't recognise them. That is why poverty is not fine.

PPL, FL3

4.3.5 Lack of food impacts focus and learning among marginalised pupils

Food poverty is a cross-cutting issue across the four broad categories of marginalisation. Most pupils recorded lacking food at home and routinely, attending school without breakfast and/or lunch. This, they said, affected their concentration levels in the classroom and often prevented their effective participation in the teaching and learning processes. This is consistent with existing evidence on the acute effects of breakfast on cognitive performance, behaviour, and school outcomes.

According to one of the pupils:



Lack of food prevents some of us from coming to school. For instance, if there is nothing at home to eat and our parents cannot afford to give us lunch, because they do not have the means. As a result, when coming to school with no food in your stomach, you cannot understand what they are teaching you and comprehension becomes difficult. Taking myself as an example, if I come to school without eating anything and return home with my father and mother not providing me anything to eat, I will not be able to study or learn anything.

Pupil, LIH, TK2.

Another said:



If you are hungry and the teacher is teaching in class, you will not be able to listen to what the teacher is saying.

Pupil, LIH, FL1

4.3.6 Lack of child-centred pedagogies impacts learning for all, while disproportionately affecting those with special learning needs

Child-centred pedagogy is one that places the pupils at the centre of the learning process within the classroom. In a child-centred learning environment, the teacher provides pupils with opportunities to learn independently and from one another. However, across schools in Sierra Leone, teachers were reportedly unable to demonstrate child-centred pedagogies in the classrooms, largely due to capacity gaps. Based on our findings, an appreciable number of teachers lack the training on inclusive education and consequently lack the requisite capacity to effectively manage the various cases of marginalisation.



We are all teachers, but some don't have that teaching methodology where you should read the mood of a student in the classroom. Most of these students are traumatised or stressed up with challenges they are facing, within this period if a teacher ask a question and the student seems not to understand because he/she may be thinking of something, then the next thing the teacher does is to shout on the student without reading the mood of the student.

Acting Principal, TK3



...A quality teacher knows the needs of her students and what kind of service they need to be provided... Teachers who think about why some students are very quiet, may have behaviour/developmental challenges, and understand that some pupils maybe partially deaf/blind but not sure. And they would want to do something about it. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case in Sierra Leone.

National KII

Stakeholders reiterated the need for teachers to become advocates for their pupils and therefore make critical referrals, for instance, for Doctor's assessment, following classroom observation: "They should be the one to say I have noticed something about this child, and that role of a teacher noticing something and passing on the information should be treated seriously. They need to see what they can do to make things a little better even if they cannot fix the problem, but they can do more to find solution to the problem." National KII. However, according to the teachers, the issue is further compounded by overcrowded classrooms which makes any form of personalised observation and support to marginalised pupils difficult if not impractical during teaching and learning processes.

Support

4.3.7 School staff voluntarily contribute to providing lunch and buying books to support learning of marginalised pupils

Across the schools, principals and teachers alike make deliberate efforts to support marginalised pupils, especially those from low-income backgrounds to ensure their continued education. This often comes on compassionate grounds and largely 'out-of-pocket'. From donation of school materials like uniforms, to the provision of lunch, and sometimes coverage of transportation cost of some marginalised pupils, teachers continue to demonstrate their commitment to eliminating all constraints to inclusive education for marginalised pupils.



We have a child from Bo who is an orphan and currently staying with her grandmother who is poor as well. Also, there is another whose parents can't afford uniform, but I decided to take the responsibility and ask the school to provide her uniform in my name so that I can pay the money. They walk 9 miles to school every day. Also, I loan a set uniform for one of the girls and their parents are yet to pay. I even threatened her out of class if she did not pay but as you know there is nothing I can do as the parents do not have the money. We are serving both as parents and as teachers as we do our best to meet most of their needs.

Principal, WR2

4.3.8 Teachers display flexibility in classroom seating arrangements which support children with disabilities and pregnant or parent learners feel more included in learning

Across schools, teachers are increasingly aware of the need to provide specific support to marginalised pupils for more inclusive teaching and learning experiences as well as the need to promote participation and school connectedness for all pupils. This is demonstrated by the adoption of flexible seating arrangements to give marginalised pupils support to optimally participate in classroom teaching and learning activities. Over half of the school staff interviewed reported using some form of flexible seating with the most common form being to bring those pupils with visual impairments closer to the board.



To start with, for those with visual impairment we ensure that they retain their glasses. And that no teacher should take from them. Those with visual impairment were supplied glasses. We make sure that we bring all those that are physically challenged to come sit at the front row of the class. We even have one boy who is an albino. We do not even allow him to stand in the assembly when the sun is hot, we let him go into the classroom. A physically disabled child or pregnant girl is seated in such a way that he/she is finding it easy to go out and ease him/herself.

Principal, WR3

4.3.9 Joint collaborative efforts with donors/INGOs support inclusive learning in schools

Several local and international organisations were reported to have supported learning in schools, especially among marginalised pupils. Organisations like Leh Wi Lan, Sight Savers, and Save the Children amongst others, are notable for their support to schools through the provision of technical and material assistance, for marginalised pupils. Leh Wi Lan, in particular, targets support towards learning improvements in literacy and numeracy across all Sierra Leonean secondary schools and particularly targets learners across the four categories of the marginalisation identified in the policy, particularly pupils with disability.



I am working with local and international NGOs in the district and we have been conducting a lot of training meetings with stakeholders and school authorities in order to bring changes in the schools. On the issue of discrimination, Leh Wi Lan has done a lot in most schools across the district. Usually, Ministry Officials, Leh Wi Lan team, representatives from the Teacher Service Commission, and the Free Quality Education Officers will go as a team for joint monitoring visits to schools in the district in order to address those issues of marginalisation of disabled and vulnerable children. Every month, during our joint monitoring visit, we open the suggestions boxes and see the concerns and challenges faced by these children and we come together as a team and take appropriate actions, and there are a lot of improvement in the area of gender-based violence as compared to before.

District KII

Speaking further about the continued support from Leh Wi Lan, another said:



Some of the handicaps are poorer than those who are not handicaps. We have a boy with hunch back and he is doing well at school, but their parents can't afford to support his education. Had it not been the intervention of the government and the support we are getting from other NGOs, like Leh Wi Lan; he should have been a dropout by now.

Principal, TK3



GLADI is an acronym for Girls Learning and Disability Issues, focusing on girls learning and disability issues, this have been our focus on gender and disability... We are also implementing a lot of other activities, for instance, we are supporting directly the S.Q.A officers that is, the School Quality Assurance officers, which is some of our mandate including monitoring them, giving them technical support and everything they require to get their jobs done; among many other things.

District KII

05

ENGAGING FAMILIES
AND COMMUNITIES

This chapter discusses findings on parental and community support provided to marginalised pupils towards their learning aligned with Policy Statement 3 of the Radical Inclusion Policy. A number of factors related to cultural norms, traditions, and practices along with household poverty are – to a varying extent – pervasive in all three districts and school types. These factors hinder Access, Connectedness, and Achievement for all pupils, but disproportionately hinder the four groups of marginalised pupils.

Cultural norms and practices often become constraints to accessing an education. Stigma and discriminations faced by marginalised learners in their families and communities further hinders their school connectedness.

Household poverty further adds an additional dimension of marginalisation of pupils. Sierra Leone is a developing country with a high incidence of poverty. In 2018,³³ 56.8% of households were below the official poverty line with rural areas having more than twice as high poverty rates than urban areas, at 73.9% compared to 34.8%. The impact of Covid-19 has further increased national poverty to 58.9%.³⁴

However, this chapter also illustrates some instances where communities and CTAs are actively tackling these obstacles affecting marginalised pupils in creative and resourceful ways and provide strong support for Radical Inclusion in schools.

5.1 Access

This section highlights how community norms and practices, such as secret societies and child marriage, hinder pupils from accessing an education. These are further exacerbated by the impact of poverty.

Constraints

5.1.1 Secret societies hinder access to schooling

‘Secret’ societies are traditional cultural institutions of Sierra Leone who have associated initiation rituals for adolescent boys and girls. These societies are more prevalent in the rural districts of Falaba and Tonkolili as compared to Western Rural. They are sex-segregated societies (mostly Bondo or Sande for girls and Poro for boys) where adolescents learn traditional skills and practice rituals in secluded areas.

³³ Stats SL, “Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) Report 2018” (Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone, October 2019).

³⁴ World Bank, *Welfare and Poverty Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic: Sierra Leone 2021 Economic Update* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-1408-2>

In most cases, children return from these ceremonies with signs of physical and psychological scarring, with Bondo society initiations resulting in Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) of girls. Consequently, Sierra Leone has one of the highest prevalence of FGM³⁵ in the world as with 83% of women having undergone it, including 61% of girls aged 15-19 years. While the discussion of the merits and demerits of these societies are beyond the scope of this report, we report on its impact to pupils' ability to attend school and learn.

Initiation rituals begin around the second term and can last anywhere from a few weeks to up to four months, which results in significant loss in schooling time. Many students drop out or continue in class with limited comprehension. All four groups of marginalised pupils reported that participation in secret societies were held in high regard by their families. They were unhappy that their parents prioritised their participation in societies more than their education.



In our village, many people prefer traditional practices over education. They like things like 'Poro' and 'Bondo'. My parents sent food every day to my Bondo. But when it is time for school and I needed money for school, they refused saying they don't have money.

LIH, WR3

5.1.2 Festivals and special occasions routinely disrupt access to learning

Another factor affecting the presence of pupils in schools were routine disruptions caused by local events. In FL2, classroom instruction time would get disrupted by regular social festivities and dancing, which distracted pupils and reduced attendances. Weekly market days were another reason for reduced attendances in schools, especially among pupils from low-income households, who would miss school to sell goods there. Learning disruptions due to markets were reported in five out of nine schools across all three districts.

5.1.3 Child, early, and forced marriage prevents access to education

Some pupils also said many parents only displayed a shallow interest in educating their children and were more interested in getting girls married. They felt these parents educate children only because other parents are doing it and not because they truly value it. They do not support their continued learning even if they can afford it and expect them to get married as soon as possible.



They are forcing their children to marry even when the child's desire is to be educated. If the girl is not ready to marry and you are trying to force her, she might do anything – go into the street, move to different location, or end up taking poison. These are some of the problems we are encountering in our communities.

LIH, TK1

35 Stats SL and ICF, "Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019" (Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone, October 2020), p. 369, <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR365/FR365.pdf>

5.1.4 Patriarchal norms disadvantage girls while pressurising boys also in accessing education

In general, the female pupils interviewed reported that boys faced lesser discrimination and stigma compared to them.³⁶ More specifically, respondents complained that the boys who made girls pregnant were not held accountable to their actions and the girls faced all social costs of it.



Some communities do not treat marginalised boys and girls the same – when you go to these communities, they think girls are not meant to be in school. As a result, the boys are more in schools than the girls in secondary levels. The treatment or management of disabled boys and girls depends to their individual families and the community, but the girls are mostly marginalised.

National KII

However, some community members and school staff cautioned that while the focus on girls was necessary, **boys are getting left out**. Boys were also very likely to drop out for economic reasons, which could also be an adverse consequence of patriarchy on boys, which expects them to be breadwinners very early in life.



The Government is mainly focusing its attention on just the girls. Yes, they are the less privileged, and we want to push them up further. But if we focus only on pushing up girls, we will push out the boys. We are expecting boys to be capable of marrying these empowered girls. So, they will drop out to earn money and provide for them.

Male CTA Member & Religious Leader, FL1

Western Rural district in particular, is also facing **challenges of teenage delinquency amongst boys**. Respondents reported that teenage boys are increasingly involved in drugs trade, substance abuse, and violent crime.



One of the key reason boys are not performing well is that they were busy planting marijuana in the bush. Sometimes we don't see them for one or two weeks as they are in the bush in their marijuana farms. Then when you look at their performance in class, you will find out that they are the ones giving us far more problems than the girls. Even right now you will find many boys at <Location redacted> lying on the floor after having taken drugs like Kush. It is these same boys that will become problem to the society in the near future. It is these same boys that are becoming criminals to make money to pay for drugs, it is these boys that impregnate school going girls. You see, it is a vicious cycle.

Principal, WR3

5.1.5 General reluctance among communities to support pregnant girls and parent learners accessing education

The larger community outside schools seemed more tolerant to their pregnancy, perhaps due to the high prevalence of teenage pregnancies.³⁷ However, their overall perception was mixed regarding permitting pregnant girls and parents of infants to study in schools with nearly half of community respondents opposing their re-entry to schools

³⁶ While our study did not interview boys, it probed for experience of marginalisation on boys in Pupil and CTA FGDs.

³⁷ According to Demographic and Health Survey 2019 (p.79), 21% of girls aged 15-19 have begun childbearing, with rural teenagers more likely to have started childbearing than urban teenagers (29% versus 14%).

Among community members who opposed their re-entry to schools, a small minority felt that having pregnant or parent learners in schools influences other girls to get pregnant.



This is going to be a bad thing (including pregnant girls in schools), because if I realised that my friend has got pregnant and she was given the opportunity to go to school, then I can also get pregnant without worrying. And we are seeing this practically now in this town, a lot of girls are becoming pregnant.

Female CTA Member, WR3

However, most community members opposed to pregnant and parent learners in school felt **that they should remain at home for practical considerations**. Some believed pregnant girls are unable to focus well on studies due to physiological changes in their bodies and should stay at home to take care of themselves. Others felt a lactating mother could either be a major source of distraction in classes if they bring their infants to school, or may remain distracted thinking about their child if it is not with her.



To me, I don't see getting pregnant girls and suckling mothers to school as something necessary because, education needs full attention. When they are in class, their focus and thinking is not with them because they have other issues that are bothering them. Do you think a teacher will be able to teach if a child keeps crying all the time? Do you think the boys will focus on studying if she tries to feed the baby? These things also need to be thought about.

Male CTA Chairperson, TK1

Support

While the constraints to accessing schooling are significant for marginalised pupils, there is overall support to education in Sierra Leone. The very existence of a separate category of schools called Community Schools shows that communities believe that education cannot wait. 13% of all schools in Sierra Leone are community owned with a greater proportion of community ownership at secondary levels (18.5% of Junior Secondary and 15.5% Senior Secondary Schools).³⁸ This section discusses key support to improving access to marginalised pupils in Sierra Leone.

5.1.6 Some parents help improve access by finding housing for their children closer to schools

Despite the access constraints highlighted above, it was heartening to find parents also valuing their children's education. Many pupils from underserved and distant areas reported living closer to schools in homes of distant relatives or family friends. In fact, some parents come together and rent houses for their children as well, in case they are unable to find friends or relatives.



Some parents come together and rent a house near to school for children of their village to stay together.

Female CTA Member & Retired Teacher, FL3

38 MBSSE, "2020 Annual School Census Report".

5.1.7 Communities set up schools to improve access to education

We also found that an unsupported community JSS in a low-income and highly underserved part of Falaba (FL2) was set up wholly through community initiative with some financial support by a Sierra Leonean expat based in Italy. While it may come across as unfortunate that the state was not able to provide for education services there, it displays a strong demand for education as people are unwilling to depend on the Government and take the initiative to establish schools. It also shows that education is a powerful cause around which communities are willing to mobilise resources globally.



We are the ones that built this school. There was no secondary school in our community. After primary, girls would get married or get pregnant. We put our labour and resources to set up this school.

Male Teacher, FL2

5.2 Connectedness

Constraints

5.2.1 Societal stigma and discrimination against marginalised pupils affect their connectedness with learning

One of the biggest constraints influencing the Access, Connectedness, and Achievement of the four groups of marginalised pupils are the stigma and discrimination they face from within their larger communities. This section highlights typical stigma and discrimination faced by some groups of marginalised pupils uncovered during the baseline assessment.

Children with disabilities face stigma and discrimination from their caregivers, teachers, and the larger community which affected Connectedness and Achievement. Some face parental abandonment due to a perception that they are cursed. Such children get trapped in poverty, which greatly hinders their access to learning. Others get limited support since parents have limited expectations and aspiration from them which affects their achievement outcomes.



In some places if you gave birth to a child with disability, there is a possibility that your husband might leave you. Especially if they have autism or epilepsy and such disabilities which are perceived as evil or as a curse or even considered contagious, then the stigma associated with that means you can't get support from your parents or from the people around her.

National KII

Pregnant or parent learners were perhaps the most stigmatised group of pupils amongst the four groups. **These learners are seen as bad influences and are discriminated against by their teachers and peers due to the prevalent community stigma against them, which affects their connectedness.** These learners said they faced varying levels of provocations and harassment which discouraged many from accessing and feeling connected with their school. They were viewed as bad influences on other girls by their colleagues, teachers, and the wider community.



My classmates provoke me by saying, 'Lord have mercy, I am not going to sit close to a pregnant woman. I may also get pregnant'. Even the teachers also told me, 'What are you going to learn? You should stay at home...you keep sleeping all day'. They made my life miserable, and I stopped coming to school for many days.

PPL, FL3

This **stigma has even been internalised by some girls**, who felt they committed a mistake or were setting a poor example for other girls rather than viewing themselves as victims.



Taking myself as an example, after being pregnant I am still coming to school. I keep telling that everything is done by God and I should be patient with schooling. Most of my colleagues after seeing me, I try to advise them what I did was a mistake and not to ever do what I did.

PPL, TK1



I felt ashamed at becoming pregnant and stopped coming to school. I felt I did not deserve to go there.

PPL, FL2

Pupils from rural and underserved areas and low-income households faced discrimination in their foster homes which affected their Connectedness and Achievement. The majority of challenges faced by these pupils stem from hunger and accessing school due to walking long distances that affect their access and achievement outcomes, which have been explained earlier. However, as highlighted in 5.1.6 above, in order to overcome challenges of walking long distances nearly one-third of girls interviewed did not stay with their parents but instead lived with extended family and relatives who are located closer to their secondary schools. However, over three-quarters of them said they faced stigma and discrimination in their foster homes. These children received limited financial support in meeting their food and educational needs, had additional household chores which reduced their learning time and faced an environment of general hostility and neglect at home.



I stay with my brother and his wife and she is bad. When it time for school, she will not give me lunch money. I have to fend for myself. I used to sell things for her but even with the money I earned, she buys something for the house and does not give me lunch money. Because of her, my brother also does not ask me if I'm going to school or not, whether I reach at the school or not or if I am learning properly or not.

LIH, WR3

5.2.2 Poverty compels pupils to supplement family labour which impedes retention

Nearly all low-income household and rural and underserved area pupils were involved in activities that supplemented family labour. While some girls were involved in doing petty trade and other economic activities to supplement family income, most girls helped with domestic chores. Pregnant or parent learners had additional responsibilities of childcare too. Poverty forces children with disabilities with minor impairments to also support the family in these activities. Thus, activities which supplement family labour also make many pupils late to arrive at school, particularly if they were also coming from far distances.



Yes, for me I have a foot problem, but I also have to do domestic work before coming to school, and that makes me too late to go to school most of the time.

CWD, TK1



I am a lactating mother, but I have to walk far distances to fetch water for my family in the mornings before coming to school and that makes me late frequently.

PPL, FL2

5.2.3 CTAs do not engage with the larger parent community on supporting marginalised pupils in accessing and achieving in schools

CTAs also play a pivotal role in keeping the larger community engaged on activities of the school. They understand the importance of sensitising parents of marginalised groups of children to support them in the best possible manner, and to build community acceptance on Radical Inclusion. However, some CTAs felt they were not engaging with parents effectively.



We need to have discussions with parents if we want pregnant girls to study here. But we don't actively go and talk to them to let them come to school. We must make more efforts to make these children come to school.

Female CTA Member, TK1

Support

Although stigma and discrimination against the four groups of marginalised pupils are high, the study uncovered instances of strong parental and community support as well. These have been described in this sub-section

5.2.4 Communities value educating pregnant and parent learners and support them to improve their connectedness

Some pregnant and parent learners reported having received support from their families and friends during their pregnancy and after childbirth. Half of all CTA members supported having pregnant and parent learners in schools and **highlighted the benefits they would get on completing their education**. Some shared anecdotal evidence of successful women who continued with their school education despite being pregnant.



I became pregnant while I was in school but also went back to school when I gave birth. Today, I can boast that I am now a Vice Principal of a school. I have constantly worked to enrol a good number of girls that have given birth. We have now got a good number of girls that are nurses and we have even got girls with Degrees in this community.

Vice Principal, WR2

They have supported them in fighting against community stigma and are also helping them in taking care of their children while they study, thereby supporting their access and achievement outcomes.



After I gave birth to my child, I wanted to go back to school. Initially, my father did not want me to study and asked me to care for my child. But I begged my uncle, who wanted me to study, to talk to my father. Eventually, my father listened to my uncle and agreed to let me go back to school. I went and sat the BECE and I passed. When my son was young, I would leave him with my mother at home and go to study. And my mother really wanted me to learn again. She takes care of my child even more than I do she wants me to return to school. Even my father says if the child sick he will take care of him. Anything I tell them about my child my parents will do it.

PPL, WR3

There were also some rare instances of the father of the child helping in childcare while the mother goes to study.



The boy that impregnated me is encouraging me every day to come to school. His family keeps our child when I go to school.

PPL, TK1

5.2.5 Children with disabilities are actively supported to continue their education

We found that not all communities stigmatise children with disabilities, particularly those with physical impairments. For instance, children with disabilities in FL2 and TK1 having physical impairments, said **they received help and support from their friends and family in their studies and enhanced their sense of belonging and enabled them to achieve better.**



I am disabled but I have one of friend who is always encouraging me, just like how my mother encourages me here. It doesn't mean that when you are disabled you do not have the right to be educated.

CWD, TK1

5.2.6 Communities institute local laws which promote connectedness and achievement

Some proactive village chiefs and community elders have created local laws that promote inclusion for all children. It was reported that community laws such as: (i) imposing a fine of Le. 500,000 on households and shop owners for hosting children in their premises during school hours (In WR3); and, (ii) a fine of Le. 100,000 on parents who do not send their children to schools (in FL2). Some communities also set their own by-laws that penalised impregnating school-going girls.



We as chiefs has called lots of meetings with the community people on the way further of our children's educational problem. We developed by-laws on anybody that impregnates a school going girl or any parents that send her child to early marriage, that person will face the full penalty of the law. We said we will fine them Le. 5 million if they make them pregnant. We saw that the rate of teenage pregnancy and early marriage has somewhat reduced.

Male, Village Chief & CTA Member, FL2

5.3 Achievement

Families and communities play a crucial role in pupils achieving better learning outcomes from education. Community attitudes and practices along with challenges of poverty can be a significant constraint that prevents children from learning well in schools and impacts marginalised groups of children disproportionately. However, our study also uncovered crucial supports from the community, including from NGO/local organisations which enabled these pupils' parents and communities to better support their learning.

Constraints

5.3.1 Parents place greater value to higher education over basic education which affects family support to achieve outcomes

There exists a perception of higher value to senior secondary education and lower value to basic education among some parents, especially in areas where senior secondary education is not yet available. They feel education is most useful in one's career only if children get to complete all levels of education till senior secondary (or higher). Otherwise, it is not as useful and not worth spending time and money on.



All jobs these days need WASSCE certificate or university education. We don't even have SSS nearby and the JSS we started ourselves only, otherwise that also was not there. We do not have money to send our children far to study. So, I think if children can't get Senior Secondary education, we are wasting our money.

Male CTA Member & Parent, FL2

This interesting finding provides an economic perspective on perceived returns to education among parents. Although the literature on such studies in Sierra Leone is limited, similar findings were obtained from Madagascar and Morocco in Africa where parents over-valued secondary education and under-valued primary education and overestimated how valuable a secondary education was in securing a government job.³⁹

5.3.2 Adverse norms on contraceptives impedes achievement outcomes

In order to curb incidences of teenage pregnancies, the Government and partner organisations have worked extensively on promoting use of contraceptives among adolescents. Access to reliable contraceptive methods remains an issue in rural districts.⁴⁰ However, even when it was accessible, parents discouraged its use thereby inhibiting them from truly achieving their potential in schools.

³⁹ Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, "Top of the Class," in *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, 1st ed. (New York: PublicAffairsTM, 2011).

⁴⁰ "Situation Analysis of School Health in Sierra Leone," *Saving Lives in Sierra Leone (SLiSL)* (Freetown: Ministry of Health and Sanitation, September 2020).



Preventive measures for teenage pregnancy were working for most girls, but after some time they just decided not to take any preventive measures due to pressure from their parent that they should not take the medicine (injectable contraceptive) again. Some parents feel if they continue to take it, there will come a time that they will want a child and it will not be possible for them again, because the medicine could have destroyed their womb. It created fear amongst girls, and they stopped taking it and now pregnancy is on the rise.

Principal, WR3

5.3.3 Pupils forced into exploitative sexual relationships due to poverty which hinders Achievement and Connectedness

Poverty was reported as the primary reason for teenage pregnancies and child marriages. Female pupils marginalised by poverty engage in transactional sex with older males in exchange for money for food, books, or transport, and often leads to pregnancy. Secondary data reveals that in 2019,⁴¹ 74% of women aged 20-49 had sexual intercourse before age 18, with 26% girls having had intercourse by age 15. Thus, the high prevalence of poverty coincides with high proportion of teenagers who have had sexual intercourse before age 18. This risky behaviour significantly impacts both their presence in classrooms and subsequent achievement.

According to local customs, girls who have been initiated through secret societies (usually by age 14) are ready for marriage. Poverty forces parents to get their children married earlier with the hope that she gets taken care of and that there is one less mouth to feed at home. Although the legal age for marriage in Sierra Leone is 18 years, a significant minority (13.9%) of girls are married or live-in together with their partners at an earlier age.⁴² Our sample also had six under-18 girls who were living with their husbands/domestic partners (Two in Falaba and four in Tonkolili).

5.3.4 Household poverty reduces family's capacity to afford quality education services and support learning

All pupil and CTA FGDs revealed how poverty critically impedes accessing educational services. Although with the advent of the Government's flagship FQSE programme, parental contributions to education have reduced, there still remain stiff financial constraints to access quality education services. In 2019,⁴³ 24.1% of primary school revenues and 15.8% junior school revenues were contributed by parents. Our study also found some schools which had received financial support approval from MBSSE demanding **parental contributions** for supporting payments towards voluntary teachers and for conducting any special classes, which directly impedes connectedness and achievement (as was discussed in 4.2.3 and 4.3.4 above).

Most pupils mentioned **transportation costs, learning material costs, and lunch money** as their biggest constraints to a quality education, which encompasses all three dimensions of Access, Connectedness, and Achievement.



If you do not have transportation, you will not be able to come to school. If you do not have a uniform, book, pen, shoe, bag, you will not be allowed into school. And even if you manage to come with all materials and uniform and if you do not have lunch money, you can't focus and there will be no point coming to school.

LIH, WR3

41 Stats SL and ICF, "Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019," p.63.

42 Stats SL and ICF, "Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey 2019." P.62.

43 MBSSE, "2019 Annual School Census Report" (Ministry for Basic and Senior Secondary Education, 2020).

Children with disabilities and pregnant or parent learners require additional resources to cater for their special learning needs and these have challenges that have been covered in an earlier section. However, when these groups also come from low-income households, they get further marginalised and it affects their achievement outcomes.

A major factor influencing learning outcomes at secondary school levels is the amount of independent learning a pupil can get outside of school hours, for which electricity supply plays a critical role. Unfortunately, **low-income households and rural and underserved areas often lack supply to or cannot afford electricity at homes.** The gendered dimension of this is further exposed since motivated boys can access public streetlights to read after school hours, which are unavailable to girls.

5.3.5 Limited financial capacity of communities reduces any local level support to promote Achievement

Another consequence of high-rates of rural poverty means communities have very little capacities to support further marginalised groups like children with disabilities and pregnant or parent learners as they are barely able to manage for themselves. Thus, financial capacities of communities to contribute towards implementation of Radical Inclusion are low in rural and underserved areas.

Support

5.3.6 NGO/development partner support in promoting community engagement in improving learning outcomes

NGOs and other development partners play a crucial role in implementing Radical Inclusion. This has been apparent by their explicit inclusion across different strands of the implementation plan. They have contributed to enhancing Access, Connectedness, and Achievement outcomes of marginalised pupils. An exhaustive mapping of all organisations working with marginalised groups of children is beyond the scope of this study. Some organisations whose work received noteworthy mention during our qualitative study have been listed below.

- a) **Children with disabilities** – Leh Wi Lan, Sight Savers, Handicap International, SLUDI, other disability organisations.
- b) **Pregant or parent learners** – UNICEF, Girl Plus, Marie Stopes.
- c) **Low-income Households and Rural-underserved areas** – Save the Children, UNICEF, Other local NGOs supporting in providing books, uniforms etc.

In conclusion, it is clear that Radical Inclusion requires strong community-level engagement in order to overcome constraints imposed by norms, customs, and practices. A school is a microcosm of the community it is embedded in, and is able to influence and get influenced by its norms and practices. An inclusive community enables schools to be more inclusive while school leadership and CTAs have the ability to influence community norms as well. Although communities are the primary source of stigma and discrimination, our study finds that they also provide the key to overcome them.

06

ENABLING POLICY ENVIRONMENT

This chapter discusses findings on the challenges and strengths of the existing policy environment, the institutional mechanisms, and macro-level socio-political and economic readiness for implementing the Radical Inclusion Policy which is aligned with its Policy Statement 4. Unlike previous chapters the findings from this chapter have not been delineated on account of Access, Connectedness, and Achievement since these institutional structures and macro-level factors are cross-cutting in nature.

6.1 Institutional structures for Radical Inclusion

This section outlines the challenges and strengths of the existing institutional mechanism of the Government at national, regional, and local levels, for implementing the Radical Inclusion Policy. Important areas of improvement were observed in policy and institutional mechanisms, such as methods of identifying marginalised pupils, existing M&E systems, teacher capacity development, and examination policy.

Challenges

6.1.1 There are gaps in data and evidence gathering on marginalised pupils

These findings on data gaps are a continuation of those listed in detail in 3.1 above, which were obtained from KIs at district and national levels. An overall limitation with the existing data collection systems of MBSSE is that it relies almost exclusively on school-level self-reported data which are unreliable. The inherent risks of relying on such data is that if an indicator is not considered important, the data collected have arbitrary values.⁴⁴ However, if the data are used for budgeting school grants and subsidies (such as enrolment headcounts), we observe systematic overreporting in order to maximise resources at school-level.

Another limitation of using school-level estimates of marginalisation is intersectionality. A pupil could belong to multiple marginalisation groups – a child could have disabilities, come from an underserved area, and may be from a low-income household. And she could be pregnant or a parent learner. Counting separately the number of pupils in each marginalised group targeted by the inclusion policy is likely to provide significant overestimates of the total number of children involved and, more importantly, will reduce understanding of the complex needs and issues involved. In order to accurately measure the influence of this intersectionality and accurately analyse effects of interventions on them, it becomes important to capture pupil-level data.

⁴⁴ For example, data on CWDs at school level varies drastically year on year, which seem quite unlikely.

Data on children with disabilities was also reported to have reliability issues. There is a dearth of screening and referral capacities from the Ministry of Health to medically diagnose a disability. In the absence of these facilities, the common practice is to use a standardised set of questions such as the Washington Group questions⁴⁵ which are used to informally screen for self-reported disabilities. However, schools reported using neither a referral system nor a systematic questionnaire for assessing disability of pupils. Consequently, school level numbers of children with disabilities tend to vary dramatically in the same region or in the same school over time. It was also reported that some disability organisations like Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues (SLUDI) also maintain more reliable data on disabilities.



The data on disabilities is not reliable. Whenever I need to identify children with disabilities, I contact our district chapter of SLUDI. They have more accurate data – not just those in schools, but also those out of schools.

District KII

Data on pregnant girls suffers from timeliness and accuracy challenges. Firstly, due to the stigma associated with teenage pregnancy, schools are quite late at identifying pregnant learners as they do not proactively inform their teachers until they become visibly pregnant. Secondly, due to their irregular attendance, the relatively higher compliance requirements⁴⁶ and lack of incentive attached to reporting it, these data are not updated routinely like enrolment.



Data on pregnant learners was not reliable because they do not record it timely thinking the girl is just lazy until she is visibly pregnant. And even after that they will think “Oh! This girl will give birth and not be pregnant anymore. Why record and make complications?”. This is because they have to collect data like the name of the girls, age, address and family background information etc. separately.

District KII

Data on parent learners is also unavailable and does not seem to be captured during the ASC.

Presently, there is no mechanism of identifying children from low-income households and rural and underserved areas. Identifying individual pupils from low-income households will need the data system to capture pupil-level data, which it is not presently designed for. However, an underserved area may be centrally identified and notified by the planning department.

6.1.2 District offices lack resources and staff for monitoring inclusion

The baseline assessment revealed that district offices had limited capacity for routine monitoring, data collection, and analysis. **Firstly, district offices are under-resourced and unable to manage independent data collection.** They largely rely on self-reported estimates from schools for education planning and management.

⁴⁵ See <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/>

⁴⁶ Principals reported that detailed information on their address, parents information and health conditions are among the many fields to be filled while recording a pregnant learner



I am very limited in monitoring the effective implementation of this policy. The topography of the land is very unfriendly, and we lack an office vehicle. Moreover, there are only three school inspectors to cover thirteen mountainous chiefdoms. We rely on data provided by schools, either collected telephonically or their hardcopy submissions. Honestly, I could only tell you the number of schools by levels, but I cannot tell you even the enrolment accurately in my district.

District KII

Secondly, the districts are unable to act on evidence-based trends due to their limited data analytical capacities and lack of communication on evidence inputs from the centre. Districts reported that they were unable to identify and respond to changing trends in enrolment, drop-outs, or other relevant education indicators since they lacked the manpower to analyse trends. Moreover, data analysis was reportedly done primarily at the central MBSSE levels (presumably, since all EMIS analytical functionality is based there). However, the flow of data was solely from districts to the centre with limited analytical advice given to the districts to act on any trends observed.



Our main job is to ensure data is sent to our national offices on time. I endorse all data I send but I don't receive anything from them. I don't have the people to do this at my office.

District KII

It was also reported that the data monitoring and analysis process outside of the ASC is ad-hoc and limited by resource constraints.

Thirdly, there is overlap in monitoring functions. The education service delivery system at the district-level involves the following actors/institutions with considerable overlap in school monitoring functions and limited ways to share or use data collected.⁴⁷

- **District Education Office** – reports to the Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management at MBSSE and responsible for overall planning and oversight of education services delivery
- **TSC District Office** – reports to the TSC and responsible for teacher performance
- **FQSE District Unit** – many of its functions, roles and responsibilities overlap with other district offices

6.1.3 Present examination policies prevent children with disabilities from qualifying BECE and WASSCE

Presently, Sierra Leone follows the West Africa Exam Council (WAEC) examination policy. All marginalised pupils write the same examination as other candidates in the BECE and WASSCE. children with disabilities are provided with a scribe, depending on their level of disability, to help read out the question paper and write answers on their behalf. However, the exam policy makes English and Mathematics as compulsory subjects at the BECE level. Unfortunately, many children with disabilities especially blind students, are not taught mathematics due to limited teacher capacities in schools. Consequently, they score a zero or near zero score which brings down their overall aggregate scores, causing their results to be withheld.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Education Partners Group, "Systems-Level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone".

⁴⁸ In order to pass BECE, students must score an aggregate of over 35% in their 3 best subjects out of 6 subjects, with English and Mathematics being compulsory.



Most schools don't offer blind children with Mathematics because they said it is difficult, but they have to take Mathematics exams and they get a zero or close to zero on it because they haven't studied it and because they are blind. And that zero brings down their average scores.

National KII

However, MBSSE has been granting special exceptions on a case-by-case basis to enable children with disabilities to pass these examinations.⁴⁹ In one instance, a child with a physical disability was permitted to take the exams orally while in another case, a blind girl whose results were detained since she failed in maths was given an exemption from calculating of maths scores in her BECE results.

6.1.4 Teacher capacity-building institutional gaps hinder creating an inclusion-oriented teacher workforce

The existing teacher capacity building systems in Sierra Leone faced capacity constraints in providing adequately trained and sensitised teachers for implementing Radical Inclusion. However, it was found that Sierra Leone is reforming its teacher capacity building systems and provides a unique opportunity to ensure inclusion plays a primary role in its objectives.

Firstly, the pre-service teacher training systems relied almost solely on the curriculum of teacher training colleges which provide teacher certificates namely, the Teachers' Certificate and Higher Teachers' Certificate. It was reported that the curriculum focuses primarily on delivering subject-specialised trainings without paying much attention to key skills needed among all teachers such as problem-solving abilities and learner-focused approaches (as highlighted in 4.3.6). Moreover, it was unclear whether trainings on remedial education were part of this curriculum, given how regularly marginalised pupils tend to miss school.



I think for me, remedial education should be an integral part of teacher training. Helping teacher to learn how to help children catch up on missed learning is important since most marginalised children miss school a lot. Especially after COVID-19, there is an urgent need for remedial education and it is a very difficult situation. What if a girl gets pregnant and misses school for a few months and comes back? Will she be welcomed in school? Can the teachers support her in catching up to learning?

National KII

Secondly, it was reported that in-service trainings are almost exclusively provided through donor-supported interventions without a national-level continuous professional development framework. While a lot of excellent work has been done on inclusion by various development organisations, in the absence of an overarching teacher development framework, it is unlikely that the trainings by different providers link harmoniously towards improving teacher professional development in a similar vein. The Teaching Service Commission (TSC) has devised a Teacher Development and Performance Policy and has defined Teacher Standards. However, it becomes essential that these policies and standards clearly includes skills for imparting inclusive education as part of it and must ensure all teacher capacity building programs in the country link with it.

Sierra Leone is presently reforming its teacher performance management systems, as part of the World Bank's FREE Education Project, and it provides a unique opportunity to ensure practices on inclusive education such as inculcating a learner focus, problem-solving capabilities, safe learning environment, and remedial education are used as core indicators of teacher practice and performance (as opposed to merely focusing on improving test scores).

⁴⁹ See the following: A child with physical disabilities was permitted to take an oral exam for BECE, A blind student was exempted calculation of mathematics, <https://twitter.com/dsengeh/status/1502755260871368704?s=20&t=hBCbXqpt42voHMtx7fEAUg>

Strengths

6.1.5 Positive policy environment for inclusion

Sierra Leone has a strong policy environment for implementing Radical Inclusion. The Education Act, 2004, has provided a legal framework for the right to free and compulsory education up to Junior Secondary level. The FQSE has removed significant financial constraints to basic education and has created the strong demand for education, especially among low-income household and rural and underserved groups.

The Disabilities Act, 2011, has enshrined the ideology of non-discrimination towards people with disabilities, including in accessing education services. Thus, it has laid the path for strong demand for education amongst children with disabilities also.

In March 2020, the Government overturned the ban on pregnant girls from attending schools, which paved the way for a demand for quality education among pregnant or parent learners as well. Moreover, it also banned corporal punishment in all schools in September 2021, which was aimed at creating an inclusive environment since marginalised pupils were most likely to get flogged.⁵⁰

Finally, the Radical Inclusion Policy has tied these policy frameworks together with a concerted plan of action for ensuring all four marginalised groups are included, and the implementation plan has prepared a framework for greater collaboration and engagement between the Government and development partners in providing quality education for marginalised pupils.

6.1.6 School Improvement Plans provide an opportunity to systematically plan and budget for Radical Inclusion

MBSSE has institutionalised an annual school development planning system in which schools prepare School Improvement Plans (SIPs) which budgets their annual expenditure of school subsidies. MBSSE has issued guidelines⁵¹ whereby schools are directed to spend up to 30% of their school subsidies for improving access and inclusion. Consequently, the baseline study reported some schools having constructed ramps to make infrastructure more inclusive, although at national level it still remains limited.⁵²

6.1.7 Commitment to Radical Inclusion observed among District Education Officials

Despite serious human and financial resource constraints, District education officials have displayed strong commitment to implement Radical Inclusion.



We make all possible means to bring all those people that are discriminated back to school so that we can include them in the school system. When we see pregnant girls taking the exams, our officials encourage them on the exams and instruct the invigilator not to intimidate them. For the BECE we had 50 to 60 candidates who were visibly seen as pregnant girls and about 2 or 3 for the NPSE. We set up an additional 36 special exam centres across the district to enable pupils from remote and far-flung areas to write exams without much difficulties. We have also tried our best to encourage hard to reach communities to set up a community school.

District KII

50 According to the Strengthening Accountability and Building Inclusion (SABI) report, <http://sabi-sl.org/sabi-learning-review-report/> 83% of pregnant girls and 7% CWDs were likely to be flogged more than once a week, compared to 5% among non-disabled and non-pregnant pupils.

51 MBSSE, "Guidelines for Use of Subsidies Allocated to Government and Government Assisted Schools," *Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education*, May 15, 2020, <https://mbsse.pubpub.org/pub/subsidyuse/release/1>.

52 According to ASC 2020, only 12% schools had constructed ramps.

Some district officials have also shown innovation by supporting community-based organisations to support marginalised children.



What we usually do during our budget preparation we usually put aside some money for those children. We give it to an umbrella organisation of the disabled (Sierra Leone Union for Disability Issues). We usually put around Le 10 million for their upkeep and support to assist the disabled. They are a very good organisation that reaches out extensively to remote and hard to reach areas also. At times, I also have a special supply of books for them. I also solicit assistance of NGOs to assist them and I usually follow-up on their issues.

District KII

Thus, there are pockets of strong initiative to implement Radical Inclusion at the district-level.

6.1.8 Collaborative culture between government and development partners strengthens institutional environment for Radical Inclusion

MBSSE has cultivated a strong culture of collaboration between the Ministry and various development partners and view the latter as an integral part of education planning and implementation. A testimony to that is the Radical Implementation Plan has identified and mapped various development partners against different parts of the plan where they could lend support the government in its implementation.



Now with most of our development partners, we are entering into service level agreements with a focus on Radical Inclusion and encourage that this is included their annual work plan.

National KII

Another key institutional support for implementing the policy is the availability of quality research and tried and tested learning resources aimed at strengthening capacities for inclusion among teachers, school leaders, and education officials.⁵³

6.2 Society's readiness for Radical Inclusion

The successful implementation of the Radical Inclusion Policy requires that the country's socio-political and economic environment is ready for it. This section highlights the strengths and constraints uncovered during the baseline assessment.

6.2.1 Socio-political acceptance at grassroots with strong political will at the top

Broadly speaking, the socio-political acceptance for this policy has been reasonably high. We observed **an overall positive sentiment among pupils, school and community stakeholders.**

⁵³ Organisations such as UNICEF, Plan International, Sight Savers, Leh Wi Lan have created and implemented useful quality resources on teacher capacity building. MBSSE has several resources to potentially choose for scaling up.



I think Sierra Leone has done amazingly well in expanding the capacity of schools by moving from double shift to one shift, making both primary and secondary schools education free and a lot by making school places more available.

National KII



When schools reopened, we saw many girls had become pregnant. But unlike last time after Ebola crisis where we were asked to expel the girls, this time the government's focus was on bringing them back to school. I really appreciate the change.

Vice Principal, FL2



I say thanks to the government because the laws they have put they are fine because now the teachers fear to beat us because of this law. Then those that were not coming to school like the cripple and pregnant women – it has made them to come to school. So I'm glad for the government for what they have done.

PPL, WR3

However, there is a significant minority who are still opposed to the Radical Inclusion Policy on grounds of pregnant or parent learners being bad influences and the inability to control students without corporal punishments. There was also a large appetite for corporal punishment in schools.



The Radical Inclusion Policy is good for lawmakers but it is not good for us. Because it acts as an influencing factor for the other children to get pregnant just like counterparts. But they are the law makers and they have decided for these children to come to school. I do not think I am in place to say it is not good. When these children meet with their colleagues that have never got pregnant and are focused, they tend to influence these other children. This will give the cause for the pregnancy issue to continue in the school. Earlier when children got pregnant, they were ashamed of coming to school. But now they are coming confidently and mixing with the other children and are negatively influencing them.

Female CTA Member, WR3



Another challenge also has to do with human rights. This is Africa, and in Africa we are used to controlling our children or sending them to run some errands, but the introduction of this human rights issue in Africa, has changed the dynamics between parents and their children. Now if you ask your child to help you in doing something, and he/she refuses you can do nothing to them. The children are well aware of the human rights issues because as soon as you touch them, they will walk their way to the police station and make a report, therefore, most parents and teachers are now afraid of controlling their children due to the human rights laws. I think this is causing children to be badly behaved more than before.

Female CTA Member & Parent, TK1

The Radical Inclusion Policy has been championed from the highest offices like the President of Sierra Leone and the Minister for Basic and Senior Secondary Education and consequently, has strong political will for implementation. The Minister has instituted a **strong messaging campaign for Radical Inclusion** in the country by regularly sharing inspirational case studies through his social media channels. Regular messaging on the FQSE from the President and on Radical Inclusion from Minister has generated strong awareness on the policy and is facilitating great acceptance of the policy.



Yeah, this was the fear in the beginning that ‘Ah! you know they brought free education and now they want pregnant girls back to school. They are not serious’. But ultimately, if you allow misinformation to spread, then it wins. The way to fight misinformation is to engage and give correct information.

It required having difficult conversations and listening to people who will tell you that your ideas are not good. It required having conversations with religious leaders. But we listened with empathy, we rumbled with vulnerability. And we succeeded to build coalitions from these confrontations. I think now this policy has been able to transcend political interests. The people have embraced it, the chiefs have embraced it.

Minister for Basic and Senior Secondary Education

6.2.2 Policy enforcement capacity constraints risk sustaining inclusion

A strong policy implementation also requires the necessary systems in place to enforce these norms. However, Sierra Leone has **capacity challenges in general law enforcement**, with a highly strained justice system. We found that some pupils and community members had limited faith in the criminal justice system to prosecute rapists who had impregnated vulnerable girls.

Another example of these constraints at school-level have been the general inability in creating a welcoming and safe environment in schools. As highlighted earlier in 4.2.5 and 4.2.6, school-based reporting mechanisms for SRGBV against marginalised groups is ineffective. Most often, Principals and the school management are unwilling to act against teachers who are perpetrators of SRGBV against children. Similarly, the inability to enforce the ban on corporal punishment is also emblematic of this grassroots enforcement challenge and requires significant work on changing behaviours and attitudes towards marginalised learners.

6.2.3 Economic feasibility of policy implementation is questionable

Another crucial aspect for successful implementation is economic feasibility of the policy and steps planned to finance this ambitious venture. On this account, the policy is lacking in detail.

A costing plan was not yet available: The Policy’s Implementation Plan has 50 intervention strands, with 250 different activities across its four policy objectives. While the implementation plan is extremely detailed on intervention strands and activities for implementing across the next five years, it is presently missing details on its costing. However, we are given to understand the costing exercise is underway and is a welcome step in helping the Government get a clear understanding of the resource requirement and how much it and other development partners will be willing to contribute towards the policy implementation.

Specific financing arrangements for the policy are unclear. The policy requires the joint collaborative efforts of multiple government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDA) as key stakeholders in its implementation. While it envisages instituting a steering committee comprising 19 MDAs which serves as a platform for inter-ministerial collaboration, its mandate seems largely technical at the moment. While the plan designates different intervention strands to be led by different departments and ministries, this inter-ministerial implementation would require them to also commit a budget for it. Presently, the MBSSE is undertaking a costing exercise to estimate resource requirements to implement the plan. It is anticipated that this exercise will be undertaken annually which will support the Government to link its different activities with earmarked budgets of various MDAs.

However, the implementation plan provides an explicit mechanism for engaging with other development partners to take ownership and finance their respective sections as well. But this risks financing being subject to individual donor priorities and levels of financial commitment. Moreover, the bulk of the inclusion-related interventions (and finances) in Sierra Leone have been managed by non-governmental agencies, thereby limiting state involvement and ownership on managing the implementation of Radical Inclusion.

A concrete way of institutionalising Radical Inclusion and simultaneously building state capabilities would also be to create a separate budget head that cuts across relevant ministries and departments, which requires legislative sanction. It would enable for smooth multi-ministerial financial collaboration as well as the fiduciary oversight and accountability needed for any external development assistance channelled through it. It is heartening to note that the Minister of Education has stated that it is his government's intention to institutionalise Radical Inclusion in the Education Act, 2004 and thereby ensure its long-term financial sustainability.

Thirdly, it was unclear whether there was any internal prioritisation of the implementation plan.

The implementation plan comprises 257 activities spanning across the four policy objectives. However, this extensive plan has not devised an internal prioritisation framework, with most activities having the expectation of being implemented simultaneously. It is expected that once the costing activity is completed, the Government and development partners will need to create a clear prioritisation which is linked with current implementation capacities in order to maximise benefits to marginalised pupils.

Fourthly, there is limited community capacity for cost-sharing in the plan. Given the expansive and extensive nature of the Radical Inclusion Policy implementation plan, it is quite likely for some amount of cost-sharing to be expected from local communities. However, given the widespread poverty in rural Sierra Leone, it would be unrealistic to expect local communities to take up a major part of financing implementation.



We as community members have done nothing as a support to these disabled or marginalised or deprived students with regards to their challenges. But the community is so poor, it also wrong to expect them to do that if we find it difficult to even support ourselves.

Female CTA Member, TK1

A typical case of cost-sharing expectations resulting in lack of sustainability has been the case of school buses procured in urban areas of Sierra Leone. There have been reports⁵⁴ that local councils have had to curtail or stop these services due to inadequate financial capacities of the councils and the inability of users to pay for their running cost.

54 See news reports published in Politico SL(2020) <https://politicosl.com/articles/sierra-leone-halts-school-bus-service>, Sierra Express Media (2021) <https://sierraexpressmedia.com/?p=89251>, Global Times SL (Sept. 2021) <https://globaltimes-sl.com/en/2021/09/08/fcc-where-are-the-school-buses/>

07

ASSESSMENT OF RADICAL INCLUSION IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

This chapter provides quantitative perspectives to support recent commitments to implement the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools by ensuring it is evidence based. It uses the policy's implementation plan as the framework to identify intervention elements involved in achieving the goal of quality learning for all learners in Sierra Leone, with a special focus on the four groups of marginalised learners and is comprised of two parts. The chapter assesses the fidelity of different intervention strands of the implementation plan and reports on data elements needed to monitor it.

In light of inclusion being a process that works on ensuring education systems respond to the learning needs of all pupils, the first part of this chapter aims to validate the proposed interventions strands in the plan and also report on data elements required for its monitoring. As described earlier in 2.2, it does so by identifying the implied hypothesis underpinning intervention strands in the Radical Inclusion plan⁵⁵ that potentially connects with quantitative data and, hence, the quantitative elements required to track the impact of the strategy on one or more of the three aspects of inclusion: access to school (Access), experience of and retention in school (Connectedness) and learning outcomes from school education (Achievement).

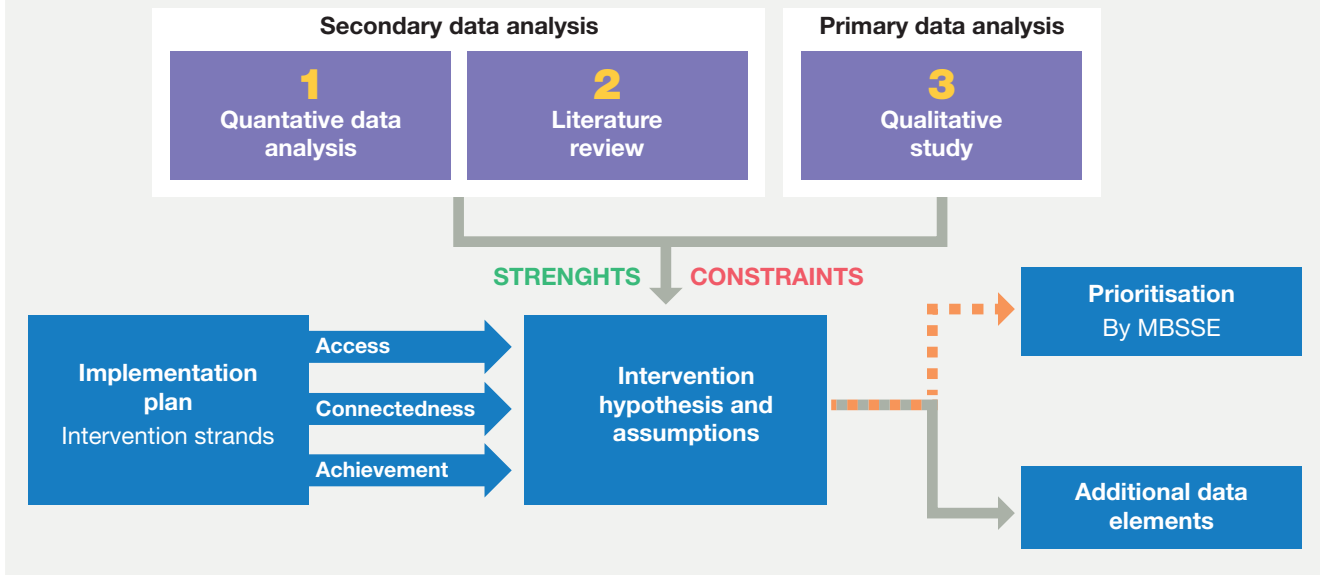
The second part of the chapter discusses some possible options for monitoring these elements now and in the immediate future as well as some practical difficulties in collecting these data elements in Sierra Leone. There is also a discussion on how evidence from data might be used to prioritise investment in these strategies.

7.1 Evaluability assessment of implementation plan

The Radical Inclusion Policy's Draft Implementation Plan was reviewed and of the 50 intervention strands identified, 36 strands were selected which had one or more clear links with Access, Connectedness, and Achievement. Next, the hypothesis for each selected strand was induced based on theory and the activities described by the intervention. Subsequently, the assumptions needed for this hypothesis to hold true were induced, following which the current reality based on findings from the baseline study was reported, and an assessment was made of whether reality supports or contradicts each hypothesis.

Finally, each hypothesis was matched with a set of additional data elements required for effectively monitoring progress of the policy along its access, connectedness, and achievement goals. This resulted in recommendations of which intervention strands should be prioritised for monitoring, and which additional data types would be needed. The detailed results of this analysis, represented in Figure 14 below, is presented in Annex B.

⁵⁵ Each of these intervention strands have multiple activities.

Figure 15: The systematic assessment process of the implementation plan


Additional datasets required to explore strategies

In addition to the desirable data elements detailed in 3.2 above, an additional seven data sets are required for a thorough quantitative exploration of the Radical Inclusion intervention strands. These data sets, along with possible sources have been detailed in Table 24 below.

Table 24: Additional datasets for monitoring Radical Inclusion

Additional Data Elements Required	Source(s) of data
Data about post-school destinations for pupils from marginalised groups Data on household incomes	Household survey data such as the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) https://www.statistics.sl/index.php/sierra-leone-integrated-household-survey-slihs.html
Data about school and classroom practices	New data system which includes the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed teacher practices assessment data to be collected as part of the FREE Education Project at school-level. • School-level Exam analysis of BECE, WASSCE and proposed National Learning Assessments data which link to creating pedagogical insights and performance disaggregated by marginalised groups. • School Quality Assurance Officers' backend data system. • Lesson observation data collected by Principals and SQAOs using Tangerine with support from Leh Wi Lan.
Data about school funding and additional costs	New data system – a new school development planning MIS for schools to feed in their School Improvement Plans and update on its implementation. This will be used for bottom-up education budgeting by MBSSE and Ministry of Finance.

Table 24: Additional datasets for monitoring Radical Inclusion (continued)

Additional Data Elements Required	Source(s) of data
Data about teacher qualifications and training	New data system – from the proposed Teacher Management Information System which integrates TSC’s data on teacher qualifications with the TMIS’s relevant data elements on pre-service and in-service training.
Measures of quality of school facilities	New data system – a new school development planning MIS for schools to feed in their School Improvement Plans and update on its implementation. This will be used for bottom-up education budgeting by MBSSE and MoF.
Measures of transport provision	New data elements on quality and costs of transportation– to be incorporated into the school catchment planning protocol.
Views of out-of-school/marginalised children and parents/prospective parents	Modifications to School Quality Assurance data protocols to incorporate views of marginalised children and community members.

7.2 Recommended evidence-gathering protocol

Studies of practices are very important and central to any evaluation of the impact of inclusion policies. Good policies that do not translate into effective practices are empty. The Radical Inclusion Policy’s Implementation Plan has a clearly defined theory of change which informs policy practice. Each set of activities (*257 Activities*) have direct outputs and outcomes which help realise an intermediate outcome (*50 Intervention Strands*). These intermediate outcomes feed into actualisation of Strategic Goals (*16 Strategies*) which in-turn lead to the broad policy impact outcomes (*4 Policy Statements*). However, the preceding section highlighted how the implied hypothesis for the success of each intervention strand requires some assumptions to hold true, which are not consistently holding up based on their baseline assessment.

Thus, it is imperative to formulate relevant evidence gathering protocols which collect school- and community-level practices and experiences to verify and evaluate the fidelity of each implementation strand for the causal chains in the Radical Inclusion Policy to hold true.

7.2.1 Monitoring policy implementation through School Quality Assurance Officers

The School Quality Assurance and Resource Management (SQARM) Office at District level is uniquely placed to play a leading role in routinely monitoring grassroots-level implementation of the policy.

They have the mandate, the direct link with MBSSE at the Central level and are featured prominently in the implementation of large-scale inclusion programmes of different development partners. It is also envisaged that this office will be enlarged to form a District Resources Group which looks into all aspects of ensuring quality and inclusion at the school-level.

Enable SQAOs to collect inclusion data through tablets to provide real-time updates on policy implementation.

These officials currently have the mandate to visit schools to provide quality assurance on school’s administrative data (such as enrolment, pupil and teacher attendance etc.) as well as some school practices. It is proposed that these SQAOs be empowered to collect school and community experience data to measure inclusion. Since they possess tablets, it provides an opportunity to measure implementation progress in real-time.

SQAOs should be able to collect repeated cross-sections of data to generate a quality database on marginalised pupils and their experiences. It is proposed that the SQAOs will also engage with marginalised pupils and collect their experiences during every visit. Since it is difficult to track individual pupils during different visits to a particular school, it is proposed that they collect cross-section data from a random sample of marginalised pupils each time. Over time, it will produce a rich database of grassroots progress on addressing constraints to their inclusion. It will also directly address one of the intervention strands of the implementation policy that seeks to gather feedback of marginalised pupils in policy planning and implementation.

7.2.2 Prioritising policy implementation and a caveat on attributability of interventions

It is planned to undertake an independent impact evaluation of the policy after five years of implementation aimed at: (i) identifying attributability of the activities, intervention strands or strategies of the policy to improved inclusion; and, (ii) examine the contribution the policy to wider changes in inclusion of marginalised. It requires the identification of clear indicators to measure each activity, intervention strand and possibly, strategic goals also.

However, the collection and analysis of data about the different dimensions of inclusion presents challenges, but it is central to an exploration of the value and impact of strategies to increase inclusion for children from marginalised groups. These challenges include:

- Selecting types of practice (education, welfare, social attitudes) for consideration.
- Developing clear definitions.
- Applying the definitions in practice.
- Ensuring integrity of data collection.
- Using appropriate analytic methods.

The implementation plan is ambitious and targets to implement all 50 intervention strands across the entire country over the next five years. However, the baseline assessment found district-level capacities to be very limited in providing support to schools in delivering education of basic quality. Truly Radical Inclusion requires the platform of a well-functioning school over which specialised support for learners with special needs can be built. Thus, there is an urgent need to prioritise intervention strands which build capacities of district offices as highlighted above.

In education, it is common to see references to a single policy or practice as being desirable, as being effective, as driving improved performance. Multiple regression analyses are based on the idea of 'assuming that all other factors are kept the same, an increase in this variable is associated with an improved outcome'. There are techniques for analysing combinations of characteristics that may be very useful for identifying the combinations or configurations of practices in schools that are associated with positive outcomes in terms of Radical Inclusion. However, schools are complex organisations with their own culture and combinations of practices. A recent qualitative study of effective secondary schools in Sierra Leone shows this clearly.⁵⁶ Thus, while undertaking policy evaluation it is important to acknowledge this complexity while identifying indicators and doing analysis of data aimed at attributing efficacy of the policy.

56 MBSSE, "Positive Deviance among Sierra Leone's Secondary Schools".

08

CONCLUSION AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Overview

The findings from the baseline assessment of the National Policy for Radical Inclusion provides an insight into the multiple dimensions and complex challenges faced in planning and implementing Radical Inclusion in Sierra Leone. It highlighted constraints faced, and support provided at the school, community, and institutional level in increasing access, improving school connectedness and safety, as well as enhancing achievement among the four groups of marginalised learners identified by the policy.

The baseline research found good socio-political acceptance of inclusive principles at the grassroots level, with strong political will to implement a strong policy at the top. Collaborative culture between government and development partners has strengthened the institutional environment, and are both a force for change. However, some system weaknesses, especially: a) unpredictable government funds; and, b) limited capacity and resource at district-level, leave questions as to how the policy can be implemented to achieve national impact, beyond development partners implementing small-scale interventions.

Although it was not possible to get a comprehensive, triangulated set of baseline figures, the research managed to produce detailed assessment of the potential of various data systems to produce accurate information on marginalised pupils in future. The research found that the ASC has good potential to produce policy monitoring data, especially if pupil information can be set against other datasets, and validation can be improved.

ASC data indicated that a large minority of schools are in underserved areas, and that the majority of children live in rural households. A significant minority of girls aged 15-19 years are mothers: 18%. Only 0.08% of girls enrolled in schools were identified as pregnant. 1.5% of children enrolled were identified as disabled, suggesting a significant number of children with disabilities are not in school, or are not identified by teachers.⁵⁷

Access to pre-primary education is low, and there are still significant challenges for students to complete primary education and transition to secondary. Very few sexual or gender-based violence cases have been recorded.

⁵⁷ UNICEF estimates that around 4% of children under 15 are disabled. <https://www.unicef.org/disabilities#:~:text=Fifteen%20per%20cent%20of%20the%20world%E2%80%99s%20population%20%E2%80%93,life.%20Nearly%20240%20million%20of%20them%20are%20children>

Barriers for marginalised children

The three most commonly raised challenges faced by marginalised students across districts were that the schools were far away (Access), and once in school they do not feel safe (Connectedness) and are hungry and cannot focus (Achievement). At the institutional-level, we found the high-degree of commitment and motivation for Radical Inclusion seen at higher-levels of government are not translating into practice in a timely manner at the grassroots, due to serious coordination and capacity constraints.

School safety

This study's findings were consistent with the multiple previous studies showing that school-based harassment and gender-based violence is extensive and has been normalised in schools.

Increasing the number of schools, improving transport provisions, or expanding school feeding programmes have major cost implications. However, one area which administration can focus on without delay is to make schools safer.

Unification of monitoring functions and strengthening of district offices

The significant institutional challenge hampering routine implementation was the resource constraints faced by district offices. There are multiple district offices undertaking school-level monitoring each having limited monitoring capacities and resources.

Prioritising data for collection

The major challenge on MEL for Radical Inclusion is collecting data elements for all intervention strands and activities comprehensively. Presently, MEL capacities at district-level are extremely limited, and it would be unrealistic to expect performance data on 257 different activities envisaged in the implementation plan to be collected routinely, even if the additional data elements required for it are made available.

8.2 Key recommendations

For Radical Inclusion to happen at the school-level, schools have to improve their basic pedagogical and management practices for all learners while at the same time provide targeted support for children who are marginalised by gender, disability, or poverty barriers. Communities also have a major role to play in removing stigma and practices that discriminate against marginalised groups of children. Our findings suggest that schools can influence and be influenced by the community it is embedded in.

In developing recommendations to accompany study findings, the team focused on systemic and supportive action which MBSSE could immediately take to strengthen the education system. These actions would help give schools the best chance of retaining marginalised children and enable scaling-up of effective models of inclusion.

Additional detailed recommendations can be found in Sections 4-7.

A. Make schools safer and more welcoming for marginalised pupils

1. Prioritise collaboration between MBSSE and development partners to make schools safer, especially for girls. Sensitisation on recognising and reporting physical abuse, strengthening of reporting and referral mechanisms, and improving capacity at the frontline to support victims of abuse, could be explored in line with the new National Referral Protocol. Some areas for action include:

- Campaigns to address negative attitudes around pregnant learners, using lessons from previous efforts to promote inclusion of children with disability.⁵⁸
 - Starting with teachers employed by TSC, develop and test measures to enforce the Teacher Code of Conduct as a starting point to reduce violence in and around schools.
 - Request that development partners map pupils who live outside the family home, and the risks they face, to increase understanding for developing safeguarding measures.
2. End exclusionary examination methods for visually impaired pupils. This could be addressed with technical support from partners for a revised marking scheme. It would be a relatively easy issue to address and report on in a short timeframe.
 3. Undertake a feasibility study to explore options to increase marginalised learners' access to schools such as providing buses, bicycles, or organising 'walking buses'.
 4. Design guidance on methods for directing FQSE funds to marginalised groups, to help these families cover the costs of attending school.

B. Strengthen school functioning as the foundation for quality, inclusive education

1. While resources for schools are likely to remain relatively low for some time, reducing the unpredictability of funding to schools would reduce pressure on pupils to find informal fees, and would limit corruption. Development partners could be asked to support a process review of school funding mechanisms, and to help MBSSE test efficiency improvements at national- and district-levels.
2. Focus teacher professional development around Radical Inclusion. Many teachers know the key messages but more is needed to change negative attitudes and behaviours in schools, as well as given the tools and enabling environment to deliver inclusive practices. Gather evidence of good practice between schools and communities. Showcase good practice, linking with TSC to ensure that professional development modules on learner-centred and inclusive teaching are developed and delivered.
3. Adopt data-driven decision-making for new school placement which prioritises lower time-to-school from marginalised pupils' homes (as opposed to say, investing in larger central schools).

C. Strengthen district education offices to support and monitor inclusion in schools

The biggest institutional challenge hampering policy implementation was the resource constraints and lack of coordination faced by district offices. There are multiple district offices undertaking school-level monitoring and response, each having limited monitoring capacities and resources.

1. Unify the mandate and financial resources of school-level monitoring to the office of SQARM.
2. In the medium-term, increase budgets for SQARM to support inclusive teaching practices, school safety, and inclusive school leadership. MBSSE should consider increasing the cadre of SQAOs and providing resources for them to visit schools regularly, based on proof of concept from LWL. Inclusion indicators can be included explicitly within SQAOs' existing school monitoring tools. These can be adapted for primary as well as secondary education.

D. Prioritise data collection on realistic and desirable indicators

1. A major challenge on MEL for Radical Inclusion is collecting data elements for all intervention strands and activities comprehensively. At present, MEL capacities at district-level are extremely limited, and it would be unrealistic to expect routine collection of performance data on the 257 activities in the implementation plan. It is recommended to collect only the most essential and practicable data for measuring Radical Inclusion, instead of spreading MEL resources too thin on activity-level reporting. See Tables 3-6 above for areas where improving data collection was found to be realistic and desirable.

⁵⁸ Rose, R., Garner, P., Farrow, B., Yu, Z., (2017) Report on Research to Inform the Development and Production of a Policy document and a Strategy on Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities in the Republic of Sierra Leone. University of Northampton, UK.

2. Developing accurate pupil-level profiling and tracking is the most effective approach to gather more accurate information on marginalised pupils. This is done best by collecting and sharing data at school-level, with district support, using teachers' and pupils' contextual knowledge to identify overlaps in marginalisation and prevent double-counting. The ASC is a good starting point to generate this type of data. Data validation, disaggregation, and contextual analysis will need to be supported to strengthen ASC accuracy.
3. Analysing school-level information from the ASC and supplementary research against larger demographic and institutional datasets will provide valuable information for targeting resources, such as which schools are both underserved and have high proportions of multiply-marginalised students.

Steps to achieve these objectives and monitor the Radical Inclusion Policy

- Measure retention of marginalised students by tracking pupil-level data over time. Since doing this at scale would require a big change to current EMIS, instead it is recommended to undertake sample longitudinal studies, where individual pupils are tracked over time to get a better understanding of ARR and Transition Rates.
- Pilot qualitative studies to track specific policy impacts on marginalised pupils' education access, connectedness and achievement. Within this, build the capacity of district teams to conduct qualitative data collection – such as 'connectedness surveys'.
- Develop longitudinal studies of marginalised learners to provide sample data which the ASC is not currently able to provide (see Table 5). It would also be useful to use data from household surveys on parent learners, low-income children etc., to create an informed background against which direct pupil data from schools can be analysed in future.
- Develop and apply a centrally determined designation of school locations as rural/underserved.
- Establish a robust system to verify school-level ASC estimates, to overcome reliability challenges. The ASC budget can be used as an opportunity to validate data rather than collect school-reported estimates, which can be directly sent to MBSSE for initial ASC data collection. It is recommended to redirect enumeration budgets for annual validation exercises from a representative sample of schools, which would allow a validated and adjusted ASC to be issued every year. Enumerators or district staff may also be trained to collect more in-depth sample pupil-level data, to create a quality dataset on inclusion outcomes.
- Supplementing quantitative data with qualitative information on learners' experience (such as pupil 'connectedness surveys') would be a further low-cost way to generate policy impact information against validated ASC pupil data. District education staff are likely to be able to carry out this data collection with the right support.
- Schools may not yet be at the level of capacity where they can produce detailed tracking profiles for marginalised pupils (who may form the majority of pupils). Continue with capacity building for schools to record, review and share data on pupils' characteristics. This should encourage supportive responses within the school and accurate upwards reporting of how many pupils fall into key policy categories. This will require sensitisation on how to identify pupil characteristics without causing harm and while navigating stigma.
- Request analysis of learning achievement by marginalised group in large-scale achievement surveys such as EGRA/EGMA.
- Leverage the co-ordination started between MBSSE and development partners on inclusion, to share learning on what can be scaled up, and to maximise opportunities to build MBSSE data analysis capacities on marginalised pupils. This could be begun through creating a learning group where partners share intervention evaluations to all involved in implementing Radical Inclusion.

■ ANNEX A: LITERATURE REVIEW

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ANNEX B: EVALUABILITY ANALYSIS OF RADICAL INCLUSION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

Access intervention strands

The following table lists nine strategies directly relevant to access, a suggestion about the implied hypothesis that appears to underpin each strategy, and a description of the assumptions required for the hypothesis to hold, along with the current reality observed based on primary and secondary data analysis done as part of the baseline assessment. It provides details on additional data requirements to monitor the implementation of the policy besides the desired data elements mentioned in Section 3.2.

Table 25: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing access

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Strengthen and expand the provision of non-formal schemes to increase the re-enrolment, retention and completion rates of out of school children and support learners who are unable to return to formal education.	Other ways of learning increase access and enrolment for pupils from marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFE has sufficient resources (human & financial) and capacities. • NFEs provide safe environments for learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NFE is insufficiently funded and has limited reach.⁵⁹ • They lack institutional safeguards on pupil safety unlike government and government assisted secondary schools which have School Safety Committees. 	Counts of enrolments in non-formal education by membership of marginalised groups. ⁶⁰
Increase access through the construction/ expansion/ adaptation/ rehabilitation of school buildings/ toilets/classrooms guided by the school infrastructure catchment area planning (SICAP) policy and accessible and safe construction guidelines.	Enrolment rate for pupils from marginalised groups is limited by poor school infrastructure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has adequate financial resources for new construction/adaptation. • Construction guidelines incorporate constraint-free designs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government has developed and endorsed a school catchment policy.⁶¹ • Limited fiscal space with the spending deficit of nearly \$3 billion mainly due to infrastructure.⁶² • Limited guidance on inclusive school construction with grassroots understanding being limited to only constructing ramps.⁶³ 	Measures of quality and safety of facilities. ⁶⁴

59 According to the *Education Sector Analysis of the Republic of Sierra Leone (2020)*, Community Learning Centers under NFE are insufficiently financed. According to MBSSE website, only 59 centers exist across Sierra Leone.

60 ASC 2020 claims to have measured non-formal enrolments also but it has not been reported.

61 World Bank (2022) *FREE Education Project Implementation Report* March 2022.

62 According to Cost Analysis of FQSE, there is a financing deficit in its implementation of at least \$2.95 billion, mainly due to deficit in financing infrastructure to the tune of \$2.66 billion.

63 School adaptations only focus on ramps and not on guard-rails, disability-friendly latrines and other aspects of constraint-free access (District KII).

64 ASC 2019 reported whether schools have Fence, Ramp, Disability Latrines and Cubicle for Menstruation.

Table 25: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing access (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Provide accessible transportation to marginalised learners in remote and underserved areas to access schools.	Pupils from marginalised groups do not attend school regularly if there is no transport.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feasibility studies identify safe, reliable and affordable transportation for marginalised pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many pupils walk long distances and want affordable motor transport.⁶⁵ Government commitment to procure buses for improving transport (at least in district HQ towns of Sierra Leone), including for special needs schools. Regular stoppage of bus services due to high operating costs. Other buses running on cost recovery from pupils which impact LIH disproportionately.⁶⁶ Only 8% of roads in SL are paved, making many schools inaccessible for buses or incurring high transport maintenance costs.⁶⁷ 	Measures of transport provision.
Raise awareness in society to shift attitude towards inclusion	Cultural norms and practices restrict access for children from marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community sensitisation activities change attitudes of society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong political will and consistent messaging for Radical Inclusion.⁶⁸ School CTAs using role models from marginalised groups to advocate for inclusion.⁶⁹ Improved acceptance of PPL and CWD observed, although pockets of entrenched biases exist, often internalised by pupils themselves.⁷⁰ Messaging led by MBSSE, but limited engagement from other ministries and political leaders.⁷¹ 	Knowledge, views and practices of community members and marginalised children.
Tackle barriers that prevent learners from accessing school	Children from marginalised groups want to go to school but are prevented by institutional and financial barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overcoming costs associated with education increases access. School-safety grievances are redressed effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government has developed and endorsed a school catchment policy although several students find difficulty in reaching schools.⁷² Free education is assured until JSS level under FQSE although additional costs for school materials prevent regular attendance in schools.⁷³ National School Feeding Policy formulated and endorsed⁷⁴ but government has limited fiscal space for additional school feeding. 	Knowledge, views and practices of community members, school staff and marginalised children.
Communities and parents are meaningfully engaged to support learners' access and complete basic education.	Community and familial attitudes affect access and retention to school for children from marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community sensitisation activities change attitudes in society. Parents can afford to send children to schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved acceptance of PPL and CWD observed, although pockets of entrenched biases exist, often internalised by pupils. LIH unable to afford transportation, school meals and additional learning costs (books, uniforms etc.).⁷⁵ 	Knowledge, views and practices of community members, marginalised pupils.

65 Qualitative study findings.

66 See news articles <https://www.politicosl.com/articles/sierra-leone-halts-school-bus-service> and <https://allafrica.com/stories/201909090545.html>

67 See Brima (2019) <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2019/08/08/infrastructure-in-sierra-leone-fixing-the-road-to-nowhere/>

68 Messaging campaigns led by Minister of Education, such as the 'Public Education on Public Education' or #PaopaSaloneMusBetteh.

69 Qualitative study findings.

70 Qualitative study findings.

71 Analysis of Twitter trends on #RadicalInclusion shows only two tweets by the President and none from other ministries in the last one year.

72 According to Qualitative study findings, distance to school and unaffordable transportation were the top 2 constraints pupils identified as hindering their access.

73 Costs for school uniforms, notebooks, bags etc. are still prohibitive for many pupils. Qualitative study found that pupils coming to school without these are not permitted to attend classes in most schools.

74 MBSSE, "National School Feeding Policy" (Ministry for Basic and Senior Secondary Education, May 2021).

75 Qualitative study findings; 74% of households in rural Sierra Leone are considered as below poverty line (Stats SL, 2019).

Table 25: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing access (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Communities and parents are meaningfully engaged to support learners' access and complete basic education.	Community and familial attitudes affect access and retention to school for children from marginalised group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community sensitisation activities change attitudes in society. Parents can afford to send children to schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved acceptance of PPL and CWD observed, although pockets of entrenched biases exist, often internalised by pupils. LIH unable to afford transportation, school meals and additional learning costs (books, uniforms etc.). 	Knowledge, views and practices of community members, marginalised pupils.
Communities take the lead in tackling stigma and challenging harmful attitude, belief and practices in order to create a more inclusive society.	Community attitudes affect access to school for children from marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community volunteers champion Radical Inclusion. SMC/BoG/CTA/PTAs advocate for Radical Inclusion. Child Welfare Committees support dealing with societal stigma. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some CTAs and community leaders champion inclusion of marginalised groups.⁷⁶ Improved acceptance of PPL and CWD observed, although pockets of entrenched biases exist, often internalised by pupils themselves. Limited capacities and resources for Child Welfare Committees to act on child protection violations.⁷⁷ 	Knowledge, views and practices of community members, marginalised pupils.
Girls, pregnant girls and parent learners are supported to continue or return, stay, complete their education (including after delivery or miscarriage when the case applies), and sit examinations.	Practicalities and cultural practices restrict access to school during pregnancy and for adolescent parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools provide special measures for pregnant girls & parent learners (infrastructural and learning concessions). School feeding programmes include PPL. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National School Feeding Policy formulated and endorsed.⁷⁸ National Strategy for Pregnant girls has a pillar for creating enabling school environments for PPL.⁷⁹ Limited resources and capacities for providing special provisions for PPL in schools. Stigma and practical challenges of their health/childcare are two biggest reasons discouraging local initiative.⁸⁰ School feeding programmes presently limited to certain primary schools only. 	Views of out-of-school parents and prospective parent learners.
Provide financial support to learners to enable them access education.	Costs deter pupils from marginalised groups to attend schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marginalised pupils get targeted government financial support. Grassroots financial institutions provide reliable and cheap credit to parents of marginalised pupils which supports their education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited government grants provided to girls pursuing higher technical education in STEM subjects.⁸¹ Streamlined mechanism to identify LIH missing since pupil-level data is not collected in EMIS. Fiscal constraints on GoSL, given large poverty in Sierra Leone. Only 20% adults have access to formal financial institutions (13% among the two lowest quintiles), including mobile money.⁸² 	Data about family household incomes.

76 Qualitative study findings show community leaders making local laws encouraging enrolment & attendance, criminalising boys for impregnating adolescent girls. CTAs would undertake sensitisation activities on Radical Inclusion in the community.

77 According to Budget FY2021 allocations to Social Protection programmes of Ministry of Social Welfare, which include Child Welfare committees, receive limited external support and have seen its budgets slashed from Le 9.8 billion in 2019 to Le 5.4 billion in 2021. In comparison, the semi-autonomous National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), which is largely involved in building rural infrastructure, has annual external support of Le 81.1 billion, supported by World Bank, KfV and IDB with local budget allocation of Le 12.6 billion.

78 MBSSE, "National School Feeding Policy" (Ministry for Basic and Senior Secondary Education, May 2021).

79 GoSL, "National Strategy for Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage".

80 Qualitative study findings.

81 See news article <https://www.politicosl.com/articles/all-female-stem-students-get-sierra-leone-govt-grant>

82 DMAC, "Financial Exclusion in Sierra Leone" (Data Management and Analytics Capabilities, 2021).

School connectedness intervention strands

The following table lists sixteen strategies directly relevant to pupils' experience of school, a suggestion about the implied hypothesis that appears to underpin each strategy and the assumptions necessary for the hypothesis to hold. It also draws on primary and secondary data to show current reality. Finally, a description of the additional data elements required to support a quantitative exploration of the hypothesis, if the assumptions hold true, is highlighted. Connectedness contributes directly to experience in schools and consequently also results in greater retention and improved learning outcomes.

Table 26: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing school connectedness

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Set up a regulatory framework to prevent and respond to abuse of learners, including those who are the most vulnerable, such as students with communication or intellectual disabilities, by school personnel and peers.	Current regulations and policies are not adequate to keep marginalised learners safe in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School personnel and peers are aware of policies and regulations on preventing abuse. • Cases of school safety violations are recorded. • School safety violations are acted upon by the school management and education administration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong awareness of Radical Inclusion Policy among school personnel and pupils, especially on enrolling pregnant and parent learners. Misunderstandings on Anti-Corporal Punishment initiatives persist.⁸³ • Multiple initiatives undertaken to prevent abuses in government and government-assisted secondary schools.⁸⁴ • School safety violations are still high, are not recorded and pupils have minimal confidence in existing mechanisms.⁸⁵ 	Data about school and classroom practices; views of marginalised pupils.
Raise awareness in communities and schools to shift attitude towards abuse and harassment, including on SRGBV.	Current attitudes of communities, teachers and pupils discourage marginalised pupils from staying in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community sensitisation activities change attitudes in schools and communities. • Mechanisms to prevent SRGBV in schools and communities are effective. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved acceptance of PPL by teachers and pupils, although pockets of entrenched biases exist, often internalised by pupils. • Increased awareness on reporting mechanisms among pupils, but they remain largely ineffective.⁸⁶ • Community-based clubs which cater to in-school and out-of-school pupils with trained facilitators effective in reducing pregnancies and increasing enrolment.⁸⁷ 	Data about school and classroom practices; Views of community members and marginalised pupils.
Determine the viability and possible plans to develop a cohort of trainers on inclusion.	Current school and teacher practices for CWD pupils reflect lack of skills or awareness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher capacity building improves inclusion of CWDs in classrooms. • Fiscal space available for MBSSE to have specialised inclusion trainers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusive teaching practices trainings by Leh Wi Lan and other implementation partners. • Tool for assessing improved teaching practice being developed.⁸⁸ • Focusing only on specialised inclusion teaching practices without inculcating problem solving and learner-centric teaching methods limits connectedness among pupils.⁸⁹ • Fiscal constraints on GoSL given large education financing deficit. 	Data about school and classroom practices.

83 Qualitative study findings.

84 Leh Wi Lan has trained school personnel and CTAs, schools have set up suggestion boxes and designated mentors, reducing violence in schools guides have been distributed, school safety committees have been instituted.

85 Qualitative study findings; Leh Wi Lan, "Learning and School Safety Study."

86 Qualitative study findings; Leh Wi Lan.

87 Oriana Bandiera et al., "Do School Closures During an Epidemic Have Persistent Effects? Evidence from Sierra Leone in the Time of Ebola," July 2020, 78.

88 World Bank (2022) *FREE Education Project Implementation Report* March 2022.

89 Qualitative study findings; Sue Stubbs, *Inclusive Education Where There Are Few Resources*, ed. Ingrid Lewis (Oslo: The Atlas Alliance, 2008).

Table 26: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing school connectedness (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Government, implementing partners and local communities give marginalised learners a platform to contribute to the promotion of inclusive education.	Experience is improved by drawing on perspectives of members of marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student clubs are established and function effectively. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based clubs are less effective in delaying pregnancy or increasing retention.⁹⁰ • Limited number of school-based clubs and even lower student engagement.⁹¹ • Sexual exploitation and child marriages are driven primarily by poverty.⁹² 	Data about school practices.
Marginalised learners are engaged in Radical Inclusion policy implementation.	Experience is improved by drawing on perspectives of members of marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from marginalised learners informs policy implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive, yet ad-hoc, engagement by top-level officials (Minister and MBSSE National officials).⁹³ • Trust in existing feedback systems is limited (eg. on reporting school safety violations). • Limited district-level M&E capacity.⁹⁴ 	Data about school practices.
Marginalised learners are provided with holistic and coordinated support.	Pupils from marginalised groups are likely to drop out without holistic support.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers provide individualised learning support. • Disabilities are identified accurately and timely. • Marginalised learners have special assistance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited health referral systems for PPLs and CWDs, particularly in rural areas.⁹⁵ • Large classroom sizes limit teacher capacity to provide individualised learning support.⁹⁶ • Limited school-based support such as childcare assistance (PPL), customised learning time or inclusive learning materials (CWD).⁹⁷ 	Data about school and classroom practices.
Ensure schools are safe for students, especially girls, by ensuring that communities and school personnel are trained to prevent, identify, respond and refer cases of abuse, harassment and SRGBV.	Inappropriate behaviours of teachers and pupils discourage pupils from marginalised groups from staying in school.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-based child protection and safety mechanisms effectively to respond to violations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited awareness, availability, and effectiveness of school-based reporting mechanisms.⁹⁸ • Sexual exploitation and GBV by teachers is rampant.⁹⁹ 	Data about school and classroom practices, views of marginalised pupils.
SMCs and BOGs are equipped to support schools and provide safe learning environments for all learners (2 separate strands in implementation plan).	School Managements play an important role to make a child feel safe at school, which improves connectedness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SMCs and BOGs are aware of and have the capacity and resources to ensure school safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited involvement of school managements in resolving school safety violations.¹⁰⁰ • Limited trainings received on school safety management.¹⁰¹ 	Data about school practices.

90 Rachel Marcus et al., "Girls' Clubs, Life Skills Programmes and Girls' Well-Being Outcomes," GAGE Rigorous Review (ODI, September 2017).

91 According to Leh Wi Lan's "Learning and School Safety Study" only 25% schools reported having a club and only 8% pupils ever attended any session.

92 Qualitative study findings.

93 Regular school visits by Minister of Education with a focus on hearing experiences of marginalised pupils.

94 Qualitative study findings.

95 Montrose, "Situation Analysis of School Health in Sierra Leone," Saving Lives in Sierra Leone (SLiSL) (Freetown: Ministry of Health and Sanitation, September 2020).

96 According to 2020 Annual School Census Report, Pupil to Qualified Teacher ratios at JS and SS range from a low of 24 and 40 to as high as 133 and 235 respectively.

97 Qualitative study findings.

98 Learning and School Safety Study".

99 Qualitative findings revealed that pupils from every single school visited were sexually exploited or harassed by teachers.

100 According to Leh Wi Lan's "Learning and School Safety Study", Principal and School Counselor are the primary channels accessed by pupils.

101 Qualitative study findings.

Table 26: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing school connectedness (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Set up regulatory framework to tackle school personnel misconduct and abuse of learners, including those who are the most vulnerable.	Pupils from marginalised groups are more likely to drop out if exposed to abuse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and protocols developed are implemented in schools. • School leadership consistently takes strict action against teachers for misconduct and abuse of learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 57% schools have Reducing Violence in Schools guide. • School Safety Councils are in place in 71% schools, but most are not active nor structured properly to be effective. • Less than half (45%) of all safety issues get documented in schools. • Principals are unable to act against errant teachers.¹⁰² 	Data about school and classroom practices.
School facilities are accessible, safe, and inclusive of all learners.	Pupils from marginalised groups are more likely to drop out of schools with poor facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have resources to make infrastructure safe, accessible, and inclusive. • Infrastructure standards are implemented. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools have limited additional resources for adapting infrastructure.¹⁰³ • Infrastructure adaptation limited to building ramps.¹⁰⁴ 	Measures of quality of facilities.
Undertake regular school inspections/ monitoring to ensure that schools are safe and inclusive environments.	Pupils from marginalised groups are more likely to drop out of schools with poor facilities and unsafe environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School safety and inclusion is regularly assessed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited capacity of districts (School Quality Assurance Officers) to assess quality and efficacy of inclusion in schools.¹⁰⁵ • Limited pupil feedback collected and acted upon by districts.¹⁰⁶ 	Measures on three dimensions of inclusion.
Undertake classroom accessibility assessments in schools to identify constraints to inclusion.	Pupils from marginalised groups are more likely to drop out if they can't be engaged in classrooms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have the capacity and resources to undertake classroom accessibility assessments. • Additional support is available for marginalised pupils. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have received limited trainings on inclusion and minimal support in implementing practices in classrooms.¹⁰⁷ • Schools lack adequate TLM customised for different learning needs of marginalised pupils.¹⁰⁸ 	Measures of quality of facilities.
Create mechanisms to regulate the imposition of hidden fees on students.	Costs deter pupils from marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools are allocated adequate resources and receive them in a timely manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 42% of teachers are on government payrolls,¹⁰⁹ thereby prompting hidden charges. • Delays in receiving subsidies force schools to charge hidden fees. 	Data about school funding and additional costs
Support the most marginalised and remote schools not on government subsidy.	Costs prevent schools from catering to marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GoSL provides other financial and non-financial support to schools awaiting Level 2 approval. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited fiscal space for GoSL to provide temporary financial or non-financial support, given levels of education spending deficits. • Communities have limited capacity to contribute financially, although non-monetary community contributions have potential.¹¹⁰ 	Data about school funding and additional costs. Data on school and community practices.

102 According to qualitative study findings, many teachers are volunteer teachers whom they have limited control over. Dearth of teaching staff in schools meant Principals were reluctant to act against teachers for fear of losing a teaching resource.

103 Qualitative study findings reveal schools do not receive any additional financial resources, besides standard school subsidies, to adapt infrastructure.

104 Qualitative study findings.

105 Qualitative study findings.

106 Qualitative study findings reveal districts are understaffed and under-resourced and any field visits are limited to collecting school-level reported estimates rather than any systematic independent assessment, including speaking to pupils.

107 Qualitative study findings.

108 Qualitative study findings.

109 2020 Annual School Census Report.

110 Qualitative study findings reveal that communities have come together to provide manpower to construct schools, establish and enforce norms encouraging inclusion of marginalised pupils.

Table 26: Monitoring intervention strands for enhancing school connectedness (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Train female and male champions who will promote inclusivity in schools.	School practices affect learning outcomes and retention for pupils from marginalised groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specially trained teachers and school leaders champion inclusion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher and school leadership trainings conducted by multiple development partners to improve inclusion capacity. • Mentors and guidance counsellors appointed in 90% schools, but limited faith in the overall school safety reporting systems.¹¹¹ • Shortage of female teachers in Sierra Leone¹¹² thereby limiting approachability from marginalised girls.¹¹³ • Limited financial resources and capacities at schools for customising teaching & learning for marginalised. 	Data about school and classroom practices.
Ensure that child protection systems are in place to enable learners to return or stay in safe school environments The absence of a fully functioning child protection system also contributes to at-risk and out-of-school children from remaining in schools.	The absence of a fully functioning child protection system also contributes to at-risk and out-of-school children from remaining in schools.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child protection systems are able to identify and act upon child safety violations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBSSE has instituted policies on anti-corporal punishment and is drafting a comprehensive school safety policy. SL has legislations and policies like Child Rights Act 2007, National Child Welfare Policy 2013 and institutions like Child Welfare Committees. • Pupils have limited trust in school safety mechanisms¹¹⁴ and reported prevalence of corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and abuse from peers and staff.¹¹⁵ 	Data about school and classroom practices.

111 Lehi Wi Lan, "Learning and School Safety Study".

112 According to Mackintosh et al. (2020), Sierra Leone has the 6th lowest share of female teachers in the world.

113 Lehi Wi Lan, "Learning and School Safety Study".

114 Lehi Wi Lan.

115 Qualitative study findings.

Achievement intervention strands

The following table lists the eleven intervention strands directly relevant to results including learning outcomes, a suggestion about the implied hypothesis that appears to underpin each strategy, the assumptions needed for the hypothesis to hold, the current reality drawn from primary and secondary research and a description of the additional data elements required to support a quantitative exploration of the hypothesis. Further details on qualitative study findings reported below are found in Chapter 4 to 6.

Table 27: Monitoring Intervention strands for enhancing achievement

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Develop and implement programs that will build the skills and provide opportunities for young, marginalised people.	Pupils from marginalised groups do not learn skills they need for their future.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vocational skills acquired at school level contribute towards reducing marginalisation. Schools have the capacity to provide vocational skills trainings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demand for skills trainings among some pupils.¹¹⁶ Little is known about outcomes from non-formal and informal TVET, including school based TVET.¹¹⁷ Existing alternate TVET education system lacks capacity and labour market relevance.¹¹⁸ 	Data about post-school destinations for pupils from marginalised groups.
Marginalised learners' needs are systematically assessed.	Individualised support helps pupils from marginalised groups to succeed and feel supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers have capacity to screen students' special learning needs. Referral and specialised support services are available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity building of teachers on screening and referral done by many development partners.¹¹⁹ Limited school health services, especially in rural areas.¹²⁰ Inclusive education not extensively covered in Pre-Service teacher training.¹²¹ 	Data about school and classroom practices.
Tailored support is provided to learners based on findings of individual assessment.	Individualised instruction helps pupils from marginalised groups to succeed and feel supported.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialised learning support is available at schools – human resources and learning materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher deployment policies silent on inclusion¹²² while it remains unclear if national teacher database captures special needs teachers. Limited resources to provide specialised support in schools.¹²³ 	Data about school and classroom practices.

116 Qualitative study findings reveal some pupils from Low Income Households in Western Rural wanted skills trainings to support their own education.

117 UNESCO IIEP, *Education Sector Analysis*, 118.

118 UNESCO IIEP, *Education Sector Analysis*, 118.

119 Training on low-cost screening methods have been conducted by Leh Wi Lan, Sight Savers among others.

120 Montrose, "Situation Analysis of School Health in Sierra Leone".

121 Qualitative study findings from National KII reveal that HTC training curriculum does not cover inclusive education.

122 TSC, "National Policy on Teacher Management" (Teaching Service Commission, Sierra Leone, July 2020).

123 Qualitative study findings from National KII reveal that nearly all teacher training and learning material adaptations for inclusive education in Sierra Leone are from external funding with limited government financing for it.

Table 27: Monitoring Intervention strands for enhancing achievement (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Facilitate the effective deployment of trained and qualified male and female teachers, including those with disabilities, particularly in remote and underserved areas.	Pupils learn well only when teachers are qualified and trained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers can be deployed based on needs. Teachers take classes regularly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher MIS under development.¹²⁴ Nearly 2/3rd teacher workforce is not on government payroll,¹²⁵ over whom TSC has limited control. 25% teachers are absent¹²⁶ and many teachers are not working in schools they were assigned on payroll.¹²⁷ Over a quarter of teachers in secondary schools (26% in JSS and 23% in SSS) have no formal training as educators.¹²⁸ 	Data about teacher qualifications and training, school-level requirements.
Support community volunteers to be trained as qualified teachers.	Pupils learn well only when teachers are qualified and trained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community volunteer teachers are selected and trained carefully. Government has the capacity to incentivise volunteer teachers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principals have limited formal control over volunteer teachers as they are volunteers. They exert informal control through promise of recruitment on government payrolls.¹²⁹ Opaque system of volunteer teacher selection. Limited fiscal space for capacity building and providing financial incentives. 	Data about teacher qualifications and training.
Develop and deliver training modules on Radical Inclusion to teachers and district officials.	Pupils learn well only when teachers are qualified and trained.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Radical inclusion is part of National Teacher Training curriculum (pre- and in-service). Radical inclusion is practiced in schools. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-day Teacher Induction Program proposed by TSC¹³⁰ only an opportunity to integrate messaging on Radical Inclusion and nothing more substantive. Main pre-service training is done in Teacher Training Colleges, whose curricula are loosely regulated by Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).¹³¹ Teacher stigma and attitudes towards marginalised pupils are constraints to practicing inclusion.¹³² 	Data about teacher qualifications and training.
Review and update primary and secondary curriculum to ensure that it is accessible and appropriate for learners of all needs and abilities.	Curriculum that connects with learners' needs and abilities encourages retention and improves outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers adopt and apply revised curriculum in classes. Learning assessments are customised to learner needs and abilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers receive limited support in improving teaching practices.¹³³ No policy of concessions granted for CWDs in assessments.¹³⁴ 	Data about classroom curriculum practices.

124 World Bank (2022) *FREE Education Project Implementation Report* March 2022.

125 MBSSE, "2019 Annual School Census Report".

126 CGA, "Sierra Leone Education Attendance Monitoring System (SLEAMS) Pilot".

127 Qualitative study findings reveal in remote schools in Falaba, teachers come just for a few months in a year, just before the exams.

128 Mackintosh et al., "Education Workforce Supply and Needs in Sierra Leone".

129 Qualitative study findings.

130 TSC, "National Policy on Teacher Management".

131 TEC is not included as an MDA responsible for this intervention strand.

132 Qualitative study findings reveal teachers propagate stigma against PPL & CWDs, sexually harass LIH girls and largely support corporal punishment in schools.

133 Qualitative study findings reveal that schools are mostly understaffed and have limited internal capacity for teacher support, Teacher Learning Circles are not functional, and teachers get limited support on teaching & learning practices from district officials (school quality assurance monitors, DDE, TSC-DO).

134 Qualitative study findings reveal many CWDs get zero scores in subjects they aren't taught due to their disabilities, thereby causing their results to be withheld.

Table 27: Monitoring Intervention strands for enhancing achievement (continued)

Intervention Strands	Implied hypothesis	Assumptions	Current reality	Additional data elements required
Standardised learning materials meet individual learners' needs and are accessible and inclusive of all students in all government and government-assisted schools.	Pupils from marginalised groups drop out or learn less if learning materials are not inclusive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adapted learning materials are available in schools. Pupils can access learning materials. Teachers adopt and apply learning materials in classroom practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some schools reportedly track individual student learning performances.¹³⁵ Customised TLM for CWDs unavailable in regular schools.¹³⁶ Hidden costs of TLM deter their access and use.¹³⁷ 	Data about classroom practices.
Standardised teaching materials are provided to enable teachers to develop teaching aids that help make learning more accessible and inclusive in all government and government-assisted schools.	Pupils from marginalised groups drop out or learn less if learning materials are not inclusive.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers have the capacity and resources to create suitable learning aids. Teachers adopt and apply learning aids in classroom practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers receive limited support in improving teaching practices. Specialised support is charged extra which further marginalises pupils.¹³⁸ 	Data about classroom practices.
Classroom assistants and non-teaching staff are deployed where appropriate and feasible.	Pupils from marginalised groups without extra support are more likely to drop out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional community members volunteer in schools as assistants and non-teaching staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some CTAs encourage in-kind contributions towards schools.¹³⁹ Large-scale poverty limits voluntary community engagement. 	Data about school and classroom practices.
Mechanisms are in place to ensure that eligible schools have access to government financial assistance.	Costs deter schools from catering to marginalised pupils.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial assistance is adequate and arrives in a timely manner. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standard rate of subsidy¹⁴⁰ for marginalised students found inadequate.¹⁴¹ Delays in getting subsidy marginalise LIH further.¹⁴² 	Data about school funding and additional costs.

135 Qualitative study findings reported by Principal and teachers.

136 Qualitative study findings from District KII reveal specialised learning materials are prioritised for special needs schools and very limited supply of TLM reach regular schools.

137 Qualitative study findings reveal that LIH pupils find it unaffordable to purchase textbooks or notebooks for learning. Parents of CWDs unable to afford expensive customised learning materials, even if they were available in the market.

138 Qualitative study findings reveal some schools charge hidden fees for extra classes or learning materials.

139 Qualitative study findings reveal active CTAs encouraged community participation in school constructions, cleaning and maintenance of premises.

140 MBSSE, "Guidelines for Use of Subsidies Allocated to Government and Government Assisted Schools".

141 Qualitative study findings reveal multiple school and district-level officials want increased per-child subsidy for marginalised pupils (especially for CWDs and PPL).

142 Qualitative study findings reveal some schools being forced to charge students extra to compensate for delays in getting school subsidy.

Leh Wi Lan

Improving Secondary Education in Sierra Leone

Leh Wi Lan/Sierra Leone Secondary Education Improvement Programme (SSEIP) is a six-year (2016-2022), UK aid-funded programme aimed at improving English and Mathematics learning achievement in all secondary schools of Sierra Leone, especially for girls and children with disabilities. This study was designed and implemented by Leh Wi Lan's monitoring, evidence, and research workstream in close collaboration with the Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

