



# National Strategy For Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone



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# National Strategy For Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone

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## Acronyms and terminology

CSE	Comprehensive Sexuality Education
CWC	Child Welfare Committees
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MoGCA	Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs
MoSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
OOSC	Out-of-School Children
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SMC	School Monitoring Committee
SQARM	School Quality Assurance and Resource Management
TSC	Teaching Service Commission

## Foreword

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A major objective of the Government of Sierra Leone is to achieve a target of zero out of school children in Sierra Leone.

We are proud to present our strategy for reaching this objective. We work directly with children in school, particularly through our program of free quality school education which has eliminated school fees in all government and government-assisted schools, thereby reducing the number of children who could not enrol in school because their parents could not afford the fees. However, there are still children across Sierra Leone who are excluded from this benefit. We, therefore, work tirelessly with children currently out of school alongside partners to deliver alternatives and routes back to education.

To reach those most marginalised, we describe approaches that will identify them, incentivise communities to support school attendance and enable our schools to coordinate responses with the communities.

The goals laid out here are linked closely with our priorities in the Medium-term National Development Plan 2019-2023. The actions lie largely outside of FQSE and there will need to be investments in these complementary actions.

The scope is broad and it requires contributions from multiple ministries and communities. The Government of Sierra Leone will develop institutional structures (such as school management committees), instructional frameworks (such as strong curricula) and building on staff capacity. All will support the safety and inclusion of children in their community and schools.

Children from vulnerable and excluded groups will be actively enabled to enter and remain in school until completion due to these national efforts. Systematically reducing financial cultural, policy and physical barriers to education makes school a place of dignity, safety, and respect for all.

We are grateful for your help in getting us to this point, and now we look forward to your continued support and leadership, at all levels, to collectively ensure that all children of our next generation are educated.



Dr David M. Sengeh  
Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education

## Acknowledgments

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The Government of Sierra Leone is immensely grateful to the seven ministries, with regional representatives, who contributed to the success of this strategy.

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) engaged experts and representatives from civil society organizations, development partners, communities, chiefs and non-governmental organisations to develop the holistic and solution-seeking strategy used in this document. We are grateful to the community-based organisations that facilitated interviews and workshops, through which they contributed expert implementation knowledge.

The MBSSE thanks the staff of the Directorate for Curriculum and Research for providing extensive oversight during the Out of School Children Study and subsequent strategy development process.

The Chief Education Officer's guidance alongside the technical input of the Chief Social Services Officer and the Director of Social Welfare meant that the strategy development was guided by technical experts and those dealing directly with the barriers identified. Ministries' staff from technical heads, directors, deputy directors and officers made invaluable input.

The contribution of Ministries, Departments and Agencies and their staff whose expertise in what works and developing actions that can be immediately implemented across the country is acknowledged and appreciated.

MBSSE sincerely thank UNICEF and Irish Aid for the technical and financial support provided to enable the completion of the OOSC study that provided the evidence base for this import strategy and the development of the strategy itself.

The ministry also acknowledges CGA Technologies' for their work both on the Study and the development of the strategy.



Dr Yatta Kanu

Chief Education Officer

Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education





## A. Introduction

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### A.1. Background and purpose of the strategy

This National Out of School Children (OOSC) Strategy has been developed with cross-sectoral government support in order to improve access to education for the long-run development of young Sierra Leoneans. It builds on a national legal and policy framework<sup>1</sup> which sets out various rights and initiatives in order to boost access to education and other services.

The OOSC Strategy complements the *National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools*<sup>2</sup> by specifically addressing the inclusion needs of OOSC. Through this strategy, OOSC refers to children currently out of school whether they have never been to school, dropped out, or are regularly truant. The strategy addresses OOSC, those at risk of becoming OOSC, and those re-entering formal education. The strategy is underpinned by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education's (MBSSE) national study of Out of School Children.<sup>3</sup>

### A.2. Methodology

This strategy is informed by an in-depth national study on Out of School Children (OOSC)<sup>4</sup> from data collected in 2020 and 2021, comprising both a substantive literature review alongside primary research with children, parents, teachers, community organisations, NGOs, and government representatives. It sought to better understand the scale of the problem of access, as well as identify and unpack precise barriers to access through the lived experience of children, with a particular focus on those faced by girls and children with disabilities. The study recommendations were validated in May 2021 and discussed at workshops throughout year.

In the development of this strategy, key issues—including the validated recommendations identified by stakeholders—were discussed in a series of workshops in order to prioritise and identify specific interventions to address the key barriers. Key stakeholders from across government and civil society were identified for these meetings and organised into thematic groups to address key intervention areas. The thematic groups included: social protection, children with disabilities, adolescent mothers, behaviour change, child protection, teachers and training, learning quality, school supply and infrastructure, data and coordination.

The groups identified and prioritised key interventions which were fed back following the workshops, informing the strategy's actions.

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<sup>1</sup> See Section A.3. for further information.

<sup>2</sup> MBSSE (2021) *National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools*. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Radical-Inclusion-Policy.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> MBSSE (2021) *Sierra Leone Out-Of-School Children Study*, Freetown: CGA Technologies, UNICEF. <https://cgatechnologies.org.uk/projects/study-barriers-access-out-school-children-sierra-leone>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

### A.3. Context: legal and policy frameworks

Sierra Leone's statutory framework outlines a comprehensive package of rights to children regarding their access to education, their treatment and protection, and it assigns corresponding duties to their parents, caregivers, and teachers as well as Government of Sierra Leone ministries, departments and agencies. Further, the policy framework purposefully sets out an equity-based approach, highlighting the particular needs of vulnerable or marginalised learners in order to uphold these rights. This strategy addresses current gaps in how these are being upheld and applied by responsible structures and actors.

#### Legislative framework

Enshrined in the Education Act 2004<sup>5</sup> is the right of every citizen to nine years of basic (defined as primary and junior secondary) education, "free to the extent specified in statutory instruments," currently banning tuition fees. This is compulsory and a parent or caregiver who fails to send their child to school shall be subject to a fine or imprisonment.<sup>6</sup> It goes on to add that, 'A child who persistently fails to attend schools for basic education shall be treated as if he were a juvenile in need of care under paragraph (b) of subsection (1) of Section 27 of the Children and Young Persons Act.'<sup>7</sup>

The 2007 Child Rights Act reaffirms the right of every child to an education,<sup>8</sup> and outlaws mistreatment of children with disabilities, highlighting their particular right to special care, education and training.<sup>9</sup> It adds that no child shall be subjected to exploitative labour where deprived of their education or health,<sup>10</sup> although they may conduct 'light work' from 13.<sup>11</sup> Schooling is no longer compulsory after the age of 15, when children may legally leave school and work full-time.<sup>12</sup> The Child Rights Act is under review to make explicit Female Genital Mutilation and child marriage as unlawful harmful practices and prohibit corporal punishment in all settings. The rights of children with disabilities are additionally enshrined in the Persons with Disability Act 2011, also currently being revised, providing them the right to free education and protection from discrimination in education.<sup>13</sup>

Legislation enshrines the protection of children from different forms of sexual violence and abuse, covering all potential perpetrators including family, teachers, or people in positions of power and community influence as well as those unknown to the victim.<sup>14</sup>

Although the minimum legal age for marriage<sup>15</sup> and consensual sexual activity<sup>16</sup> is 18 years, inconsistent legislation offers a loophole permitting children to be married with a parent or

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Education Act 2004*. Section 3(2).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, Section 3(4).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, Section 3(5).

<sup>8</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Child Rights Act 2007*. Article 26.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, Article 30.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, Article 32.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, Article 127.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, Article 125.

<sup>13</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Persons with Disability Act 2011*. Part V.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Sexual Offences Act 2012*. Section 13 and 19; *Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2019*. Section 3 and 4.

<sup>15</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Child Rights Act 2007*. Article 34.

<sup>16</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Sexual Offences Act 2012*.

guardian’s consent or the guardian of the prospective spouse, without any minimum age guarantee.<sup>17</sup>

The National Commission for Children was established by the Child Rights Act<sup>18</sup> to implement the Act including to decentralise responsibility for ensuring educational access and supply in rural areas.<sup>19</sup> Part IV of the Act establishes the statutory functions, composition and responsibilities of Child Welfare Committees (CWC) at village and chiefdom levels, comprising community members working to ‘advance the enjoyment of the rights of the child’ in the village and to coordinate these efforts in the chiefdom.<sup>20</sup> Designed to play a key role in child rights governance and to respond to protection incidents, in practice, however, CWC are not widely established, with many Chiefdoms lacking one altogether, while those in place are not resourced.<sup>21</sup>

## Policy framework

The Government of Sierra Leone’s 2018 Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy abolishing tuition fees in all government-supported secondary-level education (in addition to primary- and junior secondary-levels) was underpinned by significant financial investment from the national budget.<sup>22</sup>

That removal of one of several barriers to education was further bolstered by the 2020 overturn of a ban on pregnant girls attending school. Furthermore, the 2021 launch of National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools<sup>23</sup> reflected a shift to proactively address *inequity*, in order that the increased government expenditure is able to benefit the most marginalised children—particularly girls and children with disabilities, who are more likely to be out of school.<sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> These recent policy developments reflect a marked shift in stated intention: to purposefully include children historically overlooked in the school environment and pursue equity in access and outcome over equality in treatment. Despite this major milestone in enrolment, the root causes of being out of school remain, as they are deeply entrenched not only in system functioning, but also in norms.

The National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools primarily seeks to address barriers associated with service provision at the school in order to make a more inclusive environment to prevent drop-out and serve as a ‘pull-factor’ to draw more learners. Other policies are to address a number of those barriers in the left-hand column of diagram 1, below.

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<sup>17</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *The Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009*. Part II: 2(2).

<sup>18</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Child Rights Act 2007*. Article 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, Article 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Section 48, 50.

<sup>21</sup> MBSSE (2021) *Sierra Leone Out-Of-School Children Study*, Freetown: CGA Technologies, UNICEF.

<sup>22</sup> Education allocation increased to 7.7% of GDP in 2019 from just over 3% in 2016 (UNESCO, n.d., *Government expenditure on education – total (% of GDP)*, World Bank).

<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.XPD.TOTL.GD.ZS?locations=SL> [Accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>23</sup> Sengeh, D. M. (2020) *Education service transformation in Sierra Leone: Where policy meets the people*, [Online]. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/education-service-transformation-sierra-leone-where-policy-meets-people> [Accessed 20 February 2021].

<sup>24</sup> MBSSE (2021) *National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools*. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Radical-Inclusion-Policy.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (n.d.) *Education Sector Plan 2018-2020*, p. 16.

[https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/sierra\\_leones\\_education\\_sector\\_plan\\_2018-2020.pdf](https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/sierra_leones_education_sector_plan_2018-2020.pdf)

Other government policies and documents referenced here include the Sexual and Gender-Based Violence National Referral Protocols (being updated in 2022), the draft School Health Policy and the Assistive Technologies Policy and Strategic Plan (2021).

As such, the OOSC Strategy is designed to fit ‘under’ the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools, informed by the same principles and similar policy objectives, and has informed the Implementation Plan Radical Inclusion, yet remains a complementary and separate strategy document focused as a particular subset of this policy area.

#### A.4. Context: Barriers to access and the need for an OOSC Strategy

There was an increase of 48% in Senior Secondary School enrolment after the introduction of the FQSE programme,<sup>26</sup> broadly with gender parity in that enrolment growth.<sup>27</sup> However, the breakdown of the Gross Enrolment Rate<sup>28</sup> and qualitative data highlights that inequitable access persists, particularly along demographic (gender and disability), socio-economic and geographical lines.<sup>29</sup>

Critically, many of the barriers discussed below fall outside of the mandate of MBSSE and the education sector to address and so the OOSC Strategy requires a joint effort of various ministries, departments and agencies responsible also for child well-being, social protection and health. It is a multifaceted issue that cuts across sectors due to its basis in social norms.

Because of the issue’s inherent complexity, a degree of buy-in is required from ministries and departments including Ministry of Gender and Children’s Affairs (MoGCA), Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), National Commission for Social Action, National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage, Ministry of Health and Sanitation.

Barriers to education manifest both in service delivery (supply-side) and within homes and communities (demand-side).

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<sup>26</sup> MBSSE (2021) *Sierra Leone Out-Of-School Children Study*, Freetown: CGA Technologies, UNICEF, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p. 28.

## Key barriers to education in Sierra Leone: Findings from the 2021 study

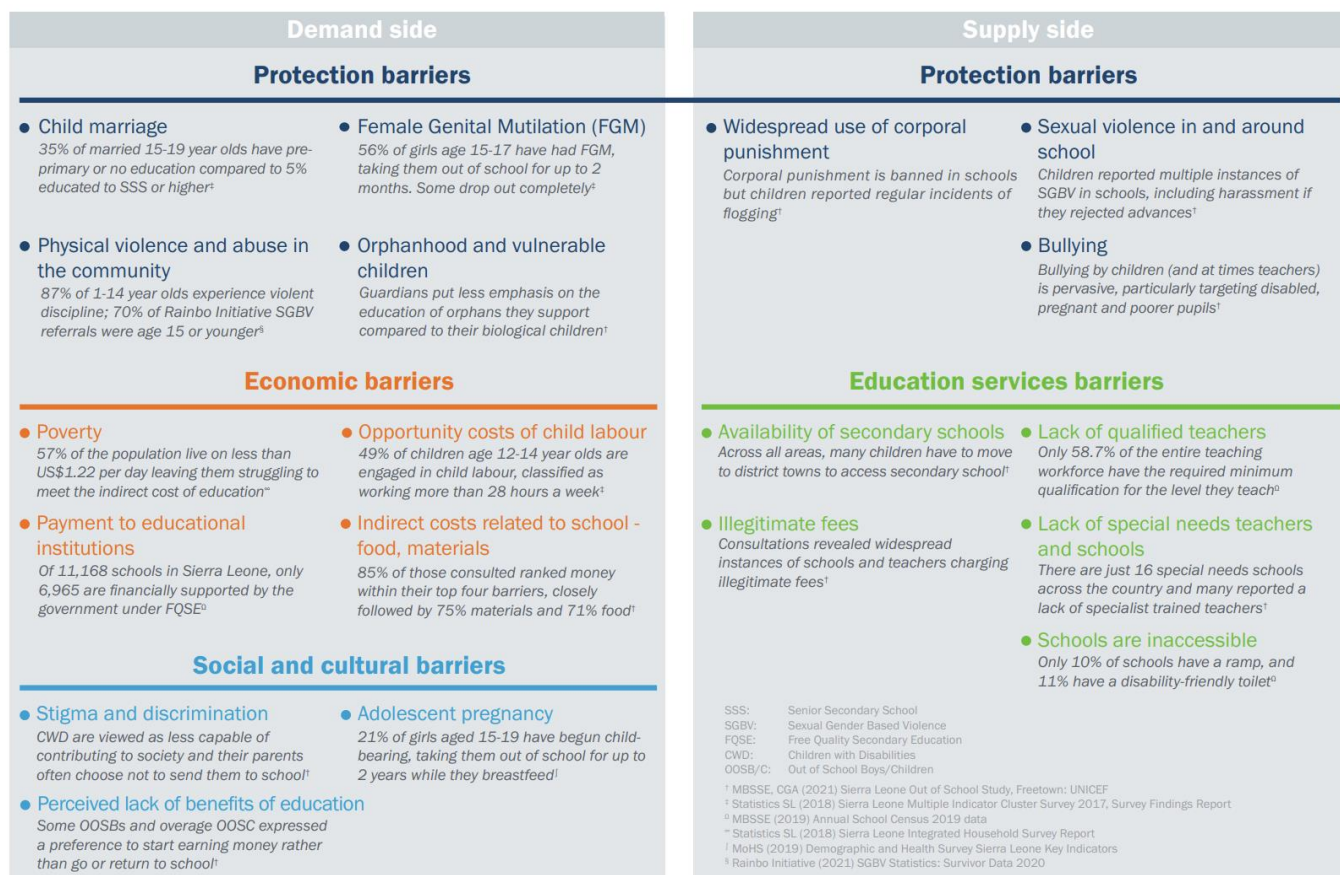


FIGURE 1: KEY BARRIERS TO EDUCATION IN SIERRA LEONE.<sup>30</sup>

On the supply side, the OOSC study found that these most notably include a lack of sufficient schools, trained teachers—for children with disability in particular—access to required materials, devices, facilities and supportive teachers.

On the demand-side, the most commonly experienced barrier is economic—be it direct costs associated with school attendance or other indirect or opportunity costs, limiting a child’s options to reliably attend school. The economic barrier intersects the child’s own physical and emotional wellbeing at home. Many cited their experience of having lost one or both parents, of extreme household poverty, or of otherwise being highly vulnerable, without reliable care for not attending.

The impact of early pregnancy or marriage was also found in qualitative consultations to reduce girls’ access, even after the overturn of the ban on pregnant learners.

**What this study highlighted is that some of the most obstructive barriers to access stem from the household or community-levels (demand-side) as a result of social and cultural norms, in particular gender norms and, as such, supply-side interventions at the school level are unlikely to fully address those.**

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

## **B. Strategy Vision**

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### **B.1. MBSSE's principles**

The strategy is grounded in upholding MBSSE's four guiding principles—Universal Access, Comprehensive Safety, Radical Inclusion, and Quality Learning and Teaching—with respect to out-of-school children. These principles aim for every child to complete the full education cycle with outcomes improving.

### **B.2. Endstate**

Children from vulnerable and excluded groups are actively enabled to enter and remain in school until completion. School is a place of dignity, safety, and respect for all—systematically reducing cultural, policy and physical barriers to education. Finally, Sierra Leone has developed the institutional structures (such as child welfare committees and school management committees), instructional frameworks (such as updated alternative education curricula), building on staff capacity, to support the safety and inclusion of children in their community and schools.

### **B.3. Theory of change**

Adapting from the National Policy for Radical Inclusion in Schools, the strategy is built on the theory of change below.

The outcomes are addressed in sections as follows:

- A. There is a sufficient supply of accessible, safe schools & environment that provides inclusive quality learning for children
- B. Households have the information, attitudes and resources that they need to prioritise education for children, increasing demand
- C. Joined-up systems that are in place and resourced at all levels provide supportive structures needed to fulfil the rights of all children

Not one column of logic on the diagram can stand alone: without addressing supply, demand and systems, the endstate cannot be achieved.



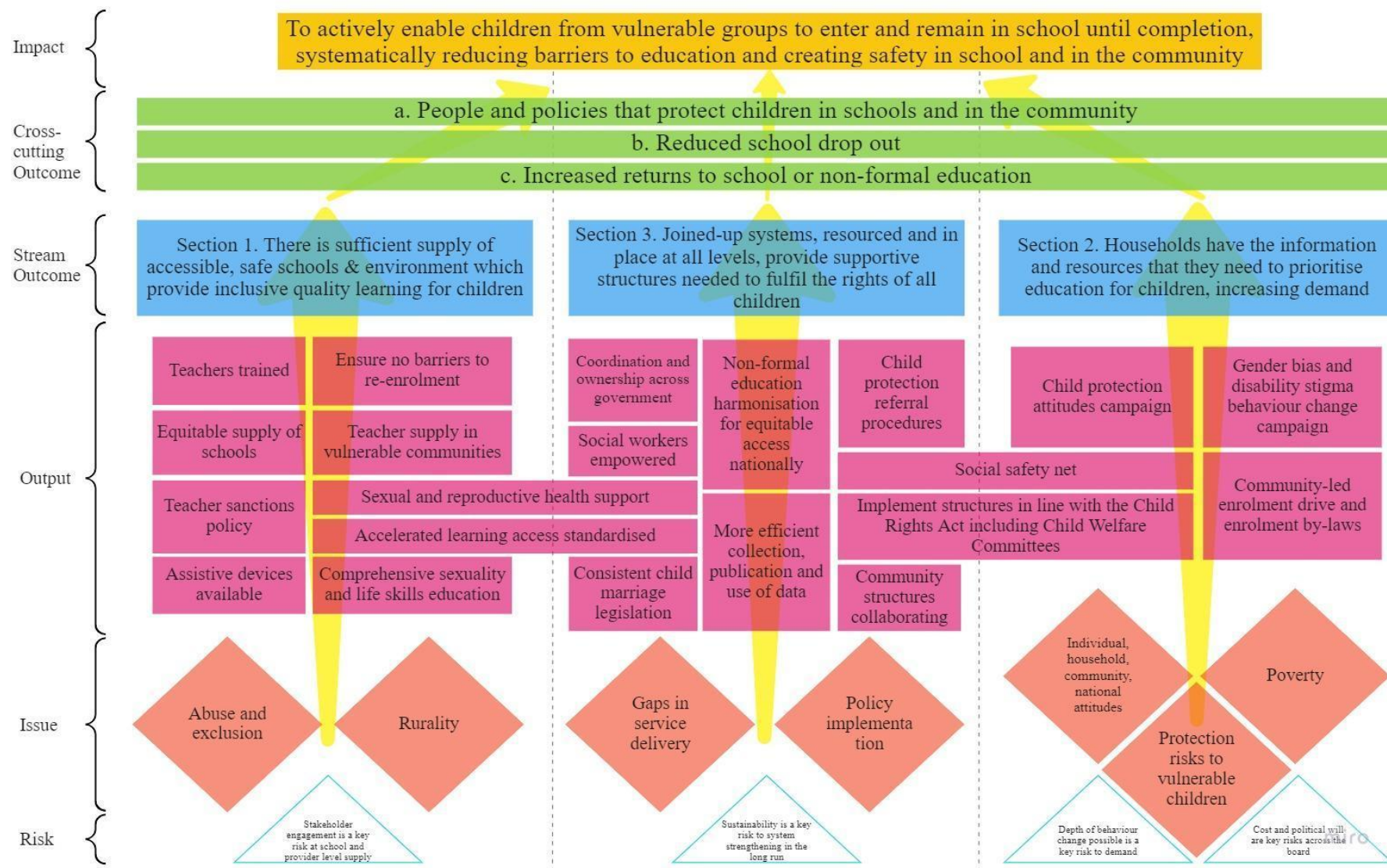


FIGURE 2: THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> MBSSE (2022) *Sierra Leone Out of School Children Theory of Change*, CGA Technologies, UNICEF, p. 2, [unpublished].



## C. Actions to support OOSC

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The following section shows the actions to be taken, the rationale and planning guidance for their implementation. They are split into those immediately available to be implemented within resource constraints and those that require an uplift in resources.

The structure is:

- Section 1. **Supply** of Child Protection and Education services: Create safe schools and safe communities
  - Immediate action: where costs of implementation may be borne by existing structures or ongoing programmes. A change in standard operating procedures may be necessary in these cases
  - Long term action: where significant time and resources are required
- Section 2. **Demand** for Education: Inform and support decisions to prioritise education
- Section 3. **Systems strengthening**: Join up and resource systems to fulfil the rights of all children

Each *action* is expanded upon as required to guide the implementation towards OOSC. This takes the form below:

### C.0.0. Action: What is to be done

- A. **Objective**: The intent of the action
- B. **Approach**: How the action's components will address OOSC
- C. **Responsible organisations**: The government bodies to be held accountable

More planning guidance is added where necessary to direct the action towards supporting OOSC.

## C.1. Create safe schools and safe communities

### C.1.1. Immediate Actions

#### C.1.1.1. Expand accelerated learning programmes alongside existing school programmes

- A. **Objective:** To encourage and directly support all currently out of school children to return to school sustainably
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Review of the efficiency of existing and past programmes including safe spaces, technical and vocational courses
  - b. Prioritise new and strengthen existing Community Learning Centres in hard to reach areas
  - c. Use existing teachers in the schools trained in non-formal education curriculum
  - d. Target expectant and parent learner, overaged students, children with disabilities and other OOSC particularly those who are economically marginalised and with intersecting vulnerabilities
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Non-Formal Education Directorate, MBSSE

#### C.1.1.2. Develop a Non-Formal Education policy on alternative and accelerated education

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To establish quality inclusive alternative education that is equitably accessible for those children currently out of school and who do not wish to or cannot feasibly join mainstream education
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Enforce compulsory registration in alternative education, if not in formal education under the age of 16 (legal school leaving age is 15<sup>32</sup>)
  - b. Detail how to achieve consistent and equitable distribution of service delivery in a Non-Formal Education policy
  - c. Review of the efficacy of existing and past programmes including safe spaces, technical and vocational courses, and community learning centres
  - d. Specify who is to use non-formal curricula resources for consistent delivery across service delivery (update these per Action 1.1.3.)
  - e. Include guidelines and minimum standards of time and quality on non-formal education service delivery, including for vocational subjects
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Non-Formal Education Directorate, MBSSE and Ministry of Technical and Higher Education

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<sup>32</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. *Child Rights Act 2007*. Article 125.

### C.1.1.3. Update curricula for accelerated and alternative education programmes<sup>33</sup>

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To encourage and directly support all currently out of school children to return to school sustainably
  - b. To provide children out of school with the knowledge and skills necessary to make informed decisions, enter and negotiate within healthy relationships, and develop informed family values
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Update the non-formal education numeracy curriculum
  - b. Turn the income generation curriculum into entrepreneurship curriculum in order to appeal to a broader audience of learners
  - c. Strengthen Comprehensive Sexuality Education in the non-formal education sector including through use of the National Life Skills Manual (2018)
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Non-Formal Education Directorate, MBSSE

### C.1.1.4. Develop a grievance redress mechanism for children unable to attend school, or at risk of drop-out

- A. **Objective:** To provide a route for schools, households and communities to secure assistance for children not enrolled or at risk of drop-out, for example, if a child is working for a caregiver or living alone
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Report non-attending students, class teachers to report to School Leader and SMCs when a child has unauthorised absence for follow-up
  - b. Popularise the 8060 toll-free reporting line
  - c. Situation Room ensure that the line is answered at a caller's first attempt
  - d. Produce reporting tool with at least two channels
  - e. Harmonise Police Family Support Unit, Don Bosco, TSC, MBSSE report lines with specified reporting procedures to and from each mechanism
  - f. Implement a process to link users to the Sexual Gender Based Violence National Referral Protocols and to the Anti-Corruption Commission grievance redress mechanism
  - g. Train School Management Committees on their roles, and to follow up on complaints
  - h. Target:
    - i. System users: community members, teachers and students
    - ii. Beneficiaries: in and out of school children
- C. **Responsible organisations:** EMIS and Situation Room, MBSSE. Supported by: School Management Committees

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<sup>33</sup> Of the four non-formal education curricula two remain 27 years old; CSE has been added to the drafted community studies curriculum and literacy has been updated. Facilitators at community learning centres and teachers in accelerated learning programmes use the same curriculum.

### C.1.1.5. Strengthen the national mentor network and boys' and girls' clubs in schools

#### A. Objective:

- a. To provide girls and boys in and out of school with the support, confidence and skills necessary to make informed decisions, enter and negotiate within healthy relationships, understand their rights and develop informed family values
- b. To reduce the risk of sexual violence and unintentional pregnancy
- c. To increase reporting of sexual and gender-based violence

#### B. Approach:

- a. Train payroll teachers in-service as mentors, and provide those teachers the opportunity to start the pre-service guidance counselling training
- b. Allocate a teacher with the guidance counsellor training to each school
- c. Assign teachers to the mentor or guidance counsellor roles based on the soft-skills and empathy to perform the role
- d. Teach *both* girls and boys about their own rights and each other's rights to empower them, led by guidance counsellor or mentor
- e. Create guidance clinics, a private space in the school for counselling
- f. Lead community dialogues through training a volunteer from the SMC to lead men's and boys' clubs
- g. Develop peer support networks for children with disabilities
- h. Deliver health and sexuality training and resources to mentors including the Sexual and Gender Based Violence National Reporting Protocol
- i. Mentors and guidance counsellors actively look for at risk OOSC and raise concerns with teachers of children that are at risk of dropping out
- j. Create formal links to related networks and structures in the community
- k. Collaborate with MoSW to integrate Social Workers to serve as guidance counsellors in schools, and provide them in-service training<sup>34</sup>

- C. **Responsible organisations:** Gender Unit, Guidance and Counselling Units, MBSSE. Supported by: MoSW and National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy

### C.1.1.6. Teach Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in the basic education school curriculum<sup>35</sup>

#### A. Objective:

- a. To provide girls and boys in school with the information necessary to make informed decisions, enter and negotiate within healthy relationships, understand their rights and develop informed family values
- b. To delay the age of sexual debut, adolescent boys and girls have the knowledge, skills and confidence to avoid unplanned pregnancies
- c. To reduce the risk of sexual violence and unintentional pregnancy
- d. To increase reporting of sexual and gender-based violence

#### B. Approach:

- a. Teach teachers the benefits of CSE to the learner

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<sup>34</sup> Bulanda, J. J. and Jalloh, S. (2019) *A needs assessment for school social workers in Sierra Leone*, International Social Work, 62(1) pp. 240-254. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0020872817725144>

<sup>35</sup> Comprehensive Sexuality Education has been integrated into the Basic Education Curriculum Framework and the syllabi of seven key subjects: Social Studies, Integrated Sciences, Physical Health Education, Religious Morality Education, Home Economics, English Studies, and Expressive Arts and Entertainment

- b. Develop CSE teaching and learning materials
- c. Train in-service teachers on the content and pedagogical techniques necessary to implement the curriculum by Academic Year 2023-24
- d. Include resources developed within the non-formal sector (Action 1.1.2.)
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Research and Curriculum, MBSSE. Supported by: TSC and National Strategy for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy

#### C.1.1.7. Encourage girls' sports in the school curricula

- A. **Objective:** To empower girls through physical activity
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Teach girls self-defence classes, with explicit links to empowerment
  - b. Encourage participation in team sports
  - c. Target basic education students
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Research and Curriculum and School Health and Nutrition Unit, MBSSE. Supported by: Ministry of Youth Affairs

#### C.1.1.8. Provide greater transparency on legitimate school charges

- A. **Objective:** To reduce the cost of learning in schools by eliminating illegitimate fees
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Stop schools from collecting illegal extra charges from school children, for example, toilet roll, soap, Physical Health Education money
  - b. Sensitise the public to what FQSE tuition support to schools covers
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Policy and Planning, Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management, MBSSE

#### C.1.1.9. Standardise uniforms and remove the need to purchase expensive customisations

- A. **Objective:** To reduce the cost of uniforms as a barrier to school by standardisation
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Abolish compulsion to buy school uniforms or materials *at the school*
  - b. Ensure other school materials like badges, ties, sports t-shirt are sold at affordable prices
  - c. Simplify the school uniforms to a select few colours in government and government-supported schools to uniforms that can be readily provided by the markets so that the cost of uniforms is reduced by competition
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Policy and Planning, SQARM, MBSSE

### C.1.2. Long Term Actions

#### C.1.2.1. Provide childcare to assist adolescent mothers to return to school

- A. **Objective:** To enable adolescent mothers to return to school
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Provide training package on positive parenting developed for use by health care workers, social workers, community members
  - b. Enhance consultative processes with local community leaders to establish by-

- laws around childcare provision for adolescent mothers
- c. Map existing childcare provisions which can be leveraged and international best practice
- d. Study to determine the most appropriate provision by geography (rural/urban), culturally and cost-effectively
  - i. Community creche or a formal creche in the school
  - ii. Feasibility study considering child safeguarding and protection
- e. Develop and implement a strategy for childcare provision
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Gender Unit, MBSSE. Supported by: MoSW, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, MoGCA

### C.1.2.2. **Provide adolescent mothers in and out of school with advice on the responsibility of positive parenting**

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To ensure adolescent mothers have the knowledge and skills to make positive health decisions enabling them to return to and remain in school
  - b. To enable adolescent mothers to take care of their children without resorting to negative coping mechanisms
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Provide a training package for guidance counsellors on how to support adolescent mothers' return to school (in conjunction with Action 1.2.5.)
  - b. Provide training for school mentors. Where possible mentors should build on existing systems within the school, such as guidance counsellors (in accordance with Action 1.1.5.)
  - c. Provide corresponding training packages for safe spaces operators
  - d. Align training packages with Comprehensive Sexuality Education material including positive parenting, and the National Community Health Worker policy
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Gender Unit, Early Childhood Development Unit, MBSSE. Supported by: National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy, MoSW

### C.1.2.3. **Provide young people with access to confidential health services, including contraception, counselling and free sanitary products at youth-friendly local Community Health Centre/ Public Health Unit in line with the School Health Policy**

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To increase use of family planning commodities, reducing adolescent pregnancy
  - b. To reduce stock-outs of family planning commodities
  - c. To increase public acceptance of the use of family planning commodities
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Increase the provision of modern methods of contraception to primary Service Delivery Points
  - b. Provide training package for health care workers on National Standards for Adolescent and Young People Friendly Health Services

- c. Remove the age of medical consent for family planning of 18, replace with guidance for medical practitioners to assess Gillick competence<sup>36</sup> to determine whether the young person is able to consent
- d. Initiate multi-layered public information campaign on preventing adolescent pregnancy through the use of family planning, through media nationally
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Ministry of Health and Sanitation. Supported by: National Secretariat for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage, MoGCA, MoSW, School Health and Nutrition Unit and Gender Unit, MBSSE

#### C.1.2.4. Provide education to children in institutions where they are unable to attend formal schooling

- A. **Objective:** To provide spaces and resources for children to continue their education where a child is in a facility or institution unable to access a school for more than one day
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Provide a space at hospitals, detention facilities, correctional centres for learning resources
  - b. Provide play labs for early childhood development
  - c. Provide a set of national curriculum textbooks
  - d. Teach at facilities with a roaming coordinator
- C. **Responsible organisations:**
  - a. Early Childhood Development Unit and Non-Formal Education Directorate, MBSSE to coordinate
  - b. MoSW, Family Support Unit, Ministry of Justice, and Ministry of Health and Sanitation to implement in their sectors
  - c. Directorate of Policy and Planning, Gender Unit, MBSSE to provide Teaching and Learning Materials

#### C.1.2.5. Design, share and communicate a welcome to school kit for late or re-enrolments

- A. **Objective:** To retain at risk children in school
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Identify and mitigate risks to individuals vulnerable to drop-out by preparing the students and teachers on enrolment
  - b. Produce a plan for effective integration with guidance for teachers
    - i. Designate a school focal point to consider requirements for catch up classes
  - c. Give guidance to new/returning pupils, including an exercise supported by teachers or counsellors to map out a plan of aspirations, identify risk factors for drop out and specify support structures to engage with to prevent this
  - d. Make these materials available alongside accelerated learning programmes

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<sup>36</sup> UKHL (1985) *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech AHA* [1985] 7" British and Irish Legal Information Institute. Accessed 19 February 2017. <http://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKHL/1985/7.html>; Care Quality Commission (2018) *Brief guide: capacity and competence to consent in under 18s*, [https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Brief\\_guide\\_Capacity\\_and\\_consent\\_in\\_under\\_18s%20v3.pdf](https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Brief_guide_Capacity_and_consent_in_under_18s%20v3.pdf)

- e. Target children that have previously been out of school, or returning from extended absence
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Non-Formal Education Directorate, MBSSE. Supported by: SQARM, MBSSE

### *Including Children with Disabilities*

#### **C.1.2.6. Conduct disability screening, in line with the Assistive Technology Policy**

- A. **Objective:** To increase access to schools to children with disabilities and children with impairments
  - a. To better identify children with disabilities
  - b. To identify children requiring onward referral
  - c. To support government's prioritisation of devices
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Pilot a screening tool in schools at enrolment *and* in the community
    - i. Align the tool with a nationally standardised disability assessment system
    - ii. Train teachers and SMC members to be able to identify children with disability
    - iii. Train health professionals on the screening tool
    - iv. Deploy to communities to include those not screened in school
    - v. Record in an Education Management Information System, potentially reporting via the One Tablet Per School project
  - b. Use the assessment to support teachers with template individual learning plans
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Ministry of Health and Sanitation lead on assessment system, MoSW lead on access to rights, Special Needs Unit and School Health and Nutrition Unit, MBSSE lead on in-school assessments. Supported by: National Commission for Persons with Disabilities

#### **C.1.2.7. Provide assistive devices, in line with the Assistive Technology Policy**

- A. **Objective:** To increase access to schools to children with disabilities and children with impairments
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Create linkages between schools and community-based rehabilitation programmes through SMCs
  - b. Conduct feasibility study for pooling devices (such as spectacles or chairs with arms to improve balance) at district offices
  - c. Work with the National Assistive Device Programme and National Rehabilitation Programme to provide assistive devices<sup>37</sup>
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Special Needs Unit, MBSSE. Supported by: Ministry of Health and Sanitation, MoSW, National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, Council of Paramount Chiefs

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<sup>37</sup> Ministry of Health and Sanitation (2021) *Assistive Technology (AT) Policy and Strategic Plan 2021-2025*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.



### C.1.2.8. Ensure all school buildings' infrastructure accommodates children with disability

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To ensure all new school constructions incorporate accessibility into their core design
  - b. To improve facilities at existing schools
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Provide physical accessibility consisting of appropriate shallow ramps, handrails, accessible toilets, furniture, lighting, seating
  - b. Review structural adaptations required in existing schools. It is recommended that adaptations are prioritised using more than one data set including MICS 2017 data on the national distribution of children with functional difficulties aged two and upwards
  - c. Conduct environmental assessments to ensure that schools are accessible and inclusive. School Quality Assurance Officers to report to District Education Committees
- C. **Responsible organisations:** SQARM, Special Needs Unit, Gender Unit, Directorate of Policy and Planning, MBSSE and MoSW lead. Supported by: Ministry Technical Higher Education, District Council and Chiefdom Education Committees, TSC, National Commission for Persons with Disability

### C.1.2.9. Improve human environments to accommodate children with disability

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To make welcome children with disabilities in education
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Provide sensitisation and skills training to educational staff on their requirement to support children living with disabilities with their activities of daily living including feeding and hygiene needs
  - b. Check that schools are not rejecting any child with disabilities. Chiefs to coordinate checks with SMCs<sup>38</sup>
  - c. Support in exams for those with difficulty writing
  - d. Make teaching and learning materials into accessible formats
  - e. Consider safeguarding requirements in individual learning plans
  - f. Encourage by-laws to firstly report and secondly support children with disability in each chiefdom
    - i. Registering all children via the screening tool (Action 1.2.6.)
    - ii. Stop stigmatisation and harmful practices
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Special Needs Unit and SQARM, Directorate of Non-Formal Education, MBSSE and MoSW lead. Supported by: Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, District Council and Chiefdom Education Committees, TSC

### C.1.2.10. Establish more special needs primary schools

- A. **Objective:** To provide specialised schooling so that all children access primary school education within their region even when precluded from mainstream schools
- B. **Approach:**

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<sup>38</sup> See action 2.1.1. for behaviour change actions.

- a. Provide the classroom space for Special Needs Education in accordance with the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy 2021
  - b. Refer children to a school that can accommodate and respond to their needs where necessary
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Special Needs Unit, MBSSE and MoSW. Supported by: National Commission for Persons with Disabilities

## *School Coverage*

### C.1.2.11. Increase senior school availability

- A. **Objective:** To reduce the number of children leaving home, travelling to attend SSS, in turn, to improve transition rates from JSS
- B. **Approach:** Use the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Supply Planning Policy 2021 to prioritise school building and expansion with needs-based analysis
- C. **Responsible organisations:** SQARM, Directorate of Educational Programmes and Services, MBSSE. Supported by: Ministry of Works, Ministry of Lands, National Commission for Social Action, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Development

### C.1.2.12. Work to register and regularise unapproved schools

- A. **Objective:** To increase the *quality* of schools by regulating and resourcing them with funds and qualified teachers
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Map unapproved schools' needs through data collection to prioritise
  - b. Review the approval processes for unapproved schools as MBSSE has committed to in the Radical Inclusion Policy within budget
  - c. Enable correct posting of payroll teachers who often teach at community schools while on a government-supported school payroll
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Deputy Chief Education Officer, MBSSE

### C.1.2.13. Greater provision of (context-appropriate) school transport

- A. **Objective:** To reduce the number of children dropping out of school due to distance and to increase safety of children on the way to school
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Review past and current transport provision interventions to establish most suitable transport options in consultation with children, caregivers and communities
  - b. Repair stock of existing busses, improving maintenance routine
  - c. Prioritise hard to reach areas where the private sector fails to provide sufficient transport
  - d. Ensure proper security vetting, training standards for transport providers
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Ministry of Local Governance and Rural Development, District Councils, Directorate of Policy and Planning, SQARM, MBSSE, Ministry of Transport and Aviation

#### C.1.2.14. Allow students to sit WASSCE for free with a BECE certificate up to five years old

- A. **Objective:** To reduce the number of children unable to return to school to sit WASSCE
- B. **Approach:** Increase the validity of BECE certificates to five years, from three, to increase the number of students returning to complete education
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Research and Curriculum, Directorate of Educational Programmes and Services, MBSSE

### *Teacher Management*

#### C.1.2.15. Implement a 'rural retention allowance' for qualified teachers as outlined in the Radical Inclusion Policy

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To distribute qualified teachers more equitably, to improve quality education in rural communities
  - b. To retain teachers in rural schools for more effective teaching
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Understand the areas hardest to retain based on teacher data, also informed by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation retention allowance methodology on hard to retain areas<sup>39</sup>
  - b. Provide basic incentives to teachers, including non-monetary<sup>40</sup>
  - c. Provide training and other continuous professional development opportunities
  - d. Provide teacher accommodation in the areas hardest to retain
- C. **Responsible organisations:** TSC. Supported by: Directorate of Educational Programmes and Services, MBSSE and Ministry of Health and Sanitation

#### C.1.2.16. Provide training schemes and qualification routes for existing but unqualified rural teachers

- A. **Objective:** To increase quality education and teacher retention in rural areas
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Map the volunteer workforce in government schools, community schools and other community learning spaces to understand their qualifications
  - b. Review training needs to consider whether and how to recruit and regularise them, produce training needs report annually
  - c. Provide training to fill the identified gaps for teachers already working in rural schools<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Ministry of Health and Sanitation (2021) *Action Plan to Increase Rural Retention 2019-2029*. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

<sup>40</sup> Education Welfare Initiative.

<sup>41</sup> The Untrained Teacher's Diploma in Basic Education in Ghana conducted training over school holidays and remotely. It featured cost sharing between Trainee Teacher and donor.

[http://www.associatesforchange.org/download3/Final\\_Impact\\_Assessment%20of%20UTDBE\\_final\\_sent\\_13.1\\_0.16.pdf](http://www.associatesforchange.org/download3/Final_Impact_Assessment%20of%20UTDBE_final_sent_13.1_0.16.pdf) and

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297760334\\_Untrained\\_Teachers\\_Diploma\\_in\\_Basic\\_Education\\_Program\\_in\\_Ghana\\_Teacher\\_Trainees'\\_and\\_Lecturers'\\_Perspectives](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/297760334_Untrained_Teachers_Diploma_in_Basic_Education_Program_in_Ghana_Teacher_Trainees'_and_Lecturers'_Perspectives) [Accessed 5 May 2022].

- d. Provide scholarships and Teacher Training Institution distance learning courses for rural teachers, with consideration for individual's access to resources
  - e. Establish peer support networks for teachers, with support for school leaders to create reflective practice<sup>42</sup>
- C. **Responsible organisations:** TSC. Supported by: MBSSE, Ministry of Technical and Higher Education

#### C.1.2.17. **Build an inclusive and representative workforce through the prioritised recruitment and training of women and persons with disabilities teachers**

- A. **Objective:** To create an inclusive and representative teaching workforce where female teachers and teachers with disabilities are proportionately represented at all teaching and school levels
- B. **Approach:**
- a. Research to understand why there are fewer women teachers, and to understand the impact of scholarships for women at Teacher Training Institutes
  - b. Promote teaching as a career for women and persons with disabilities
  - c. Celebrate and promote female teachers and teachers with disabilities as role models and publicise their stories
  - d. Provide full/partial scholarships at Teacher Training Institutions for women and persons with disabilities
  - e. Implement gender quotas on enrolment to Teacher Training Institutions
  - f. Recruit female teachers and teachers with disabilities working in community schools
  - g. Provide additional retention allowances for female teachers and teachers with disabilities
- C. **Responsible organisations:** TSC. Supported by: Special Needs Unit and Gender Unit, MBSSE and Teacher Training Institutions

#### C.1.2.18. **Develop the disciplinary process to enforce disciplinary measures outlined in the Teachers' Code of Conduct**

- A. **Objective:** To reduce and address incidents of teacher misconduct such as taking unapproved leave, illicit charges, and inappropriate behaviour including sexual exploitation
- B. **Approach:**
- a. Develop a clear and actionable process to fairly enforce the sanctions and disciplinary measures listed in the Code of Conduct<sup>43</sup>
  - b. Ensure all teachers have signed the Teachers' Code of Conduct
  - c. Publicise the code of conduct with communities for community accountability
  - d. Publicise 8060 toll-free line for pupils and public to report
  - e. Ensure investigations into reported incidents of misconduct are recorded on the teacher's record on the Teacher Records Management system.<sup>44</sup> Additional permissions levels may be required
  - f. Introduce a digitised Teacher's Attendance Monitoring system (see Action 1.2.22.)

<sup>42</sup> Cambridge International Education (n.d.) *Getting started with Reflective Practice* <https://www.cambridge-community.org.uk/professional-development/gswrp/index.html> [Accessed 1 March 2022].

<sup>43</sup> TSC (2021) <https://tsc.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Code-of-Conduct-for-Teachers-in-Sierra-Leone.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> TSC (2021) <https://tsctrm.org/>

C. **Responsible organisations:** TSC lead. Supported by: MBSSE specialist inputs, SQARM

### C.1.2.19. **Work with teacher training colleges to introduce new mandatory training on inclusiveness into the teacher certificate curricula**

A. **Objective:** To train teachers pre-service to affect the values of radical inclusion

B. **Approach:**

- a. **Inclusive education training** to ensure every newly qualified teacher (at each educational level) has the skills to work with children of all abilities and vulnerabilities, and to identify special learning requirements and potential solutions
  - i. Train all teachers pre-service in core modules to assess, and to respond to, the needs of children with disabilities in their schools through understanding individual requirements
  - ii. Train all teachers to use the Toolkit for Enabling Inclusive Learning (TEIL) and to recognise the range of barriers
  - iii. Provide targeted training for teachers to specialise in special needs education (such as sign language) as in-service training
- b. **Discrimination and stigma prevention training** to ensure teachers understand the long-term effects of corporal punishment and psychological abuse<sup>45</sup>
  - i. Train all school staff on how to actively reduce discrimination and stigma among pupils
  - ii. Cover alternative means of discipline and the psychological impact of flogging
  - iii. Enforcement of a strict no flogging/caning policy in schools and link teachers to the Reducing Violence in Schools Guide
- c. Develop training videos/ sessions for current teachers, school heads and administrators on how to provide an inclusive learning environment

C. **Responsible organisations:** TSC lead. Supported by: Ministry of Technical and Higher Education, Teacher Training Institutes, Sierra Leone Teachers Union, MBSSE

## *Data*

### C.1.2.20. **Deploy teachers using data on students, including those with special needs**

A. **Objective:** To achieve the equitable, quality provision of teaching services

B. **Approach:**

- a. Work in line with the National Teacher Deployment Policy<sup>46</sup>
- b. Map community and school Special Educational Needs data
- c. Deploy teachers accounting for their spoken language(s) to support those children that have difficulty with their Krio or English
- d. Capture teachers' qualifications, teaching areas, and relevant training

C. **Responsible organisations:** TSC. Supported by: EMIS, Directorate of Research and Curriculum and Directorate of Policy and Planning, MBSSE and MoSW

<sup>45</sup> Arseneault, L. (2017) *The persistent and pervasive impact of being bullied in childhood and adolescence: implications for policy and practice*, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 59(4) pp. 405-421  
<https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcpp.12841>

<sup>46</sup> TSC (2021) <https://tsc.gov.sl/summarizing-the-national-teacher-deployment-policy/>

### C.1.2.21. **Collect fully disaggregated age, gender, and disability data in all future national censuses**

- A. **Objective:** To improve quality and detail of data for more effective targeting of approaches
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Review the use of Washington Group questions in the Sierra Leonean context, to understand the most appropriate way to collect disability data
  - b. Disaggregate all surveys down to the level of individuals; if collecting personal data, they are to include age and disability questions
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Statistics Sierra Leone. Supported by: all government bodies

### C.1.2.22. **Further develop a comprehensive Management Information System to include learner data**

- A. **Objective:** To identify at-risk students, and improve service delivery, building links to other systems to identify and target OOSC
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Use existing up-to-date data to create a baseline national dataset and mapping on OOSC
  - b. Develop a schools database that holds in (near) real-time: school coordinates, editable school data linked to pupil enrolment and attendance down to the level of individuals
  - c. **Data security** must be considered at all stages of development and as a minimum: database access and change logs, strong password enforcement, accountability for hardware safety, encrypted database, limited storage of data on local devices, not collecting children's biometrics, different access levels in accordance with data protection legislation, and reducing the number access points to the system
  - d. Use as a single reference point for other education data, for example, the Teacher Records Management System and the Annual School Census so that data is linked to a trusted source and is therefore comparable between surveys, improving opportunity for longitudinal study
  - e. **Implement a pupil attendance monitoring system** that
    - i. Gathers annual learner enrolment and tracks individual children's day-to-day attendance against enrolment throughout their school career
    - ii. Select a practicable life-long Unique ID for students, which stays with the learner as they transition across academic years and between schools
    - iii. Support monitoring of children and create referral pathways for additional follow-up case management support if and when children drop-out, linking to child protection systems
    - iv. Provide continuous data on drop-out rates including when and where they occur to support the development and evaluation of strategies and programmes to address them
      - 1. Dashboard showing school and community OOSC performance
    - v. Collect parents' contact details to aid follow-up for students that have dropped out or have poor attendance
  - f. Flag children regularly missing school to the school Leaders for further referral or direct action
  - g. Present and systematically share data on learning outcomes, gender and marginalisation to assist programme targeting

- h. Capture data of all enrolled pupils to enable the government to assign school subsidies based on data with higher levels of assurance. Capture marginalisation factors upon enrolment
  - i. **Introduce teacher attendance monitoring** to ensure teachers recruited to work in rural areas remain in rural areas
    - i. Reward punctual and high-performing teachers, for example using the national teacher awards system
    - ii. Sanction teachers who abandoned their post or have prolonged unapproved absence (see Action 1.2.18. for more detail)
  - j. Feasibility assessment of long-term extension beyond government and government-supported schools to community schools
  - k. Produce reports to alter incorrect information in the payroll
- C. **Responsible organisations:** EMIS, MBSSE. Supported by: TSC, National Commission for Children, West African Examinations Council, Accountant General to implement payroll changes

#### C.1.2.23. **Incentivise school clusters that reduce the rate of OOSC to zero, prevent drop-out, and achieve smooth transition across classes**

- A. **Objective:** To enable schools and communities to collaborate to achieve 100% enrolment
- B. **Approach:**
- a. Pilot scheme to provide school clusters or communities with additional resources for achieving 100% enrolment
  - b. Provide structure for schools to collaborate with the community to enrol students, through CWC or in the short run SMCs
  - c. Establish the necessary data on the Education Management Information System
  - d. Support their final year learners to enrol in the next school
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Policy and Planning, SQARM, Gender Unit, MBSSE. Supported by: MoGCA, Statistics Sierra Leone, Ministry of Finance, District Councils



## C.2. Demand for education: Inform and support decisions to prioritise education

The actions for this outcome discuss how we increase and enable families' and communities' demand for education.

### C.2.1. Immediate Actions

#### C.2.1.1. Implement a national advocacy and sensitisation campaign to address attitudes towards the value of universal education and safeguarding of children

##### A. Objective:

- a. To improve the value attached to educating all community members, including girls and children with disability
- b. To reduce protection risks for children at home and in schools

##### B. Approach:

- a. Use multiple channels, to include national and local radio stations and community dialogues, with traditional leadership, for both men and women
- b. Work with traditional and religious leaders to ensure messages permeate
- c. Develop communications effective for those without literacy
- d. Audiences:
  - i. Girls and children with disability must know their rights
  - ii. Children encouraged to support their peers, mitigating stigma
  - iii. Parents and schools must know their obligations
- e. Encourage schools to celebrate an anti-bullying week, with school club discussions on discrimination
- f. Increase the value of education
  - i. Provide guidance on how parents can actively support their children's education through SMCs: early opportunities for critical thinking improve long term attitudes to education
  - ii. Include the topics below in key messages:
    1. Education increases employment and earning opportunities for all
    2. Parents must send children to school: not sending children to school daily is illegal, there are sanctions for flouting the policy
    3. Parents education improves nutrition and health of their children
    4. Gender specific messaging: If a woman is educated, she is better able to access her rights and act within her community
    5. Disability specific:
      - a. What disability is and what it is not
      - b. People with a disability have the same rights as everyone else to freedom, respect, equality and dignity. This includes the right of children with disabilities to access education



- c. Awareness of the support for children with disability and how to access it
  - g. Improve norms around safeguarding and child protection
    - i. Address physical and psychological violence in the community, including female genital mutilation, Bondo initiation and the consequential attitudes towards early marriage
    - ii. Develop safeguarding guidelines as part of a comprehensive school safety strategy
    - iii. Include the topics below in the key messages for community members:
      - 1. How to report using the National Reporting Protocol
      - 2. How to access school gender champions and other support
      - 3. What is safety and communities' responsibility towards:
        - a. A survivor's right to stay in school
        - b. Illegality to protect someone who has harmed a child, and the sanctions for it
        - c. A child, who are never to blame for any abuse, harm or neglect
  - h. Prioritise rural areas with the highest rates of, for example, child marriage
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Gender Unit, Special Needs Unit, MBSSE and MoSW lead. Supported by: MoGCA, National Secretariat for the Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy and Child Marriage, national networks, including Council of Paramount Chiefs and the Inter-Religious Council, CWC and SMCs

### C.2.1.2. Leverage the authority of local power structures to ensure that laws protecting children and requiring them to be in school are enforced

- A. **Objective:** To enhance the use of the existing structures, such as through the introduction of by-laws<sup>47</sup>
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Discretionary use of by-laws should include consideration of the prevalence of available schooling within a given community
  - b. Share accountability through collective action to bring children to school on registration day, and to support children's attendance
  - c. Suggested basis for by-laws for consideration by the actors above:
    - i. Reward 100% attendance at school
    - ii. Motivate the community to motivate the schools to start on time and fill the correct term dates through the Chiefs
    - iii. Parents and caregivers shall enrol any child the age of 6 to 17 years in school before the beginning of the academic year in September every year. Any parents or caregivers failing to enrol their child is liable to pay a fine of 500,000 SLL per child per year<sup>48</sup>
    - iv. Parents and caregivers shall ensure attendance of any child the age of 6 to 17 years in school each day of the school term. For each unauthorised

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<sup>47</sup> Traditional leaders have a great deal of influence and there are some people that will be more readily influenced by customary law – Save the Children (2017) *Child Marriage in Sierra Leone*, <https://resource-centre-uploads.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/child-marriage-sierra-leone.pdf> p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> In accordance with Education Act 2004 Part II, 3 (4) <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2004-2p.pdf>

day of school missed by a child, parents or caregivers will be liable to pay a fine of 10,000 SLL

d. **Timeline:** By-laws can be implemented immediately

C. **Responsible organisations:** National Council of Paramount Chiefs and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Section Chiefs to implement. Supported by: Directorate of Policy and Planning, MBSSE

### C.2.1.3. Door to door enrolment drive utilising existing community structures

A. **Objective:** To present parents and caregivers with the necessary minimum prompt to enrol all children in their care

B. **Approach:**

a. Request Council of Paramount Chiefs discuss the importance of ensuring all children are enrolled to reduce any burden of implementation

b. Community enrolling all children, reducing the number of children never officially recognised

c. By using existing structures this will not be implemented in all areas but will be a low-cost intervention where feasible

C. **Responsible organisations:** Council of Paramount Chiefs lead. Supported by: Community headmen, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, MBSSE through existing supportive structures such as SMCs, Mothers' Clubs

## C.2.2. Long Term Actions

### C.2.2.1. Capacitate SMCs to implement and monitor inclusion issues and strategies in their communities

A. **Objective:** To develop school oversight to ensure inclusion and school safety

B. **Approach:**

a. Link the SMCs to the community on issues of inclusion, reducing the burden on teachers

b. Guidelines on SMC action to include community linkages

c. Guidelines to be issued to all schools including community and private schools

d. Training for inclusion oversight: what are SMCs expected to oversee from the schools

C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Policy and Planning, Gender Unit, MBSSE. Supported by: TSC and SQARM, MBSSE

### C.2.2.2. Increase uptake of formal Early Childhood Education

A. **Objective:** To increase children in Early Childhood Education, to improve learners' school readiness and positive attitudes to education, and will therefore reduce numbers of OOSC in the long-term

B. **Approach:**

a. Using geospatial analysis, increase the number of pre-primaries in the FQSE support

b. Bring existing pre-primaries around the country onto the FQSE programme

- c. Link to the facilities with existing Community Learning Centres to share space and coordination
- d. Policy to incentivise increasing private Early Childhood Development community centres
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Early Childhood Development Unit, Directorate of Policy and Planning, MBSSE

## *Social Safety Net*

### C.2.2.3. Targeted support strategies for poor and vulnerable households

- A. **Objective:**
  - a. To implement and communicate key components of the 2022 National Social Protection Strategy, particularly related to school-age children to overcome cost barriers to education<sup>49</sup> by supporting household income
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Targeting of OOSC or otherwise vulnerable learners requires baseline data and thus a link to Education Management Information System
  - b. Implement a child benefit in line with the National Social Protection Strategy with a thorough safeguarding review and access to grievance redress mechanisms
  - c. Assess benefits of prioritisation of key vulnerable groups such as single parent households, orphans and vulnerable children, persons with disabilities to target the groups most likely to drop-out of school
- C. **Responsible organisations:** MoSW, National Commission for Social Action

### C.2.2.4. In-school cash transfers support targeted to meet school costs for the most at risk of drop-out

- A. **Objective:** To reduce drop-outs as economic barriers were found to be the most significant barrier to school<sup>50</sup>
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Pilot an education-specific cash transfers programme to increase pull to school to understand the method with best safeguarding and efficacy
  - b. Pilot merit-based cash transfers for secondary school learners
  - c. Identifying linkages to other education service delivery, cash transfer, and social protection programmes
  - d. Target through the Education Management Information System
  - e. Avoid stigmatisation through targeting with broadly defined eligibility
  - f. Targeting: Draw on any evidence from datasets (existing or planned, for example, One Tablet Per School) to understand those most likely to drop-out of school and their marginalisation factors, enabling effective targeting of cash transfers to the most at risk
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Directorate of Research and Curriculum, SQARM, Directorate of Non-Formal Education, Gender Unit, MBSSE lead

<sup>49</sup> 35,000 households have received Social Safety Net cash transfers since 2014, reducing absolute poverty – NaCSA, 2022, *Draft National Social Protection Strategy*, Section 1.2. Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone.

<sup>50</sup> MBSSE (2021) *Sierra Leone Out-Of-School Children Study*, Freetown: CGA Technologies, UNICEF.

#### C.2.2.5. Expand the scope of school feeding programmes beyond just government-supported primary schools

- A. **Objective:** To ensure community schools are able to benefit from the outcomes of the government's integrated home-grown school feeding strategy
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Include rural poor attending community schools
  - b. Improve communication with schools to ensure school leaders know when to expect delivery or delays so they can manage expectations
- C. **Responsible organisations:** School Feeding Secretariat lead. Supported by: Directorate of Educational Programmes and Services, SQARM, MBSSE

## C.3. Systems Strengthening: Join up and resource systems to fulfil all children's rights

### C.3.1. Immediate Actions

#### C.3.1.1. Harmonise child marriage policies and outlaw female genital mutilation

- A. **Objective:** To reconcile the Child Rights Act of 2007 and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Pass an amendment to the Child Rights Act explicitly prohibiting child marriage. This would serve to close the loophole in the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act 2009, which allows under-18s to marry with adult consent so that children under-18 may not marry
  - b. Outlaw female genital mutilation and cutting explicitly in law
  - c. Prosecution of those laws to prevent early and forced marriage and actively reduce the prevalence of cutting
- C. **Responsible organisations:** Gender Unit, MBSSE, MoGCA, Government

#### C.3.1.2. Improve capacity of Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and Family Support Unit to respond to Child Protection and Well-being cases

- A. **Objective:** To ensure MoSW and Family Support Unit work effectively to protect children within their mandate
- B. **Approach:**
  - a. Build an accurate picture of the minimum scale to respond to cases<sup>51</sup> and how to enhance MoSW, MoGCA and Family Support Unit
  - b. Link Primero central database of Child Protection cases to Education Management Information System to flag existence of concern
  - c. Establish a standard reporting method from schools
  - d. Create adequate access and funding for safe houses, transport and other costs associated to protect children
  - e. Enforce safe environments by training and empowering law enforcement on the rights of children, girls and children with disabilities
  - f. Clarify roles and responsibilities of MoGCA and MoSW at the district
    - i. Establish effective regular coordination for use of social workers
    - ii. Review what is possible for the ministries to achieve with present and potential resources, including the 2007 recommendation for regional offices<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Castiñeira de Dios, J. (2022) *Barriers women face to access justice in Sierra Leone*, [unpublished].

<sup>52</sup> Governance Reform Secretariat (2007) *Management and Functional Review of the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs*, Freetown: Government of Sierra Leone. DFID, PAI, CoEn Consulting.

- C. **Responsible organisations:** Gender Unit, MBSSE, MoSW, MoGCA, Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and Family Support Unit

## C.3.2. Long Term Actions

### C.3.2.1. Recruit more social workers within Ministry of Social Welfare

- A. **Objective:** To adequately support *all* child protection cases
- B. **Approach:**
- a. Increase in the number of social workers or volunteers trained to respond to child protection cases beyond the current 2-3 per district
    - i. In the short term, outsourcing via temporary contracts for surge capacity until review completion is an option
  - b. It is anticipated that social workers will work with Inclusive Education Units, SMCs and CWC
  - c. Develop Standard Operating Procedures to guide social workers on how to attend to different types of cases or concerns related to children
- C. **Responsible organisations:** MoSW. Supported by: MoGCA, Directorate of Educational Programmes and Services, MBSSE

### C.3.2.2. Establish Child Welfare Committees consistently and sustainably<sup>53</sup>

- A. **Objective:**
- a. To establish structures to enforce legal protections for children
  - b. To coordinate and refer child protection and well-being concerns at the community level to the appropriate structures and services
- B. **Approach:**
- a. Communicate intent to establish legally required bodies with local leadership
  - b. Community Leadership invite volunteers to sit on the committee
  - c. Train district-level focal points to cascade training to village CWC
  - d. Support CWC to meet monthly
  - e. Communicate to partners and national stakeholders the Government intent to align any community-level committees established in parallel
  - f. Establish a point of responsibility in charge of coordinating CWC in MoGCA, National Commission for Children and a focal point for coordination between CWC and school management in MBSSE
  - g. Report child well-being concerns outside of school to CWC
  - h. Provide SMCs with an access point to the community through CWC
  - i. Home visit children at risk of drop-out by CWC representative
- C. **Responsible organisations:** MoGCA, Directorate of Policy and Planning, Directorate of Educational Programmes and Services, MBSSE

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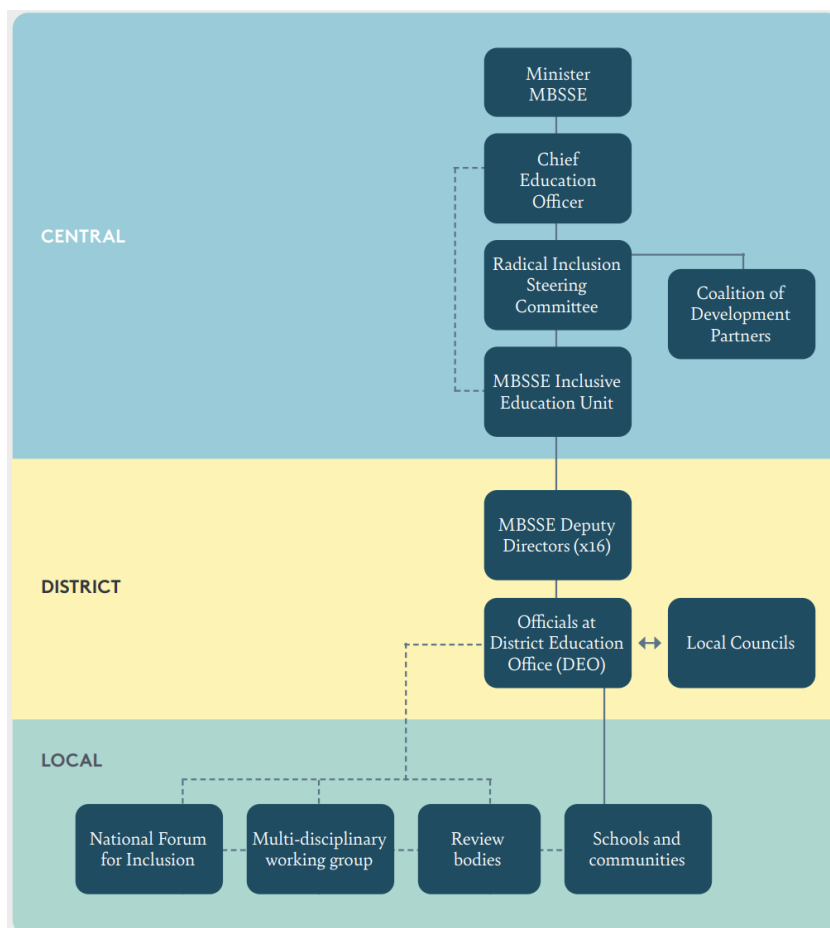
<sup>53</sup> Child welfare committees had been established but reduced efficacy as support reduced. This delay to the full implementation of the Child Rights Act 2007 inhibit support from statutory bodies such as the National Commission for Children as well as CWC at village and chiefdom levels. These are the key overseers of children's rights. – MBSSE (2021) *Sierra Leone Out-Of-School Children Study*, Freetown: CGA Technologies, UNICEF.

## D. Governance

### D.1. Coordination structure

This strategy’s implementation is to be overseen by the Radical Inclusion Steering Committee.<sup>54</sup>

FIGURE 3: ORGANOGRAM OF IMPLEMENTATION GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS.<sup>55</sup>



#### Steering Committee<sup>56</sup>

The Radical Inclusion Steering Committee is to comprise responsible government agencies chaired by MBSSE, with the members from across government.<sup>57</sup> Links to development partners and Civil Society Organisations through the Coalition of Development Partners.

<sup>54</sup> MBSSE (2022) *National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools Implementation Plan*, Section 3 ‘Governance and coordination arrangements’, Education Partners Group, pp. 67-73, [unpublished].

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 69.

<sup>57</sup> Ministry of Local Government Rural Development; MoGCA; MoSW, MoHS; Ministry of Youth Affairs; Ministry of Technical and Higher Education; Ministry of Planning and Economic Development; TSC; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Works; Ministry of Information and Communications; Ministry of Transport and Aviation; Teacher Training Institutions; Sierra Leone Road Safety Authorities; National Commission for Children; National School Feeding Secretariat; National Secretariat for the Reduction in Teenage Pregnancy; National Social Security and Insurance Trust – Ibid, p. 69.

Within the Steering Committee there will be an OOSC sub-committee to coordinate the actions of this out of school children strategy. It will sit no less than once every Steering Committee meeting.

Whilst the entire Steering Committee will oversee this strategy, with a broad invite to attend, the OOSC sub-committee is to consist of the Heads of:

1. Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management, MBSSE
2. Directorate of Curriculum and Research, MBSSE
3. Non-Formal Education Directorate, MBSSE
4. Gender Unit, MBSSE
5. Directorate of Social Welfare, Ministry of Social Welfare
6. National Secretariat for Reduction of Teenage Pregnancy, Ministry of Health and Sanitation
7. Chief Social Services Officer (Professional Head), Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs
8. Directorate of Policy and Planning
9. National Commission for Children
10. National Commission Persons with Disability

The sub-committee is expected to invite relevant partners from the Steering Committee as per the requirements of the agenda, specifically considering organisations of specialisation such as Organisation of Persons with Disability.

The senior MBSSE representative is to Chair the meeting, nominally the Chief Education Officer or a delegate.

### **Development Partners**

The Coalition of Development Partners will report to the steering committee. It will allow greater MBSSE oversight and coordination of NGO and CBO programmes supporting OOSC.

### **Local**

The National Commission for Children should report to the Steering Committee on the activities and outputs of Village– and Chiefdom–level Child Welfare Committees (CWC) reporting to District Education Committee, the Social Service Officers, TSC Deputy Directors, and FQSE Coordinators.

In the absence of CWC, until the law is implemented, District education officials and SMCs will bridge from schools to the communities.

## **D.2. Periodic review**

The Steering Committee has the remit to review this strategy annually, define priority interventions, identify key gaps in child social protection coverage, and push for policy changes and oversee findings, to support OOSC and get them back into school.

Monitoring this strategy will take place with an annual review of line-by-line progress through the strategy by the OOSC sub-committee. It is expected that development partners will undertake some of these actions.



The key indicator for this strategy is number of out of school children, which surveys and continuous study will track (per Action 1.2.22.). The committee will adjust prioritisation of the strategy's actions as school reporting data shows the implemented actions' efficacy.