



Project Information Document (PID)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 03-Dec-2018 | Report No: PIDISDSC25260



BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Country Sierra Leone	Project ID P167897	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name Focusing Resources on Equity and Excellence of Education Project (FREE Education Program) (P167897)
Region AFRICA	Estimated Appraisal Date Apr 03, 2019	Estimated Board Date Jul 25, 2019	Practice Area (Lead) Education
Financing Instrument Investment Project Financing	Borrower(s) Ministry of Finance	Implementing Agency Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education	

Proposed Development Objective(s)

To increase the number of students in better functioning schools.

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US\$, Millions)

SUMMARY

Total Project Cost	70.00
Total Financing	70.00
of which IBRD/IDA	30.00
Financing Gap	0.00

DETAILS

World Bank Group Financing

International Development Association (IDA)	30.00
IDA Credit	30.00

Non-World Bank Group Financing

Counterpart Funding	20.00
Borrower	20.00



Trust Funds	20.00
DFID/Bank Partnership for Education Development	20.00

Environmental and Social Risk Classification

Moderate

Concept Review Decision

Track I-The review did authorize the preparation to continue

Other Decision (as needed)

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. **Sierra Leone is a country of approximately seven million people located on the west coast of Africa.** It is divided into 16 districts and 21 Local Councils (LCs). Approximately 42 percent of the population is below the age of 18 and 60 percent is below the age of 25. Human development outcomes are low, with Sierra Leone ranking 184 out of 188 countries on the 2018 United Nations Development Programme Human Development Index. Life expectancy is 52.2 years, the infant mortality rate is 83.3 per 1,000 live births, and the maternal mortality rate is one of the highest in the world with 1,360 deaths per 100,000 live births.

2. **The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak had a devastating impact on human development and the economy of Sierra Leone.** The first cases of infection were reported in Sierra Leone in May 2014, which marked the beginning of an unprecedented epidemic that resulted in the infection of 12,000 people and took the lives of more than 3,880 people. It also had severe negative consequences on the country economically and socially. In July 2014, the Government declared a state of emergency wherein curfews were imposed throughout the country and entire districts were put under quarantine. Most of the country’s population was unable to access basic health services, schools were closed, and economic activity came to a standstill.¹ Poverty rates, which had declined to 46 percent before the crisis (from 52.9 percent in 2011), increased to 49 percent in 2015.²

3. **The country’s macroeconomic indicators experienced significant decline as a result of the Ebola crisis, which was further compounded by a downturn in iron ore prices.** By 2015, the economy had contracted by 21 percent because of the Ebola crisis and the sharp decline in iron ore prices.³ The positive trend in the Government’s fiscal position was reversed with domestic revenue declining to 10.1 percent of GDP in 2015,

¹ For example, 90 percent of firms reported a decline in sales, 32 percent of private sector workers were laid off, and 61 percent were working reduced hours.

² These are projections based on the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey from 2004 and 2011.

³ In 2014, there was a complete collapse of the price of iron ore which declined by 47 percent.



down from 12.6 percent in 2013. Inflation increased to 9.8 percent by the end of 2014 and further increased to 17.4 percent by December 2016 largely because of the growing depreciation of the currency.

4. **While the economy is still recovering from the impact of the EVD crisis, domestic revenue mobilization remains challenging.** Economic growth was 3.7 percent in 2017 reflecting weak recovery of mineral production particularly iron ore. The overall budget deficit, including grants rose to 8.4 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017 (compared to 7.3 percent in 2016) due largely to a shortfall in revenue mobilization and spending overruns in all the major expenditure categories. Despite a 0.3 percentage point improvement, total revenue fell short of the 13.5 percent of GDP target for 2017, mainly due to the delay in enacting the 2017 Finance Bill, non-implementation of retail fuel price liberalization, accumulation of tax arrears by public sector institution and leakages through excessive duty waivers. Despite the shortfall in revenues, spending pressures increased emanating from elections preparations and civic registration, road construction and wages and salaries for outgoing parliamentarians. The overall fiscal deficit was financed by external loan disbursements and grants as well as domestic borrowing, mainly from the banking system, which exceeded the 2.0 percent of GDP limit on which the Government's medium-term fiscal program is anchored. The most recent Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) (June 2017) indicates that Sierra Leone remains at a moderate risk of debt distress. Inflationary pressures also remained elevated throughout 2017 due mainly to the depreciation of the currency late in 2016 and in the first half of 2017, and the enduring impact of the upward adjustments in utility tariffs and fuel prices in November 2016.

5. **In March 2018, Sierra Leone had the sixth successful election and the new administration was inaugurated in May 2018.** The new government has spelled out its priorities to address the country's numerous needs, that are underpinned by five core principles: disciplined leadership, national integration, efficiency, professionalism and delivery. The new government is preparing the new National Development Plan "New Direction" which outlines the eight strategic priorities: (i) Education for Development; (ii) Health; (iii) Water; (iv) Macro-economic management; (v) Energy; (vi) Agriculture; (vii) Tackling Corruption; and (viii) Security. Education has been set as the flagship priority program and the government has launched the Free Quality Education Policy starting in September 2018.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

6. **Education service delivery in Sierra Leone is by a mix of state and non-state providers.** In 2016, there were nearly 8,900 pre-primary (12 percent), primary (71 percent), junior secondary (13 percent) and senior secondary (4 percent) schools in Sierra Leone, enrolling approximately 2 million students. In terms of ownership, only 14 percent of the schools were government or government-owned in 2016, while the remaining were owned and operated by non-state actors, including mission/religious institutions (51 percent), communities (21 percent), and private entrepreneurs (13 percent). A substantial number of schools owned and operated by community and mission/religious institutions also receive government assistance, with 45 percent and 22 percent of mission/religious and community schools being approved schools (in 2016) and thus eligible for government financial support.⁴

7. **Sierra Leone has made substantial progress in increasing access to education in the post-war period, especially for girls.** The primary completion rate (PCR) increased from 55 percent in 2004 to 75.4 percent in

⁴ In addition, only 62 percent of government owned schools were approved schools in 2016.



2016, and is above the regional average (69 percent). Secondary enrolment increase in the post-war period has been especially remarkable – with completion rates in Junior Secondary Schools (JSS) and Senior Secondary Schools (SSS) increasing from 26 percent and 11 percent in 2004 to 64.5 percent and 27.6 percent, respectively, in 2016. Access also increased at the tertiary level with the number of students in public tertiary institutions increasing from 8,913 in 2000 to 31,103 in 2012. Notably, female enrolment increased sharply - the gender gap in enrolment has closed at primary, reduced substantially at junior secondary though persists at SSS and tertiary levels. Despite this progress, the sector is facing significant related to poor learning outcomes and skills acquisition, inequities in access, weak sector governance and management, and low and inefficient public spending.

Key Challenges facing the Education Sector

8. **Poor learning outcomes.** Sierra Leone is experiencing a learning crisis. The 2014 Early Grade Reading Assessment found that 87 percent of Grade 2 students could not read a single word, while 97 percent got zero marks on reading and comprehension. The issue persists at higher levels – in 2016, only 50 percent of Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) candidates received a pass in English or Math, while only 3.59 percent of West Africa Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) candidates obtained a credit in any five subjects including English and Math. Key factors contributing to these gaps include:

- *low quality teaching* - Almost one-half of the teachers are not qualified for their level and position. However, even ‘qualified’ teachers have significant gaps in subject-matter and pedagogical competencies.⁵ The teaching profession is not attracting the best. Meanwhile, weak pre-service programs by teacher training colleges (TTCs), fragmented in-service training systems, and lack of a comprehensive continuous professional development (CPD) system further impact on teacher quality;
- *weak teacher management* - characterized by inefficiencies in teacher deployment leading to disparities in pupil-teacher ratios,⁶ opaque recruitment and approval processes, and poor incentives and accountability mechanisms that affect teacher motivation and performance;
- *inadequate learning environment in schools* - characterized by overcrowding, dilapidated classrooms, lack of water and sanitation facilities, limited teaching and learning materials, and inadequate availability and use of textbooks.

9. **Low and inequitable access.** Despite gains in enrolment, many primary-age children are out of school, mostly poor and disabled. Although most children start grade 1, retention rates are very low (e.g. survival rate to last grade of primary was 48 percent in 2012), especially among the children from poor households and adolescent girls. Inequities in access to pre-primary and SSS are particularly salient - with gross enrolment rates (GERs) of 13.7 percent and 29.5 percent, respectively. These rates lag behind those found in comparable countries and are marked by significant geographical and socioeconomic disparities. Key factors driving these gaps include: (i) *high cost burden especially for poor families*⁷ - driven in part by schools charging unofficial levies as fee subsidies

⁵ Research from Sierra Leone indicates no difference in effectiveness of qualified and unqualified teachers.

⁶ E.g., in Freetown, there is one qualified teacher for every 30 pupils, while in Pujehun the ratio is 1 to 84.

⁷ Annual out-of-pocket expenditure per child in primary and secondary was PPP US\$98 and PPP US\$375 in 2011, which was higher than countries like Ghana, Niger, Uganda, Cameroon in the same period. Though out-of-pocket expenses per child in tertiary was high in absolute terms (PPP US\$765 in 2011), it was lower compared to other countries.



had been low and disbursed late, and weak targeting of education subsidies.⁸ At the pre-primary and SSS, affordability issue is a major issue for the poor households as 40 percent of these schools are private (vs. 6 percent of primary schools); (ii) *distance to schools*. Low access to pre-primary, SSS and technical and vocational training (TVET) is partly driven by the limited number of schools at these levels and their concentration in urban areas. Lack of feasible transport options (especially in rural areas) exacerbate the distance challenge;⁹ (iii) *teenage pregnancy* – with 29 percent of out-of-school girls excluded from school as a result of teenage pregnancy; (iv) *school-related gender-based violence* – which impacts negatively on girls’ attendance and retention.

10. **Weak sector management and governance.** Performance of the sector is also limited as a result of a weak system for management of the sector and governance issues. Key challenges include: (i) *a weak policy and regulatory environment*. 54 percent of all schools are unapproved due to backlog in the approval process and compliance. Teacher management is also weak, including a large number of unapproved teachers¹⁰. While the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) was constituted by an Act of Parliament in 2011 to address teacher issues and is receiving report under the Revitalizing Education Development in Sierra Leone (REDiSL) Project (P13370), it is not yet fully functional. Further, staff turnover has led to whole units in the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) being defunct for years (e.g., curriculum and assessment units) leading to a lack of leadership and policy direction in these areas; (ii) *an inadequate quality assurance (QA) system*. A QA system at the center and districts has not been systematized, and the system that does exist lacks sufficient staff, resources and expertise to provide effective supervision and support. Meanwhile, at the facility level, school management bodies do not provide effective oversight, and lack capacities in strategic planning, financial management (FM), revenue mobilization, and performance management; (iii) *insufficient data systems*. There is no institutionalized system for tracking learning outcomes, and current efforts have been largely project-based. An Education Management Information System (EMIS) is in place for general education but it is fragmented and underutilized; and (iv) *weak aid management* - characterized by aid fragmentation, with various donors using parallel implementation arrangements (many of which bypass country systems). Weak country systems and fiduciary risks contribute to donors’ decision to use such arrangements.

11. **Low and inefficient public spending.** In 2016, public spending on education was \$109 million or 12.5 percent of total government spending which is lower than the regional average. Of this, less than 50 percent (\$54 million) was spent on primary (\$39 million), JSS (\$3.5 million) and SSS levels (\$9.5 million). In per pupil terms, public spending in primary and secondary in Sierra Leone is the lowest amongst countries with similar GDP per capita. The share of recurrent spending in total education spending is very high (>99 percent in 2016), of which nearly three-fourths is spent on staff compensation. Meanwhile, there is a large backlog of schools pending approval and teachers not on payroll, which has fiscal implications. There are also many inefficiencies - related to insufficient financial control of the payroll, weak targeting and fragmentation of education subsidies, inadequate links between funding and performance, low budget execution, disbursement delays, limited capacities in planning and financial management in educational institutions, over-centralization, and weak accountability over use of resources.

⁸ Unapproved schools do not receive although they serve the poor, nor do secondary schools (except girl child subsidy in JSS).

⁹ For every preschool and SSS school, there are 7 and 18 primary schools, respectively, and are mostly in urban areas – e.g. Western region has 44 percent of all preschools (compared to 14 percent of primary schools).

¹⁰ Based on initial 2017 census data, there are more than 3,000 ‘qualified’ teachers in approved public schools not on payroll, plus another 3,000-4,000 ‘qualified teachers’ in schools with a pending application for approval.



Relationship to CPF

12. **The proposed FREE Education MPA Program is consistent with the Joint Country Assistance Strategy (CAS) FY2010–2013 (Report No. 52297), particularly one of its two pillars, which focuses on human development and specifically on investments to support decentralized delivery of social services and primary education.** The newly elected government has also identified education and training as key investments in human capital development in supporting economic growth. The MP is well-aligned with these key strategic documents and is also responsive to the sector constraints and priorities as identified in the Systematic Country Diagnostic (SCD), which has been presented to the Board and public disclosed immediately after the March 2018 elections. In-country consultations for the new Country Partnership Framework (CPF) are on-going.

C. Proposed Development Objective(s)

The higher level development objective is to improve Sierra Leone human capital with increased access to quality education.

Key Results (From PCN)

13. The MPA Program will progressively target three outcomes

- **Intermediate Program Outcome 1 (Phase 1):** One million students learning in schools with (i) improved teacher attendance and efforts and (ii) improved student attendance, retention and progression, (iii) and improved student learning outcomes.
- **Intermediate Program Outcome 2 (Phase 2):** One and a half million students learning in schools with (i) improved learning conditions; (ii) improved teacher attendance and efforts; (iii) improved school management and community engagement; resulting in improved student attendance and progression and improved learning outcomes.
- **Intermediate Program Outcome 3 (Phase 3):** Increased the number/share of students completing primary and secondary education and increased the number/share of students reaching grade level proficiency in key subjects.

D. Concept Description

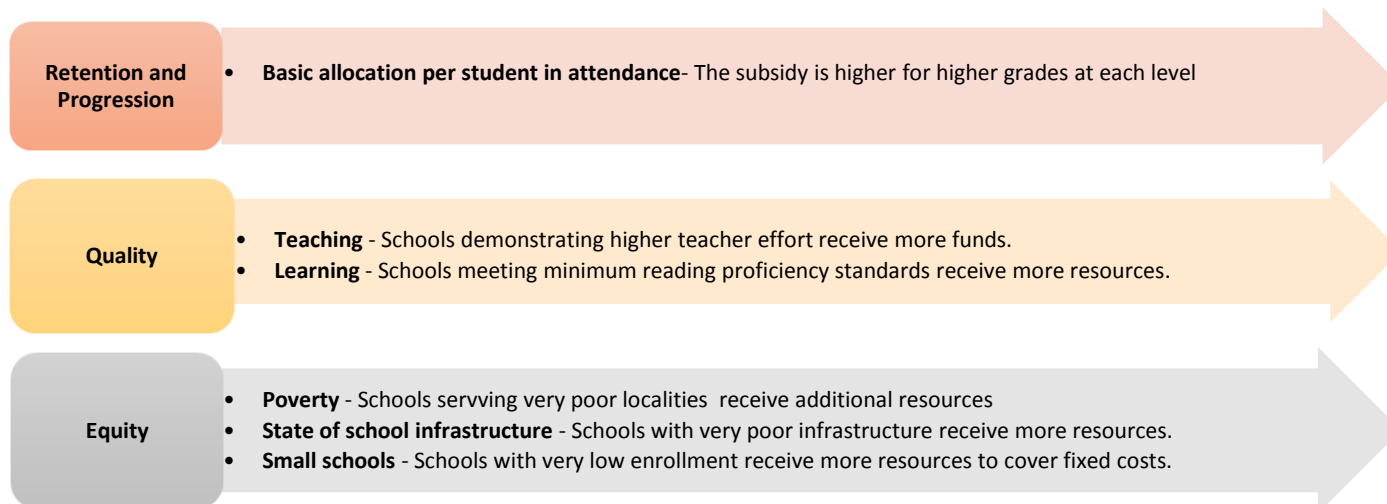
14. **Phase 1 of the MPA has four components:** Component 1: School improvement; Component 2: Curriculum, Textbooks and Learning Materials and Assessment; Component 3: Teacher Management and Development; and Component 4: System Administration, Governance and Financing. Component 1 focuses on interventions at the school-level to enhance the effectiveness of education provision. Components 2, 3 and 4 support a system-level framework to ensure alignment and coherence necessary for the schools to operate (see annex 1 for a summary of the Program Framework).

Component 1: School Improvement (US\$xx million)



15. **Sub-component 1.1: Performance-based school financing.** This sub-component would focus on strengthening education provision by providing performance-based grants to primary, JSS and SSS schools. This sub-component will support the provision of grants while also further building and strengthening, over the long-term, the government school financing system which is currently based on simple student enrolment capitation. The scope (targeting/reach) of this sub-component will be determined during preparation based on the available funds from the government, IDA and other partners. The design of this sub-component will build upon the existing performance-based school grants activity which began a few years ago under the REDiSL Project, and which is still administered under the REDiSL Project Additional Financing. The performance-based school grants supported under the proposed program will build on this system but will have an increased focus on teaching and learning, and equity. The performance-based financing will focus on three sets of performance results: student attendance, retention and progression; teaching and learning (quality); and equity where funding is provided to schools in extreme poverty, small schools, poor state of facilities, and institutions benefiting children with disabilities. A description of the design of the school grant and its calculation provided in Annex 2.

Figure 3. Elements of Performance-based School Grants



16. **Further, this sub-component will also support activities to strengthen central and decentralized government capacity to administer these grants and draw on effective technologies for implementation.** Specifically, this component will aim to improve school-based management practices (providing training to School Management Committees in school improvement planning and financial management); strengthen community engagement and local accountability; improve transparency and information dissemination; and strengthen internal and external (third-party) monitoring, supervision and audit of school grants. It will also incorporate the use of digital tools to facilitate data collection, including information for the performance-based grants, at the school-level.

17. **Sub component 1.2: School Infrastructure development.** This sub-component will review and identify the infrastructure needs in schools (e.g. classrooms, WASH, major rehabilitation), as well as develop options and modalities for addressing the gaps. Subsequently, Phase I will also finance pre-testing/piloting of these approach(es) to inform any subsequent scale-up. For example, Local councils can be incentivized to build an identified infrastructure in target schools in target LCs through the provision of a matching grant (70 percent matching grant: 30 percent LC funding). Payment to LCs will be against outputs and quality of deliverables – such as (i) 25 percent construction complete in line with construction quality standards, (ii) 75 percent construction complete in line with construction quality standards,



(iii) 100 percent construction complete in line with construction quality standards. Public-private partnership (PPP) approaches to infrastructure expansion will also be explored. A design and supervision technical assistance (TA) firm will be recruited to prepare model architectural drawings, establish unit costs, draft bidding documents, draft model environmental plans (as appropriate), provide advisory support to LCs, and establish and monitor construction quality standards.

Component 2: Curriculum, Textbooks and Learning Materials and Assessment (US\$xx million)

18. **Sub-component 2.1: Curriculum, Textbook and Learning Materials.** This sub-component will (i) support MBSSE to translate the curriculum framework into learning outcome standards; and (ii) develop or curate a set of core textbooks that can be printed and distributed to schools at reasonable costs. In connection with Component 1 (school grants) and Component 3 (Teacher Management and Development), schools and teachers are expected to emphasize textbook utilization to ensure that students master the knowledge and competencies expected in the curriculum.

19. **Sub component 2.2: Enhancing assessment capacity.** This component will support (i) national West African Examinations Council (WAEC) office to improve the integrity of National Primary School Examination (NPSE) and Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE); and (ii) developing national learning assessment capacity. It will focus on helping the assessment agency develop harmonized (outcome-based) assessment frameworks that align with the curricula and that test application and understanding (as opposed to rote memorization), develop robust item banks and test forms that can be vertically or horizontally equated, strengthen test administration, psychometric analysis, policy formulation, reporting and dissemination.

Component 3: Teacher Management and Development (US\$xx million)

20. **Sub-Component 3.1: Teacher capacity development.** This sub-component will provide pedagogical support to teachers and head teachers to implement the curriculum and achieve improved student and teacher performance/effort. The professional development program will cover: (i) foundational academic knowledge; (ii) curriculum framework; (iii) structured pedagogy in core subjects; (iv) assessment of student learning; and (v) classroom management and ability to support students with learning difficulties. The training and pedagogical support for teachers will combine face-to-face interactions with digital content and communication.

21. **Sub-Component 3.2: Teaching force human resource management.** Building on the results of the EU support program, this sub-component will continue to implement the teaching force HR reforms led by the TSC including the implementation of the pre-service teacher training standards, teacher professional standards and teacher performance management.

Component 4: System Administration, Governance and Financing (US\$xx million)

22. The objective of this component to strengthen the capacity of the MBSSE and its participating institutions for planning, management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and provide support for program implementation (e.g., M&E, fiduciary, safeguards). To address the capacity constraint, this component will support three activities: (i) strengthening the capacity of the MBSSE and its relevant institutions for planning, management and M&E; (ii) strengthening data management and analysis, including upgrading the centrally managed EMIS at the MBSSE to be able to connect with other data systems linked to teacher training and student assessments; (iii) completing the school mapping for schools without Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates for future real-time monitoring, decision-making, and resource allocation; (iv) establishing an effective quality assurance (QA) system.



- 23. **Subcomponent 4.1. Capacity development of planning, management, and M&E.** This activity is designed to strengthen the capacity of the MoSPE for planning, policy analysis, and M&E. Under the component, the project will support for professional development programs for the existing staff of the Directorate of Planning, other relevant Directorates in the areas of planning, policy analysis and M&E.
- 24. **Sub component 4.2: Support consistent school data collection and analysis.** To address data collection in the short term and ensure consistent *reporting*, the proposed FREE program will support the Ministry to continue to implement the ASC using technology that has been carried out successfully under the REDiSL project. This ASC will be administered for at least three years using digital technology. Some funding will be used to help MBSSE to decentralize collection and cleanup of data as well as develop a additional data module which can be administered on alternate years. In addition, the FREE program will help the MBSSE, to: (i) strengthen data analysis capacity; (ii) enhance infrastructure requirements for decentralized data collection and real-time reporting; and (iii) strengthen the monitoring and evaluation practices within the Directorate of Planning and Policy.
- 25. **Sub component 4.3: Setting up an effective quality assurance system.** This sub-component will support the development, adoption and implementation of a quality assurance system focusing on registration, accreditation and regulation of the non-state schools in the country.
- 26. **Sub-component 4.4: Program coordination, M&E.** This sub-component will undertake the planning, coordination and reporting of the program, as well as provide technical support to the delivery of the entire program. The sub-component will also support the verification of the performance-based grants, school infrastructure development, teachers training and textbooks distribution and utilization. Additionally, it will cover the administrative costs associated with program coordination. Implementation of the Program sits with the MBSSE’s Permanent Secretary’s office and is delegated to a FREE Secretariat. During implementation, interim reporting will be required from district inspectorates in districts targeted under specific components and will be established and supported under this component. Reporting will be coordinated and consolidated by the FREE Secretariat but will be led by the M&E Unit in the Directorate of Planning and Policy with input, as needed, from the FREE Secretariat. The Project Fiduciary Management Unit (PFMU) of the Ministry of Finance (MoF) is responsible for the program fiduciary (procurement, financial management, disbursement and audit).

Legal Operational Policies	Triggered?
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No
Projects in Disputed Areas OP 7.60	No

Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts

Based on the above initial assessment, the Environmental and Social risk is considered moderate for both environmental and social aspects. The environmental and social risks associated with the project are minimal, site specific, and can easily be managed with the required mitigation measure.



Note To view the Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts, please refer to the Concept Stage ESRS Document.

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