

Systems-level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone

Commissioned by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). Undertaken by the Education Partnerships Group (EPG) with funding from the UBS Optimus Foundation.

Systems-level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone

Commissioned by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). Undertaken by the Education Partnerships Group (EPG) with funding from the UBS Optimus Foundation.

Date of Publication: April 2020

The Education Partnerships Group has made every reasonable effort to ensure the accuracy and validity of the information contained in this report. Any errors or omissions are accidental and are the responsibility of the report writing team.

Suggested citation: The Education Partnerships Group (2020) Systems-level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone. Freetown: The Education Partnerships Group and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education

This report is available on the MBSSE website: https://mbsse.gov.sl/reports/and the EPG website: https://epg.org.uk/

For more information, contact:

The Education Partnerships Group epgenquiries@arkonline.org

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education info@mbsse gov sl

Acknowledgements 3

Acknowledgements

This report was commissioned by the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) of Sierra Leone and with funding from the UBS Optimus Foundation.

We wish to acknowledge with much appreciation the former Minister of Education, Mr. Alpha Osman Timbo, who initially commissioned this report and provided the team with access to the Ministry. We also wish to extend our sincere thanks to the current Minister of Education, Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, for the time he took to engage with the project and the Education Partnerships Group (EPG) team during his first weeks in office. We are indebted to Dr. Albert Dupigny who championed the project from its inception and created multiple avenues for the EPG team to meet with relevant education stakeholders and guided discussions on education trends in Sierra Leone.

We extend our gratitude to all our colleagues at the MBSSE, together with colleagues from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD), the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MoFED) and State House, for their insights and guidance. We extend special thanks to the following MBSSE colleagues: Mrs. Adama Momoh, Dr. Alhaji Kamara, Mr. Amara Sowa, Mr. Charles Kammanda, Mrs. Emily Gogra, Mr. Horatio Nelson-Williams, Mr. John K. Ansumana, Mr. Karim Sow, Mr. Milton Pearce, Mr. Mohamed S. Sesay, Mrs. Olive Musa, Mr. Sorie I. Turay, Dr. Staneala Beckley, and Dr. Yatta Kanu. In particular, we are thankful for the support of Mr. Stephen Tandacy Musa who has worked tirelessly to support the EPG team, including organising meetings, sharing his office space, and providing invaluable insights, guidance and enthusiasm.

EPG is grateful for the participation of Mrs. Colina Macauley and Mr. Morrison Saidu from the Decentralisation Secretariat within the MLGRD, and Mr. Sallieu Kamara from the MoFED. EPG is particularly appreciative of the unwavering support, guidance and insights of Mr Lansana Keifala, together with the critical contributions made by Dr. Emmanual Gaima at State House.

EPG is grateful for the input and guidance from Mr. Colin Bangay, Ms. Annie Homer, Mr. Kayode Sanni, Dr. Michael Mambo and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) Sierra Leone team throughout the process. Additionally, EPG would like to recognise the insights provided by Ms. Mari Shojo and Mr. Shomikho Raha at the World Bank.

We would like to acknowledge Mr.Abdulai Conteh and Mr.Anthony Mansaray who facilitated the key informant interviews in Bombali, Kambia, Kenema, and Moyamba and provided extensive support to the project. We wish to express our deep gratitude for the contribution of Abdulai, who showed exceptional dedication to this project borne from a tireless commitment to improving education in Sierra Leone.

Finally, we would like to thank the 80 respondents from the four sampled districts, who willingly gave their time and openly answered our many questions. Their views, knowledge, and experience form the basis of the qualitative research for this study. Thank you.

Foreword 4

Foreword

There has never been a more exciting time for education in Sierra Leone. His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio and the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) is committed to transforming education service delivery and improving learning outcomes for all children and young people by enabling them to fulfil their potential, contribute to the national and global economy, and participate in public life.



At the heart of Sierra Leone's development aspiration is its people. Human Capital Development is central to the Government's Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) 2019-2023 entitled "Education for Development", which lays out a new direction for improving the lives of Sierra Leoneans through education, inclusive growth, and building a resilient economy.

The provision of free quality education is the cornerstone of our commitment to developing Human Capital. The Government's flagship Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative aims to achieve greater access, quality, and equity for over 1.5 million children by removing financial barriers to school enrolment and improving teaching

and learning outcomes. To meet this commitment, the Government doubled the annual education budget from 11% to 22% from 2017–2018.

In order to achieve this ambitious and transformational vision, it is critical that Government decision-making is informed by timely, actionable, and locally relevant data. These ingredients are essential for evidence-based policy design and implementation. My joint appointment as Sierra Leone's Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and Chief Innovation Officer at the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation (DSTI) reflects the Government's commitment to leveraging data, technology, and innovation to strengthen education service delivery and improve teaching and learning outcomes for all.

Evidence-informed policymaking seeks to increase the role of empirical data and insights in policy decisions. Naturally, evidence-informed policymaking should not be at odds with innovation. Where evidence is unreliable or simply non-existent, it is essential to analyse current efforts and explore innovative new ways to test new policy initiatives in order to generate evidence for future policy decisions.

Of course, the Government cannot do this alone. At the MBSSE, we believe that strong and collaborative partnerships across government agencies and with various highly reputable institutions within and outside Sierra Leone will help us achieve our objectives. This report is one example of such a partnership and the MBSSE's commitment to ensuring the latest evidence on how the quality and efficiency of education service delivery informs policy design and implementation.

In 2019, the MBSSE commissioned the Education Partnerships Group (EPG) to undertake a systems-level analysis of education service delivery, with a particular emphasis on identifying the disconnects between policy design and delivery. EPG worked closely with the MBSSE to co-design the objectives, scope, and methodology of the study and to ensure cross-Government participation, including colleagues from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD); the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED); and the Office of the President at State House.

The report presents data at multiple levels of the system (central, district, schools) in order to support the streamlining of decision-making processes, strengthen system-wide accountability, and facilitate the complete decentralisation of basic education service delivery. To date, the report has informed the development of Sierra Leone's Education Sector Analysis, preceding the new Education Sector Plan (2020–2025); a proposed restructure of the MBSSE and the establishment of a Delivery Unit. The report has also informed the ongoing policy development work of the MBSSE's Emergency Education Taskforce (EET) Operations, Policy and Planning (OPP) Pillar, chaired by the Chief Education Officer, Dr. Yatta Kanu.

Foreword 5

Furthermore, the MBSSE continues to prioritise data-led initiatives to ensure evidence-informed policies and policy initiatives lead to strengthened education delivery and improved learning outcomes, including:

- A functional review of the MBSSE conducted by the Office
 of the President's Public Sector Reform Unit (PSRU) in late
 2019 to examine the challenges, service delivery functions,
 and institutional structure and staffing in order to enhance the
 Ministry's overall performance potential.
- The Government of Sierra Leone's Education Data Hub, connecting data from the Annual School Census and the National Examination Results to support decision making through a data-driven process to inform policy, planning and evaluation of interventions across schools.
- Sierra Leone's Education Innovation Challenge (EIC) designed and launched in late 2019 by DSTI and the MBSSE to find new, innovative ways to improve learning outcomes in primary schools, currently being scaled up in partnership with the Education Outcomes Fund (EOF).
- The MBSSE's new 'one tablet per school' programme, building on the success of the MBSSE's 'Situation Rooms' launched during the Ebola response to analyse real-time data to make evidence-based decisions, as part of our COVID-19 emergency response.

Strengthening evidence-based policy is an essential part of the MBSSE's mission to create an environment for all children in Sierra Leone to have an equal opportunity to access quality education. I wish to thank everyone involved in the creation of this report. It represents a true collaboration across Ministries, Departments and Agencies; research partners; development partners; and – most importantly – our schools. We hope the same sector-wide collaboration continues to improve the quality of education for all children, for many years to come.

Dr. David Moinina Sengeh

Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education Chief Innovation Officer, Directorate for Science, Technology and Innovation



The MBSSE continues to prioritise dataled initiatives to ensure evidence-informed policies and policy initiatives lead to strengthened education delivery and improved learning outcomes

Executive Summary

Background and Context

Sierra Leone is a West African country of approximately 7.5 million people. Politically, it is a democratic nation with a constitutional parliamentary republic. There are three spheres of government: the national government, Local Councils and Chiefdom Councils. Between 1991 and 2001, the country experienced a ten-year civil war. This was followed by a devastating Ebola outbreak in 2014 - 2015, which killed about 4,000 people and severely disrupted public service delivery, including forcing schools to close for a period of nine months. Education is a priority for the current government, with President Julius Maada Bio announcing a five year initiative to roll out free pre-primary, primary and secondary education, known as 'Free Quality School Education' (FQSE) in August 2018.

According to the National Census Data 2018, 1.7 million students are enrolled at the primary, junior secondary and senior secondary levels. While enrolment has increased in recent years, completing school remains a significant challenge, with only 64% of children completing primary, 44% completing junior secondary, and 22% completing senior secondary education.² Learning outcomes remain worryingly low — with only 12% of children in Grades 2 and 3 meeting the expected levels of numeracy skills for their grade.³ Additionally, there are huge regional and socioeconomic inequalities. In the western region, three times more children achieve the expected reading skills for their grade than in the rest of the country.⁴ Amongst the richest children, around 39% demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills, compared to only 3% of the poorest children.⁵

The governance of education service delivery in Sierra Leone is complex. As the delivery of basic education (primary and junior secondary) is a devolved function, it is governed by the Local Government Act 2004, and implemented by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). The sector-specific legislation governing and regulating the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) is the Education Act 2004. The delivery of senior secondary education is solely the mandate of the MBSSE, whilst the delivery of higher and technical education is delivered by the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE).

- 1 MEST. (2018) Education Sector Plan 2018-2020, p. 1
- 2 NICEF. (2018) Country Office Annual Report 2018 Sierra Leone, UNICEF, New York, p. 3 www.unicef.org/about/annualreport/files/Sierra_Leone_2018_COAR.pdf
- 3 UNICEF (2017) Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Findings https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/much-children-learn-new-evidence-sierra-leone/
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Government of Sierra Leone. (2004). The Local Government Act, Freetown, Sierra Leone. http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2004-1p.pdf.

Objective of the Study

This report was commissioned by the MBSSE in May 2019, following consultations with the Education Partnerships Group (EPG) early in 2019. The objective of the study is to conduct a mapping of the education system in Sierra Leone at two levels in order to identify inefficiencies and possible ways to address them:

- An organisational mapping of the current education service delivery, including the MBSSE legislative mandate, organisational structure, functions, as well as individual roles and responsibilities, and
- 2. Process mapping of three key areas of education service delivery as identified by the MBSSE for further investigation:
 - a. School subsidies;
 - **b.** School monitoring;
 - c. Education budgeting, disbursement and expenditure.

Both organisational and process mapping of key areas seek to identify disconnects between policy design and delivery. The report is intended for use by the MBSSE and other relevant stakeholders, inside and outside the government, to support the streamlining of decision making and processes, strengthen the accountability within the education system, and facilitate the full decentralisation of basic education service delivery from the central to the district levels. This study corroborates the majority of findings published in the functional review of the MBSSE carried out by the Public Sector Reform Unit (PSRU) in 2019.

The report includes a set of suggested next steps based on the findings of the study. These suggestions are for the Ministry to consider as it explores how to best strengthen education delivery and implement FQSE.

Study Methodology

The report is based on 98 in-person interviews with national and regional stakeholders, selected in consultation with the MBSSE. Data was collected in four districts: Bombali (North), Moyamba (South), Kenema (East) and Kambia (North-Western).⁷ There were two main steps in data collection:

- Desk Review of available policy documents, including legislation and official policy, internal ministry documents, job descriptions and operational guidelines
- Key Informant Interviews conducted with staff associated with basic education service delivery at central and district level.

During analysis, data collected from school, district, and the central level were coded from the digitized note template into relevant themes. Data was triangulated across the four districts and respondent types to identify emerging trends and differences within and between districts, and between central and district level. The key findings and suggested next steps were validated in a workshop with the MBSSE Senior Management Team (SMT) as well as by the Minister before the finalisation of the report.

Scope and Limitations of the Study

The following limitations should be kept in mind when interpreting the data and results of the study:

- The study focuses on basic education and it sampled only primary schools;
- 2. It does not cover education service delivery by city councils;
- **3.** It is not nationally or regionally representative and provides a snapshot in time across sampled districts. Findings must be interpreted as indicative not conclusive;
- **4.** Process mapping for education budgeting, disbursement and expenditure is only at district level;
- **5.** The list of policy documents used for the study cannot be confirmed as exhaustive as there was no central repository of information to refer to.

Overview of Key Findings and Suggested Next Steps

1. Education Service Delivery

This section begins by looking at who holds responsibility for the delivery of basic education in policy and in practice, at the central and district levels. At the central level, basic education service delivery is the primary responsibility of MBSSE. The MBSSE was created in 2018, after the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) was split into the MBSSE and the MTHE.

The Teachers Services Commission (TSC) created in 2011 is a semi-autonomous body that is part of the MBSSE. The FQSE unit established in 2019 is also part of the MBSSE. The TSC and FQSE have staff at the district level reporting to individual headquarters in Freetown, in addition to the District Education Office (DEO), which reports to the Directorate of the Inspectorate within the MBSSE at the central level.

At the district level, basic education has been officially devolved since 2004, and service delivery at Primary and Junior

Secondary level is the responsibility of the Local Councils, who report to the MLGRD. Local Councils have Local Council Education Committees (LCEC) that are composed of selected councillors. Overall responsibility for planning and oversight of education service delivery (as well as implementing education services at senior secondary level), however, remains with the DEO. There is an unclear and overlapping division of roles and responsibilities at district level between the DEO, FQSE, TSC and Local Council leading to confusion and an inefficient use of limited resources.

Despite there being multiple government bodies involved in the delivery of basic education, they are each mandated under their own legislation, with no unifying legislative act to guide centralised and decentralised functions.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Legislation guiding education service delivery

a. There is no unifying legislative act and/or accompanying policy guidelines outlining the centralised and decentralised functions of education service delivery.

2. Central level structure (MBSSE)

- a. The MEST 2009 organogram and the MBSSE job descriptions have not been updated to reflect the current structure and reporting lines of the MBSSE.
- b. Half of all positions in the technical arm of the MBSSE are currently vacant, meaning senior staff have no junior staff to which to delegate work.

3. District level structure

- a. There is significant overlap and duplication of the roles and responsibilities of staff in the DEO, the TSC District Office, and the FQSE District Coordinators, with limited mechanisms for sharing information between offices.
- b. Devolution of basic education is accepted by both the DEO and Local Council; however, it is only partially implemented. There is a lack of operational guidelines on how devolution should be implemented in practice.
- c. The role of the LCEC, as well as how they work with the DEO on decentralised functions, is ambiguous in practice.

Suggested Next Steps

Suggested next steps

Suggested actions

- 1 Draft unified legislation for education decentralization⁸
- Consultation between the MBSSE and MLGRD during the current review of the LGA to ensure harmonisation
- Consultation between the MBSSE and MLGRD during the review of the Education Act
- Consultation between the MBSSE and relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to draft new or review existing education legislation
- 2 Create implementation guidelines for all decentralized functions of education service delivery*9
- Consultations between the MBSSE and MLGRD at central and district level to draft harmonized guidelines
- Consultations with additional education stakeholders at central and district level to understand different perspectives
- Draft accompanying training materials for central and district officials based on draft harmonization guidelines
- Pilot draft implementation guidelines in order to determine what requires further development or clarification
- Draft monitoring and evaluation framework to learn from the piloting and roll out of implementation guidelines
- · Publish finished guidelines online
- 3 Review structure, roles, and responsibilities of central and district level MBSSE staff
- Draft MBSSE organogram restructure for effective and efficient service delivery¹⁰
- Develop clear and updated job descriptions to match the organogram
- Draft monitoring and evaluation framework to learn from the MBSSE restructure
- Hold workshops for central and district level staff to ensure a shared understanding
 of the structure, reporting lines, roles and responsibilities.
- 4 Draft clear Terms of Reference for all operating Education Committees at district level and below*
- Consultations between the MBSSE and MLGRD at central and district level to draft clear Terms of Reference (TORs)
- Draft accompanying training materials for central and district officials based on the TORs
- Draft monitoring and evaluation framework to learn from operating Education Committees
- 5 Improve communication and information sharing between staff at all levels of the MBSSE
- Develop guidelines for records management, data storage and information sharing for the MBSSE

⁸ The MBSSE has started the process for this

⁹ Denotes where EPG may be able to provide further support.

¹⁰ The MBSSE is already working on this.

2. School Monitoring

This section looks at school monitoring in policy and in practice. In policy documents, the term 'school monitoring' is not used anywhere. School inspections, however, are included in the Education Act 2004, with Part X (Section 47) mandating the Minister to ensure that inspections are routinely undertaken. In the 2009 MEST organogram, the Directorate for the Inspectorate in the MBSSE holds overall responsibility for school inspections.

In practice, there is confusion about what 'school monitoring' entails, but in general, the term is used to refer to official school inspections, as well as other official visits to schools (by units, commissions, or committees formed under the MBSSE or MLGRD) to monitor any aspect of education service delivery. There is no uniform school monitoring tool being used across districts or accompanying guidelines on how the tool should be implemented or frequency of its use. There is no systematic storage, sharing or use of school monitoring data currently collected.

Summary of Key Findings

Responsibility for school monitoring

- a. The District Education Offices (DEO) are insufficiently resourced to ensure that all schools are monitored, although the human resources required to fully execute school monitoring is also unclear.
- b. There is duplication of school monitoring responsibilities amongst the DEO, TSC District Office and FQSE Coordinator. Despite duplication of responsibilities between different offices, many schools are still not monitored due to resource constraints.

School monitoring process

- c. There are no publicly available minimum quality standards for schools on which to base monitoring visits.
- d. There is a lack of clarity about what 'school monitoring' should entail and the frequency with which it should occur.

School monitoring tools

- e. Different school monitoring tools are used in different districts and they are predominantly compliance focused. Devolution of basic education is accepted by both the DEO and Local Council; however, it is only partially implemented. There is a lack of operational guidelines on how devolution should be implemented in practice.
- f. Currently there is no way to share or use the data collected through school monitoring processes.

Suggested Next Steps

Suggested next steps

Suggested actions

- 1 Draft comprehensive minimum quality standards for schools*
- Consultations with the MBSSE at central and district level
- Consultations with headteachers, teachers and School Management Committees
- Consultations with additional education stakeholders at central and district level to understand different perspectives
- Draft comprehensive minimum quality standards for schools
- 2 Review, simplify and standardize the existing school monitoring tool and process*
- Harmonise work already done on school monitoring tools by the EU and other partners to avoid duplication of effort
- Review the tool to ensure that it is developed on the basis of agreed minimum quality standards and is fit for purpose
- Review the indicators for determining quality of teaching and learning in the existing tool
- Consultations with Inspectorate staff at central and district level to suggest simplifications
- Pilot simplified tool in order to determine what requires further development or clarification
- 3 Create monitoring and evaluation capacity within the MBSSE as recommended by the functional review
- Provide training to all Inspectorate staff on the new school monitoring tool
- Develop and expand existing education information systems to include school monitoring data
- Provide training to all Inspectorate staff on how to input school monitoring data into expanded EMIS
- 4 Conduct an audit of the current human resources available for school monitoring*
- Draw on recommendations from the functional review conducted by the PSRU and conduct an audit of the existing human resources for school monitoring

3. Education budgeting, disbursement and expenditure

This section looks at the process of budgeting, disbursement and expenditure of funds for education at the district level in both policy and practice. The budgeting, disbursement and expenditure process is similar across devolved sectors. Budgeting is carried out jointly between the DEO and the Local Council and the practice followed is in line with the policy outlined in the budget circular. Once the budget is approved, funds are disbursed from the Ministry of Finance to local councils. Disbursements are usually not full or timely – this affects implementation of planned activities.

Local councils disburse funds received from the centre to the DEO upon receiving a request from the latter through a Public Expenditure Tracking (PET) form. After checks to ensure the request is in line with the approved budget and action plan, the funds are disbursed. While expenditure receipts from the DEO are reconciled by the Local Council Finance Officer, there is a lack of clarity on mechanisms to monitor the quality of activities conducted by the DEO with the funds spent.

Summary of Key Findings

- 1. Drafting and submitting budgets for approval
 - The DEO and LC agree on the education budgeting process and their respective roles and responsibilities in policy and practice.
 - b. There is tension between the DEO and the LCEC during budget development as basic education is devolved.
 - c. Schools are not involved in the budgeting process.
- 2. Fund disbursement and expenditure
 - d. The process to disburse funds from the Local Council to the DEO is clear.
 - e. The central government often delays fund disbursement to the districts. Funds received are less than funds approved, rendering the budgeting process redundant.
 - f. The protracted process for the DEO to access funds from the Local Council delays the implementation of planned activities.

- 3. Monitoring education budgeting, disbursement and expenditure
 - g. During the education budgeting process, monitors from the MoFED visit the district.
 - h. There is some confusion about the exact nature and frequency of DEO expenditure and activities being monitored by the Local Council.
 - Both internal and external auditors audit Local Council expenditure.

Suggested Next Steps

Suggested next steps

Suggested actions

- 1 Conduct research into the inclusion and involvement of schools in the budgeting process
- MBSSE to consult with the MoF to understand the feasibility of including schools in the budgeting process
- Consultations between the MBSSE and MLGRD at central and district level to determine the feasibility of including schools in the budgeting process
- 2 Review the process, mechanisms, and timeline for funds disbursement from central to district government
- MBSSE to consult with the MoF on reviewing and streamlining the current process for education funds disbursement
- Draft guidelines for strengthened communication between MoF, Local Councils and DEO for advance notice on the amount and timeliness of money available for disbursement
- Pilot new strengthened communication between MoF, Local Councils and DEO to determine what requires further development or clarification
- 3 Develop policy guidance on fund disbursement and management between Local Councils and devolved sectors
- MBSSE to consult with MoF and MLGRD to develop guidelines on timing and monitoring of funds disbursed at district level
- Pilot new policy guidance on fund disbursement management to determine what requires further development or clarification
- 4 Create a systematic approach to monitoring how education funds are spent by the DEO and the quality of education activities carried out*
- DEO to liaise with Local Councils to brainstorm feasible monitoring approaches and feed back to central level
- Joint consultation between the MBSSE and MLGRD to determine ideal monitoring process
- Draft guidelines for strengthened monitoring of expenditure
- Pilot strengthened monitoring of expenditure to determine what requires further development or clarification

4. School Subsidies

While school subsidies were introduced in Sierra Leone in 2001, the current government made revisions to the subsidy amount and process in 2018. All government and government-assisted schools are now meant to receive a per pupil subsidy of 10,000 Leones in primary school; 50,000 Leones in junior secondary schools (JSS); and 60,000 Leones in senior secondary schools (SSS) every term. The most critical challenge has been the persistent and significant education budget deficit, meaning that not all eligible schools are registered and approved to receive school subsidies. The current sector deficit is estimated by the MBBSE as close to Le 23 trillion for 2019-2023 (approximately USD 2.3

billion).¹¹ The subsidy deficit is estimated to be around Le 670 billion (approximately USD 68.5 million) over the same period. According to the MBSSE, this figure is likely to increase as more out-of-school children join the system as a result of the FQSE policy.

There is no formal policy guidance on the school subsidy process including its eligibility criteria, disbursement, use and accountability mechanisms. However, despite the lack of official documentation, respondents across all four sampled districts demonstrated a consistent informal understanding of the purpose and process of the school subsidy scheme.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Mapping the process

- a. Despite the absence of any official written policy or guidance on the subsidy scheme, respondents understood the purpose and process of the school subsidy scheme.
- 2. Compiling eligible school list & allocation of subsidies
 - b. There are low levels of confidence in the quality of school level data and inefficient mechanisms for verification.
 - c. Schools are incentivised to inflate enrolment numbers to increase their subsidy amounts.
 - d. Subsidies are insufficient to adequately address the needs of some schools.

3. Disbursement, withdrawal and use of subsidies

- Subsidies are frequently disbursed after the school term has begun and the amount is sometimes incorrect.
- f. Respondents reported withdrawing funds from the bank either directly or after first seeking a letter of authentication from the DEO.
- g. During expenditure, subsidies are spent predominantly on outputs and not focused on driving school improvement.
- 4. Monitoring & complaints procedure
 - h. Current monitoring efforts do not work and there is a lack of effective accountability mechanisms, leading to misuse of funds with no real consequences.
 - i. There is no effective complaints procedure for schools to follow.

¹¹ This data is from internal calculations and presentations prepared by Dr. Michael Mambo and shared with the research team. Mambo, Michael (2019) Presentation on the Progress on Implementation Plan for the Free Quality School Education and Costings, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Suggested Next Steps

Suggested next steps

Suggested actions

- 1 Draft (i) a written policy, accompanied by (ii) operational guidelines, (iii) monitoring framework, and (iv) complaints resolution procedure*
- Consultations with the MBSSE at central and district level
- Consultations with headteachers, teachers and School Management Committees
- Consultations with additional education stakeholders at central and district level to understand different perspectives
- Draft policy guidance and operational guidelines for school subsidies, including clear guidance on their use
- Develop an accountability framework for school subsidies
- Pilot policy guidance and accountability framework to determine what requires further development or clarification
- 2 Ensure shared understanding on financial management, reporting, and use of school subsidies
- · Conduct district level training workshops with all stakeholders
- 3 Develop options for strengthening enrolment data in terms of (i) the quality of data collected and (ii) database storage
- Consultations between relevant MBSSE departments (notably EMIS) and DSTI on strengthening the Annual School Census data collection and storage
- Develop a robust system of verifying the enrolment data when preparing list of eligible schools
- 4 Evaluate the allocation criteria for school subsidies*
- Explore multi-dimensional ways to allocate school subsidies
- Conduct a cost effectiveness analysis of each option
- Draft a sustainability plan for school subsidies, particularly after donor aid finishes
- 5 Ensure subsidies are disbursed in a timely
- Draft guidelines for strengthened communication between MoF, Local Councils and DEO for advance notice on the amount and timeliness of disbursement
- Pilot new strengthened communication between MoF, Local Councils and DEO to determine what requires further development or clarification
- Pilot new strengthened communication with schools to determine what requires further development or clarification

The finalised report has been shared with the MBSSE and its partners. Findings and suggestions from this report are informing the current Minister Dr. Sengeh in the development of policies for the MBSSE. EPG will continue to work with MBSSE to further develop suggested next steps and consultatively assign responsibility with members of MBSSE.







Education Partnerships Group is incubated by Ark Ventures, part of the education charity Ark.