



MINISTRY OF
**BASIC AND SENIOR
SECONDARY EDUCATION**
SIERRA LEONE

National School Feeding Policy



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS	v
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT	3
1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	4
1.3 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT.....	5
1.4 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN	7
1.5 INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT	8
1.6 POLICY RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES	9
1.6.1 Goal	11
1.6.2 Policy Pillars	11
1.7 SCOPE OF THE POLICY.....	12
1.7.1 IHGSFP Principles	13
1.8 POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	14
1.9 POLICY FINANCING	15
SECTION 2: POLICY STATEMENTS	17
2.1 INTRODUCTION TO POLICY STATEMENTS.....	17
2.2 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 1.....	17
Specific Objective for education	17
2.3 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 2.....	18
2.4 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 3.....	18
2.5 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 4	19
Section 3: Implementation, Monitoring, And Evaluation	21
3.1 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK	21
Table 1: Allocation of roles and responsibilities	21
3.2 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE.....	22
3.4 MONITORING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.....	23
3.5 EVALUATING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION.....	24
3.6 POLICY REVIEW	24
Section 4: Coordination and Management	25
4.1 COORDINATION.....	25

FOREWORD

It is a vision of H.E of President Julius Maada Bio to expand and broaden school feeding nationwide and it is with great pleasure that I present on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone the first National School Feeding Policy.

This policy has been developed in response to a shift in the focus of activities of government towards nutrition and food security, and of partner organisations from food aid to food assistance. Accordingly, the policy provides the guidelines for the transition and institutional arrangements and structures for a home-grown school feeding scheme. With this policy, Sierra Leone has taken a bold major step to follow the current trend of countries taking responsibility and ownership of their school feeding.

Why school feeding? The literature on school feeding is replete with research and evidence on its multiple potential benefits as an effective social safety net for vulnerable children, families, and communities. The specific benefits include increasing access to school and promoting enrollment, regular school attendance, retention, enhanced performance, cognitive development, promotion of gender parity and completion of school. Delivered with good quality nutritious food commodities, school feeding contributes to the improvement of the health and nutritional status of children. A nationally owned and run home-grown school feeding of the kind that is the object of this policy puts a considerable premium on the multi-faceted aspect of school feeding including linking school feeding activities with local food production and procurement that can trigger social and economic development of communities.

Previous administrations of governments have made efforts to address this, as demonstrated by several positive official statements such as those in the second and third Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP), the Medium Term National Development Plan (MTND) (2019-2023), and the 2013-2018 and 2018-2020 Education Sector Plans (ESP). The current policy development process carefully considered those documents to ensure that it is in alignment with existing human capital development and social protection policies and programs; in particular, with policy provisions on education, health, nutrition, and development.

However, the government of Sierra Leone under the New Direction Government is deeply committed to home-grown school feeding and has advanced some of these ideas informed by the far-reaching benefits of the Free Quality School Education initiative. The policy provides strategic direction for planning and running school feeding that is locally grown and implemented by the Government of Sierra Leone, with external agencies providing technical guidance on policy,

planning, implementation, capacity development, and resource mobilization. A defining characteristic of school feeding is that it is multi-sectoral. Shared responsibility with stakeholders including government ministries, civil society organisations, development partners, donors' institutions, communities, and the private sector is required for successful implementation. It is against this background that extensive consultations were held with stakeholders for input into the development of this policy and its implementation strategies. The policy identifies the roles and responsibilities of all implementing institutions within a decentralized national program, structured to link school feeding with smallholder farmers, the community, and the private sector.

I would like to express my profound appreciation to all individuals and institutions that have made this policy a reality. I am grateful to the World Food Programme, the Catholic Relief Services, and Joint Aid Management for funding its development; the consultants for putting this document together and the many stakeholders who contributed views to its substance and shape. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security will play a key role in the success of this policy alongside the Ministry of Health. I am optimistic that the policy will guide us to vigorously address the formidable challenges ahead of us and operate a successful home-grown school feeding for the children of Sierra Leone towards achieving the President's Human Capital Development vision.

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to read 'D. Sengh' or similar, with a stylized flourish.

David Moinina Sengh

Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) wishes to acknowledge the immense efforts of the World Food Programme for supporting the policy formulation process, the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for supporting the policy development process, Joint Aid Management, Plan International, Caritas-Bo, Civil Society, and all the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) development partners for their contributions in getting this policy validated.

The Ministry also wishes to acknowledge Professors Joe Pemagbi, Ekundayo Thompson, and Abdullah Mansaray for starting the development of the School Feeding Policy and for developing the very first draft of the document in 2014..

Other line ministries including the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development are also acknowledged for their various inputs in the school feeding policy formulation process.

Our profound gratitude goes to the consultant Ms. Alphonsine Bouya for her efforts in giving the document the required final nuances to make it an enduring legal framework and Dr. Augustine Tom-Robert for reviewing and finalizing the final version of the policy.

Finally, we would like to extend our deepest appreciation to the Operation, Policy and Planning (OPP) team of The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary education, the Directors and staff of the School feeding Secretariat and all who helped in diverse ways in the development and completion of this policy.

ACRONYMS/ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM / ABBREVIATION	EXPLANATION
AIDS	Acquired Human Deficiency Syndrome
ASC	Annual School Census
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DEO	District Education Officer
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HGSF	Home Grown School Feeding
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
JAM	Joint Aid Management
JSS	Junior Secondary School
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
IHGSP	Integrated Home-Grown School Feeding Programme
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MWR	Ministry of Water Resources
MPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
MTI	Ministry of Trade and Industry
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NSADP	National Sustainable Agricultural Development Plan
PCR	Primary Completion Rate
PRRO	Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PTA	Parents – Teachers Association
SABER	System Approach for Better Education Results
SDGs	Strategic Development Goals
SF	School Feeding
SFP	School Feeding Programme
SLG	Sierra Leone Government
SMC	School Management Committee

SO	Specific Objective
SUN	Scaling Up Nutrition
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
WASH	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a context of widespread poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition, school feeding has been an important safety net in Sierra Leone since independence, ensuring that many children can participate in primary education, and receive a daily minimum healthy diet. However, the various models of school feeding that have been in place in Sierra Leone have had disadvantages, among them high financial and administrative costs, little diversity, and little or no contribution to the local economy, in terms of food production and processing. For this reason, the Government of Sierra Leone has taken a step back to analyse the experience and present challenges using the World Bank's System Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) tool and to devise a model of school feeding for Sierra Leone that addresses the observed shortcomings.

At the core of this new model is the wish to pursue a homegrown model. This is expressed in the policy vision of a sustainable school feeding program that ensures nutritious and healthy school meals to children enrolled in schools in Sierra Leone, using, to the largest extent possible, food produced and processed by local producers, and implemented by national actors and agents. Most of the specific details of the Integrated Home-Grown School Feeding (IHGSF) will be developed and implemented with the appropriate partners.

This policy builds on the Government of Sierra Leone's pioneering Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative and pursues the guiding principles of the MBSSE that include universal access to quality and equitable education, radical inclusion, quality teaching and learning and comprehensive safety of all learners.

- Radical Inclusion – Development is only complete when everyone and anyone is given equal access to education, supported by a sustainable school feeding programme.
- Comprehensive Safety – For effective learning to take place, it needs to be powered by an enabling environment, such as good structures and adequate, nutritious food in school.
- Quality Teaching and Learning – Quality Teaching and learning experience is harder to be achieved in a makeshift classroom or on an empty stomach.
- Universal Access – All children in Sierra Leone should have access to good schools and quality education.

The policy's goal is to promote the holistic development of children, local farmers, producers, and the community by ensuring that school feeding is recognized and treated as a sustainable, multisectoral investment program that receives support from various actors, including the Government at central and decentralized levels, communities, the private sector, civil society, the diaspora, and external donors.

The long-term objective of this policy is to ensure that school feeding contributes to the vision, mission, and goals of the Government of Sierra as articulated in the Mid-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) and the Education Sector Plan (ESP). Procuring and providing locally produced and processed nutritious and healthy school meals to pupils, contributes to education attainment and improvement of children's nutritional status. Achieving this objective will take several generations of basic education with reliable school feeding, good quality

schooling, and strong educational outcomes. On this basis, the policy establishes specific objectives that school feeding pursues in the following sectors:

Education - increased access to school, regular attendance, retention, concentration to learn, and completion of the full cycles; gradual integration of a comprehensive home-grown school feeding into the education system.

Health and Nutrition - reduced chronic and acute malnutrition, including reduced protein-energy and micronutrient deficiencies by providing pupils an essential package for nutrition and learning.

Agriculture - increased national food production and processing by providing a stable and predictable market for local small producers and encouraging them to increase competitiveness, professionalization, and commercialization of local products.

Rural development - strengthened and enhanced food value chains in Sierra Leone in terms of the number of processed and commercially marketed food products, improved storage facilities, jobs opportunities, and incomes for all people involved in these value chains through enhanced access to market and improved feeder roads.

Social development - increased social living conditions of the poorest segment of the population by reducing economic gaps, inequalities, and disparities among the communities.

The IHGSFP will apply a flexible approach, by procuring food needed for the school feeding internationally, nationally, and locally. Enshrined in the implementation of the IHGSFP are ten principle pillars that will ensure that the poor and most vulnerable benefit from the market that the IHGSFP shall create and inform implementers how vulnerable households and segments of the population can be included in the food procurement process.

Given the multisectoral nature of the implementation of the SFP, the MBSSE shall serve as the clearinghouse for the School Feeding Program (SFP) matters. It shall ensure the participation of other actors at the national level and provide overall strategic guidance and management of the process including monitoring and evaluation. The policy strongly advocates for the active participation of other line Ministries in complementing school feeding along with their respective mandates. It emphasizes the establishment of strong partnerships amongst development partners, the private sector, and civil society organizations. The policy also recognizes the importance of sustainable funding as an assurance of quality school feeding and therefore advocates the broadening of the MBSSE resource base by engaging a range of partners including the private sector as well as development partners.

School Management Committees (SMC) will ensure the efficient and transparent implementation of the SFP at their school through an efficient management information system. A capacity-building program will accompany the implementation guidelines to ensure national actors and communities are empowered to undertake their tasks efficiently and effectively. The policy includes an implementation action plan that outlines the strategies, expected outputs, and activities with corresponding actors and anticipated timelines of completion. It will also include a costed activity plan that will ensure efficient resource allocation and use.

On approval of the policy, development partners will continue to implement the current SFP, gradually transitioning to the new model.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sierra Leone is a West African country with a population of about 7.5 million people. Fifty-three percent of the population lives below the income poverty line of US\$ 1.90 per day. According to the wealth index, a larger proportion of poor households reside in rural areas and urban slums.¹

According to the 2015 Population and Housing Census, 40.9 percent of the population is less than 15 years and only 3.5 percent are 65 years and above. The working-age population represents fifty-six percent. Forty-nine percent of the economically active population is female, and slightly more women (52 percent) than men are engaged in agriculture. Sixty-five percent of petty traders are also women.² Gender inequalities, though still significant in some sectors, are gradually declining.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic is also taking a toll on the economy. According to recent World Bank updates on the Sierra Leone economy, the COVID-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on the country's medium-term growth prospects with the economy projected to contract by 2.3 to 4.0 percent in 2020.

A recent nationwide nutrition survey indicates that chronic malnutrition (stunting) remains high in Sierra Leone³; more than thirty percent of children are stunted.⁴ Research studies⁵ confirm that the prevention of stunting in the first two years of life is important in avoiding the irreversible in the later years. These negative effects of stunting include a decrease in cognitive, motor, language development, and learning capacity.

The inequality of women and the resulting violence they face are evident in many aspects of society. Systemic factors disproportionately affect the protection, attendance, and performance of girls in school as they reach adolescence and adulthood. Women make up thirty-three percent of the labour force in crop farming, compared to 30 percent of men. The gender division of labour in agriculture, combined with women's reproductive role, maximizes women's energy inputs and non-remunerated work.⁶

The Government of Sierra Leone is committed to ensuring quality and inclusive education for all children, a flagship of H.E. President Julius Maada Bio. The government perceives the national School Feeding Programme (SFP) as one of the channels to contribute towards the achievement of the vision of quality education for all children in Sierra Leone. The government is unwavering

1 Sierra Leone- SABER report, 2018

2 Idem.

3 Action Against Hunger and Government of Sierra Leone, Survey report on food security and malnutrition in Sierra Leone, 2018.

4 Idem.

5 Blessing J. Akombi, Kingsley E. Agho, John J. Hall, Nidhi Wali, Andre M. N. Renzaho, and Dafna Merom (2017) *Stunting, Wasting and Underweight in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Systematic Review*. Int. J Environ Res Public Health. 2017 Aug; 14(8): 863. Published online 2017 Aug 1. doi: 10.3390/ijerph14080863

6 UNICEF: Gender Analysis of the Situation of Women and Children in Sierra Leone, 2011.

in its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2 – Ending Hunger and SDG 4 – Equitable Quality Education) and its obligation to several regional and international education protocols and the existence of a supportive national policy environment serves to strengthen its commitment to invest in programmes such as school feeding that help promote education. This policy envisions rapid national socio-economic development achieved through a coordinated, integrated, and accountable national school feeding programme. It is the primary responsibility of the Government to fund school feeding sustainably and from clearly identified sources based on the projected number of school children to be fed each year.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Sierra Leone's education system comprises of four stages - three basic levels - primary, junior secondary, and three years of either senior secondary education or technical vocational education - and four years of university or other tertiary education. The FQSE initiative aims to provide access, quality and equity by removing financial barriers for the three basic levels of education; allowing Pupils to attend school at no cost to them. Typically, Pupils begin junior secondary school around the age 12 and remain at that level through age 15. Girls living in rural areas typically have the harshest time reaching this level of schooling due to negative cultural beliefs that often encumber their participation.

Pupils enroll in senior secondary schools from the ages of 15 to 18, and it is at this level that they may choose to either continue their academic pursuit with plans of proceeding to university or focusing on vocational training. Most vocational education programs focus on agricultural skills, followed by other proficiencies like mechanics, carpentry, and bricklaying. Despite the opportunities, education in Sierra Leone faces significant hurdles. Secondary school participation is low, with a net attendance ratio of 39.9 percent from 2008 to 2012 for boys and 33.2 percent for girls. Notwithstanding improving access, class completion remains a major issue with high dropout rates and consistently low enrollment in secondary school. Early pregnancy, gender-based violence, child marriage, and cultural biases perpetuate the cycle of gender inequality.

The Government of Sierra Leone is committed to attaining universal primary education through (i) increased access to free pre-primary education for children aged 3 to 5-year-old to reach 15% in 2020 (ii) increased enrollment and completion rates in primary school to 85% by reducing the cost of schooling especially with the launch of FQSE, (iii) improved school feeding programme for government and government-assisted primary schools, and (iv) increased transition from primary to junior secondary schools to 92%.

Quality and relevance of education are key to the attainment of the above-mentioned vision and mission of the education sector. Student learning is the most critical outcome in education. Several interacting factors contribute to high levels of educational achievement among which is school feeding. School feeding programmes provide balanced and regular meals for school children but also as a means of encouraging enrolment and completion of school whilst improving the nutritional status and the health of the pupils. The present school feeding policy applies to the pre-primary sub-cycle of education and the 6-3 block (9 years) cycle that make up the formal part of basic and junior secondary education.

This increase in enrolment at all levels demonstrates that the interventions to improve access have been successful. However, the challenge going forward is to maintain children at school once enrolled, ensuring completion of the basic education cycle.

According to the 2019 Annual School Census (ASC), while enrolment increases, completion of school remains a significant challenge with only 80% children completing primary, 69% completing junior secondary and 44% completing senior secondary.

Thus, the Government of Sierra Leone considers the provision of free quality education as a key factor in accelerating the future growth and development of Sierra Leone. The vision of the Government's 2018-2021 ESP is clearly articulated in the following statement that *"an appropriately educated, entrepreneurial and innovative citizenry, tolerant, productive and internationally competitive"*. Additionally, it has defined its education mission, *"to provide opportunities for children and adults to acquire knowledge and skills, as well as nurture attitudes and values that help the nation grow and prosper."*⁷

1.3 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

There has been continued interest in and recognition of the multifaceted value of school feeding by the government of Sierra Leone. After the 1991-2002 civil conflict, the government provided a resettlement package, which included school feeding to encourage parents to enroll their children in school. It was also to motivate children whose schooling was disrupted by the conflict to return to school. While no comprehensive policy document provides the necessary national direction, the government's understanding of the merit of SFP in education is articulated in the MTNDP, themed, 'Education for Development', and the 2018-2021 ESP.

Pillar 6 (Strengthen Social Protection Systems) of the MTNDP asserts that:

"Poverty, inequality, and vulnerability are widespread and multidimensional... social protection is an effective mechanism to address childhood poverty and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty within families, reduce inequities that women, girls, and orphaned children without care encounter... promote the quality of life, increase stability and ensure equity... developing human potential."

The document identifies malnutrition as a major factor that retards the learning progress of children, with the consequence of loss of valuable human capital.

The MTNDP strategy for tackling the above challenges utilizes school feeding as part of an integrated social protection measure, thus: provide cash and in-kind transfer packages as appropriate in education, health, nutrition, and shelter for disadvantaged children, women, girls.

The Education Sector Plan 2013-2018 now extended to 2021 and asserts that:

⁷ Sierra Leone: Education Sector Plan, 2018-2020, now extended to 2021.

[file:///C:/Users/abdulai.conteh/Dropbox%20\(Ark\)/EPG/4.%20Projects/3.%20Live%20Projects/7.%20Sierra%20Leone/1.%20Phases%201%20&%202/1.%20Project%20Management/8.%202019%20Management%20Transition%20Documents%20for%20Faith/002%20Sierra%20Leone%20Education%20Sector%20Plan%202018-2020.pdf](file:///C:/Users/abdulai.conteh/Dropbox%20(Ark)/EPG/4.%20Projects/3.%20Live%20Projects/7.%20Sierra%20Leone/1.%20Phases%201%20&%202/1.%20Project%20Management/8.%202019%20Management%20Transition%20Documents%20for%20Faith/002%20Sierra%20Leone%20Education%20Sector%20Plan%202018-2020.pdf)

“School feeding serves to promote access to basic education in primary schools, improve education/quality of services, and provide a social safety net. The school feeding programme enhances enrolment, attendance, and gender parity. It improves pupils’ ability to concentrate and their learning abilities in the class. Plans are being formulated for home-grown school feeding using community production supported by agricultural services or programmes.”

The document emphasizes under its “Next Steps” *making school feeding and take-home rations more widespread with an increasing percentage of the food materials being homegrown*. The plan further emphasizes a government-led Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSEF) programme paying cognizance to the following strategic policy framework: (i) Education for All (UNESCO, 1990), (ii) UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education, (iii) SDG 4 and (iv) National Education Policy 2010, section 6, which deals with cross-cutting issues (e.g., rights and protection). The government shall extend a school feeding programme to provide nutritious meals to Pupils from pre-primary and primary schools.

The legal basis of this policy is Article 9 (Educational Objectives) of the Constitution, which guarantees every citizen equal rights and adequate educational opportunities. In particular:

Article 9(a) ensures that every citizen is allowed to be educated to the best of his/her ability, aptitude, and inclination by providing educational facilities at all levels and aspects of education such as primary, secondary, vocational, technical, college and university, and

Article 9(b) safeguards the rights of vulnerable groups, such as children, women, and the disabled in securing educational facilities.

Additionally, the **Education Act 2004** provides, in Section 3(2)(b) for every citizen of Sierra Leone to: “(a) have the right to basic education which accordingly shall be compulsory and shall be designed to (b) improve the social and health circumstances of the citizen”.

The **Child Rights Act 2007**, which sought to enact most of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, provides additional underpinnings for this policy. This Act safeguards fundamental child rights and calls for all children “to have access to education, healthcare, and protection from abuse, neglect, and exploitation”.

The **Education Sector Plan** focuses on the achievement of three goals: “(i) improvement of access, equity, and completion; (ii) improvement of quality and relevance of what is taught and learned; and (iii) strengthening of education service delivery.”

The **Multi-Sector Strategic Plan** to reduce Malnutrition in Sierra Leone asks the government “to expand and intensify school feeding for all children and adolescents to specifically include all pre-primary schools through junior middle school.”

The **National Sustainable Agricultural Development Plan** (NSADP) pays specific attention to the “production, processing, and marketing of domestically consumed and export-oriented crops, livestock, forestry, and fisheries products”. It aims to “increase agricultural productivity (intensification and diversification), among smallholder farmers who constitute the poorest segment of society, through a variety of support measures along the entire agricultural value chain.”

The **National Social Protection Policy** includes the provision of “free education, school subsidies, and school meals” into the first category out of the eleven of the policy measures to be pursued.

This school feeding policy also derives its legitimacy from and is congruent with existing government policies and the international agreements and protocols to which Sierra Leone has adhered. These include the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs), the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN)-Initiative, the African Union Social Protection Framework, the African Union Declaration on Home Grown School Feeding, and the recently adopted United Nations (UN) Resolution that declares 2019-2028 as the Decade of Family Farming. It also aims to “raise the profile of the role of the pastoralism, and smallholder farming in contributing to the achievement of food security and improved nutrition.”

1.4 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Various national policy documents advocate for school feeding and support this national School Feeding Policy. The introduction of free basic education by the Government Education Act (2004), provided improvement in access to education with the number of children in primary school increasing from 1.1 million in 2003-2004 up to 1.4 million in 2016. The number of pupils enrolled in junior secondary school rose from 139,000 in 2003-2004 to 300,000 in 2016.⁸ Pillar 6 of the Medium term National Development Plan asserts that “poverty, inequality, and vulnerability are widespread and multidimensional...social protection is an effective mechanism to address childhood poverty and break the intergenerational cycle of poverty within families...reduce inequities that women, girls and orphaned children without care encounter,...promote the quality of life, increase stability and ensure equity...developing human potential.” The document identifies malnutrition as a major factor that impedes the learning progress of children, with the consequential of loss of valuable human capital.

The MTNDP emphasizes enhanced quality of life ensuring that all Sierra Leoneans enjoy a high standard of living. The MTNDP, advocates for the reformation and expansion of the school feeding programme. It recognizes the role of the school feeding programme in improving access to food to children in schools. This also aligns with the Agriculture Policy objectives that seek to increase incomes and improve household food and nutrition security, as well as promote food safety.

Most of the food and nutrition insecurity challenges largely result from poverty exacerbated by the changing climate. Extreme events such as floods, epidemics (Ebola, and Coronavirus) are prevalent in the country, significantly affecting livelihoods. The government under the Medium term National Development Plan promotes school feeding as part of an integrated social protection program for which it pledges “*cash and in-kind transfer packages as appropriate in education, health, nutrition, and shelter for disadvantaged children, women, girls....*”.

The education policy also acknowledges that learners, who walk a long distance to school, often without having had any food before leaving home in the morning, find it difficult to concentrate

⁸ Sierra Leone: Education Sector Plan, 2018-2020

on schoolwork during the day. The school-feeding program is an incentive for children from poor families to attend school. The National Policy for School Health provides for a Comprehensive School Health Programme that recognizes the importance of school feeding in relieving short-term hunger and a source for nutritious meals.

1.5 INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The Education for All (EFA) declaration of the Dakar Framework for Action, signed at the 2000 World Education Forum and endorsed at the 2007 Dakar High-Level Group on Education for All, calls for intensified efforts towards school feeding as an important multi-sectoral approach and safety net for building inclusive education systems. School feeding addresses SDG 2, 4, and 5 on ending hunger, achieving improved food and nutrition security, and promoting sustainable agriculture, ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all, as well as promoting gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls.

In developing this policy, the Government of Sierra Leone builds on experience and lessons learned from several other countries⁹. Largely the policy strives (i) to apply the logic of Home-Grown School Feeding (HGSE), and (ii) ensure the presence in the country of the preconditions for successful school feeding models that global best practices.

In the HGSE, procurement is local, with purchases from local smallholder farmers and other producers close to schools. This way, HGSE facilitates the access of farmers to a significant, sustainable local market, and in the end, promotes the local economic development. At a regional level, school feeding is receiving increasingly high-level political support and commitment. In 2003, the Comprehensive Africa Development Programme (CAADP) and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) program raised the importance of linking school feeding to local production and purchases through HGSE. This in turn will stimulate an increase in agricultural production, make small-scale farmers more secure, and enable them to make calculated investments through improved seeds, fertilizers, and technologies; and thereby ensure regular supply of foodstuffs to various schools, leading to wealth creation for rural households.

Global research has identified five key standards preconditions¹⁰ that determine the success and sustainability of school feeding programs. These are:

- Clear policy frameworks that link school feeding to national and sectoral policies and strategies: aligning school feeding with other national policies increases the potential for sustainability and high quality of implementation.
- Stable funding and budgeting: Infusing school feeding into national planning and budgeting processes is critical for securing sufficient financial capacity to maintain school

⁹ Drake L, Woolnough A, Burbano C, Bundy D: 2016, Global school feeding sourcebook: lessons from 14 countries. Imperial College Press. London, UK. In xxx 2018, members of the Government and officials travelled to Brazil to learn from the Brazilian experience in school feeding as an important arm to fighting hunger and malnutrition.

¹⁰ Bundy D., Burbano C., Grosh M., Gelli A., Jukes M., & Drake L.: 2009, Rethinking School Feeding: social safety

feeding at an adequate level and for long-term sustainability. This implies the creation of a national budget line for school feeding.

- Institutional capacity to implement and coordinate school feeding programmes and required complementary activities: the availability of institutional structures, staff capacity, management skills, knowledge, and technology are fundamental to the implementation of the programme. The responsibility for implementation should be vested in a government institution or ministry, and adequate monitoring and reporting mechanisms should be contrived to assure transparent and efficient use of the resources.
- Needs-based, cost-effective, quality, and well-adapted design and implementation of school feeding programmes grounded on an accurate assessment of the national context.
- Strong community participation and ownership: the strongest programmes are those that are owned and supported and by communities.

This policy also fulfills one of the internationally agreed standards of good practice deemed essential for effective school health and school feeding programmes, laid out in the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER). The school health and school feeding frameworks are mutually reinforcing, for example, delivery of micronutrients and deworming provide a supportive environment for the delivery of school feeding. The general school health framework informs this school feeding policy and the Sierra Leone school feeding SABER exercise. Both frameworks provide a strong foundation that strengthens and improves the quality of implementation of the SFP.

1.6 POLICY RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

Since the independence of the country in 1961, conflict and natural disasters, hunger and pervasive poverty has disrupted the functioning of the education sector. Several factors militate education, such as gender inequity, a high dropout rate among girls, poor performance in public examinations, poor health, and acute malnutrition. All these factors affected the education, health, and growth of children. This was the case during the civil war of 1991-2002 and the Ebola epidemic of 2014-2015 and the Covid-19 pandemic, which has harmed the social and economic outcomes of the country. It is against this backdrop of disparate school feeding delivery that this policy evolved to direct a comprehensive and well-coordinated approach to school feeding in Sierra Leone.

School feeding in Sierra Leone has a checkered history of interruption by emergency crisis and natural disasters, serving as an instrument to revive schooling in emergencies. Although many organisations intervened in school feeding for years, it has never been universal, neither has it been directed by a consolidated national policy. Providers have operated in areas selected by the level of vulnerability to hunger and food insecurity to attract children to school, promote attendance and completion, and narrow the gender gap in enrolment. For example, World Food Programme (WFP) implemented a school feeding programme in 1991, which was limited to the Kenema, Moyamba, and Port Loko districts. From 2001-2009, WFP implemented its Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, which included school feeding exclusively targeting the southern and eastern regions. This programme supported access to primary education by relieving short-

term hunger among school-going children from families that were rebuilding their livelihood.¹¹ Various organisations (WFP, CARE, CRS, Caritas, Plan International, and World Vision) dedicated to promoting the education of children intervened with school feeding in different districts to address the dire situation.

The school feeding policy defines Sierra Leone's long-term approach to school feeding. In the immediate period, it relieves short-term hunger and contributes to the improved health of learners and their access to education. In the long-term, it could contribute positively to strengthening the human development capacity of the nation, by improving the education level of the population, increasing their chances of attaining rewarding employment, and significantly reducing socio-economic inequalities. The long-standing relation between agriculture and nutrition must be emphasised to bring significant returns to small-scale farmers, encourage improvements in technology, and enhanced research and development.¹²

The Government in 2014 and 2018 conducted a diagnostic assessment of the school feeding programme using SABER developed by the World Bank. The tool systematically assesses education systems against evidence-based global standards and good practices to assist countries to reform their education systems for proper learning. WFP adopted the tool to establish the state of play of school feeding programmes globally. The results of the SABER exercise served as the basis for the improvement and strengthening of school feeding programmes including the formulation of national school feeding policies. The result of these exercises that brought together Government officials, education partners, and school feeding providers is widely circulated.

The current School Feeding Policy provides a framework for cooperation between the relevant sectors and actors. It also provides a mechanism for the effective, efficient, design, and implementation of the Integrated Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (IHGSFP). This draws from the global HGSP model, ensuring meaningful involvement and participation of communities. Hence, the policy shall:

1. Provide the basis for an Integrated National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in Sierra Leone that is embedded in the national framework of policies and strategies and supports them.
2. Describe one model of school feeding for Sierra Leone which:
 - I. Ensures national ownership of the school feeding programme across different sectors and districts and communities.
 - II. Ensures the efficient and reliable provision of healthy and nutritious school meals in pre-primary, primary, and junior secondary schools.

¹¹ The security crisis in the sub-region in the nineties and early twenties generated the need for a regional humanitarian response programme, the Protracted Relief and Recovery Operation, of which emergency school feeding was part of the Sierra Leone component.

¹² Oshaug, A and L. Haddad (2002), "Nutrition and Agriculture" in *Nutrition: A Foundation for Development*. Geneva. ACC/SCN. <http://acc.unsystem.org/scn/> or www.ifpri.org

- III. Ensures that school feeding increasingly generates benefits for smallholder farmers and local communities, and
- IV. Ensures that the MBSSE continues to focus its resources on its core-responsibilities, including the promotion of free quality education while implementing the IHGSFP.

Prioritizing the role of agriculture in school feeding is possible if the HGSF programme is adopted. This will concentrate spending on local foodstuffs and provide structured demand and ready markets for local farm produce and local suppliers, leading to wealth creation for rural households. A successful and sustainable country-owned school feeding program depends on the integration of school feeding into national laws, and into relevant sector policies, strategies, and plans. Strong communication and coordination between the Ministries of, Basic and Senior Secondary School, Agriculture and Food Security, Finance, Health and Sanitation, Water Resources, Local Government and Rural Development, Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, Trade and Industry and, Planning and Economic Development as well as between the national government and development partners, is imperative for the implementation of this policy.

The policy pursues the mission of the ESP “to provide opportunities for children and adults to acquire knowledge and skills, as well as nurture attitudes and values that help the nation grow and prosper” and with a long-term vision for Sierra Leone to become a middle-income country by 2035; with “80 percent of the population above the poverty line. It would have gender equality, a well-educated, health population, good governance and rule of law.”¹³

1.6.1 Goal

The principal aim of the national school feeding policy is articulated toward “a decentralized and sustainable programme, based on the global home-grown model, that promotes human capital development through increasing access to education and learning opportunities and enhanced health and nutrition, and linked to local agricultural productivity and community growth.”¹⁴

Moreover, this policy aims to promote the holistic development of children, local farmers, and communities by ensuring that school feeding is recognized and treated as a sustainable, multisectoral investment program that receives support from a multitude of actors, including the Government at central and decentralized levels (districts), communities, private sector, civil society, and external donors.

1.6.2 Policy Pillars

Long term Objective

The long-term objective of this policy is to ensure that school feeding contributes to the vision, mission, and goals of the GoSL as articulated in the National Development Plan and the Education Sector Plan, by providing locally produced and processed nutritious and healthy

¹³ Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan update 2018

¹⁴ School Feeding Concept Note. GoSL/WFP/CRS, 2018

school meals to all pupils enrolled in pre-primary and basic and junior secondary education schools, contributing to the improvement of children's nutritional status.

Achieving this objective will take several generations of basic education with reliable school feeding, good quality schooling, and strong educational outcomes.

Specific Pillars (SPs)

The implementation of the policy and the IHGSFP will lead to:

- **(SP1):** In Education: (i) increased access to school, regular attendance, retention, concentration to learn, and completion of the full school cycles; (ii) gradual integration of a comprehensive home-grown school feeding into the education system from pre-primary to junior secondary school.
- **(SP2):** In Health and Nutrition: reduced chronic and acute malnutrition, including reduced protein-energy and micronutrient deficiencies by providing pupils in pre-primary and basic schools with healthy, diverse, and nutritionally sufficient meals on every school day, alongside with complementary interventions such as deworming and increased nutritional awareness and skills of children and parents.
- **(SP3):** In Agriculture: increased national food production and processing by providing a stable and predictable market for local small farmers and by encouraging them to increased competitiveness, professionalization, and commercialization of local products, allowing small farmers to make investments on a long-term basis.
- **(SP4):** In Rural Development: strengthened and enhanced food value chains in Sierra Leone in terms of the number of processed and commercially marketed food products, improved storage, increased food quality, and safety as well as increased jobs opportunities and incomes for all people involved in these value chains, enhanced access to markets for local producers through improved feeder roads.
- **(SP5):** In Social Development: increased social living conditions of poorest segments of the population in terms of reduced economic gaps, inequities, and disparities among communities as well as the various components of the population in the rural areas where the IHGSFP will be implemented.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The SFP policy objectives shall be attained through strategies that will be implemented in close collaboration and coordination with relevant stakeholders within Government, UN agencies, NGOs, civil society organizations, the private sector, and school communities. This policy has been developed with a focus on pre-primary and primary schools, its principles, and the model for implementation and coordination.

The MBSSE is the lead entity and ensures that activities related to SFP are conducted efficiently, effectively, reliably, and transparently. To ensure proficiency in its execution, there is a need to create a School Feeding Agency (SFA) of the IHGSFP to deliver an effective program and secure its future as the President's signature initiative. Until the passage of the relevant legislation to create the Agency, the SFP Secretariat based within the MBSSE shall deliver the program. The Secretariat shall be supervised by the MBSSE. The Agency shall be provided with adequate

resources, competent staff, and the appropriate technology for efficient and effective management and oversight, liaison with all partners, adequate monitoring, and reporting mechanism to assure transparency and accountability during implementation.

1.7.1 IHGSFP Principles

This policy seeks to provide strategic direction and guidance for the Government of Sierra Leone, its development partners, and all other stakeholders on the design and effective implementation of a viable school feeding programme. Specific implementation guidelines for the Integrated 1 Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (IHGSFP) shall be developed and guided by twelve principles that will ensure that the spirit of the present policy is fully realized and respected when providing school meals to children in Sierra Leone. These principles are outlined as follow:

<p>Mutuality The IHGSFP is based on a win-win business spirit. For children, receiving an education and the provision of healthy meals are a right. On their part, local smallholder farmers receive access to a significant market, but they must fulfill their obligations to provide quality food at competitive prices.</p>	<p>Multi-sectoral School feeding is an intervention of the entire government at central and decentralized levels, of parents, teachers, farmers and producers and partners, and others in its implementation, monitoring, evaluations, and regular reviews.</p>	<p>Reliability Parents and children can count on the government and its partners to provide school meals on every school day.</p>
<p>Predictability All stakeholders involved in the implementation of the IHGSFP shall know in advance, what is expected from them, and what resources are needed and available for the completion of tasks.</p>	<p>Transparency All decisions relevant to the implementation of the IHGSFP shall be based on upon-agreed objectives and verifiable criteria reached through an inclusive and clearly defined process.</p>	<p>Accountability Throughout the implementation of the IHGSFP, a clear chain of accountability shall ensure that Government and the public have access to accounts that fulfill standards for public service accounting.</p>
<p>Community participation and ownership Communities will play an active part and have a significant degree of influence, involvement, and decision-making in the implementation</p>	<p>Complementarity To ensure the growing benefits for local communities, the increasing local demand for fresh food for school feeding shall be</p>	<p>Cost-efficiency and cost-effectiveness For sustainability, available national resources shall be used efficiently, providing quality school meals at a</p>

<p>of the school feeding program. This will include supporting initiatives that create partnerships with local businesses, civil society, and faith-based organizations.</p>	<p>accompanied by support during the entire food value chains. This will secure the increasing local supply of quality food, as well as viable jobs, and opportunities for improvement of households' income.</p>	<p>lower cost. Apart from meals, the INHSFP will generate additional benefits for local small producers. Clear guidance will be established on how to rightly balance between efficiency and effectiveness.</p>
<p>Flexibility The diverse regional context and situation in which IHGSFP will be implemented calls for a flexible approach. Meals served at schools in different regions may differ (based on objective criteria and within established standards of quality, nutritional value, and price), and that procurement sources may change.</p>	<p>Sustainability The IHGSFP is conceived as a long-term investment that will continue if its reasons and justifications prevail. Over time, the benefits of the IHGSFP will continuously reduce the net costs of the school feeding programme.</p>	<p>Social equity and gender The IHGSFP will contribute to social equity, and address gender and social inequalities in education through communities, parents, and teachers. SFP will be sensitive to the needs, rights, and entitlements of the most vulnerable children including children living with disabilities, affected by HIV/AIDS, pregnant children, and Orphans.</p>

1.8 POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The policy development process sought to foster ownership, knowledge sharing, image management, and participation at the national, regional, and local levels. Therefore, while the process acknowledged and utilized considerable documentation from project reports and concept papers, a stakeholder consultation was undertaken through workshops, review meetings, and interviews. The philosophies were that the voices of ordinary Sierra Leoneans would be reflected in the document and working processes and ideas integrated into the policy.

This policy relied on a rigorous desk review of documents ranging from national, regional, and international frameworks and policies around food security, hunger, and social protection. It also entailed extensive consultations with a range of stakeholders at the national, regional, and school levels. Furthermore, it relied on discussions with various government ministries, institutions, government programmes, District Councils, Directorates of Education, School Administration and Management, School Boards, parents, learners, and the private sector in all 14 districts of the country, to establish what needed addressing in the school feeding policy. The methods used to

gather information included an inception meeting with key stakeholders, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. After these consultations, a multi-stakeholder validation workshop followed to review the policy.

Consultations were also held with private sector entities to create awareness and encourage their support from business and corporate social responsibility perspectives, targeting particularly those in the food-related establishments and extractive industries (as a mechanism for alternative livelihoods). Development partners in the local government, poverty reduction, and agriculture, health, and education sectors were involved in the awareness creation and validation processes.

The committee held expert interviews with technocrats, researchers, and policy analysts in education, health, agriculture, and other relevant areas. The committee also solicited public feedback on institutional arrangements for delivering school feeding and proposals for financing the intervention. Beyond the mainstream educational, school health, and agriculture promotion perspectives, there were emerging concerns related to energy, sustainable development, climate change, equality, equity, rights-based approaches, food security, and technological innovation. Other priorities for review, design, and implementation of SFP included monitoring and evaluation, capacity building, and strengthening linkages between key stakeholders.

Consultations of Interest group involved NGOs and CSOs drawn from the thematic areas of Finance, Gender and Social Accountability, Child Health and Child Rights, Food and Agriculture and Food Security, Basic Education, and Trade and Industry, Planning and Economic Development Livelihoods, and Local government and rural development. Also consulted were organised labour, small enterprise owners in the agro processing sector, and market traders' associations.

1.9 POLICY FINANCING

The Government of Sierra Leone shall fund school feeding sustainably from clearly identified sources based on the projected number of school children fed each year. The School Feeding Secretariat shall bear responsibility for ensuring the core human resources and the finances for their employment and the operational costs of running the National Secretariat and Regional Offices. It shall allocate budgetary resources for monitoring at the national, regional and district levels. When SFP is fully operational, feeding grants shall go directly to the district offices based on the fiscal decentralization efforts.

Currently, funding for the School Feeding Programme mainly comes from government and development partners, and the delivery of school feeding services is through contractors. Government support includes a commitment to expand current budgets in all relevant ministries for integrated initiatives on a comprehensive SFP outlined in the School Health policy. The policy further advocates for an active role of the school boards and management committees in the management of school feeding. The Government shall include the procurement of school feeding supplies, management of monies raised for school feeding and strengthening of community participation. To foster ownership community participation will be strongly enhanced. Regional education directorates will be responsible for overall coordination, planning, implementation,

monitoring and evaluation of school feeding, including the procurement of school feeding supplies.

Providing quality school feeding services requires secure and sustainable funding and it is envisaged that support for the IHGSFP shall be a collective effort. The government shall enact a law that will enable the MBSSE to create a budget line to support the IHGSFP. Funding school feeding delivery shall be a shared responsibility between various actors to bring about wide ownership. This shall be spearheaded by the Ministry of Finance and shall include other line Ministries, the National School Feeding Secretariat/Directorate/Agency, local authorities, communities, and the private sector through their corporate social responsibility. Locally generated funding is essential for purposes of greater autonomy and discretion in meeting local level needs as well as ownership and accountability to the local communities.

Budget allocation specific to school feeding and decentralized to the local council level shall enhance the security and sustainability of the school feeding program funding. The MBSSE shall seek stable funding and budgets, a prerequisite for the long-term sustainability of the school feeding program. As national resources can be scarce, the reliability of school meals will depend on the cost-efficiency of the program implementation based on the approved cost per child per school day (circa 2,300 Leones, equivalent of US\$0.23).

The IHGFSP will benefit from additional, complementary resources to increase the educational outcomes of schooling and the nutritional value of the school meals provided to pupils. Complementary funding shall be leveraged by the Government, for example, funds under health intended for improving the nutrition of the children through deworming, malaria, and other health prevention, funds under agriculture that enhance local production of nutrition-sensitive crops including livestock, and fishery products that are well adapted to the local agro-climatic conditions. Government line ministries participating in the IMC shall leverage line budgets that complement strategic activities of the IHGSFP.

Other complementary activities will have to be financed through funding from Government partners, including the private sector, civil society, bilateral and multilateral partners, and not least the diaspora. To secure a reliable planning horizon and avoid any disruptions during the implementation of the program, the Government shall seek to establish a multi-year funding framework for the IHGSFP, which will also integrate any complementary contributions.

Resource mobilization shall reflect the multi-partnership nature of school feeding, and therefore the ministers participating in the IMC and the partners participating in the Advisory Board shall cooperate to raise funds locally and externally. Funding sources considered secured for the NSFP include core, national public financing through the MoF, the Consolidated Fund, and Central Government Funds. Other potential sources that the National School Feeding Secretariat shall explore to match funding gaps include the following:

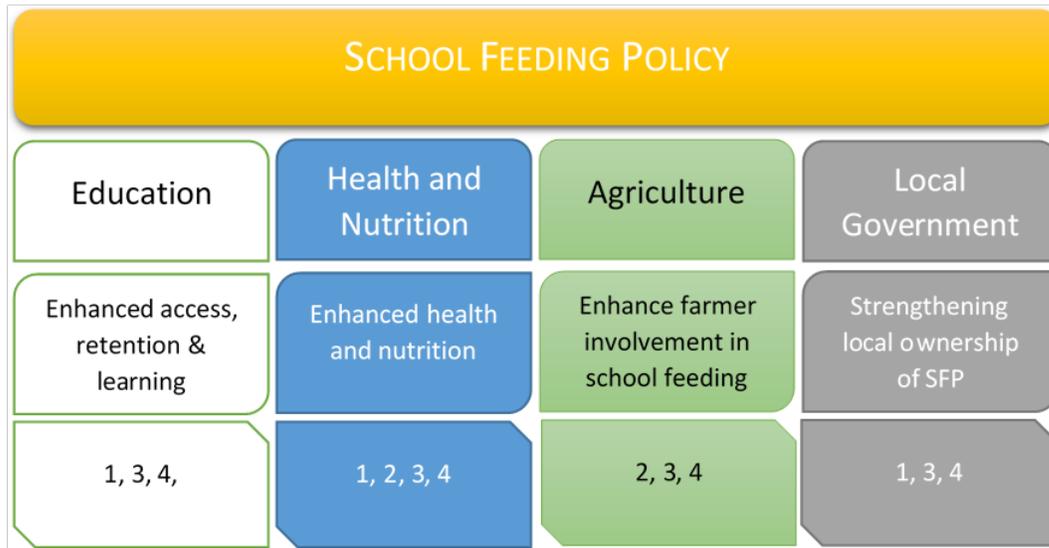
1. Bilateral sources (Development partners)
2. Complementary resourcing by local authorities
3. In-kind support by local communities
4. Private-sector funding sources through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) sources

SECTION 2: POLICY STATEMENTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO POLICY STATEMENTS

The SFP Secretariat will implement several strategies in close collaboration and coordination with relevant stakeholders within the Government, UN agencies, Civil Society, the private sector, and the school community to attain the objectives of this policy. The implementation work plan will guide the execution of the policy provisions. The MBSSE will take the lead in coordinating the implementation and in ensuring robust systems to monitor, account, and report on the progress of implementation of these strategies to stakeholders. Different entities in their respective mandated sectoral and technical capacities will support the execution of these strategies through collaborative efforts and arrangements with the MBSSE.

The four policy areas emerge from these policy objectives and Figure 1 below illustrates the relationship:



2.2 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 1

Specific Objective for education

The government will be actively involved in the implementation and coordination of the Integrated Home-Grown School Feeding (IHGSF) program while engaging communities through various programs aligned with government policies.

- i. Increased access to school, regular attendance, retention, concentration to learn, and completion of the full school cycles
- ii. Reinforced gradual practice of the IHGSFP into the education system from pre-primary to junior secondary school.

Strategy:

- Ensure timely delivery of food to schools to ensure the availability of food for learners throughout the term.
- Strengthen the food supply chain through rigorous monitoring of procurement and food delivery processes resulting in timely delivery of food to schools.
- Expand and upgrade school feeding infrastructure to ensure that all schools are equipped with the ideal school feeding infrastructure which includes: a kitchen equipped with adequate cooking stoves, eating utensils, and a storage facility.
- Encourage the use of fuel-saving stoves/techniques or other environmentally friendly forms of energy.
- Ensure that schools have a school feeding infrastructure that meets basic food safety and hygiene standards.

This policy recognizes the significance of expanding school feeding to senior secondary schools. As such, assessments will be undertaken by MBSSE to establish the viability of the expansion. Schools in food-insecure areas will be prioritized as most learners and children have limited access to food all year round.

2.3 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 2

MBSSE will collaborate with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to standardize the composition of school meals based on best practices for nutrition requirements.

Specific Objective for Health and Nutrition:

Enhance the nutrition and health of learners through the provision of balanced and nutritious meals on every school day.

Strategy:

- Along with its partners, explore means of diversifying school meals: Diversification of school meals will contribute to increased dietary nutrition intake by learners, consequently contributing to better health.
- Ensure the introduction of school gardens, procuring locally produced food, and engaging the private sector and the local community to supplement the school meal.
- Enhance health, hygiene, and nutrition education in schools: This strategy will include.
 - Ensure means of diversifying school meals as this will contribute to increased dietary nutrition intake by learners, hence contributing to better health. It includes the introduction of school gardens, purchasing of locally produced food and engaging the private sector and the local community to supplement the school meal.
 - Improve food preparation and hygiene standards in schools through continuous training of cooks and regular monitoring of the quality of food prepared for learners.
 - Ensure availability of clean and safe water, and adequate sanitation facilities in schools.

2.4 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 3

MBSSE and development partners will link the IHGSFP to a viable local supply chain, to enhance smallholder livelihood and strengthen environmentally sound food systems and contribute to rural development.

Specific Objective for Agriculture:

- i. Support Smallholder producers by linking them to the School Feeding Programme.*
- ii. Strengthen climate-smart agriculture production for resilient food systems and environmentally conscious participation.*

Strategy

- Promote the diversification of school meals through sourcing local foodstuff. School meal menus will be tailored to local and nutritious food preferences.
- Collaborate with Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to strengthen the capacity of smallholder producers to supply locally produced and available foods to schools: this strategy will support the capacity strengthening of smallholder farmers to produce a variety of surplus food that can be supplied to schools.
- Decentralize the management of school feeding to local government offices. This strategy will support the decentralization of food procurement to the districts and the schools since this links the market to the communities.
- Develop procurement guidelines to facilitate an efficient and effective procurement process.
- Establish accountability mechanisms resulting in regular updates to relevant stakeholders including parents, the school boards, school management, and the local government offices.

2.5 POLICY STATEMENTS - AREA 4

Specific Objectives for Local Government and Rural Development:

Promote local collaboration and joint ownership of child nutrition, health promotion, and education by local authorities, communities, and stakeholders. Achieve effective school feeding delivery through stakeholder involvement and ownership in exacting responsiveness and accountability at all levels.

Strategy

- To achieve this objective, the government shall ensure reliable and predictable public financing complemented by multiple and innovative mechanisms from local authorities, the private sector, financial institutions, and communities.
- Government and its partners shall mobilize local resources, initiative, and leadership in the school feeding programme through extensive community consultation, involvement, and contribution. Often, the delivery and sustainability of local funding are irregular, and this will adversely affect the SFP operations.
- Ensure that the human resources and the finances for their employment and the operational costs of running the School Feeding Secretariat and the District Offices are regular and timely. Funding the SFP feeding shall be a shared responsibility between various actors (Ministries, the diaspora, private sector sources, fund-raising efforts by the

SF Agency, and complimentary in-kind support by communities to stimulate wide ownership).

- Budgetary resources for monitoring at the national, and district levels shall also be earmarked and allocated on time. When SFP is fully operational, feeding grants shall go directly to the districts in line with the government's fiscal decentralization policy. Locally generated funding is critical for greater autonomy and discretion in meeting local level needs as well as ownership and accountability to the local people. This will require consistent political, technical, and bureaucratic support for this to translate to adequate and continuous financing and other resource support from the national budget rather than the present periodic and irregular releases of funds.
- Ascertaining engagement and inclusivity is an essential aspect of sustainability. National and local capacities should be built and enhanced for the expected uptake by the identified stakeholders and players. This will require in-depth stakeholder analysis of needs and interests and how these evolve within the School Feeding Agency's agenda.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING, AND EVALUATION

3.1 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

As indicated, the creation of a School Feeding Agency (SFA) is essential to the delivery of an effective programme and securing its future. Until the promulgation of the relevant legislation to create the agency, the program will be delivered by the school feeding secretariat. The secretariat shall work under the supervision of the MBSSE.

The following table summarises the proposed roles and responsibilities of the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC), of the school feeding secretariat, and district level organization of school feeding.

Table 1: Allocation of roles and responsibilities

	Activity	Responsible Party
1.	Establish and equip a School Feeding Unit in the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.	MBSSE with the support of partners
2.	Provide for school feeding in the national budget and explore other avenues for resource mobilization.	MoF, MBSSE, WFP, CRS, CSOs, donor partners
3.	Integrate school feeding in the plans and activities of all government social protection ministries, departments, and agencies.	MBSSE, MoF, MoHS, MAFS, MLGRD, MSW, MGCA, MoWR
4.	Recruit personnel for school feeding operations according to need by the Minister of Education.	MBSSE, MoF, MoPED
5.	Design an IHGSFP project document and implementation guidelines with a strong focus on local food production and procurement.	MBSSE & current implementing partners.
6.	Develop the capacity of government and related institutions for school feeding;	School feeding partners
7.	Carry out a detailed assessment of the financial, infrastructural, human, and material needs of the national school feeding program.	MBSSE with support from school feeding partners
7.	Constitute the implementation structure of the National School Feeding Programme at decentralized levels (regions, districts, wards, schools, etc.)	MBSSE
8.	Undertake extensive public information and awareness campaign for an adequate understanding of the Integrated National Home-Grown School Feeding and meaningful participation in its process.	MBSSE

9.	Construct infrastructure required by the Integrated National Home School Feeding Programme such as stores, kitchens, and spaces for meal consumption.	MBSSE, and other partners, GoSL, CSOs
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The present policy is based on several assumptions and prerequisites to be put in place for the IHGSFP to work and foster the benefits described in the above section. For the successful and sustainable implementation of this policy the following conditions are assumed to exist:

The guiding principle on the flexibility of the programme mentioned in this document will ensure a high level of cost-efficiency combined with strong and increasing local benefits.

The separation of programme implementation and monitoring and evaluation will increase the transparency and accountability of the program.

The private sector is motivated and prepared to take advantage of the opportunities generated by the school feeding program. Enough qualified national actors in the country shall ensure adequate competition and reliable implementation of the program. The transitional arrangements foresee an assessment to identify and address capacity gaps of actors.

Administer a strong monitoring mechanism to ensure that the school feeding programme achieves its objectives and is accountable and transparent. Also, learning outcomes in Sierra Leone basic and junior education justify the efforts of households, children, and partners in participating and contributing to schooling. Without adequate learning outcomes reflected in increased employment, income opportunities, and improved living conditions, it will be difficult to secure the households, children, and partners’ interest in investing in school feeding and education.

The partners of the school feeding programme continue to provide technical assistance and support resource mobilization. By their mandate, the bi- and multilateral partners are committed to supporting the Government and the people of Sierra Leone in their efforts to develop, reduce poverty, and pursue healthy and productive lives.

3.2 IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

The Policy will be implemented in phases depending on the availability of resources. It will continue the current practice of geographical targeting of communities most vulnerable to hunger and food insecurity until resources and institutional capacity allow expansion to a universal level. The phases will be elaborated in the school feeding plan of action proposed under transitional activities.

MBSSE will set up an appropriate mechanism to review this policy after a period of 3 to 4 years of implementation.

The different steps described in the above section are summarized in the agenda below. Variations may occur, but the entire transition towards the fully nationally owned IHGSFP is expected to be fully functional by 2024.

Table 2: Schedule of activities

Transition Implementation Schedule [†]	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Elaboration of SF Policy							
Policy approval by Cabinet							
Elaboration of SF implementation guidelines							
Implementation of SF by WFP, CRS, JAM, Plan International, CARITAS BO							
Establishment of IMC							
Establishment of SF decentralized bodies							
Formulation of IHGSFP document							
Commence IHGSFP implementation (pilot activities)							
Capacity assessment/elaboration of capacity strengthening plan							
Implementation of capacity strengthening plan							
Implementation of IHGSFP							

[†]All indicators, where applicable, will be monitored and reported disaggregated by gender.

The above schedule must be considered along with the SABER Action Plan approved in November 2018.

The approval of the policy by the MBSSE and the Cabinet, the development of the school feeding implementation guidelines, the setting up of institutional structures, the preparation of a comprehensive capacity strengthening plan will be core business in the year 2021/22.

3.4 MONITORING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The School Feeding Secretariat will develop an annual operational plan (AOP) which will be the basis for monitoring the SFP. Programme managers will collaborate with Regional Coordinators to track progress on sub-national activities and results collated into half-yearly (bi-annual) reports. Each district will organize a bi-annual review meeting on the achievement of key policy areas that fall within the scope of local authorities. These reviews will include social accountability reports from the designated platforms. Reports from the district will be collated and presented in a bi-annual regional learning event which will involve school feeding staff, members of Regional School Feeding Oversight Committee, District Directorate of Schools, traditional authorities, and civil society organizations, and other appropriate partners and stakeholders.

It will be the responsibility of the M&E unit to design regular and intensive monitoring and evaluation system that reflects the national, regional, and local structures of the SFP. Results

obtained from these exercises will be disseminated among stakeholders for their information and action, as necessary.

The program implementation will be monitored and evaluated based on the following results framework. More on this will be detailed in an MBSSE developed Programme Implementation Guidelines.

3.5 EVALUATING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of this policy will be monitored through an annual implementation report, and a comprehensive evaluation will be carried out every 3-5 years. The evaluation will feed into the SFP five-year road map and the policy implementation action plan.

The monitoring and evaluation of this policy will be done at both the policy and programme implementation levels. The objectives outlined in this policy will be assigned clear indicators that will be measured each year to assess their achievement of outcomes. Many of these are already in existence and widely used by the relevant ministries.

The MBSSE already has indicators and data on educational outcomes (enrolment, retention, and performance) captured by the Management Information System (MIS). The National Health Survey (NHS) has indicators for nutritional outcomes. Similarly, WFP has data on the Food and Nutrition status of the vulnerable segment of the population from their VAM studies. Efforts should be made to include children between the ages of 6 and 14 years in the DHS sample frame. All these will be further and systematically developed into a performance management framework for the NSFP policy.

The IMC shall decide whether an independent or internal evaluation should be conducted. Resource availability will be a key factor in the choice as external institutions (research universities), or private independent consultants will conduct the evaluation.

3.6 POLICY REVIEW

The implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation processes will provide insights on the extent of achievement of the policy's objectives on an annual basis. This effort will allow for reflections and lessons to review policy aspects and elements.

A mid-term evaluation will be conducted to examine the continued relevance of the rationale, vision, objectives, and key areas of the policy. Completed activities and achieved targets shall be replaced with emerging priorities. Stakeholder consultations will be undertaken at all levels, from sub-district to national, and will involve public and private sectors, traditional authorities, media, other civil society and organized labor. The results will be used to revise and update the policy framework, even within the context of the School Feeding legislation. Also, the results will provide the benchmark for the IMC to review the programme every three to four years. These reviews will consider the lessons learned and capitalize on emerging issues that will lead to strengthening and/or modify the existing policy and strategies.

Based on this M&E database, the IMC will discuss and recommend whether any aspect of the IHGSFP should be adjusted, be it (i) concerning its objectives, its coordination, and management structure, the composition of school meals, required additional capacity strengthening, additional complementary activities, or (ii) any other aspects of importance.

SECTION 4: COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT

4.1 COORDINATION

The school feeding programme requires strong coordination, collaboration, and the concerted efforts of many stakeholders including government ministries and departments, institutions, international organizations, communities, and the private sector. Effective participation and meaningful contribution of all these entities require a clear understanding of explicitly defined roles and responsibilities and strong supervision and coordination machinery.

The above mentioned indicates an agenda that is broader than the scope of any single ministry. Therefore, learning from international best practices, a semi-independent body is required to manage this broad, multi-faceted agenda and become the coordinating office at the national level.

The coordinating office must be insulated from the prospect of being relocated within different ministries, as governments change and ministries are created, combined, or split according to a prevailing, political vision. There must be a clear institutional obligation in place, clarifying roles and responsibilities for participating ministries, departments, and agencies that are understood at all levels for various parties so that they can be held accountable. An appropriate office shall employ mechanisms to strengthen inter-ministerial and inter-sectoral collaboration at all levels. Such an agency becomes a specialized ambit of the MBSSE, delivering a specialized function on behalf of the government, it shall oversee policy implementation, and enforce the provisions of the relevant legislation, sometimes with support from another public entity. This Agency shall be a relatively independent entity, with administrative powers to exact performance, determine conditions, and initiate reforms concerning its school feeding expertise.

Given that the policy embodies a strong social justice mandate, locating the SFP in the wider agenda of social protection ensures the necessary representation of diversity for effective and accountable decision-making. In this regard, the following procedures are required to fulfill this policy aim:

- The enactment of legislation establishing a School Feeding Agency with a strong governing Board, a multi-sectoral technical advisory committee (IMC), and a Secretariat.
- Operationalization of de-centralized regional offices to ensure the performance of the sub-national obligations of the Agency of coordination, backstopping, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Strengthened district efforts in school feeding through accountability, transparency, and clearer departmental involvement and stakeholder responsibility in implementation.

Implementation structure:

Transitional Arrangements and Activities

The preparation of the present policy must be considered the first step of the transition towards a nationally owned HGSFP as recommended by the SABER exercise. The setting up of the

required structures ensuring the national capacity to take over the implementation of the program takes time. During this period of transition, it is important to ensure the continuity of school feeding in Sierra Leone.

For this reason, the Government of Sierra Leone through the MBSSE has entered into agreements with its school feeding partners, especially the World Food Programme, CRS, and JAM, PLAN INTERNATIONAL and CARITAS-BO , through the signings of MOUs. The transitional arrangement between the Government of Sierra Leone and school feeding partners will provide for a gradual and phased reduction in the partners' role from food aid providers for school feeding to a food assistance facilitator, providing advisory and technical services. On this basis, the Government school feeding partners will start switching towards the IHGSFP model, whilst carrying out pilot projects on local purchases. This will create a local experience on which the capacity strengthening program can draw.

Based on the guiding principles of this policy, discussions at the school and district level, and experience from ongoing activities will be undertaken, and detailed implementation guidelines will be prepared to respond to the recommendation of the SABER's plan of actions. These guidelines will establish the exact processes and quality standards of the program.

A capacity-strengthening plan also recommended by the SABER exercise will be elaborated with the view to bridging any identified gaps so that all actors involved in school feeding have the full capacity required to implement the program without further external assistance.

The capacity-strengthening programme may include activities such as investments in infrastructures, up-front training, and on-the-job training, coaching, and mentoring. It is expected that after an initial phase of capacity strengthening activities, national actors will gradually start implementing the programme, applying national procurement rules, etc.

The activities listed in the implementation timeline are essential (and not yet exhaustive) for establishing a viable home-grown school feeding programme during the transition period.

SECTION 5: POLICY CONCLUSION

Improving the school feeding program is imperative for human development and economic growth. It is an integral part of Sierra Leone's priorities to achieving the vision for long-term development. This is so because of the returns derived from good nutrition for schoolchildren both in their immediate and longer-term competencies. Besides relieving short-term hunger and contributing to improved health of learners and their access to education. In the long term, it contributes positively to strengthening the human capital development of the nation by improving the education level of the population, increasing their chances of attaining rewarding employment, and significantly reducing socio-economic inequalities.

This policy intends to improve the school-feeding programme and maximize the benefits of school feeding such as, improved school participation, improved health and nutrition, support to smallholder producers, strengthened coordination, and sectoral linkages.

The MBSSE will lead the overall coordination for the policy implementation. However, given the inter-connectedness of the policy issues to other sectors, successful results-oriented implementation will depend on full participation, commitment, and accountability of all stakeholders. This will require the involvement of multi-stakeholders and several line ministries, the private sector, development partners, civil society, the community, and the beneficiaries themselves. Decentralization of the SFP will be to the districts within existing platforms, which have relevant key Ministries responsible for agriculture, water and sanitation, fisheries, forestry, gender, health and nutrition, rural development, and trade and industry. By embracing a multi-sectoral perspective, the policy expands ownership and implementation responsibilities to all sectors, which will result in increased sectorial commitments and opportunities for improved support.

This policy builds on the Government of Sierra Leone's pioneering FQSE initiative and pursues the guiding principles of the MBSSE - including universal access to quality and equitable education, radical inclusion, and comprehensive safety of all learners. It reinforces the government's commitment to improving quality, inclusive education that is central to long-term development efforts and growth for the country.

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