

## **SIERRA LEONE COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION FUND** **COUNTRY PRESENTATION**

### **1. THE CONTEXT**

#### **1.1 Brief History of Education**

- The cradle of education and referred to as "Athens of Africa".
- The first University, the first Boys Secondary School and the first Girls' Secondary School in Africa, South of the Sahara and North of the Limpopo River
- This country developed and provided scholars and professionals, especially teachers, administrative officers, clergy and personnel in other liberal arts studies that served other English-speaking nations, especially on the West Coast of Africa.
- That historic achievement reversed after independence. But the education itself was theoretically oriented, with limited component of life-sustaining skills in the curriculum, leaving a very large number of young people unfulfilled, frustrated and angry.
- The sharpest educational system decline occurred in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, when governments' support system was largely centralised in Freetown. The rebel war from 1991 to 2002 exacerbated the downward trend with massive educational infrastructural damage during the war of both personnel and institutions
- Physical rehabilitation of schools ongoing
- About 65% of teachers have not resettled to rural areas
- Fee free primary education was introduced in 2001 and 120% increase in enrolment in grade 1 compared to 1991 figures
- Weak financial position of government poses a major challenge to the realization of basic educational policy
- EFA success demands the participation of international community and every facet of the nation including communities have to be involved.

#### **1.2 Basic Education**

The Education system of Sierra Leone is known as the 6-3-3-4. The number represent 6 years of primary schooling/education, 3 years of Junior Secondary schooling/education, 3 years of post junior secondary schooling/education and 4 years of tertiary level education leading to a first degree. The system is structured into two main parts-

1. Basic Education
2. Post-Basic Education

Basic Education encompasses

- a. Pre-Primary Education
- b. Formal and Non-Formal Primary Schooling
- c. Non-Formal Primary Level Education
- d. Junior Secondary Schooling
- e. Non-Formal Junior Secondary Level Education
- f. Basic Level Technical and Vocational Skills Training
- g. Literacy Education and Life Skills

The goals of the EFA relate more to the basic education level of the system than the post-basic. However it is worth noting that issues of quality at the basic level are much dependent on quality at post-basic education level. Examinations in the school system occur at

- h. The completion of primary level-class 6- the National Primary School Examination (NPSE)

- i. The completion of Junior Secondary Schooling (JSS) i.e end of formal basic education-JSS3- the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE)
- j. The completion of Senior Secondary/Technical and Vocational schooling i.e.SSS3/TVS3- the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) and National Vocational Qualification- Level 3 Examination (NVQ3).

A full and complete implementation of the 6-3-3-4 system has not been possible because of the decade long conflict which only just ended. Achieving the goals of EFA are very much dependent on getting the system operating properly and addressing the problems and disparities at the basic education level.

### **1.3 State of the Basic Education System**

Following the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in the early 1990s, the schools were organized into three levels-primary school (Classes1-6), Junior secondary School (JSS 1-3) and Senior Secondary School (SSS 1-3). Basic education was designed to cover the first two levels, while the last was for further study.

The 2001 World Bank Survey which looked at the school system at two levels- Primary School (Classes 1-6) and Secondary School (JSS1-SSS6)-revealed that in January 2001, there were a total of 3152 schools. 80% were government-assisted, 10% were private and 9% were purely government. The difference between these categories of schools is that whereas the government owned schools were set up and are being run by the Government, the private schools were established by private initiatives and are managed by their proprietors and the respective Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Boards. The Government assisted schools on the other hand were established by religious organisations (Catholic, Protestant and Islamic), individuals, communities and NGOs. The Government, who is also expected to provide teaching and learning materials, is paying the salaries of the teachers. Given the meagre allocations for basic education, what is available has had to be spread very thinly among over 3000 schools.

UNICEF and national and international NGOs have carried out Non-Formal Primary Education programmes (NFPE) in some areas of the country since 1992. The objective has been to increase participation of girls and boys in basic education and involve parents and communities in the running and management of the schools. The curriculum is similar to that of the formal schools, but emphasis is placed on literacy, numeracy and civic education. The daily school period is short (3 hours a day) over an 11 months school year. Similar initiatives have been taken to assist the Ministry of Education in reaching out to children in war affected areas. These include the Rapid Education Reintegration Programme (RREP) and the Complementary Reintegration Education Programme (CREP). There is also the Community Education Investment Programme (CEIP) that provides packages of supplies to schools in exchange for enrolling ex-child combatants.

#### **1.3.1 Enrolment**

Unofficial figures for the total enrollment at the start of 2002/3 were 735,366 in about 3039 primary schools. The total number of children registered in Class I alone rose from 87,846 in 1991 to 228,229 in 2002. The major reason for this increase has been attributed to the introduction in 2001 of free primary education in all government and government assisted schools.

Despite this positive development, there are significant regional disparities in enrolment, with access to education lowest in the Northern and Eastern regions. Enrolment ranges from 75% in the western area to only 28% in the Northern region. Gender disparities are less pronounced, but in the North of the country, enrollment figures for females are a cause for concern. In 2001, female

enrolment in this region was recorded at 33.6%. This is due to traditional discrimination against women in that region, including the belief that investment in the education of the girl child will not reap dividend.

### **1.3.2 Challenges**

The major challenge confronting the government in the provision of quality basic education is the problem of ensuring enough resources in the form of infrastructure, qualified teachers, payment of attractive salaries and adequate teaching and learning materials, the formation of realistic and visionary policies and the forging of partnerships that are well coordinated and harmonized. There is also absence of a communication component within the framework of the basic education programme.

### **1.4 Government Education Policy**

Sierra Leone's unenviable position at the bottom of the UNDP's Human Development Index lingers on. Government has set out for itself a number of priorities geared towards combating poverty and eradicating hunger. With the classification of Sierra Leone as a Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) efforts are now being made to put together a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) outlining the new visionary direction of the country for the short and medium term following an earlier Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper in 2002. With this classification, Sierra Leone benefits from over \$600,000,000.00 (Six hundred Million United States Dollars) in debt relief. These funds should be spent on social projects geared towards addressing the basic needs of communities. A number of sectors, including the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)-which attracts 20.7% of the national budget, are expected to benefit from these funds to help boost the educational infrastructure around the country. A National Action Plan (NAP) on education and their objectives have been chartered out between major stakeholders i.e proprietors of educational institutions, civil society, relevant unions NGOs, INGOs, CBOs, UN Agencies, District Councils, Chiefdom Authorities, and the Missions. Strategies to also achieve these objectives have been mapped out and incorporated into the overall government policy as clearly spelled out below. Consultations at regional and district levels were carried out to ensure the involvement of all relevant stakeholders.

These objectives were arrived at to address the impediments in the way of achieving EFA within the stipulated timeframe i.e 2002-2015

- Expanding comprehensive early childhood care and education
- Free and compulsory primary education
- Equitable access to appropriate life skills
- Equal access to basic and continuing education
- Elimination of gender discrimination
- Quality as priority objective

Currently before Parliament is a bill titled the **EDUCATION ACT, 2003 being an act to reform the education system including pre-primary education, technical and vocational training, adult and non-formal education and the role of privately owned universities; and to provide for other related matters.** The bill focuses on the rights of individual to education and the mechanisms to ensure that these rights are achieved e.g. free and compulsory basic education.

### **1..5 Other Key Players**

In addition to the HIPC funds and funds allocated on a quarterly basis to the MEST, the World Bank recently approved a loan of \$41,000,000.00 (Forty One Million United States Dollars) for the Rehabilitation of Basic Education Programme (REBEP) of the MEST. These funds are

expected to go a long way towards rehabilitating the shattered educational infrastructure that has been a consequence of years of a virtual absence of a culture of maintenance, compounded by 11 years of a dastardly and senseless war that saw schools and other educational institutions being unfortunate targets for destruction.

Other key stakeholders in education and their contributions are outlined below:

- The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), a commission instituted by government to address post war issues is providing funding to implementing partners for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of education facilities.
- A coalition of civil society groups called the National Accountability Group (NAG) has emerged to work alongside the anti-corruption group established by government.
- International NGOs and agencies including ActionAid Sierra Leone, PLAN, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and UNICEF are supporting the Rapid Response Education Programme for children who have been out of school as a result of the war.
- Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) has undertaken advocacy issues on the girl child at local and national levels. They have established a Centre, in Grafton, Freetown to address and build capacity of people on issues of the girl child.

### **1.6 Civil Society**

- In Sierra Leone, the potential strength of Civil Society as an effective check to state power has been recognized by successive governments since independence in 1961. Between 1968-1985, Civil Society in Sierra Leone was considerably weakened and politicised.
- In more recent times, unlike a decade ago, Civil Society has been raising its voice to be heard in the governance of the country. Civil Society organisations have been mobilized into resisting military dictatorship and calling for democratic governance.
- In public policy formulation, the basic level of participation is where groups potentially affected by the policy simply provide information to technical experts on their needs, preferences or prior experiences.
- Generally speaking, not much has so far been done in terms of concrete efforts at doing advocacy on key educational themes and issues. Even though religious organisations (Christian and Muslim) continue to play a very significant role in promoting education in Sierra Leone.
- Work in the area of education over the years has been largely centred on the construction/rehabilitation of physical infrastructure and the provision of basic teaching and learning materials.
- Government has responded accordingly by promising that effective September 2003, government will pay the fees of all girls entering Junior Secondary Schools in the North and East where the statistics are most alarming. FAWE, Action Aid and PLAN International have been leading campaigners in this area.
- Talking Drums Studio, Sierra Leone Teachers Union and Anti Corruption Commission conducted an 8-month long assessment to ascertain community perspectives on quality education in Sierra Leone and made a presentation to the Parliamentary Sub-committee on Education outlining their findings and requesting that they initiate action geared towards addressing core issues that affect quality education in Sierra Leone.
- The Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) on its part has been active in advocating mainly on issues related to conditions of service for teachers (their constituents) but very limited, if anything, otherwise.
- Peoples Educational Association (PEA) and PADECO have been active over the years in doing work on adult education and creating awareness in communities around the country

about that, but not much has been done beyond that. PEA has worked with organisations like United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and a few others on work with non-formal primary education, and rapid education programmes (CREPS) etc.

- Apart from the work done by the already mentioned organizations, there is actually no vibrant coalition of CSOs to advocate on educational issues in Sierra Leone. There is clearly the need to build the capacity of civil society to advocate for better access to education. Because of the high turn-over rate in most CSOs, their advocacy capacities are not stable. Staffs often leave after many investments have been made into building their capacities. They became more marketable and sought greener pastures.

## **2. CEF INTERVENTIONS**

### ***2.1 What CEF Has Done***

Series of consultative meetings of the Managing Agencies on how to take the CEF process forward resulted to the initiation of a nation-wide consultative process leading to the identification of advocacy civil society groups and partners- their perceptions of education, gaps and weaknesses that would form the basis of the strategic plan. Consultations among managing agencies also ended up to the adaptation of the global CEF objectives into national objectives on which the Terms of Reference of the nation-wide consultations were based. A draft report was produced and circulated to partners for their feedback. In a meeting of stakeholders held on the 22 and 23 September 2003, feedback on the draft report was given by the respective members and a draft strategic plan developed based on the consultations report. The draft Strategic Plan and Budget were circulated to partners and the CEF Co-ordinator in UK for their feedback.

The CEF through Standard Chartered Bank Sierra Leone Ltd. directed its effort in generating the interest of the corporate sector to engage in the CEF process. So far up to ten corporate bodies have indicated interest in the CEF and a formal presentation of the project was made to the corporate sector in April 2003. Their engagement is dependent upon the formulation of a workable and acceptable strategic plan for the CEF.

### ***2.2 Strategy***

The proposed programme can be pursued using the following strategies: **Capacity Building, Advocacy, Mobilization and Sensitization.**

#### ***2.2.1 Capacity Building***

A major focus of CEF activities would therefore focus on building capacity of civil society groups and communities through training and support with the requisite logistics and some financial resource requirements, establishment of appropriate structures for advocacy, development of viable advocacy programmes and campaigns around the network, supporting the creation of viable coalitions for advocacy and establishing appropriate networks for advocacy and the local/grassroots, district, regional, national and international levels.

#### ***2.2.2 Advocacy Approaches:***

The advocacy approach will be most useful in calling attention to relevant international policies on Child rights that have not yet been officially adopted so that these could be embraced and implemented. It could also be used to influence the promulgation of legislation in support of quality basic education. e.g. making into law the ongoing Bill entitled **Education Act, 2003** that may make it mandatory for all parents and other child carers to send their children to school and that may levy a special tax in support of quality basic education for all.

The audience in this approach may include the Head of State, cabinet ministers, Parliament, Opinion leaders, traditional authorities, community leaders, religious leaders, business leaders, NGOs and policy and administrative officers of relevant line ministries.

Certain activities could be employed in pursuit of advocacy. These include lobbying through interpersonal communication, backed by e.g. an information kit or a pamphlet with brief information on key relevant points. Another activity is media advocacy, in which journalists are briefed and influenced, through focus group discussions and workshops, to join the campaign.

Advocacy could also take the form of high profile workshops and seminars in which very influential personalities including the President, Vice President and other high-ranking personalities are asked to make statements, which may affirm their commitment to basic education.

It could also take the form of special events at which the children themselves advocate for support to basic education by pitifully narrating their plight in the absence of adequate provision for quality basic education for all.

### ***2.2.3 Mobilization Approaches***

This approach is very effective in bringing together all stakeholders to form a national coalition to work in concert for the formulation and implementation of policies to promote participation and ensuring quality basic education. Its functions could be replicated at the regional or district levels for more effective communication coverage at all levels of the communities.

Another activity could be participatory planning workshops, which would mobilize the ideas of key players of basic education for national and district level planning of advocacy and campaign strategies. Such exercise will be very useful in determining the strengths and weaknesses of on-going advocacy and campaign, identify gaps, new strategies and resource needs.

### ***2.2.4 Sensitization Approaches***

Sensitization approaches involve the use of all available media to reach out to various segments of the society. These approaches include the use of Radio, TV, community meetings, drama, street theatre, posters, video shows to video viewing groups, meetings in markets and agricultural fields, town criers, radio listening groups, songs, proverbs and story telling.

The approach emphasises the use of multi-media in the hope that when people hear the messages over and over again from different channels, they may be forced to take note and be induced to feel sufficiently sensitized to act on them

The use of multi-media also allows for the packaging of information in various formats and languages that are familiar to the target groups.

In a country where modern communication channels are at various levels of development in the different regions, the multi-media strategy is very important. It facilitates communication in whatever channel is available to various groups in the society.