

Cycle 4: UPR of SIERRA LEONE



Fact Sheet 1:

RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM THIRD UPR CYCLE

1. Free, Compulsory, and Accessible Basic Education: Recommendations calling for free, compulsory, and universally accessible primary/basic education, including removal of financial barriers and enforcement of education laws

States: Turkey (143.156 & 143.157); Costa Rica (143.159); Mauritius (143.166); India (143.164)

2. Gender Equality and Protection of Girls' Right to Education: Recommendations focused on girls' education, gender equality, and the inclusion of pregnant girls and teenage mothers

States: Fiji (143.160); Malaysia (143.165); Sudan (143.171); Portugal (143.168)

3. Inclusive Education for Children with Disabilities: Recommendations emphasizing inclusive education policies and access for children with disabilities

States: Costa Rica (143.159); Holy See (143.162); South Sudan (143.169)

4. Education System Strengthening, Infrastructure, and Planning: Recommendations addressing school infrastructure, enrolment, system improvement, and strategic planning

States: Morocco (143.167); Sri Lanka (143.170); Sudan (143.171)

NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

- ❖ The **Free Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme**, launched in 2018, eliminated tuition, examination, and core learning costs at primary and secondary levels, increasing enrolment by over 1.3 million learners in its first year and improving retention, particularly for girls and children from low-income households.
- ❖ The **2020 Radical Inclusion Policy** further advanced rights-based education by guaranteeing access for pregnant girls, adolescent mothers, children with disabilities, and other marginalized learners, aligning national practice with human rights standards.
- ❖ **Sustained government commitment** is reflected in allocating about 21% of the national budget to education, supporting teacher recruitment, curriculum reforms, school feeding, and gender-responsive interventions toward inclusive, quality education.

CHALLENGES AND THEIR IMPACTS

- ❖ **Infrastructure Challenges:** Despite FQSE expanding access, rural and marginalized schools face infrastructure gaps: overcrowded classrooms, unsafe buildings, and poor WASH. Rooms built for 45 often hold 80+ learners, even in Freetown, harming learning quality, safety, teacher workload, and retention.
- ❖ **Inadequate Teacher Training:** Teacher shortages and weak training further compound learning deficits. Only 61% of primary school teachers are formally trained, and key subjects such as mathematics, science, and English are frequently combined, irregularly taught, or omitted, particularly in remote areas where learners may go weeks without instruction.
- ❖ **Access, retention, and learning gaps remain pronounced:** Over 60% of children in many rural districts enter primary school without pre-primary education, while pre-primary enrolment stands at just 25%. Approximately 22% of children aged 4–17 years are out of school, with dropout rates rising sharply to 36% at senior secondary level due to poverty, long distances to schools, and teenage pregnancy. These gaps are reflected in national outcomes: 57% of adults are illiterate, and half of children leaving primary school cannot read or write.

- ❖ **School feeding programmes** remain inconsistent, donor-dependent, and limited in coverage, leaving many children—especially in remote areas—attending school hungry, which undermines concentration and learning
- ❖ **Gender-related barriers continue to limit retention and completion:** Despite the Radical Inclusion Policy, harmful practices persist: nearly 30% of girls marry before 18 and about 86% of women aged 15–49 experience FGM. Gender norms favour boys’ education. Lack of menstrual sanitation keeps girls out of school, worsening literacy, numeracy and dropout rates.
- ❖ **Sustainability, financing, and accountability constraints:** Although education receives about 21% of the national budget, fiscal pressures, inflation, and weak monitoring and data systems threaten the sustainability, accountability, and measurable impact of reforms.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Christian Brothers Development Office, Sierra Leone; Edmund Rice International and VIVAT International **urge Member States to recommend** to Sierra Leone:

1. Equitable Access and Inclusion

Increase education investment to expand access and infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Enforce the Radical Inclusion policy by improving school accessibility, deploying special-needs teachers, registering out-of-school children with disabilities, providing assistive learning materials, and addressing gender inequality through gender-responsive curricula. Reduce dropout by supporting vulnerable learners, addressing poverty-related barriers, providing remedial education, and ensuring safe, inclusive school environments.

2. Quality Education and Learning Outcomes

Strengthen teacher training and retention through improved professional development and competitive, inflation-adjusted salaries. Expand and standardize school feeding programmes in remote areas, ensure timely and sustainable financing, strengthen home-grown feeding models, and link school feeding with health and welfare services to improve attendance, nutrition, and learning outcomes.

3. Governance, Transparency, and Participation

Enhance accountability by publishing district education budgets, ensuring timely disbursement of school funds, regulating unapproved schools, and conducting regular public audits of education and school feeding programmes. Promote community participation by supporting community schools and enabling parents, civil society, and the media to monitor education resources and outcomes.

ADVANCE QUESTIONS

1. What steps are being taken to translate the increased education budget allocations into measurable improvements in learning outcomes particularly teacher quality, classroom conditions and literacy and numeracy attainment in rural and marginalized communities?
2. What mechanisms have been put in place to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the Radical Inclusion Policy, especially for girls, children with disabilities and other vulnerable learners, to prevent dropouts and guarantee completion of quality basic and secondary education?

Sources:

- UNICEF Sierra Leone: Annual Report 2024 & Education Sector Analysis 2020-2024.
- World Bank Group: Sierra Leone Education Country Brief (2024/2025) & Country Opinion Survey 2025.

Contact Details:

1. **Abu KARGBO:** Email: akargbo@edmundrice.org; WhatsApp: +232 79 979775
2. **Constantine DABREU:** Email: eri.gaillard@gmail.com; WhatsApp: +33 6 3018 3045