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**Presentation on:**

## **Overview on Sierra Leone - UNESCO Collaboration in the fields of UNESCO's Competence - 2013- 2015**

Mr. Chairman of the General Conference

Your Excellencies, Heads of States of Member States

Director-General of UNESCO

Excellencies, Ambassadors and Heads of Diplomatic Missions

Directors and Heads of UNESCO Sectors and Cluster Offices

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me start my presentation by congratulating UNESCO on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone for yet another General Conference. I wish to express our sincere appreciation of the collaboration between UNESCO and the Government and people of Sierra Leone especially during our current period of Post Ebola Recovery and Transition.

Mr Chairman, as you maybe aware, the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) ravaged the three Mano River Union countries, including my country Sierra Leone. The epidemic devastated all areas of economic and social development. Before the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic, Sierra Leone was rated among the fastest growing economies in the world, but our gains have been reversed significantly. I am however consoled by the belief that Sierra Leoneans are resilient people and without doubt, we will rise above

the challenges holding us down presently to a height never previously achieved. To achieve this ambition we will obviously need the continued support of UNESCO.

Mr Chairman, I am saddened to report that we lost over 200 medical personnel including doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, pharmacists and other paramedics to Ebola. Additionally, thousands of children in my country have become orphans. We are however encouraged by the fact that through out our trying times UNESCO, and fellow African and other Countries including International Organizations and nongovernmental organizations rendered help to our country in the form of medical personnel, medication and equipment to end the tragedy.

Mr Chairman, Distinguished Delegates, I wish to inform you that the three governments of the Mano River Union have embarked on massive Post Ebola Recovery Programmes and will therefore welcome assistance in all the areas that have been tremendously hit, especially education and health.

Mr. Chairman, through the support of UNESCO and other international partners Sierra Leone continues, even in the face of Ebola, to make significant progress in a number of areas in education.

School level enrolment continues to surge. Although we do not have all children of primary school age (6–11 years) in school, enrolment at the primary level exceeds the number of 6 to 11 year olds in the country. Enrolment at the secondary level is now increasing at a faster rate than at the primary level. Our challenge now is not just a matter of constructing more secondary schools but also ensuring that we have enough teachers that have the capacity to teach at all levels.

Gender parity in enrolment has been achieved at the primary level and noteworthy progress is being made at the secondary level. In fact in the majority of local council areas there are now more girls than boys in primary school. Gender parity is yet to be achieved in performance in the end of school level examinations conducted by the

West African Examinations Council (WAEC) but there are encouraging signs that the gap is narrowing.

Mr Chairman, Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) continue to be at the heart of plans for the education of our youths. My delegation regards UNESCO as a partner who can support Africa to successfully implement the TVET strategy that was adopted by the African Union. Effective and successful implementation of this strategy would result in practical skills transfer to our youths. In this regard, with the support of UNESCO we have developed a TVET policy, carried out a situation analysis of TVET and started work on a national TVET curriculum; but there is still a great deal to be done. We now anxiously look forward to action on the October 2009 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) UNESCO signed with the Government of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Chairman, we are revamping higher education in Sierra Leone. We are encouraging positive competition, encouraging the introduction of courses and programmes relevant to our present and immediate future needs as well as encouraging reputable external universities willing to offer programmes that we need but are not being offered by our local institutions to establish campuses in-country. At the same time we are providing the resources that will enable our public higher education institutions to meet our essential manpower needs and be more competitive by significantly increasing subvention whilst at the same time increasing accountability and value for money.

I wish to state at this point that all interventions detailed in our post-Ebola strategy document and Recovery Plan have their origin in our Education Sector Plan (ESP) for 2014–2018:– Learning to Succeed and our Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper III (PRSP III):– The Agenda for Prosperity 2013–2018.

Our ESP has 3 main goals: Goal 1: to improve access, equity, and completion; Goal 2: to improve the quality and relevance of education; Goal 3: to strengthen education service delivery. These goals are the backbone of the objectives and strategies in the

education section of our PRSP III but with an extra emphasis on skills training, TVET and higher education.

Culture and Tourism come in for much attention in our PRSP III – Our tourism potential is undeniable– we have beautiful beaches, many historical sites and relics as well as lush animal-rich mountain forests in the north of the country and great fishing spots. The Ebola epidemic has dulled our tourism potential a little but we are at the point of developing a re-branding package that we hope will help with our image in the world and change perceptions. In this regard we look forward to action being taken on the elements of cultural, historical and tourism support detailed in the October 2009 MOU UNESCO signed with the Government of Sierra Leone.

In the Information and Communication sectors the Government has encouraged the growth of a free press and there are several private radio, print and television outfits all over the country. The Government is poised to design a long-term program on information and communication in Sierra Leone, with a focus on developing a national communications strategy; training of journalists and capacity building of media practitioners.

Mr. Chairman, there are a lot more development issues and constraints relative to the field of UNESCO's competence. But for want of time, and in order not to bore this distinguished body, I will leave further details for elaboration and discussion at the other appropriate segment meetings of the Conference. The simple message of this short presentation is to inform this distinguished body that Sierra Leone needs strong collaboration in order to fully implement its Post Ebola Recovery and Transition Programme.

We need your support, and the time is now!

Thank you for your attention and happy deliberations.