



**Government of Sierra Leone  
Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education  
NEW ENGLAND VILLE  
Freetown**

## **Sierra Leone's Experience with Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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### **Presentation Outline:**

- ❖ **Overview**
- ❖ **Measures put in place by the Education sector to enhance teaching and learning in the midst of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone.**
- ❖ **Summary of explanation on the financing gap**
- ❖ **Recommendations**
- ❖ **Conclusion**

# Overview

- ❖ Sierra Leone has an educational system based on the 6-3-3-4. At the moment, we have about 2.5million school population (Pre-primary, Primary, Junior and Secondary schools).
- ❖ Sierra Leone was the last country in the Mano River Union (MRU) basin to record a positive case of the COVID-19 virus, on **31 March 2020** marking also the closure of schools and colleges. As of 16 November, 2020, the country now has **2,391** (cumulative) total cases, **1,822** recoveries, and **74** deaths (**Worldometer, 2020**). It is important to note that the figures are those officially reported and based on tests done at COVID-19 related test facilities established by the government.
- ❖ Prior to the index case, the country implemented strategies that were largely proactive and innovative measures to prevent the pandemic from entering the country. This could be attributed to lessons learned from the Ebola epidemic in 2014/2015. These include:
  - Robust screening at the airport for all passengers coming into the country.
  - Quarantining of travelers from countries regarded as epicenters.
  - Engagement with local leaders to enable the use of local structures for sensitization purposes.
  - Promoting the use of handwashing facilities (veronica buckets and soap) in public places, including offices.

# Measures put in place by the Education sector to mitigate COVID-19 in Sierra Leone.

- ❖ Under the leadership of the Hon. Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, Dr. David Moinina Sengeh, a Senior Management Meeting was convened and decision taken to set up committees with established Terms of References;
- ❖ Committees were headed/chaired by Directors of the Ministry of Education and co-chaired by development partners representatives’;
- ❖ Four (4) committees were developed under four (4) pillars namely:
  - (i) Pillar One: Communications and Media
  - (ii) Pillar Two: Continuous Distance Learning
  - (iii) Pillar Three: Schools Reopening
  - (iv) Pillar Four: Operations, Planning and Policy

# Measures put in place cont.

- ❖ Whilst the Communications and Media Pillar was headed by the MBSSE Communications Specialist (Mr. Phodei Ibrahim Sheriff) with the UNICEF Chief of Education (Celeste Staley) as the Co-head/chair, the Continuous Distance Learning pillar was chaired by the Chair of the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), Dr. Staneala Beckley, and co-chaired by the EU Education Programme Manager (Giuseppe Paglioni). The Schools Reopening Pillar was headed by the Inspectorate Director (Mr. Mohamed Sillah Sesay) who was also supported by the World Bank Senior Education Specialist (Dr. Mari Shojo) and the Operations, Planning and Policy pillar was headed by the Chief Education Officer (CEO), Dr. Yatta Kanu and she was assisted by the DfID-UK Senior Education Advisor (Colin Bangay).
- ❖ Pillar Leads held their committee meetings on different days and at different time to discuss the best way possible in tackling the further spread of COVID-19 especially when the Ministry of Education had planned to reopen schools and colleges.
- ❖ All the 4 pillars came up with plans aligned with the Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP). The radio teaching programmes were introduced across all the 190 chiefdoms in the country with support from the TSC. Development partners assisted with solar radios as well as those that used batteries and memory sticks for both teachers and pupils to save their lessons.

# Measures put in place cont.

- ❖ Development partners (National and International) in education also formed part of the memberships of the four different groups as they deemed fit based on their respective interventions;
- ❖ The Committees in their various committees came up with plans that were aligned with the Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP) that identified a financing gap;
- ❖ Based on initial simulations, the government has revised the projected GDP growth figures and revenue loss for 2020 according to potential outcomes (see the [COVID-19 Quick Action Economic Response Programme/QAERP](#)):
- ❖ **Scenario 1 (best case):** There are numerous positive cases and fatalities in trading partner and donor countries, but no positive cases in Sierra Leone. Under this scenario, projected GDP growth rate is revised from 4.2% to 3.8% and a revenue loss of 9%.

# Measures put in place cont.

- ❖ **Scenario 2 (worst case):** Positive cases in Sierra Leone result in short term nationwide movement restrictions. Here, the projected GDP growth rate is revised from 4.2% to 2.2% and a revenue loss of 15%.
- ❖ **Scenario 3:** In addition to continued disruptions globally, positive cases emerge domestically, the country's health system becomes overwhelmed, and more significant 'lockdown' measures are introduced for a more extended period. Under this scenario, projected GDP growth rate is revised from 4.2% to negative.
- ❖ The QAERP's primary objective is to be able to respond to the health crisis as well as mitigate the socio-economic challenges that will emerge as a result of the pandemic. These included among others the education sector. The programme costs are as follows:

Scenario	Total Cost (USD Million)	Financing Gap (USD Million)
Scenario One(Best case)	231.4	161.3
Scenario Two (Worse case)	304.1	234
Scenario Three	379.5	309.4

**The Table above shows estimated cost and financing gap to support the Government of Sierra Leone’s Quick Action Economic Response Programme (QAERP).**

# Summary of explanation on the financing gap

- ❖ Clearly, for all the scenarios, there is a huge financing gap. The country is already struggling with a huge debt burden (both foreign and domestic). *If the option of financing the gap is through additional borrowing, the impact will be catastrophic.* Recognizing this, development partners announced debt relief, and in some cases moratorium, as well as concessionary loans and grants to help provide the fiscal space needed to support the government efforts in the fight against COVID-19.



# Recommendations

## ❖ **Awareness and prevention**

While the government continues to introduce measures to contain and prevent the spread of the pandemic, recent political tensions (particularly between the government and the main opposition) has undermined the response effort. Social mobilization efforts are also affected as the media (particularly social media) is awash with inciting political messages, instead of COVID-19 prevention and awareness messages. Therefore, conscious effort should be made to de-escalate the political tension and refocus everyone's effort on the response.

## ❖ **Inclusive stakeholder coordination**

It goes without saying that a coordinated and inclusive approach will help boost social mobilization efforts and help contain the pandemic. Therefore, it is important for the government to review its coordination strategy to include all stakeholders including opposition parties. The lessons from the Ebola crisis clearly suggest that there was significant acceptance of the social mobilization messages when political parties and community leaders joined forces with the government.

# Recommendations cont.

- ❖ **An adaptive and long-term response**

Finally, while the swift attempt by government to prepare a response programme is highly commendable, given the evolving nature of the pandemic, backed by the additional data now available, it is important for the government to review QAERP to not only reflect the new realities, but the underlying challenges the country was facing even before the crisis.

# Implementation of Recommendations

- ❖ On the issue of awareness and Prevention, the Ministry of Education continues to raise awareness on the use of face-masks and handwashing by all pupils as well as students and the use of face-mask and hand washing is encouraging among educational institutions;
- ❖ For inclusive stakeholder coordination, the Ministry of Education has ensured that no one is left behind in the fight against COVID-19. The two ministries (Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education) continue to collaborate with support from development partners, both national and international. This synergy enhance safe reopening of schools and colleges across the country about 7 week now with no reported case of COVID-19.
- ❖ In the case of an adaptive and long-term response to address the challenges Sierra Leone continues to embark on robust data collection to be able to make evidence-based decisions in the fight against COVID-19.

# Recommendations cont.

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The Ministry has developed a five year strategic plan and just completed and presented its 2021 budget to the Ministry of Finance for approval. In the plan and budget, we have allocations budgets for curriculum development, expansion of continuous distance learning, intensification of health and health-related messages in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and our development partners.

# Conclusion

- ▶ The fight against COVID-19 has never been easy for Sierra Leone but with concerted efforts and donor support, backed by massive and constructive awareness raising and sensitization programmes at all levels, we have been able as a country through National Coronavirus Response Center (NACOVERC) zero case report since schools reopened.

**END OF PRESENTATION AND THANKS  
FOR YOUR AUDIENCE**

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