

# How is gender equality included in education sector planning?

An analysis of power, voice and social change in Sierra Leone

**Sierra Leone Country Report**

## Annex D.3 Sierra Leone Country Report

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## List of Acronyms

<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisation
<b>EFA</b>	Education for All
<b>EMIS</b>	Education Management Information System
<b>ESP</b>	Education Sector Planning
<b>FAWE</b>	Forum for African Women Educationalists
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Organisation
<b>FGM</b>	Female Genital Mutilation
<b>GPE</b>	Global Partnership of Education
<b>IIEP</b>	Institute for International Educational Planning
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>JSR</b>	Joint Sector Review
<b>LEG</b>	Local Education Group
<b>MBSSE</b>	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
<b>MSWGCA</b>	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
<b>MTHE</b>	Ministry of Technical and Higher Education
<b>TVET</b>	Technical, Vocational and Educational Training
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>WASH</b>	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

## Context and overview of planning process

Although the last two decades have seen considerable progress on global commitments to address gender disparities in education, many challenges remain. Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are still furthest from equality in educational access and achievement, with factors such as poverty and location compounding with discriminatory gender norms to exclude girls from education (UNESCO 2022b). Through the [Gender at the Centre Initiative \(GCI\)](#), a program that encourages Ministries of Education to embed gender equality at the heart of education systems, a study was commissioned to examine how gender equality is integrated in education sector planning in 8 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Niger and Sierra Leone). The synthesis report identifies examples of good practice, opportunities and threats to promote gender transformative education systems. This country report presents the findings of the analysis for Sierra Leone.

The Education Sector Plan (ESP) planning process for Sierra Leone was led by the Ministry of Education, with support from selected consultants and key stakeholders within ministries, across civil society organisations (CSO's) and technical partners. It was financed by a development grant from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). The process started with the Education Sector Analysis (ESA) in 2020 supported by the UNESCO - International Institute of Educational Planning (UNESCO-IIEP). A Joint Sector Review (JSR) was conducted in 2021 and following this a consultation for the current plan in mid-2021 as part of the support provided with the Gender at the Centre Initiative. An education sector plan appraisal was also completed in May 2022, again supported by UNESCO-IIEP. Although the Sierra Leone ESP is yet to be completed, the development process was chosen as the case study for this report as it is the most current planning process available.

Sierra Leone operates in a challenging context. Statistics show that in 2020, the total population was 7.9 million of which 51% are girls and women. In 2019, 40% of the population was below 15 years old. The country regularly ranks low on global indices such as the Gender Inequality Index (ranking of 182 out of 189 in 2019) which is a composite index of health, empowerment, economic participation, and educational attainment.

This analysis focusses on the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2022-26 planning process in Sierra Leone. It was based on 12 interviews with stakeholders:

3 Ministry representatives, 5 CSO/ NGO, 2 consultants and 3 Technical partners

6 men, and 6 women.

## Thematic Findings

### Political Economy

#### Political will

The interviews showed that there is strong and high-level commitment to gender equality in education and clear political will to capture this commitment in policies and plans in the sector.

For example, all the stakeholders interviewed cited the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Education published in 2021 as a key driver for including gender equality in planning process. This policy has evolved over recent years but was launched under the current Education Ministry leadership, who have been active in their support and engagement for this policy. Key benefits of this Ministry endorsement of gender equality were evident in planning discussions as interviewees said they felt comfortable promoting initiatives that may previously have been considered controversial, such as pregnant girls being encouraged to continue their education.

The realisation of the Radical Inclusion Policy was supported by an active network of civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGO) who remain keen to hold the government to account on education rights and gender equality.

Further evidence of strong political will, although not specifically education focused, is another recent high-level commitment to gender equality in Sierra Leone: the Gender Empowerment Bill in 2021 which aims to reserve 30% of seats for women in parliamentary and local elections and in appointed public positions.

Despite the inclusive culture and high-level commitment to the Radical Inclusion Policy seen in the draft Education System Plan (ESP), some gaps are also observed. The ESP log frame, for example, lacks the detail needed to monitor gender equality commitments and follow up actions.

Lack of financial and human resources committed to gender are the most common factors quoted for slow progress or poor delivery on gender transformative strategies in education. The majority of interviewees gave examples of efforts by the Ministry that were not yet transformative, such as only providing basic facilities of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in schools, with the more transformative efforts falling beyond the financial capacity of the Ministry budgets. Interviewees also reported that the Ministry's dependence on funds from development partners to realise more ambitious efforts to address gender inequalities was limiting.

## Accountability

Accountability for delivery of gender equality in education is limited by lack of data, lack of staff and lack of clear structures, especially outside of Freetown.

Most stakeholders interviewed for this study struggled to articulate how and where accountability mechanisms exist that can hold duty bearers to account for delivering against gender equality ambitions in the Radical Inclusion Strategy. In the draft ESP, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) is responsible for 'ensuring educational rights for girls, children with disabilities and other marginalised groups', with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education (MBSSE) and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE) responsible for gender mainstreaming.

Accountability mechanisms of districts and boards of governors and school management committees address maintaining standards in teaching and learning, but this level does not appear to have a role in upholding gender commitments.

It is notable that the draft ESP highlights that, although monitoring standards and expectations exists in districts, quality assurance officers, boards of governors and school management committees struggle to fulfil their monitoring and supervisory responsibilities due to lack of staff and time.

The Education System Analysis (ESA) from 2020 records that the previous ESP had disjointed data reporting systems, which undermined accountability to deliver on gender equality . Accountability and reporting mechanisms on individual performance are noted in the ESA ; Yet these exist at central institution levels and agencies but are not being systematically used in the districts. It is unclear if this performance system has a feature which registers individual performance towards upholding commitments to gender equality.

Key informants also mentioned current data gaps to inform education decisions, including the lack of sex disaggregated data on Technical Vocational and Education Training (TVET). Children's Forums who report to the MSWGCA and intervene with the schools on behalf of young people to ensure commitments of inclusion are upheld was one positive district-level accountability loop that was mentioned in interviews. Several stakeholders verified that this exists and had potential to be effective but is still not widespread or robust enough.

## Relationships

### Power and decision-making

Although invitations to smaller working groups demonstrated 'power over' who was invited or excluded, stakeholders felt that the planning spaces gave 'power to' actors, encouraging constructive dialogue where contributions were valued.

Power hierarchies were evident in who was invited to be part of planning exercises with some stakeholders reporting some organisations were excluded or underrepresented in working groups or other forums for consultation. However, interviewees involved in the design and invitation to working groups indicated that the intention of being prescriptive around invitations was to ensure a gender balanced representation from the stakeholders involved.

Planning stakeholders commended the culture that encouraged critical feedback, allowing draft plans to be discussed and filtered through the LEG consortium. The majority of stakeholders felt that inputs provided through these channels were considered. This iterative process allowed actors to see how and where their inputs were integrated and offered them the opportunity to validate subsequent drafts.

### Networks and Coalitions

There are strong coalitions and civil society groups committed to gender transformative change, but these groups are not yet using their collective strength systematically to influence education gender equality in and through education.

The Local Education Group (LEG) coordinated by the World Bank is comprised of donors, NGOs and CSO coalitions. It clearly exerts significant influence, and the number of members with gender equality expertise is significant. Youth and education coalition bodies highlighted that they had significant influence and status in planning processes and within the LEG due to their representation of large networks of other organisations. However, interviewees reported that the LEG has neither a standing gender item on their agenda nor a sub-group focusing on gender; both could improve coordination on and attention to gender in planning and beyond.

Several stakeholders mentioned how donors exerted influence on the government through, for example, ensuring that agreements were contingent on high level commitments to deliver on gender equality in and through education.



Although not directly targeted at the planning process itself, alternative methods to claim space to influence decisions in education support were mentioned by the CSO Education For All (EFA) coalition which worked with a campaign organisation called Equity Now. The campaign used social media to create public interest and put pressure for prioritisation of specific issues such as the ban on school re-entry of girls when pregnant. They felt prompting a wider dialogue in the media on key topics has the power to generate pressure from public opinion to accelerate key policy decisions in education and that this could be used in influencing education planning in the future.

## Voices

### Gender expertise

Resourcing and positioning of gender expertise in the education ministries is weak, resulting in a dependency on external expertise to bolster technical input at critical moments in the planning cycle.

Interviewees reported that in the ESP planning process, the weight of gender expertise sits with the CSOs, international non-governmental organisations (INGO's) and technical partners, including UNESCO and donor communities. Feedback from actors within these sectors reported a lack of gender expertise across the education ministry, with the education ministry 'gender unit' being under-resourced and not invited to key moments across the planning process. The lack of gender expertise at the Director level in the Ministry of Education was mentioned by most stakeholders as a key weakness in delivering on ambitions towards gender equality in planning and other implementation decisions.

A notable success in the planning process was the input of technical gender expertise in the ESA that pre-dated the ESP in 2020. This was delivered by the Education Ministry gender unit with support from an external gender expert provided through UNESCO-IIEP as part of the GCI supporting. This report included robust gender analysis in a dedicated chapter as well as including gender as a cross-cutting theme across the rest of the ESA. This was widely seen by other gender allies as a key achievement. An ESP Appraisal completed by an external body using the GPE education sector appraisal framework, has picked up several areas of incoherence or gaps regarding gender, where the plan does not respond to the evidence presented in the ESA.

During the planning phase, the Ministry representatives were expected to play the role of 'gender champions' for their departments, which is a responsibility that is not contingent on existing gender expertise. It was reported by planners that 'gender champions' were included in each of the ESP working groups, however, these representatives reported that they were not always confident in the technical aspects of this responsibility. Gender experts from INGOs and CSOs were also included as part of the working groups in the ESP planning but saw some of their more transformative inputs overlooked or watered down in the draft that was

then shared for review. This process of filtering out was attributed to the absence of gender expertise in writing teams who made final decisions on planning drafts.

"Senior Staff who are not gender experts are given gender responsibilities as an 'add-on' to their existing role. We would really benefit from some technical training on gender to be able to deliver on these expectations." - Ministry Gender Champion

## Voices of young people and communities

ESP consultation processes included intentional efforts to reach diverse community members, young people and girls in particular, though this intention wasn't followed through into the smaller working group phase.

The interviewees from the Ministry and CSOs reported that significant district-wide consultation processes were conducted with a variety of stakeholders including students, teachers' associations, head teachers, local government, traditional leaders, CSO's and youth networks to feed into both the analysis and the ESP. Some respondents highlighted that due to time constraints the community consultation in the planning process was limited and was not as widespread as desired. Young people were consulted as part of a district consultation process supported by EFA and Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), with intentional space made for girls to be included. Issues such as bullying and support for pregnant girls were fed back into the ESP planning process through the EFA coalition. Other stakeholders however felt that young people were notably absent in the formalised ESP working group meetings. Several interviewees indicated that, their absence could undermine the strength and applicability of the plan, particularly for girls.

"Young people were not included in the writing chapters of the ESP working groups; this is all about them; they should have a much greater role." - CSO representative, Sierra Leone

## Society

### Social norms

More could be done at a central level to engage and create alliances with key norm holders who influence education.

Many interviewees highlighted the powerful role traditional leaders play in promoting implementation of the ESP and shifting harmful attitudes and beliefs that impact on education and inclusion. Influencing social norms does not feature in the ESP draft as a key strategic area for engagement, despite this being an area identified by the ESA and known to be at the root cause of many gender inequalities and exclusion of marginalised groups. Gender experts from across the CSO and NGO sectors highlighted the missed opportunity in the ESP for the government to strategically engage religious and traditional leaders to address key issues such as violence, child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) that are all known to have a profound effect on education, particularly for girls.

“The ESP does not address social norms clearly enough. Suggestions for the Ministry to directly engage traditional leaders to support girls’ education were missed. We consider these engagements key as they will make a significant difference to more transformative progress on gender equality in education.” - INGO Gender Expert

## Resistance

Resistance mainly manifested as a reluctance or inability to commit adequate resources to gender transformative interventions and was couched as the need for prioritisation of activities. None of the stakeholders reported any direct resistance to efforts to promote and deliver on gender equality specifically. The political will behind the Radical Inclusion Policy was often cited as the reason for the lack of more overt resistance, as a reluctance to engage would be seen as undermining this important government policy. The implication of this finding is that the presence of strong political will to address gender equality can quash resistance, making it harder to voice it openly where it does exist.

## SWOT Analysis

### 3.1 Strengths

The political will behind the Radical Inclusion Policy is a major strength. Having a government that publicly endorses these principles allows gender advocates to hold actors to account at all levels and create a culture where discussions about solutions to gender equality are encouraged.

The inclusion of diverse voices in the pre-planning consultation phases is a notable strength. It indicates how the Ministry values consultation with multiple stakeholders in planning and delivery, such as young people, teachers, traditional leaders and community members.

The gender input to the Education Sector Analysis created an evidence-based foundation upon which the planning process and the ESP Appraisal could build.

The transparent and iterative decision-making process allowed several rounds of input for gender experts to have a chance to review and offer feedback on ESP drafts.

The active engagement of varied stakeholders in the ESP Appraisal process has also allowed gender related inconsistencies between the ESA and ESP to be addressed before the plan is finalised.

The presence of an active network of NGO, CSO and technical partners committed to gender equality in education provides additional funding and expertise to support the Ministry to deliver on their commitments.

### 3.2 Weaknesses

There is a disconnect between the high-level commitment to gender equality, and the technical resourcing of and engagement with gender experts within the Ministry and in the planning processes. A key bottleneck identified is the lack of senior level gender experts who can be part of the decision making and writing stages of the process.

Despite gender guidance at the financial prioritisation stage, the level of funds available from central sources means activities with more transformative potential are missed or expected to be picked up through funding from donors or NGOs and CSOs partners, which is less secure.

### 3.3 Opportunities

There is a receptive senior level audience who are willing to receive further training and support on gender transformative leadership.

Positioning technical gender expertise at a senior decision-making level with associated human resource and budget would be a real asset in planning and delivery.

There is an opportunity to improve the cross-sector coordination of education actors with a focus on gender equality through the LEG framework, which will strengthen efforts to keep gender on the agenda.

Given their position and influence, there is an opportunity to engage with and better include religious and traditional leaders in the ESP processes. This should also support the inclusion of budget to address social norm change in the implementation plan from a central level.

Further investment and support for local and regional level accountability mechanisms, which already exist and are ripe for this support, will energise ownership of gender equality and inclusion at a local and regional levels.

### 3.4 Threats

Gender expertise within planning and leadership positions is given a low status, so is not always integrated into processes or high-level decisions from the start.

Delivery of this ESP at scale is threatened by poor cross-sectoral and regional coordination. These connections need stronger leadership to ensure services and regions are working together to deliver quality gender equitable education.

Accountability loops between multiple stakeholders such as the Ministry, development partners and regional offices are poorly articulated allowing for commitments made in the ESP on gender equality by the Ministry to be unmonitored/ unrecorded.

## Stakeholder analysis

Interviewees were asked to plot where they felt various actors sat on the following scale. While opinions varied, the matrix below does give an indication as to which groups could be targeted with different engagement strategies.

### Stakeholder Matrix

Within key informant interviews the researchers included a stakeholder mapping exercise. KII's were asked to plot actors on two axes: level of power and influence; and commitment to positive change on gender equality in education.

This exercise resulted in a mapping of actors in four groupings:

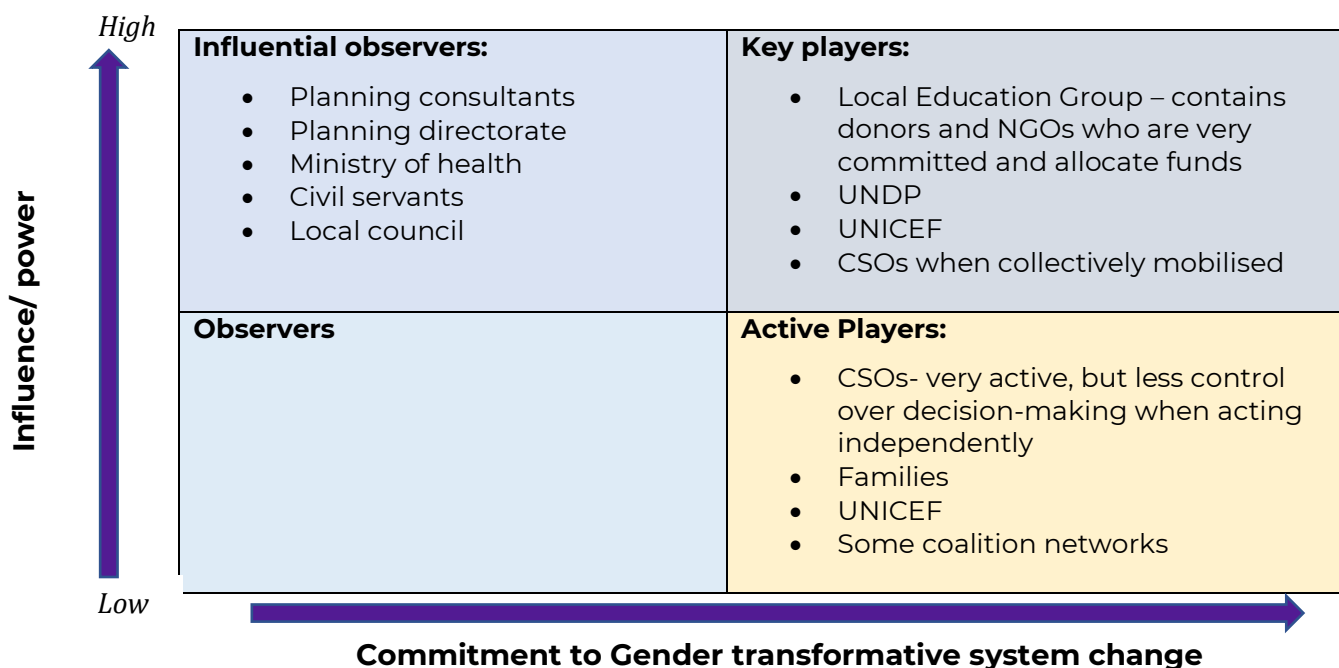
**Influential observers:** High power, low commitment to gender equality

**Key players:** High influence and high commitment

**Active players:** high commitment, lower influence

**Observers:** Low influence, low commitment

The results are valuable at country level to consider methods of influence to engage different actors or targeted in advocacy campaigns.”



## List of Documents Reviewed

1. Draft Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan: Transforming Learning for All 2022 -2026
2. Independent appraisal of Sierra Leone ESP 2022-26 May 2022
3. Republic of Sierra Leone Education Sector Analysis 2020
4. National Policy on Radical Inclusion in Schools 2021
5. Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan 2018 -2020
6. GPE/IIEP/UNESCO Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Preparation
7. GPE/IIEP/UNESCO Guidelines for Education Sector Plan Appraisal