

**UNITED NATIONS
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2021 VNR REPORT ON SDGs IN SIERRA LEONE



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

JUNE 2021

Foreword

Despite the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sierra Leone has been able to prepare its third Voluntary National Review (VNR) report for presentation at the 2021 High-Level Political Forum on the SDGs. We will be among the countries presenting progress report on these UN Goals the highest number of times, which demonstrates our Government's sustained commitment to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

We have continued to follow a strategic approach to implementing the SDGs, as we remain steadfast in upholding two of the 17 Goals as our accelerators that are deemed cardinal in the transformation of our economy and building long-term resilience for sustainable development. The two accelerators are: SDG 4 (inclusive education) and SDG16 (justice, peace and inclusive society) which are also key in the process of advancing the achievement of other SDGs. The report also covers nine other priority goals for 2021, namely: Goal 1 (ending poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 3 (health), 5 (gender), 8 (decent work), 10 (inequality), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate change) and 17 (means of implementation).

With the full participation of stakeholders, we successfully generated large data set from nationwide consultations on the 11 Goals, leading to a comprehensive report that was validated by all the institutions involved in the process, including government ministries, departments and agencies; parliament, local councils, civil society organisations including those for persons with disabilities; and the private sector, the media, research institutions and development partners.

As a third-timer VNR country, we present an evaluative report, showcasing SDGs policy impact on the welfare of our people, comparing results today with those in our last VNR in 2019. We rapidly pulled primary and secondary data on all 11 priority SDGs. More especially, we embarked on a deeper rapid impact assessment of key policy interventions towards achieving the targets of our accelerator Goals 4 and 16.

For Goal 4 on education, we did basic evaluation of the impact of the government Free Quality School Education Programme on the welfare of pupils and parents, as well as education outcome for the primary level, focusing on school feeding support, tuition fee grant and teaching and learning material support. For Goal 16 on justice, we did a simple evaluation of the impact of the legal aid assistance that government accords the less privileged, including free legal representation and advice.

Furthermore, the prioritisation of education and justice has been done within the country's *Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap* and our pioneering role as *Chair of the g7+ group* of conflict and conflict-affected countries, coordinating international efforts to walk fragile countries towards resilience and sustainable development.

Let me thank all those that participated in the preparation of our third report, including our esteemed development partners, more so the UNDP, UNICEF and UNFPA, who complemented the government's financial resources for the process. We are grateful to civil society organisations, the private sector, research institutions, the media, central government institutions, parliament, and local councils and communities. We are thankful that the inclusive and concerted efforts of these institutions made it possible to produce this report within a very short period without leaving any one behind.

Hon. Francis M. KaiKai (Ph.D)
Minister of Planning and Economic Development

Acknowledgement

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development would like to express its profound thanks and appreciation to all the organisations that participated in the preparation of Sierra Leone's third Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report for the 2021 United Nations High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the SDGs. The report could not have been comprehensively done within a very short period in these extraordinary COVID-19 trying times if it had not been the concerted and sustained efforts by the central and local government institutions, working in close collaboration with a wide range of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), the university, the private sector, the media and development partners. We are very grateful to the Sierra Leone Parliament, especially the Parliamentary Committee on the SDGs for their support in the entire VNR process. The Sierra Leone integrated CSO platform on the SDGs deserves special recognition for taking the lead in local-level data collection and consultations across the 16 districts of the country with limited resources. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) deserve recognition in this endeavour. They provided most of the financial resources utilised to produce this report, in addition to the Government's resources. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has also been supportive in financing some technical sessions, as well as the Voluntary Service Overseas Sierra Leone for financing some aspects of the field data collection. We recognise all those who made contributions to the preparation of this report that we could not mention here.



Acronyms

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DDCCs	District Development Coordination Committees
DFA	Development Financing Assessment
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FQSEP	Free Quality School Education Programme
GST	Goods and Services Tax
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCD	Human Capital Development
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
ICDP	International Conference on Population Development
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
LDC	Least-Developed Country
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDAs	Ministries Departments and Agencies
MFAIC	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MLHE	Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan
MWR	Ministry of Water Resources
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MCPR	Multidimensional Child Poverty Report
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NRA	National Revenue Authority
NSA	Non-State Actors
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PWDs	Persons Living with Disabilities
PPP	People's Planning Process
PFM	Public Financial Management
QAERP	Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SLIHS	Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

UNDP
VNR
WASSCE

United Nations Development Programme
Voluntary National Review
West African Senior School Certificate Examination



Table of Contents

Foreword 2

Acknowledgement 3

Acronyms 4

Key Highlights of the Report 8

The review processes 8

Summary of SDGs progress 9

Integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs and leaving no one behind 12

Among good practices and lessons 12

Challenges to the SDGs 12

Introduction 13

National strategic policy context 13

Focus and objective of the 2021 VNR Report 14

Organization of the Report 15

The COVID-19 Effect in the 2021 VNR Process 16

Macroeconomic effects 16

Household effects 18

Methodology of the Review Process 21

Consultations and data collection framework 21

Coordination of the VNR process 25

Limitation of the process 26

Assessment of the Policy and Enabling Environment for the SDGs 27

Creating ownership of the SDGs 27

Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals into national frameworks 27

Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development 28

Leaving No One Behind 28

Institutional mechanisms 31

Structural issues, including population and fragility management 31

Progress on Accelerator SDG 4 Education 34

Rapid impact assessment of Government Free Quality School Education Programme at primary level 34

An impact assessment on education using UReport Technology 41

At indicator level 41

Progress on Accelerator SDG 16 Justice 44

Rapid impact assessment of legal assistance provided by the government to the less privileged 44

Welfare impact of legal representation—Beneficiary level response 47

Status of health of beneficiaries before and after legal assistance 49

General beneficiary perception as to the impact of the Board Legal Assistance Scheme 49

Other areas under SDG 16 49

Progress on SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13	51
Means of Implementation SDG 17	59
Domestic revenue reforms	59
Private sector development	60
Development cooperation and NGO operations	61
Implementing an Integrated National Financing Framework	61
Summary of resource flows	62
Government development expenditure and donor/NGOs resource support	64
Strengthening local service delivery system	68
Science, technology and innovation	69
Statistical systems, monitoring and evaluation and public sector performance management	70
The COVID-19 Response and Recovery Efforts	71
The National COVID-19 Health Preparedness Response	72
The Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme (QAERP)	74
Financing Economic and Health Response	75
Among key measures and deliverables pursued in the Health Response Plan	75
Economic Response Plan	76
Other sources of financing and general coordination of response	77
The UN-Driven Response and Recovery Plan for Sierra Leone	77
Conclusion and Next Step	79
Summary of the review process and SDGs progress	79
Summary of challenges	79
Among key lessons learned	80
Recommendations	80
Next Steps	81

Key Highlights of the Report

Sierra Leone remains steadfast in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs despite the extraordinary challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in the last nearly two years. The Government had implemented its new Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP, 2019-2023) for only eight months when this global pandemic hit with unspeakable effects that ravaged the world economy with severe consequences on the already highly vulnerable sub-Saharan African economies to external shocks. In Sierra Leone, for example, the initial momentum that was gathered on the country's MTNDP (2019-2023), which is the basis for implementing the SDGs at national level, was precipitously dampened by the pandemic.

Against the background of these extraordinary times, coupled with the country specific development context, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) continued to follow a highly strategic approach to sustainable development, constantly ensuring that it prioritised among priorities. It has accordingly sustained its principal focus on the country's accelerator SDGs projected to the UN in 2019: SDG4 (on inclusive education) and SDG16 (peace, justice and inclusive societies, emphasising building strong institutions). The two goals remain leading dimensions to the transformational agenda of the state, while we continue to pay attention to the rest of the other goals—basic analysis suggests that SDGs 4 and 16 relatively have greater effects on those other goals.

As a third-timer VNR country (following its previous reviews in 2016 and 2019), our 2021 report is highly evaluative. It showcases the policy impact of strategic state initiatives undertaken in pursuit of Goals 4 and 16, first and foremost, and then the rest of the 2021 VNR Goals prioritised by the UN: SDGs 1 on *ending poverty*, 2 on *zero hunger*, 3 on *health*, 5 on *gender*, 8 on *decent work*, 10 on *inequality*, 12 on *responsible production and consumption*, 13 on *climate change*, and 17 on *means of implementation and partnerships*. It is therefore hoped that this report will share useful lessons from Sierra Leone, as the country hopes to learn from other member states presenting this year.

A. The review process

The review process for 2021 was highly participatory. All relevant stakeholders—government institutions, parliament, civil society/non-governmental organisations, Development Partners, local councils and traditional leaders/community people, persons with disability, women and young people (including children), the wider media, and the private sector—stayed the course of playing their expected roles in the process, as before. They participated in intensive consultations at national and local/district levels, provided data, took part in SDGs sensitisation on radio/TV and in town/community halls, helped coordinate processes across the country, took part in data analysis and preparation of a range of field reports feeding into the comprehensive VNR report, assisted in updating SDGs Results Framework, and provided financial resources.

Among development partners, the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) continued to honour its traditional role of mobilising UN Agencies to support the review process through the Resident Coordinators Office. As always, the UNDP and UNICEF were central in providing financial support, besides their technical input, while the UNFPA played a laudable role in this year's

process, technically and financially in positioning the population management related issues in the report.

The data came from broad secondary and primary sources. As a report with huge but rapid welfare evaluation content, greater attention was paid to generating and reporting on information revealing policy impact dynamics, gauging testimonies of beneficiaries of interventions at household and community level, than on planned SDGs targets as contained in the SDGs Results Framework for which getting survey and related secondary data has always been a challenge. We have included in the report special updates, on the country international commitment to improving management of population growth and to walking out of fragility into resilience and sustainable development.

B. Summary of SDGs progress

Accelerator Goal 4 Inclusive Education

We undertook a rapid impact assessment of the Government Free Quality School Education Programme (FQSEP) in pursuit of the targets of SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive education. Of the 249 pupils, 252 parents and 83 school administrators interviewed from the 83 sampled government and government-assisted primary schools, more than 90 percent said they were generally satisfied with the government FQSEP across the 7 provincial districts visited. The specific components of the FQSEP analysed were: a) school feeding support; b) tuition fee grant by the government; and c) provision of core teaching and learning materials. We estimated from this assessment that parents having children in primary schools supported by the government could save about Le 800,000 (about US\$80) per pupil per year from this support; which can be invested in a small business in rural communities or used in meeting basic health expenditure, as the case may be, thereby impacting on other SDGs, such as 1 (reducing poverty), 2 (ending hunger), and 3 (health). Accordingly, school enrolment has increased and gender parity at primary level remains achieved, with the ratio of girl to boy enrolment estimated at 1.0 in 2020/21, compared to 1.03 in 2019/20 and 2018/19. A challenge to overcome, among others, is continued deployment of more qualified and motivated teachers to match school enrolment, coupled with the need for constant school supervision.

Accelerator Goal 16 Peace and Inclusive Justice

We undertook a rapid impact assessment of the government legal aid assistance across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone to gauge the welfare effects on the beneficiaries of interventions, especially the less privileged. Of the 153 beneficiaries interviewed (of which 99 were poor), more than 70 percent said they were satisfied with the legal assistance rendered them, ranging from free legal representation to general legal advice and application of alternative dispute resolution remedies. Indeed, 98 of the 99 poor beneficiaries interviewed said that they received assistance free of cost. Thus, if, say, a typical average fee for this assistance was Le 2 million (USD200) in any one instance, this amount could be saved by a poor individual beneficiary, which can be invested in a small business or used to meet other welfare needs, thereby impacting on other SDGs. We noted that more than 400,000 persons (a lot of them very poor, and freed from long-served prison remand without trial and indictment) have benefitted from legal assistance since the National Legal Aid Board was established in 2015. Additionally, more Magistrates and Judges

have been deployed in rural districts since the last country VNR Report in 2019 to reinforce access to justice in remote communities. A key challenge to overcome among others is the need to increase support for legal aid services and for the justice system in general.

Goals 1 Poverty, 2 Hunger and 10 Inequality

The country has made more gains in urban poverty reduction, currently estimating 34.8 percent (on 2018 survey calculation), compared to 46.9 in 2003/04; against rural poverty at 73.9 percent, compared to 78.7 percent in 2003/04—suggesting poverty remains a rural phenomenon in the country. Which is depicted in the multidimensional poverty index, the urban sector figure currently estimating 37.6 percent (on 2017 survey calculation), compared to 44.8 percent in 2015. This index jumped up from 78.9 percent to 86.3 percent for rural areas during 2015-2017. National level poverty measures 56.8 percent currently (on upward adjusted poverty line) or 47.3 percent on the same poverty line, compared to 52.9 percent in 2011 and 66.4 percent in 2003/04; multidimensional poverty overall dropping from 88.2 percent in 2003, to 68.3 percent in 2015 and 64.8 percent currently. Extreme poverty (a major measure of hunger reduction performance) follows the trend. At national and urban levels, extreme poverty declined from 14.43 and 7.8 percent in 2003/4, to 12.9 and 3.8 percent in 2018 data, respectively; while rural estimates slightly increased from 18.75 to 19.9 percent. Regarding inequality, government continued to roll out social protection support to the extremely poor, and community development programmes in rural communities through its National Commission for Social Action, while sustaining its special support for the girl child (related to Goal 5 efforts on gender), from a long-term investment perspective. It continues to provide special support for girls offering Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, and the First Lady’s “Hands-Off Our Girls” campaign to end child marriage and reduce teenage pregnancy. Substantial attention is also provided towards scaling up access to quality education for persons with disabilities, as well as justice and other needs. A key challenge relates to the need to improve poverty resource targeting to end extreme deprivation and inequality; while stepping up investment in human capital development to address these problems in the long-run.

Goal 3 Health

Over the period 2013-2019/20 the country decreased under-five mortality rate from 156 deaths in 2013 to 122 deaths in 2019/20 per 1,000 births; infant mortality dropping from 92 to 75 deaths per 1,000 births during the same period; as well as neonatal mortality rate, from 39 to 31 deaths per 1000 live births. Maternal mortality rate also dropped from 1165 in 2013 to 717 deaths per 100,000 live births during the period. This can be associated with a reduction in stunting children from 38 to 30 percent; wasted children from 9 to 5 percent; and underweight from 16 to 9.9 percent, during 2013-2019/20. However, HIV prevalence somehow increased from 1.5 to 1.7 percent among adults age 15-49 during 2013-2019 (women 2.2 percent in 2019 compared to 1.7 percent in 2013; men 1.3 percent in 2019 compared to 1.1 percent in 2013). The challenges to overcome include accessibility issues with regard to hard to reach areas due to poor terrain causing delays in delivering healthcare services on time; as well as traditional beliefs and values that limit in-take of healthcare information, coupled with inadequate skill birth attendants

Goal 5 Gender

Some progress has been made on key indicators for gender, such as on the share of women employed for cash in total number employed in non-agricultural activities, which currently stands at 45 percent, compared with 41 percent in 2013. The proportion of them experiencing sexual violence declined from 11 percent in 2013 to 7.0 percent in 2019. However, some indicators show some deterioration, such as on the percentage of women who have experienced physical violence since age 15, increasing from 56 percent in 2013 to 61 percent in 2019. The share of female members of parliament remains low at 13.6 percent against 30 percent threshold, although is above the 12 percent recorded in 2018/19. The share of female local councilors estimates 18.7 percent against the 50/50 target. Among the challenges to overcome include limited awareness raising, continued gender stereotypes and limited financial and general capacity constraints facing women.

Goal 8 Decent Work

Special attention has been paid to protecting the child against labour and ensuring a motivated work force, and work that is consistent with environmental sustainability. The percentage of children engaged in child labour reduced from 44.4 percent in 2013 to 29.3 percent in 2017, providing the current estimate. The minimum wage was increased by 20 percent from Le 500,000 to Le 600,000 to improve the lives of workers both in the private and public sectors. The legislative and policy environment is generally improving. There is an existence of Comprehensive Decent Work Programme, for instance, leading to the development of the Labour Market Information System and the National HIV/AIDS workplace policy, while facilitating domestication of International Conventions on the Elimination of Child Labour. Challenges to overcome include limited public sensitisation on the consequences of child labour and enforcement of related legislations and policies, and limited financing to support child development.

Goals 12 Responsible Production and Consumption and 13 Climate Change

A strategic institutional progress in this domain was the establishment of the Ministry of Environment in 2019 to increase the political investment in environmental management and sustainability. Along these efforts is also the establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency as a standalone institution from the Office of National Security to scale up national preparedness and response relating natural disaster for which constant follow-up on climate change related issues is critical. Operationally, during 2019-2020, the government conducted coastal vulnerability assessments at Municipal and Chiefdom levels in six pilot sites and determined the key climate-sensitive sectors and hazards in these pilot communities. It also assessed the vulnerability of specific economic sectors to predict climate change scenarios for the years 2025, 2050, 2100; all revealing that the coastal vulnerability ranking for the pilot communities was at the *medium-level*. Sustained technical and financial support is required going forward with government determination in this area.

Goal 17 Means of Implementation and Global Partnership for Development

While the country was not spared in the extraordinary fiscal and general challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, it generally remained resilient in the face of this scourge, managing to continue with financing of its programmes; thanks to the sustained cooperation it maintained with its development partners a number of whom scaled up and/or repurposed assistance during this period to keep the economy afloat. Domestic revenues dipped at the peak of the pandemic in 2020

but remained above the 2019 estimate. In the face of these challenges, we strengthened public financial management; deepened e-governance and central, sectoral and district/local level coordination, supported by the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation in the Office of the Presidency; while data and statistical systems were improved across board, as well as monitoring and evaluation and public sector performance management.

C. Integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs and leaving no one behind

Given the integrated, yet indivisible nature of the SDGs, government has continued to prioritise certain goals believed to have more transformative impact on the economy and other goals. These goals are SDGs 4 (education) and 16 (justice and strong institutions) as lead accelerator goals. We have also continued to monitor progress on a range of dimensions relating to addressing the *leaving no one behind* objective. Here, we continue to monitor livelihood risks of certain segments of society that require special assistance and attention whom otherwise could be left furthest behind.

D. Among good practices and lessons

Government is scaling up efforts at strengthening village/chiefdom level planning and plan implementation in the localisation of the national development plan and SDGs. Within the revenue mobilisation drive of the state, a Block Management System has been introduced whereby revenue collection posts are established within the vicinities of localised businesses and markets to reduce the distance between contributors and revenue collectors. Digital financing and literacy are also taking roots, with a special focus on mobilising the participation of informal economic operators in revenue generation and formal financial system.

E. Challenges to the SDGs

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a major challenge in the implementation of the SDGs in light of the financial and economic crunch it caused to the entire global economy with heightened vulnerability for least developed economies like Sierra Leone. This will continue to pose challenges to raising revenue-to-GDP ratios that are still way below 20 percent. Consequently, the government will continue to push on broadening financing options, exploring innovative ways in the process in the context of the implementation of the country's Integrated National Financing Framework. Transforming the informal sector, which continues to account for more than 50 percent of the economic operations remains critical in this direction.

1.

Introduction

Sierra Leone is presenting its third Voluntary National Review Report on the SDGs implementation. The country was last reviewed in 2019, after its first report in 2016. The 2019 report presented progress in advancing national institutional arrangement from the 2016 review to deliver the goals, while highlighting the extent it had gone in achieving domesticated SDG targets.¹

In both reports, we captured the country's efforts to mainstream and address the Leaving No One Behind (LNOB) principle, as well as the need to balance and integrate into national planning processes the three dimensions of sustainable development: *the economic, social and environmental dimensions*. The 2021 report continues to provide status update on these two important principles guiding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Unlike the previous VNR processes and contexts, the current reporting cycle is characterised by a protracted global pandemic, the COVID-19. Since December 2019, the outbreak has wreaked havoc on the world economy and revenue flows in proportions that have never been witnessed after the Great Depression of the 1930s.

1.1 National strategic policy context

Human Capital Development (HCD) remains the lead priority, flagship programme of the GoSL within the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (SL-MTNDP 2019-2023). This is at the core of socioeconomic transformation, building resilience and sustainable development in Sierra Leone. This strategic priority has come against a background of recording a very low country human capital development index score, currently measured at 0.35.² That, the loss in productivity as a future worker in Sierra Leone has been estimated at 65 percent, compared to 61 and 59 percent in Low Income Countries and sub-Saharan Africa, respectively. That is, a child born in Sierra Leone today will only be 35 percent as productive when it grows up, say, to age 18, given its current education, health, nutrition and related growth situation and facilities accorded it. Accordingly, the GoSL has prioritised HCD focusing on education, food self-sufficiency and accessibility and healthcare for the school going child. These three HCD areas are covered in the 1st and 2nd clusters of the country's MTNDP, namely: Human Capital Development (Cluster 1), and Diversifying the Economy and Promoting Economic Growth (Cluster 2).

In general, the eight clusters of the SL-MTNDP have all been taken as critical and mutually reinforcing. The six others, in addition to 1 and 2 named above, are: Infrastructure and Economic Competitiveness (Cluster 3); Governance and Accountability for Results (Cluster 4); Women,

¹See Sierra Leone's VNR Report 2019 at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23378Sierra_Leone_VNR_FINAL.pdf.

² See the Sierra Leone 2019/20 Annual Progress Report on its MTNDP (2019-2020, page 3) obtainable from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in Freetown.

Children and Disability Issues (Cluster 5); Youth, Sports and Migration (Cluster 6); Addressing Vulnerability and Building Resilience (Cluster 7); and Means of Implementation (Cluster 8).

As narrated in some details below, these clusters are all well-aligned to the SDGs, as well as the African Union Agenda 2063. They are also in tune with the New Deal and its five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals aimed at supporting LDCs to exit fragility. In March 2020, the country concluded and has been implementing since then, a Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap, to strategically accelerate the implementation of the SL-MTNDP and the SDGs. The roadmap is within the overall arrangement of the g7+ group of countries advocating for special international cooperation to support efforts to walk *fragile and conflicted prone countries* towards resilience and sustainable development—a group Sierra Leone has chaired since 2014. Sierra Leone’s resolve and progress in this area were illuminated in December 2020 when it exited the Formal Agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission Configuration. It nonetheless has strategically put in place a post-configuration-exit Roadmap Agenda with an implementation framework in line with the Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap and the SL-MTNDP.³

Furthermore, the period since the country presented its last VNR Report in 2019 witnessed a global crisis of untold proportions—the COVID-19 pandemic—that egregiously affected the global economy, placing already vulnerable sub-Saharan nations like Sierra Leone at heightened risks. The effects of this virus will be discussed in some details in the next chapter to further clarify the context in which the 2021 country VNR Report has been prepared.

1.2 Focus and Objective of the 2019 VNR Report

Sierra Leone has remained strategic in pursuing the SDGs, with a special focus on its accelerator SDGs projected to the UN in 2019: SDG4 (inclusive education) and SDG16 (justice, peace and inclusive society). The two remain leading dimensions to the transformational agenda of the state. Education is at the heart of the Government’s Human Capital Development flagship programme aforementioned, flanked by healthcare and nutrition in the programme, noting further that the country’s MTNDP (2019-2023) is titled “Education for Development”.⁴

In general, prioritising both education (SDG4) and justice (SDG16) is central to pursuing other goals, such as 1 (*ending poverty*), 2 (*zero hunger*) and 10 (*inequality*), as well as 3 (*healthcare*) and 5 (*gender*). For instance, increasing access to justice as an entitlement and basic need is fundamental to stemming rural multidimensional poverty, currently estimated at 86.3 percent, as well as income poverty at 73.9 percent; compared to 37.6 and 34.8 percent for urban areas, respectively.⁵ Reducing school fee burden and related expenses on poor households will release resources to increase their access to other basic needs, including healthcare services and investment in small businesses consistent with SDG8 (*decent work*), and even 11 (*responsible production and consumption*) and 13 (*climate change*); and hence 17 (on state revenue mobilisation and partnerships) in the long-run. Since education is one of the dimensions of multidimensional poverty, strengthening

³ Sierra Leone Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap 2020

⁴ Sierra Leone MTNDP (2019-2023)

⁵ Sierra Leone National Multidimensional Poverty Report 2019

access to education will contribute to reduction of both child and population level multidimensional poverty under SDG1.

Against this background, and being a third timer VNR country for 2021, our 3rd report is evaluative, principally focused on showcasing tangible results and impact of select initiatives the government has implemented under SDGs 4 and 16 during 2019-2020/21. We specifically focused on impact assessment (using rapid methods) of a) the Government Free Quality School Education Initiatives for primary level (SDG4), and b) legal aid interventions for the less privileged and indigents, especially those in the rural areas (SDG16). We gauged the extent of transformative effects these initiatives have had on the welfare of relevant populations in order to share lessons and inform national implementation paths going forward. Indeed, the implications emerging from the COVID pandemic about the need for the economy to build and enhance socioeconomic resilience has further increased the resolve of the state to sustain its special attention to SDGs 4 and 16, projected at the centre of the country's *Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap*.

In general, we attempt to present basic impact analysis for all the 11 VNR SDGs prioritised for 2021: Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 17.

1.3 Organization of the Report

Chapter 2 discusses the COVID-19 context, bringing out its main effects and implications for the 2021 VNR process; followed 3 on the methodology and process for preparing the report. Chapter 4 presents highlights on the policy and enabling environment underpinning the implementation of the SDGs in the country; while 5 discusses progress on SDG 4, mainly presenting results of the rapid impact assessment of the Free Quality School Education Programme for the welfare of school pupils and parents, while gauging effects on educational outcome. Chapter 6 presents results of rapid impact assessment of the Legal Aid Board interventions for the welfare of relevant beneficiaries of legal assistance provided by the Board; while 7 discusses progress on the rest of the 2021 priority SDGs, except Goal 17 on Means of Implementation and Partnerships that is separately discussed in Chapter 8. Chapter 9 extends the discussions in 8 by presenting response and recovery strategies from COVID-19; while 10 concludes the report, summarising key findings, challenges and lessons learned, and highlighting recommendations and next steps.

2. The COVID-19 Effects in the 2021 VNR Process in Sierra Leone

Less than one year into the implementation of the Sierra Leone’s MTNDP (2019-2023), the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world’s economy on a scale that has not been witnessed since the 1930s Great Depression. Small and externally dependent economies like Sierra Leone were immediately thrown off-balance in the global crisis. Many LDCs suffered from the pandemic even without much infections and deaths. As at 3rd June 2021 at 17:20 GMT, the total reported COVID cases in Sierra Leone were 4,156; recoveries 3,141; and deaths 79. While this presents Sierra Leone as a low COVID-risk country in Africa and the world in general, the country’s high level of socioeconomic vulnerability has not excluded it from bearing the brunt of the pandemic.

2.1 Macroeconomy effects

The economy was projected to grow at 4.2 percent in 2020 from 5.4 percent in 2019, and at an average of 4.5 percent during 2021-2023 before COVID. With the onset of the pandemic, *real GDP* contracted by 2.2 percent in 2020, with a 7.6 percentage points lower than the 5.4 percent growth posted in 2019.⁶ The 2020 *total revenues* (including grants) of Le 7.81 trillion (19.0 percent of GDP) was 6.0 percent lower than the Le 8.30 trillion in the revised budget for the year (20.2 percent of GDP), following COVID. The contraction in GDP and domestic revenue generation stemmed from the several lockdowns Sierra Leone went through during the pandemic; compelled to institute measures restricting movement of people; and placing strict caps on public and private gathering and general functions. These health and safety protocols made it hard for businesses to operate, with tourism, hotel operations, entertainment industry, manufacturing, agriculture and services among the hardest hit sectors during this period.

Table 2.1a and Figure 2.1 present trends in GDP and sectoral growth during 2016-2020, capturing the COVID period 2019-2020. They show drastic contraction in mining and quarrying from 2019 (17.1 percent) to 2020 (-42.2 percent); manufacturing from 4.5 to -6.8 percent and services from 3.8 to 3.2 percent during 2019-2020. Although they stayed positive, agriculture, forestry and fishing growth rates declined, as well as electricity and water and construction, as the table and figure indicate; all contributing to the negative growth of GDP on average, from 5.4 percent in 2019 to -2.2 percent in 2020.

Table 2.1a: Trend on GDP and sectoral growth rates 2016-2020

Economic Indicators	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	3.9	4.5	3.9	5.6	2.5

⁶ See Report of the UN Socioeconomic Impact Assessment for COVID-19; Sierra Leone 2019/20 Annual Progress Report on MTNDP (2019-2023)

Mining and Quarrying	52.4	-13.6	-4	17.1	-42.2
Manufacturing and Handicrafts	4.8	4.9	3.2	4.5	-6.8
Electricity and Water Supply	4.4	5.9	4.8	4.7	4.9
Construction	6.7	5.1	-6.5	4.7	4.6
Services	5	5.3	4.1	3.8	-3.2
Annual Growth Rate	6.3	3.8	3.5	5.4	-2.2

Source: Macroeconomic sector paper submitted for the SL-MTNDP 2020 Annual Progress Report

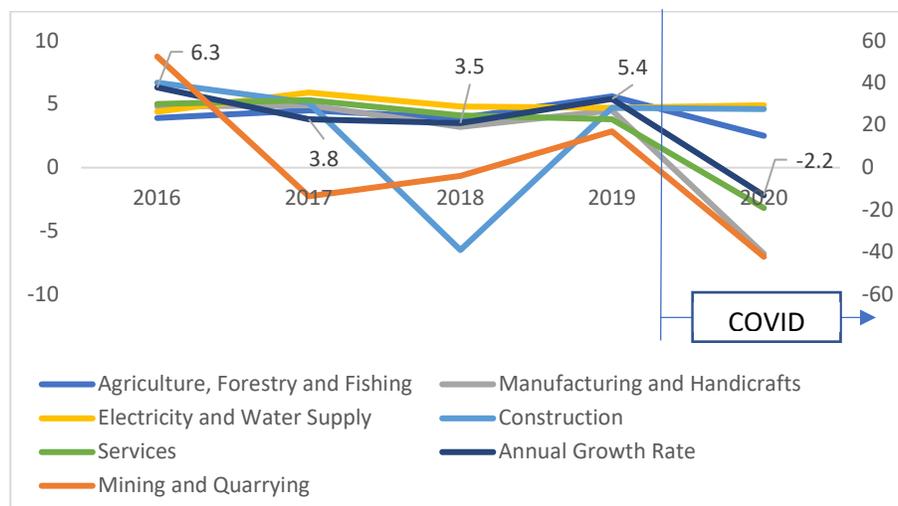


Figure 2.1: Trend on GDP and sectoral growth rates 2016-2020

Source: Generated by author from the macroeconomic sector paper submitted for the SL-MTNDP 2020 Annual Progress Report

From **Table 2.1b**, *government consumption* far more than outweighed *private consumption* during COVID. While private demand more or less remained the same during 2019-2020 (2.7 percent 2019 compared with 3.0 percent 2020), government spending disproportionately catapulted to 60 percent in 2020 from 2.7 percent in 2019, attributed to phenomenal COVID-related spending needs (**Table 2.1b**). Inevitably, the government had to put in place two key emergency response/recovery programmes during the period; a) A Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme (QAERP), and b) A Health Preparedness and Response Plan, that were more heavily socially focused than having direct impact on private economic investment. Coupled with the health and safety protocols described above, this left the economy to operate far below capacity, while unemployment soaring up. The table illustrates the negative implications the pandemic had for fixed capital formation and export, which contracted during 2018/19-2020, while *import* remained positive in growth in 2020, slightly dropping from 2019.

Table 2.1b: Annual percentage growth of public and private consumption & fixed capital formation, export and import

Macroeconomic Indicator	2018	2019	2020 (est.)
Private Consumption (%)	-7.0	2.7	3.0
Public Consumption (%)	-1.3	2.7	60.0

Gross Fixed Capital Formation (%)	63.4	9.0	-8.2
Export of Goods and Services (%)	-34.9	19.2	-10.2
Import of Goods and Services (%)	-11.5	8.1	6.0

Source: Generated by author from the macroeconomic sector paper submitted for the SL-MTNDP 2020 Annual Progress Report

While *inflationary pressures* had moderated by the end of 2020 at double digits, it had risen year on year during the first quarter, reaching a high of 15.6 percent in March 2020. The lower than originally projected domestic revenue performance caused revision to the national budget plan more than once, putting upward pressure on fiscal deficit (estimated at Le 2.31 trillion or 5.6 percent of GDP in 2020) and hence on public debt whose total stock as at end 2020 amounted to Le31.48 trillion (76 percent of GDP), increasing by 18.9 percent from Le 26.48 trillion in 2019. Although *exchange rate* of the Leone to US Dollar generally remained stable during 2019-2020, the eruption of the COVID-19 had forecasted a serious depreciation of the local currency, given the expected phenomenal macroeconomic uncertainty the pandemic was expected to cause to private sector decisions, which could have exacerbated the overall socioeconomic effects.

2.2 Household level effects

According to a survey following the eruption of the COVID-19, the number of households that had been able to consume required meals in a week dropped by 20 percent from April to the first week of July 2020; the number of those reporting reduced daily meals amounting to 30 percent.⁷ The rural areas, where incomes are generally low, have been especially affected—the income poor in the rural sector were reported by the 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLISH2018) at 73.9 percent, compared to 34.8 percent for the urban poor.⁸

The food insecure had reached 63 percent in June 2020 from 53.3 percent in August 2019, according to an emergency food security monitoring system; with 10 percent reporting to be severely food insecure.⁹ In real number terms, by July 2020, about 5.1 million people were food insecure, according to this survey; increasing by 41 percent from 3.9 million reported for this condition in January 2020.¹⁰ The following districts (**Figures 2.2a and 2.2b**) had the highest prevalence of food insecurity following the eruption of the COVID-19: Port Loko District (89 percent), Falaba District (79 percent), Bombali District (77 percent), Kenema District (70 District), Koinadugu District (69 percent), Tonkolili District (67 percent), Moyamba District (66 percent), and Kono District (60 Percent). These effects were especially propelled by the chains of lockdowns and restrictions of movement of people, businesses, farms and off-farm operations.

⁷ See Report of the UN Socioeconomic Impact Assessment for COVID-19 (2020, page 26).

⁸ See the 2018 SLIHS Report (2019, page lii).

⁹ See Report of the UN Socioeconomic Impact Assessment for COVID-19

¹⁰ See Report of the UN Socioeconomic Impact Assessment for COVID-19 (2020, page 27).

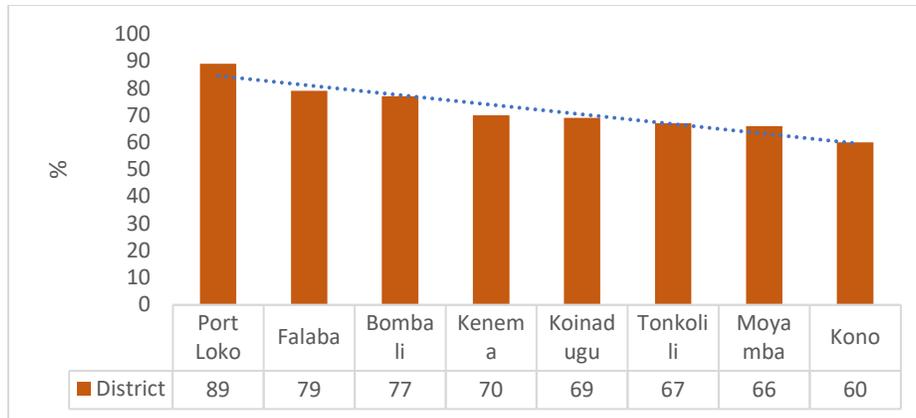
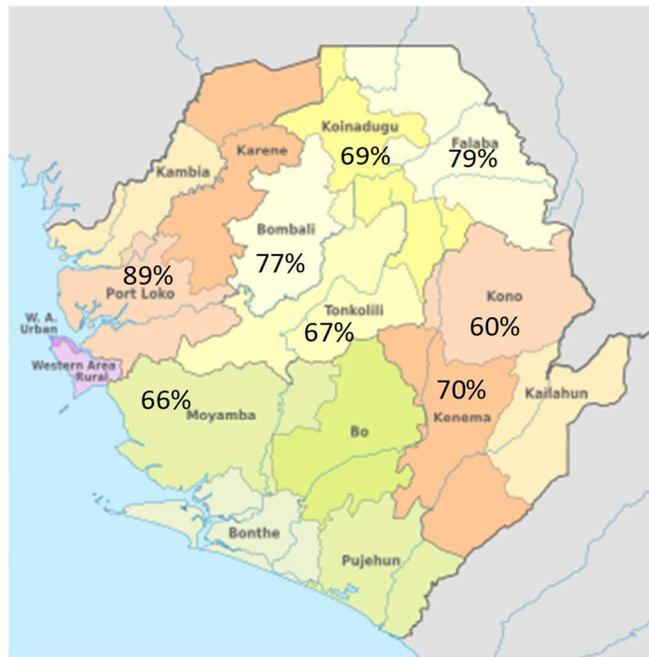


Figure 2.2a: COVID-19 related food insecurity by district

Source: Assessment of the Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 in Sierra Leone Report 2020

Figure 2.2b: Distribution of COVID-related food insecurity scores across district with highest prevalence



While the rural areas could be perceived to have borne the brunt of these effects, the Western Area (where the capital of Freetown is located) “experienced a very sharp increase in food insecurity from 31 percent in January 2020 to 50 percent in June 2020”.¹¹ The districts with highest proportions of households living in severe food insecurity were Port Loko (33 percent); followed

¹¹ See Report of the UN Socioeconomic Impact Assessment for COVID-19 (2020, page 27).

by Western Urban with 22 percent; and then Tonkolili (18 percent) and Kenema (17 percent). Hunger and undernutrition could have especially been reinforced by COVID among vulnerable groups, including women, children, the disabled and the aged, commonly at the highest risks of negative impact during crises. Moreover, households of informal workers in urban areas were particularly affected by COVID-related restrictions on movement and access to markets.

The above is the context the Sierra Leone 2021 VNR Report on the SDGs has been situated and prepared. Naturally, expected performance in the delivery of SDGs results and targets could have been dwindled by COVID-19 during the period since the country's last VNR Report in 2019; five months after its current Medium-Term National Development Plan was launched as the major anchor for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in the country. Moreover, the drastic fall in general revenue flows during this period caused enormous delays to start the 2021 VNR process in time, thanks to organisations like the UNICEF and UNDP, and to some extent the UNFPA for providing support that heavily complemented GoSL resources for the 2021 VNR process.

In **Chapter 9**, we shall present the country's response strategies to the pandemic, as well as its recovery plans that contain useful lessons to inform better conceptualisation and delivery of programmes and projects going forward.

3

Methodology of the Review Process

This section summarises the multilevel stakeholder consultation and data collection processes and coordination involved in the production of Sierra Leone's 2021 VNR report. It concludes with the limitations of the report preparation framework and approaches employed to inform better VNRs in the future.

3.1 Consultations and data collection framework

Background engagements

We remain adherent to the general UN guidelines for the preparation of VNR Reports in member states. The process of preparing this year's report for Sierra Leone commenced with the holding of a large background stakeholder meeting on 16th March 2020 convened by the Minister of Planning and Economic Development. The meeting was the first to officially inform all key stakeholders about the country's participation in the 2021 VNR process, with a total of 55 participants.

Before 16th March, high-level sideline meetings were held bilaterally between the Minister and his colleagues in Cabinet and development partners, mostly the United Nations Agencies. There were also preparatory technical meetings at national and international levels, often held virtually, attended by the national SDG technicians and focal persons in state and non-state institutions.

Rapid Impact Evaluation of the Accelerator Goals 4 and 16

In the weeks of 19th and 26th March 2020, rapid primary data collection exercises were undertaken on SDG 4 (education) and SDG 16 (justice) to determine the extent of impact that key policy interventions in these goals had on the welfare of relevant beneficiary populations and SDG targets.

For *education*, data collection was primarily focused on gauging testimonies as to the welfare effects that government *school feeding programme*, *tuition fee grant* and *provision of free teaching and learning materials* had on beneficiary pupils and parents and on educational outcomes at primary school level. Responses were solicited from pupils, parents and school administrators, while secondary data was obtained at the level of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). The beneficiary data collection was done in *seven (7) out of 14 provincial districts*—in the Karene, Falaba, Tonkolili, Kono, Kenema, Pujehin and Bonthe Districts, covering all four (4) provincial regions as captured in the map in **Figure 3.1**. In all, a total of 249 pupils and 252 parents in 83 provincial government and government-assisted primary schools were interviewed, with one (1) administrator in each of the schools sampled.

Figure 3.1: Sampled district for Rapid Impact Assessment (RIA) for FQSEP at primary school level



For *access to justice*, data collection was principally focused on gauging testimonies as to the welfare effects of legal aid interventions providing free legal representation and advice on beneficiary populations, mostly the less privileged and indigent across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone. Data capture included persons that were freed from prisons, such as those in remand (for very long periods in some instances) without indictment and or trial; those whose trials were expedited and concluded, including those freed in the process; and those generally provided with legal representation and advice, and assisted through alternative dispute resolution mechanism (or out of court settlements). In all, a total of 153 respondents were interviewed, of which 99 were extremely poor persons.

Data collectors in the two rapid impact assessments (for education and justice) involved officials from the national statistical office (Statistics Sierra Leone) that led the development of data collection instruments for education, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education officials, the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Board (who already had sector evaluation experts that led the process for access to justice), and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development officials. The Legal Aid Board utilised its paralegals deployed across the 16 districts to collect data.

The research instruments for the rapid evaluation were informed by an international online training conducted much earlier in the process on *Embedding Evaluation in Voluntary National Reviews*

participated in by government and development partner officials, including MoPED experts and the policy and M&E specialists from the UNICEF.¹²

A One-Day Intensive General Stakeholder Technical Session

This was held on 10th May, attended by the Minister of Planning and Economic Development and Representatives from the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office, bringing together a range of other government officials, representatives from the 22 Local Councils covering the 16 districts of Sierra Leone, members of the SDGs Committee in Parliament, development partners, CSO representatives, and the media. Registering a total of 65 participants, the objectives of this session were a) to provide status update to participants on the VNR process, and b) to discuss the roles and responsibilities of all present in the data collection. Two research instruments were jointly reviewed at this session:

- a. ***District/community level data collection instrument on the 11 SDGs prioritised for the 2021 VNR: SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, and 17:*** - It elicited testimonies from participants as to what they perceived as impact of the 11 SDGs on their welfare, highlighting challenges and recommendations. This involved *key informant interviews* and *focus group discussions*, bringing together traditional chiefs, local councilors, community-based CSOs and NGOs, youth and women groups, the disabled, and district/municipal council level officials. Selected civil society representatives led the consultations and data collection covering the 16 districts of the country; obtaining information from a total of at least 720 participants, with an average of 45 per district. Radio discussions were organised alongside data collection to sensitise the wider public about the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.
- a. ***Institutional level data collection instrument:*** - This sought responses at management level as to the institutional, policy and structural progress the country has made in the implementation of the SDGs; drawing direct guidance from the UN guidelines on the preparation of VNRs. Among other issues, the instrument gauged progress on the ***policy and enabling environment for the SDGs*** and the ***'leaving no one behind (LNOB)'***. Respondents included government officials, local council staff, members of parliament, UN agency officials, CSOs, and private sector institutions.¹³

The session also discussed sectoral data collection at national level focusing on gauging level of achievement of targets planned in the country's SDGs specific Results Framework. This Information was generally obtained from secondary sources, past surveys and routine/administrative data in government MDAs, working with non-state institutions.

¹² The research instruments on the rapid impact assessment on education and justice are available in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in Freetown.

¹³



One-Day Intensive Technical Session with the wider Membership of Parliament, Audit Service Sierra Leone, Anti-Corruption Commission, the general Civil Society Community and the Media

The session (held on 19th May in the House of Parliament) provided VNR process update to these wider communities, while discussing their role in the process. A total of 60 persons participated, including 22 Members of Parliament drawn from various parliamentary committees; all committing to monitoring the report preparation process and contributing to the supply of required progress information on the instruments described in the previous section.

A Poll gauging opinions of young people on the impact of SDGs in Sierra Leone using UReport Technology

As in the 2019 VNR Report for the country, the UNICEF again conducted a poll using UReport Technology during 20th to 26th May to record perceptions of young people (adolescents and youth age 15-35) on the impact of the SDGs in the country. It focused on Goals 3, 4, 8, 13 and 16. The results of this survey complemented testimonies collected from other instruments on the same Goals.¹⁴

¹⁴ The research instrument is available in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in Freetown.

Two-day intensive Technical Working Sessions to update Sierra Leone's ICPD Commitments to inform the VNR

These sessions were held on 3rd and 4th June in Freetown, organised by MoPED in collaboration with UNFPA. The Government and UNFPA have had a long cooperation on the implementation of national population management frameworks. As a cross-cutting, structural issue, population management has been central in the achievement of the SDGs in the country. Thus, with support from UNFPA, the government prepared a National Population Policy launched in November 2019, with clearly defined objectives, targets and indicators aligned to the SL-MTNDP and SDGs. Sierra Leone also participates on the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD) with express commitments drawn from its Population Policy that the government monitors and periodically reports on at international level. Since November 2019 when the Nairobi Conference on ICPD was held, these commitments have been followed-up on, especially in the context of the implications that the COVID-19 may have for future population management in the country. It is crucial, therefore, that the 2021 VNR Report for the country provides an update on progress in implementing the ICPD Commitments, and by extension the state of implementation of the national population policy.¹⁵ The two-day sessions were attended by government officials, implementing partners of UNFPA support to GoSL and development partners to provide status update the ICPD, as well as achievement of target in the National Population Policy. They were attended by 35 persons.

Sector level validation of data on the 11 VNR SDGs and national validation of the comprehensive VNR Report

Three successive meetings were organised from 31st May to 3rd June, bringing together an average of 20 participants per session from government MDAs, CSOs/NGOs, development partners to discuss data on achievement of SDG targets at sector level (grouping the 11 VNR SDGs into relevant sets of sectors for discussion). These were meant to review and clean information on achievements of planned targets. On 7th June, the entire VNR Report was validated, bringing together representatives from all major groups of stakeholders consulted in the entire process, including government MDAs, local council representatives, parliament, CSOs, the media, the private sector, research institutions and development partners; registering more than 70 participants. The draft document was jointly reviewed, debating certain data and analytical aspects of it. Individual track changes to the report were extremely useful.

3.2 Coordination of the VNR process

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development continues to coordinate the implementation of the SDGs in the country. It has led the preparation of all country VNR Reports, working closely

¹⁵ See the Sierra Leone National Population Policy

with all key stakeholders discussed above. The UNDP has been a major anchor on behalf of the UN Country Team (UNCT) directly working with MoPED in the VNR processes, as well as the UNICEF, both of whom have been major traditional operational partners in the delivery of UN assistance to the country. The UNFPA played a central role in the 2021 process, in bringing out population management perspective in this year's report. Issues of integrated national financing for the SDGs took a centre stage in the implementation of the Goals in the last two years, following the conduct of a comprehensive Development Finance Assessment and the design of an Integrated National Financing Framework for the country. The MoPED coordinates all of this on behalf of GoSL, cooperating here with the UN Resident Coordinator's Office, the UNDP and UNCDF with the participation of the World Bank, IMF, the EU and the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, among a range of other partners and national institutions, including the Ministry of Finance, the National Revenue Authority, the Central Bank, the private sector and CSOs.

3.3 Limitation of the process

As in the previous VNRs, this report has not captured progress on all targets planned in the country's SDGs Results Framework due to limited of survey and administrative data. We were also only able to undertake rapid impact assessment on the country's accelerator SDGs 4 and 16 a) given their strategic nature within the national policy, and b) principally because of limited financial resources to warrant in-depth impact analysis on many Goals. Even with SDGs 4 and 16, we did not undertake comprehensive policy impact analyses on them; only a few questions directly relevant to the VNR reporting were administered. For education, impact of Free Quality School Education Programme of government was superficially assessed and only at primary level, gauging response on school feeding support, tuition fee grant and teaching and learning material support. Deeper analysis can be done in this area later on, capturing other school levels supported under the government FQSEP, including junior and senior education. Furthermore, because of limited resources, only a relatively few government and government-assisted primary schools, pupils and parents were interviewed. Limited resources could also not permit to capture as many beneficiaries as desired to assess the impact of legal assistance rendered the poor. Nonetheless, the sample sizes were considered adequate for the purpose of the VNR, covering a highly representative geographic size. While COVID-19 accelerated these limitations, the cooperation received from the wide range stakeholders in the process could have reduced any negative effects these challenges could have on the data and report outcome. It is believed this report has provided valuable inputs to inform future related processes and development policy research.

4

Assessment of the Policy and Enabling Environment for the SDGs

As in the previous VNR Reports for Sierra Leone, this section discusses: a) efforts in creating ownership of the SDGs at national, sectoral, district and community levels; b) incorporation of the goals in national and sub-national frameworks; c) the extent of integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into national development processes; d) how much we have deepened efforts at leaving no one behind; e) how much we have sustained or advanced institutional mechanisms for implementing the goals; and f) what structural issues have emerged in terms of good policy practices and reforms to facilitate implementation of the 2030 agenda in the country.

4.1 Creating ownership of the SDGs

This has been the first achievement we made in Sierra Leone in the history of our participation in the VNR processes since the first reviews in 2016, starting by creating ownership of the SDGs in Sierra Leone. As already detailed in methodology in the last chapter, there is a clear and entrenched ownership of the SDGs by the people and at all levels of development actors. You can follow the description of this achievement on pages 13-15 of Sierra Leone's 2019 Report.¹⁶ We have built on and maintained this achievement over the years through sustainable sensitization; increased partnership among stakeholders; continuous training and capacity building at local level, parliamentary, sectoral and state-actor level and academic engagement, reaching out to the universities and radio/TV on the SDGs.

4.2 Incorporation of the Sustainable Development Goals in national frameworks

We remained consistent in upholding the strong principle of alignment between the SDGs and our national development frameworks at different delivery levels, as described in our previous VNR reports of 2016 and 2019 (see pages 15-17 in the 2019 Report, for instance¹⁷). As noted in those reports, the first major step undertaken by the state to domestically adapt the SDGs was the effective integration of the goals into the national development plan; and we have maintained this throughout subsequent frameworks at national, sectoral and local level. We continue to maintain that, in Sierra Leone, the national development plan is the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs on the ground. The implementation of the former constitutes the implementation of the latter in the country. For this, we have always ensured that the national development plan results frameworks, such as the current Sierra Leone MTNDP operational (results) framework, heavily integrates the SDGs results framework; to ensure that there is coherence, logic and effectiveness in the implementation of the global agenda through the national plan (see our previous VNR Reports and Sierra Leones MTNDP 2019-2023 that you can obtain from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in Freetown).

¹⁶ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23378Sierra_Leone_VNR_FINAL.pdf.

¹⁷ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23378Sierra_Leone_VNR_FINAL.pdf.

4.3 Integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development

We have increased the recognition of the inevitable need to integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. We have ensured this integration at all levels of national, sectoral and sub-national policy synthesis; as well as in the implementation of programmes where monitoring of the interaction between the three dimensions in service delivery is constantly needed. The establishment of the Sierra Leone Ministry of Environment in 2019 in addition to the existence of the Environmental Protection Agency was due to an increased understanding of the need to strengthen the balance of these dimensions—later sections, especially under the leaving no one behind and progress on SDGs 12 and 13, will highlight some tangible results achieved in this direction. The country’s regular participation in the VNRs, itself, is very instrumental to raising and sustaining the awareness about this need; as the process of consultation and data pulling on progress has always involved follow-up public sensitisation on the SDGs and their key principles including balancing the three dimensions.

4.4 Leaving No One Behind

As in the 2019 VNR report, this section will present progress made in pursuing the welfare of especially high-risk groups in society. The pursuit of the *LNOB* principles draws from the values that shape how we do and measure development. As the status reported in this section captures a lot of progress made under the respective SDGs discussed in later sections, only the central progress elements in driving the LNOB are presented.

Socioeconomic participation and inclusiveness

Promoting the shared prosperity, peace and stability that Sierra Leone has achieved since the end of the civil war in the early 2000s has required a peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another as well as an increase in the economic participation of all persons, regardless of their region, religion and district of origin. The country has promoted these prerequisites. It has conducted four peaceful and fair General Elections since the war ended in 2002 with the participation of major civil groups in the country. The National Election Commission in its effort to support transparent and credible future elections has developed a strategic plan comprising 10 pillars, drawing from international best practices and lessons learned from previous elections.

The Commission on Persons with Disability, and National Commission on Children accelerated the participation and inclusion of children and people with disabilities (PWDs) in decision making and governance. The National Commission for Social Action (NASCA) stayed the course of implementing and coordinating a wide range of social protection and economic empowerment programmes for these vulnerable groups, especially those at the risk of exclusion, whilst the Sierra Leone Labour Congress continued to expedite the social and economic interest of many Trade Unions.

The sustained operations of the Human Right Commission, National Commission for Democracy, and the National Youth Commission helped in furthering efforts earlier achieved in enhancing inclusion and peaceful coexistence. In order to strengthen and protect the human and constitutional

rights of citizens, the Government advanced the Justice Cowan Constitutional Review Process that will soon see a revised and more results-oriented, inclusive and peaceful new National Constitution. Also, GoSL is finalising preparations to establish a Peace and National Cohesion Commission, having presented and passed the requisite bill in parliament in this regard.

Inclusion and empowerment of children, women and girls

Having Human Capital Development as the flagship programme of the government has been especially central to the long-run advancement of productivity, inclusion and empowerment of both the boy and girl children and by extension women. Furthermore, the enforcement of the Hands-Off Our Girls Initiative championed by the First Lady has catalysed reduction of inequities and inequalities in communities affecting the advancement of women. Following intense advocacy in local communities, women now hold positions in traditional village/section/chiefdom administrations. At international level, Sierra Leone currently holds the Presidency of the UN Women Board, a UN Entity for gender equality and women's empowerment. This has increased the chances of the country increasing inclusion and participation of women across various socioeconomic spheres (see progress under SDG 4, 5 and 8).

Welfare of the disabled, the stigmatized and aged

Various public programmes supported by government partners have been on course in this area. This included the sustained rolled out of cash support for PWDs and the aged by the National Commission for Social Action. The social safety net programme of the Commission, agro-support from the Ministry of Agriculture and a host of other interventions of government have been contributing to improving the welfare of PWDs, the aged and the generally less privileged as priority. Additionally, the interventions of the Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board in providing free legal representation has been crucial in advancing the welfare of this vulnerable group, including those with entrenched stigma like sex workers, gay-related actor and others (see progress under SDG 16).

Efforts at addressing food insecurity and extreme poverty in communities

The National Commission for Social Action has also been pivotal here, a specialised Commission in handling food insecurity and extreme poverty in communities. Also, the GoSL through the Ministry of Agriculture and World Food Programme, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation and Statistics Sierra Leone established the Joint periodic Food Security Monitoring System (FSMS) to support decisions and programming towards overcoming food insecurity and extreme poverty. The establishment of District Farms in the 15 Agricultural Districts of the country to boost production of staple food (rice) has been critical in the course of efforts in this domain. The Ministry of Agriculture distributed basic irrigation and soil analysis equipment to District Agricultural Engineers for effective and efficient field work, consistent with the transformation of agriculture and rural economy, the rural areas continuing to account for the highest proportion of national poverty. And hundreds of hectares of land were rehabilitated additionally to this end (see progress under SDG 1, 2, and 10).

Justice system and the welfare of the poor and the most vulnerable, including persons in prisons

The government has done tremendously well in this area on a number of fronts. The state had perennially suffered from acute unavailability of magistrate courts and state defense counsels especially in the rural areas, thereby engendering increase caseload of people in remand without indictment and trial. Accordingly, GoSL recently appointed 15 more High Court Judges and 11 more magistrates across the country with a special focus on rural access to justice. Also, a total of more than 400,000 including foreign nationals have benefitted from legal aid interventions since the Legal Aid Board of Sierra Leone was established in May 2015. The Board focused its interventions on promoting access to justice for the underprivileged providing them with free legal representation, legal advice, and related services across the board, including persons in pre-trial detention and prisons (see progress under SDG 16 for more details).

Addressing concerns and welfare of island and coastal communities

The country continued to be mindful of its long coastline of more than 500 km with a number of islands and settlements. In the first half of 2021, a special presidential initiative for local area development covering the vast coastal communities of the Freetown Peninsula was drafted and is currently being discussed towards having a full-blown programme for these communities.

Managing natural resources, ensuring justice for future generations

Here, the country continued to emphasise the domestication and implementation of the Extractive Industries Initiative (EITI) principles, and to provide the requisite support to the new Ministry of Environment which is currently implementing massive tree planting programme in the country among a range of interventions. The GoSL has been regulating the activities of the timber industry, especially logging, currently under suspension over the whole range of the rainy season (see progress under SDGs 12 and 13 below).

Information, data and data disaggregation

Data disaggregation has been strengthened in the country, as the country recognised and focused on the availability of credible data for development planning. In particular, the World Bank recently committed a total of US\$30 million to supporting Statistics Sierra Leone to undertake various projects, including deepening statistical services at district level, implementation of the first electronic mid-term population and housing census in Sierra Leone, and a whole range of related data systems improvement. The national statistics office continued to maintain a gender desk to ensure the mainstreaming of gender issues in data generation and analysis.

4.5 Institutional mechanisms

Virtually, the arrangement has not changed from the description provided in our 2019 VNR report, despite the COVID-19 pandemic (see page 26 of the country's 2019 VNR Report¹⁸). We continue to implement the SDGs within the existing framework of implementing and reporting on national and subnational development plans to ensure coherent, harmonized and aligned national development efforts supported by external assistance. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development continues to coordinate implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level, as it does for national development plans. As presented in the methodological section, all development stakeholders in the national planning processes—within and between central and local government, drawing in local traditional authorities, CSOs/NGOs, the private sector, the academic, schools, the media and development partners—are all involved and are part and parcel of the arrangement for the implementation of the SDGs. The SDGs are implemented nationally through the national development plan (see page 26 of the country's 2019 VNR Report).

4.6 Structural issues, including population and fragility management

The COVID-19 pandemic opened up the structural challenges the state had faced in financing development, especially with regard to the entrenched bottlenecks underpinning domestic revenue performance drawn from a weak private sector, dominant informal economy, general public financial management limitations and the huge room in the public sector to ensure effective delivery of results. These inherent challenges could increase the exposure of the country to more debt burden in crisis times, coupled with unemployment-related risks (the youth factor) in a country experiencing a considerable population growth rate at 3.2 percent (2015 estimates). Nonetheless, a range of structural reforms have been instituted and in force in the last two years on the back of a strong and sustained political will and follow-up. These include the following:

National revenue and public sector management and administration

- Modernising and automating domestic revenue mobilisation, accompanied by stringent expenditure management, stepping up fiscal risk management, increasing discipline in debt contracting by state-owned enterprises and management of contingency liabilities, and introducing digital/online applications in general public expenditure management.
- Putting human capital development first in state policy, with special focus on the development of the child into productive adult, strengthening public sector service delivery capacity and performance management, monitoring and evaluation of public projects, advancing justice and property rights system and environmental protection.

Population management

Some progress has been made in advancing the country's Commitments on the International Conference on Population Development (ICDP) under the following:

¹⁸ See https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23378Sierra_Leone_VNR_FINAL.pdf

Country ICPD Commitment 1: The Government of Sierra Leone commits to the overall goal of zero unmet need for family planning services by 2030.

- With reference to the determination to allocate at least 1 percent of the health budget for family planning by 2022 under this commitment:
 - In 2020, a 0.03 percent was allocated in the national budget but reportedly not disbursed
 - A family planning unit established in the Ministry of Health to follow up on these issues, while the Minister of Planning and Economic Development provided constant update on the Commitments to Cabinet, MoPED holding the Desk Coordinating UNFPA support on population issues across the country.
- In terms of reducing the unmet need for family planning from 24.8 percent to 20 percent by 2025, this has gone down to 20.8 percent for all women, and 21.2 percent for modern methods, currently. There have been trained service providers in family planning across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone; and there has been an increase in procurement and expanded distribution of method-mix for family planning, including the last mile to avoid stock outs.

Country ICPD Commitment 2: Commits to the overall goal of zero preventable maternal deaths by 2030.

- A major progress indicator here is training and employing 1000 midwives, 180 nurse anaesthetists, and 72 surgical assistants by 2025 under this commitment. During 2019-2020 a total of 406 midwives, 24 surgical assistants, and 50 nurse anesthetises were produced.
- In terms of reducing maternal mortality from 1,165 per 100,000 live births by 50 percent in 2028, this has gone down from 1165 in 2013 to 717 in 2019 (by 38.45 percent presently).

Country ICPD Commitment 3: Commits to the overall goal of zero gender-based violence and harmful practices by 2030.

- A major progress indicator is to enact the Prohibition of Child Marriage Bill which will criminalize child marriage for all types of marriages by the end of 2020; for which some of the milestones already achieved in the last two years include: heightened child marriage campaign in communities; Hands-off-our Girl's campaign; engagement with traditional and religious leaders; review of the Child Rights Act 2007; and conduct of life skill sessions on ending child marriage.
- In terms of reducing adolescent birth rates from 125.1/1000 (2013) to 74/1000 by 2020, this has dropped to 102/1000 currently on the back of various deliverables, including the establishment and well-funded National Secretariat for the reduction of teenage pregnancy as a GoSL flagship project; establishment of the Adolescent and Youth Friendly Services; media engagement on adolescent pregnancy; reviewed and updated policies targeting the girl child; and ensuring integration of comprehensive sexuality education into the Basic Education curriculum framework and key subjects.
- Achievements under these ICDP commitments and indicators are generally associated with progress under SDGs 3 (health) and 5 (gender) which are presented in some details below.

Addressing fragility

The following highlights some progress made within the Sierra Leone's Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap implementation, consistent with the New Deal's five Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals and different country progress indicators:

- Under the *inclusive politics goal* and *political settlement dimension*, a slight progress has been made in terms of increasing percentage of women elected as MPs at 13.6 percent (2020) compared to 12 percent in 2019 and a general target of 30 percent; those elected as local councilors stand at 18.7 percent, against 50/50 target. Disabled persons as MPs records 1.5 percent (2020) against 1 percent baseline (2019) and 5 percent target.
- Under the *justice goal* and *job livelihoods and private sector dimension*, unemployment rate reduced by 4.6 percent (2020) from its rate of 3.4 percent in 2019 and target reduction of 2 percent;
- While under the *revenue goal* and *service delivery dimension*, custom clearance time reduced to 1 day (2020) from 3 days in 2019 and a target of 2 days; corruption perception index remaining at 33 percent (2020) as was in 2019, compared to a target of 50 percent.

Achievements under these fragility and resilience drive are generally associated with progress under SDGs 16 (justice) and 17 (means of implementation) which are presented in some details in later section.

5.

Progress on Accelerator SDG 4 Education

5.1 Rapid impact assessment of Government Free Quality School Education Programme at primary level

We will start with presentation of rapid impact assessment results of the Government Free Quality School Education Programme at primary level, sampling 83 schools in 7 provincial districts with 249 pupils and 252 parents and 1 administrator respondent from each of the sampled schools. Programme areas assessed are: a) school feeding support; b) tuition fee grant, and c) provision of teaching and learning materials

Background response on school feeding—school level response

Table 5.1a presents background questions and responses towards gauging the impact of school feeding on educational outcome and general welfare of primary school pupils and parents in Sierra Leone. A total of 83 schools were interviewed (responses provided by the heads of schools): 19 (22.9 percent) government schools; and 64 (77.1 percent) government assisted schools. They all (100 percent) indicated that school feeding was provided by various entities. Of the 83 interviewed, 28 (33.7 percent) said the school feeding was provided by government, against 55 (66.3 percent) that said this was provided by NGOs. It should be noted, however, that some non-state agencies such as World Food Programme provide feeding support on behalf of the government, so that the responses here could only have been revealed on the basis of who physically delivered the supplies.

A total of 73 (88.0 percent) said feeding came regularly, against 10 (12.0 percent) responding to the negative. In terms of timeliness of supply of support, 63 (75.9 percent) said the support came timely, against 20 (24.1percent) who said it did not. And asked as to which classes (from 1 to 6) in the schools were covered in the support, they indicated that all classes benefited from the feeding programme; with a total of 30,440 pupils reported to have benefited since 2018 in the 83 schools interviewed.

Table 5.1a: Background response

Field Question	Response indicator	Values
1. As to whether schools interviewed benefit from school feeding programme of Government	Total schools interviewed	83
	Government schools interviewed	19 (22.9 %)
	Government-assisted schools	64 (77.1 %)
2. Types of institutions providing school feeding support	Total recorded Interviews	83
	Government	28 (33.7%)
	NGO	55 (66.3%)
3. Whether school feeding support comes regularly	Total recorded responses	83
	Yes	73 (88.0 %)
	No	10 (12.0 %)
	Total recorded responses	83

Field Question	Response indicator	Values
4. Whether school feeding support comes timely	Yes	63 (75.9 %)
	No	20 (24.1 %)
5. Whether all children benefit from school feeding	Total recorded response	83
	Yes	All Classes 1-6
6. Number of children benefiting from school feeding programme from 2018 to date	Total	30,440
	Girls	14,927
	Boys	15,513

Tuition fee grant & teaching and learning materials—school level response

From **Table 5.1b**, 70 (84.3 percent) of the 83 schools interviewed indicated that they benefited from both Government’s school fee grant and teaching and learning materials; against 5 (6.0 percent) who said they benefited from school fees support only, 6 (7.2 percent) learning materials only, and 2 (2.4 percent) none of the assistance. A total of 24,224 pupils (12,140 males and 12,084 females) benefitted from fee payment in the 83 schools interviewed, including all classes, from 1 to 6.

Table 5.1b: Tuition fee grant and learning material

1. Whether the schools benefited from school fees and learning material provided by government	Total recorded responses	83
	School fees only	5 (6.0 %)
	Learning materials only	6 (7.2 %)
	Both	70 (84.3 %)
	None	2 (2.4 %)
2. School interviewed that said fees were paid by government	Total	83 (all interviewed)
	# of female pupils in school	12,084
	# of male pupils in school	12, 140
3. Whether all classes (1 to 6) were covered	# of school respondents	83 (all interviewed)

From **Table 5.1c**, the great majority of the responses (75 at 90.4 percent) of the 83 schools interviewed indicated that core textbooks were provided by the government, against 8 (9.6 percent) that answered to the negative; 65 (78.3 percent) said the government provided notebooks, against 18 (21.7 percent) to the negative; chalk 61 (73.6 percent), against 22 (26.5 percent) to the negative; pens, pencils and crayon 51 (61.4 percent), against 32 (38.6 percent) to the negative; and other learning material 49 (59.0 percent), against 34 (41.0 percent) to the negative. As to whether supplies came *regularly*, 29 (35.3 percent) of 82 school responses pointed to the affirmative, against 53 (64.6 percent) to the negative. And as to whether it came *timely*, 28 (34.6 percent) of 81 school responses pointed to the affirmative, against 53 (65.4 percent) to the negative. Finally, a great majority of the sampled schools (91.5 percent) reported that materials received were relevant, against 8.5 percent to the negative.

Table 5.1c: Teaching and learning material

1. Whether core textbooks were provided by the government	Total recorded	83
	Yes	75 (90.4 %)
	No	8 (9.6 %)
2. Whether note books provided by the government	Total recorded	83
	Yes	65 (78.3 %)
	No	18 (21.7 %)
3. Whether chalk provided by the government	Total recorded	83
	Yes	61 (73.6 %)
	No	22 (26.5 %)
4. Whether Pens/Pencils/Crayon provided by the government	Total recorded	83
	Yes	51 (61.4 %)
	No	32 (38.6 %)
5. Other learning materials provided by the government	Total recorded	83
	Yes	49 (59.0 %)
	No	34 (41.0 %)
6. Whether the supply of learning materials came regularly	Total recorded	82
	Yes	29 (35.3 %)
	No	53 (64.6 %)
7. Whether the supply of learning materials came on time	Total recorded	81
	Yes	28 (34.6 %)
	No	53 (65.4 %)
8. Whether the learning materials were relevant to the school	Total recorded	82
	Yes	75 (91.5 %)
	No	7 (8.5 %)

Pupil/parent background response

Table 5.1d presents background characteristics of the school pupils and parents interviewed towards gauging the impact of the FQSEP at primary school level, relating to school feeding, tuition fee, and teaching and learning material support provided by the government and non-state actors. Of the 249 pupils interviewed, 134 (53.8 percent) were males and 115 females (46.2 percent). And of the 252 parents interviewed, 148 (58.7 percent) were males and 104 females (41.3 percent).

Employment of parent respondents: 207 (82.1 percent) were self-employed, 24 (9.5 percent) paid employees, 15 (6 percent) unemployed, 5 (2 percent) retired and 1 (0.4 percent) student. Marital status: 138 (54.8 percent) were married & monogamous, 76 (30.2 percent) married & polygamous, 21 (8.3 percent) widowed, 12 (4.8 percent) never married, 3 (1.2 percent) separated and 2 (0.8 percent) divorced. Education: 148 (54 percent) never attended school, against 116 (46 percent) who did attend. Those that attended: 39 (34 percent) completed primary education, 32 (28 percent) junior secondary education, 26 (22 percent) senior secondary education, 13 (11percent) Technical/Vocation/Nursing/Teaching education, and 6 (5 percent) higher education.

Table 5.1d: Pupil/parent respondent characteristics

Field Question	Response	Impact values
Pupils		
1. Sex of the respondent	Total Pupils interviewed	249
	Male	134 (53.8 %)
	Female	115 (46.2 %)
Parents		
1. Sex of the respondent	Total Parents interviewed	252
	Female	104 (41.3 %)
	Male	148 (58.7 %)
2. Respondents Employment Status	Total Parents interviewed	252
	Paid Employee	24 (9.5 %)
	Self Employed	207 (82.1 %)
	Unemployed	15 (6.0 %)
	Student	1 (0.4 %)
	Retired	5 (2.0 %)
3. Respondent Material Status	Total Parents interviewed	252
	Married Monogamous	138 (54.8 %)
	Married Polygamous	76 (30.2 %)
	Separated	3 (1.2 %)
	Divorced	2 (0.8 %)
	Widowed	21 (8.3 %)
	Never Married	12 (4.8 %)
4. Ever Attended School	Total Parents interviewed	252
	Yes	116 (46.0 %)
	No	148 (54.0 %)
5. Highest educational attainment of respondents	Total Parents interviewed	116
	Primary	39 (34 %)
	Junior Secondary	32 (28 %)
	Senior Secondary	26 (22 %)
	Vocational/Tech/Nursing/Teaching	13 (11 %)
	Higher (First Degree)	6 (5 %)

School feeding —parent response

From **Table 5.1e**, 86 (34.1 percent) of the 252 parents interviewed said they provided lunch for their school children; against 166 (65.9 percent) parents answering to the negative. As to the average lunch money provided per child per day, the 86 parents that answered to the affirmative said they provided Le 2,241 on average.

Table 5.1e: Parents and provision of lunch

Indicator	Response	Parent
1. Whether pupils provided with lunch by their parents since the start of school feeding.	Total recorded	252
	Yes	86 (34.1 %)
	No	166 (65.9 %)
2. Average lunch money per child per day	Total recorded	86
	Le	2,241

Level of satisfaction with school feeding

From **Table 5.1f**, pupils, parents, and school authorities all generally rated the school feeding support very highly, with those not satisfied only estimated at 8 (3.2 percent) of 249 pupil responses and 6 (2.4 percent) of 252 parent responses; no school authority interviewed was unsatisfied. Pupils that said they were very satisfied, just satisfied and okay, put together, estimated at 96.3 percent, while parents that expressed the same level of satisfaction is estimated at about 95 percent, and a 100 percent level of satisfaction by all school authorities interviewed.

Table 5.1f: Level of satisfaction with school feeding

Category	Pupils	Parents	School Authorities
Total recorded responses	249	252	83
Very Satisfied	75 (30.1 %)	172 (68.3 %)	44 (53%)
Satisfied	87 (34.9 %)	61 (24.2 %)	34 (41 %)
Okay	78 (31.3 %)	13 (5.2 %)	5 (6.0%)
Not Satisfied	8 (3.2 %)	6 (2.4 %)	-

Tuition fees grant—parent response

From **Table 5.1g**, 93 (36.9 percent) of the 252 parents interviewed indicated that school fees were paid by them before 2017/18 when the FQSEP was introduced. Surprisingly, the responses suggest that more parents did not pay school fees prior to the inception of the FQSEP, estimated at 159 (63.1 percent) respondents. [AD1] There should be a caution in the appreciation of this outcome; in that, public school examinations fees that were paid by the Government before FQSEP must not be interpreted as tuition fees that parents had paid; of course, tuition fees could have been subsidised by the government earlier. The average amount paid was Le 38,592 according to the parents interviewed.

As to whether fees were paid in 2020/2021 school year after the introduction of the FQSEP, the greater majority (238/94.4 percent) of parents interviewed said they did not pay school fees. The extreme minority who said they still paid had quoted the same amount of fees Le 38,592.

Table 5.1g: School fees support by government

Field Question	Response indicator	Values
1. Whether school fees were paid by parents before 2017/2018	Total recorded responses	252
	Yes	93 (36.9 %)
	No	159 (63.1 %)
2. Average amount paid by parents as school fees in	Total recorded responses	93
	Le	38,592 (100 %)
3. Whether school fees were paid by parents in 2020/2021	Total recorded responses	252
	Yes	14 (5.6 %)
	No	238 (94.4 %)
4. Average amount paid as fees by parents in 2020/2021	Total recorded response	14
	Le	38,592 (100 %)

Teaching and learning material—parent response

From **Table 5.1h**, 147 (58.3 percent) of the parents interviewed reported that they provided school materials for children, quoting Le 85,014 as amount spent per year. As to whether these materials were provided by them in 2020/2021 following the introduction of the FQSEP, 161 (63.9 percent) in the majority said they did not. Those in the minority that said they still provided material quoted Le 45,247; a yearly expenditure less than what they paid earlier.

Table 5.1h: Teaching and learning material

Question	Response	Parent
1. Whether school materials were provided by parents before 2018	Total recorded responses	252
	Yes	147 (58.3 %)
	No	105 (41.7 %)
2. Average amount spent on school materials by parents in 2018	Total recorded response	147
	Le	85,014
3. Whether school materials were provided by parents in 2020/2021	Total recorded responses	252
	Yes	91 (36.1 %)
	No	161 (63.9 %)
4. Average amount spent on school materials by parents in 2020/2021	Total recorded response	91
	Le	45,247

School enrollment—school level response

From **Table 5.1i**, the administrators from the schools sampled reported that a total of 23,141 pupils were enrolled in their schools prior to the introduction of the FQSEP in 2017/18 (11,743 males and 11,398 females), rising to 26,053 in 2020/2021 after the introduction of the programme (13,555 males and 12, 498 females). While the natural rate of growth of population could be a factor for an annual increase in school enrolment, of about 2,912 here (12.6 percent), the conscious policy effort of the government of introducing the FQSEP could have a significant contribution to this increase.

Table 5.1i: Gauging enrolment before and after FQEP

1. Estimated school pupils covered 2017/18 academic year before the introduction of Free Quality Education	Total	23,141
	Male	11,743
	Female	11,398
2. Estimated school pupils covered in 2020/21 academic year after the introduction of Free Quality Education	Total	26,053
	Male	13,555
	Female	12,498
3. Enrollment of school pupils prior to the school feeding programme	Total recorded responses	22,667
	Male	11,294
	Female	11,373

Estimate of monetary savings from the FQSEP for parents and projected impact on household poverty

We note from the above field responses that the government’s Free Quality School Education Programme has been doing substantially well, with monetary and non-monetary benefit to parents and households. Respondents at all three levels expressed general satisfaction with the programme as related to primary level school feeding, tuition fee grant and provision of teaching and learning materials. We note at the same time the need to enhance the regularity and timely delivery of support under the programme to enhance its impact on households and educational outcome. Against this inference, we are attempting here to estimate monetary savings parents could have generated through the introduction of the government FQSEP at primary level, considering the following parameters and accompanying assumptions.

- a) Unit savings a parent could make in government/government-assisted primary schools per pupil per day and per year from school feeding: - We use the government school feeding support per pupil at Le 2,700 per day, which you can compare with the Le 2,241 reported by parent respondents in the data presented above. Multiplying Le 2,700 by 200 days, estimated to be the total school days per year, gives a total yearly savings of Le 540,000 per pupil for parents.¹⁹
- b) Average government spending on tuition, textbooks and examinations: - Here we will draw from published data on annual average public spending on primary school for tuition, textbooks and examination for 2019, estimated at Le 242,000 in the latest Education Sector Analysis.²⁰

From these unit estimates, we project that the minimum savings that a parent could make per year per pupil in government or government-assisted primary schools will be equal to Le 782,000 [which is Le 540,000 (from school feeding support) + Le242,000 (tuition, textbooks and examination)]. This minimum amount, coupled with related monetary benefit from the programme can now be accumulated overtime and invested in small business undertaking or towards improving farming; or even used to meet basic health bills in a typical poverty setting. This could make a considerable welfare difference for the rural households where income poverty is highly

¹⁹ From <https://freetownsociety.org/freetown-school-term-date-list/>, the total number of school weeks per years is 40; multiplied by 5 average school days gives 200 days for the school year.

²⁰ See Sierra Leone Education Sector Analysis Report (2020, page 63).

concentrated. The increased access to education associated with school feeding, reduced school fees and reduced household expenditure burden on learning materials also directly contributes to reduction in multidimensional child poverty (SDG1 and SDG2).

5.2 An impact assessment on education using UReport Technology

A poll gauging perception of adolescents and youths on performance of FQSEP using U-Report technology, 2021 outcome compared with 2019

This UReport poll (capturing a total of 5,320 responses of registered U-Reporters aged 15-35 years with 74 percent male and 26 percent female) was meant to complement the rapid impact assessment above coordinated by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, working with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and Statistics Sierra Leone. From this survey, 45 percent of respondents aged 15-35 years felt that the FQSEP had impacted them and their families positively. This is lower than the 64 percent reported in 2019 using this technology. However, comparisons have to be made with caution due to the difference in age groups since the 2019 poll was conducted among 15-19 years old only.

Among the reasons given for the positive impact was families not having to pay fees (49 percent), which was also the most commonly cited impact in 2019. The second most common reason is having more children going to school cited both in 2019 (26 percent) and 2021 (25 percent). Respondents appreciated that families did not have to buy exercise or text books (9 percent), and that families can save money (7 percent). More children understanding their lessons better was mentioned by 6 percent of respondents in 2021. Other positive impacts mentioned include the free school meal given in some schools and the West African Secondary School Certificate Education (WASSCE) fees being paid.

At the same time, 30 percent of the respondents said the FQSEP impacted them negatively, attributed to payment of extra charges reported by 38 percent (24 percent in 2019), overcrowded classrooms 23 percent, and paying for exercise or textbooks 12 percent (compared to 16 percent in 2019). Others include unapproved and unmotivated teachers.

This UReport poll generally support outcome from the rapid impact assessment results presented above for the FQSEP support at primary level; beneficiaries (pupil, parent and school administrators) indicating a generally high satisfaction with the programme, having high chances of yielding better educational outcomes in the country. It should be recognised at the same time that for the programme to be sustainably beneficial, it has to be accompanied by other school development support, such as building more school structures, approving more schools, employing more trained and motivated teachers, and scaling up school inspection and monitoring.

5.3 At indicator level

The Free Quality School Education Programme was introduced with increased government spending to the educational sector to more than 20 percent since 2019. This has been accompanied by marked increases in school enrolment across all levels, from pre-primary, primary to secondary

as shown by trends in **Figure 5.3**. More so, we saw very sharp jump in enrolment increases when the programme was introduced in 2018/19: pre-primary enrolment increased from 90,701 in 2018 to 140,731 in 2019 (by 44.1 percent); primary from 1,369,738 to 1,772,777 (by 29.4 percent); junior secondary from 315,500 to 451,685 (43.2 percent); and senior secondary from 206,506 to 305,485 (47.9 percent) during 2018-2019. Primary enrolment slight dipped in 2020 with a -0.7 percentage points growth, while the rest of the school levels maintained positive growth but disproportionately far less that growth in 2019. This can be attributed to the COVID-19 restrictions during 2020 that saw schools closed down for several months.

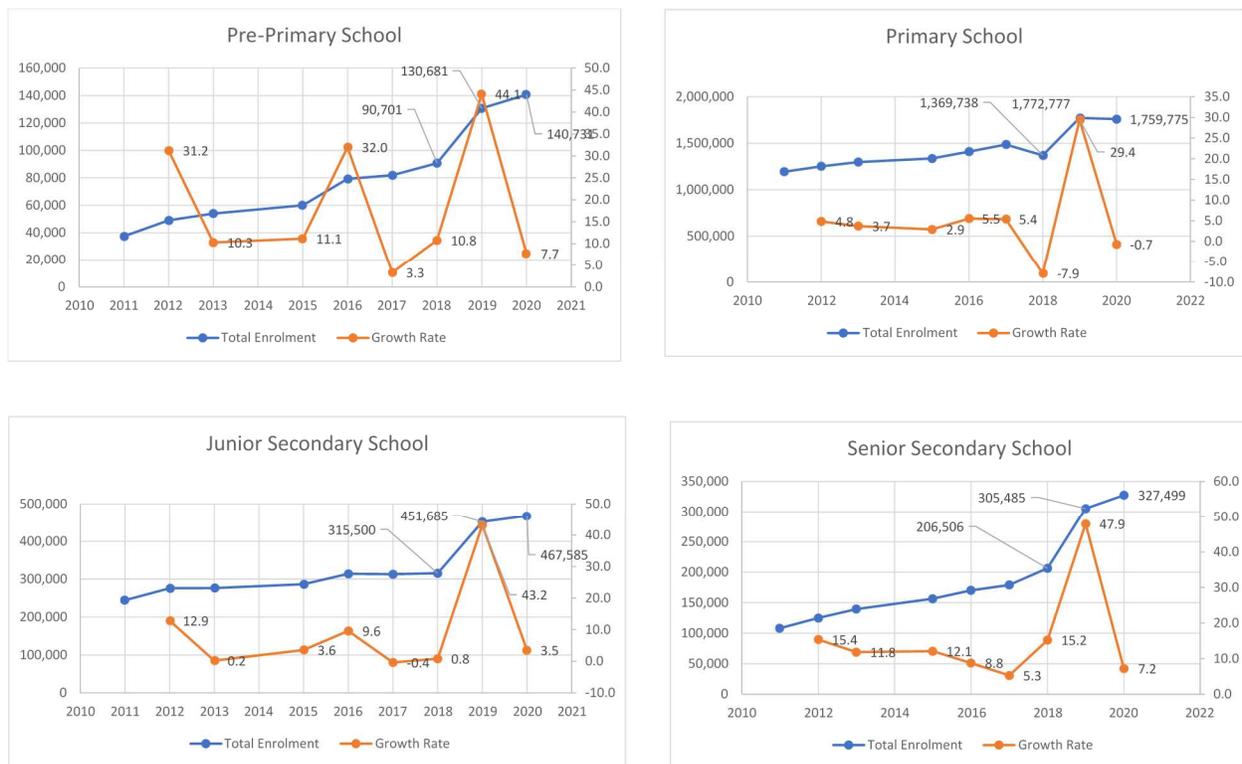


Figure 5.3: Trends in school enrolment before 2010-2020

The target on gender parity in primary school (as contained in the SDGs Results Framework) has been achieved and more or less maintained since 2018/19, recording 1.0 in 2020/21, compared with 1.03 in 2019/20 and 2018/19. The junior secondary parity has also been achieved, recording 1.0 in 2020/21, compared with 0.94 in 2019/20 and 0.93 in 2018/19. Senior secondary is close to parity at 0.97 (2020/21), compared with 0.93 in 2019/20 and 0.91 in 2018/19; all encouraging.

School completion for girls estimated 84.6 percent in 2020/21, compared with 79.7 percent in 2019/20 and 90 percent 2018/19—the drop in 2019/20 can be attributed to the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The completion rate for boys in primary in 2020/21 is 83.0 percent, compared with 79.6 percent in 2019/20 and 66.6 percent in 2018/19. For junior secondary: girls' completion is 73.8 percent in 2020/21, compared with 68.1 percent in 2019/20 and 67 percent in 2018/19; boys 73.9 percent 2020/21, compared with 68.9 percent in 2019/20 and 53.6 percent in 2018/19. For senior secondary: girls' 43.2 percent in 2020/21, compared with 41.7 percent

2019/20 and 15 percent in 2018/19; boys' 45.2 percent in 2020/21, compared with 45.2 percent in 2019/20 and 22 percent in 2018/2019.

In conclusion, some significant progress has been made towards achieving desired educational outcomes in the country through undertaking key policy initiatives, such as the Free Quality School Education Programme. Nonetheless, there are infrastructural, motivational and supervision challenges associated with initiatives like FQSEP. The contribution of these investments can only be sustained when they are accompanied by others, such as increasing the number of schools/classrooms and qualified and motivated teachers as school enrolment increases; as well as ensuring that constant school supervision is provided.

6.

Progress on Accelerator SDG 16 Justice

6.1 Rapid impact assessment of legal assistance provided by the government to the less privileged

We will start with presenting the results of rapid impact assessment of Legal Aid Board interventions in delivering justice for the poor, sampling 153 beneficiaries of whom 99 were indigents (very poor persons) across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone. The programme areas assessed are: a) legal representation; and b) general legal support, including application of alternative dispute resolution mechanism.

Background data on Board support—Board level response

General legal assistance

In all, a total of 413,169 people including foreign nationals have benefitted from legal aid services since the Legal Aid Board of Sierra Leone was established in May 2015: a total of 24,768 in 2015/16; 83,053 in 2017; 106,655 in 2018; 112,841 in 2019 and 85,852 in 2020 (**Figure 6.1a** illustrates the distribution of the number of people that have benefitted from the scheme during 2015-2020). Annual percentage increases in the number of beneficiaries in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 are 235 percent, 331 percent, 356 percent and 247 percent relative to 2015/16, respectively. This indicates massive efforts undertaken by the Legal Aid Board to promote access to justice during 2015-2020. The focus of interventions has been on promoting access to justice for the indigents (persons who are poor and therefore cannot afford legal services) providing them with free legal representation, legal advice and related services across the board, including inmates in pre-trial detention and correctional centres.

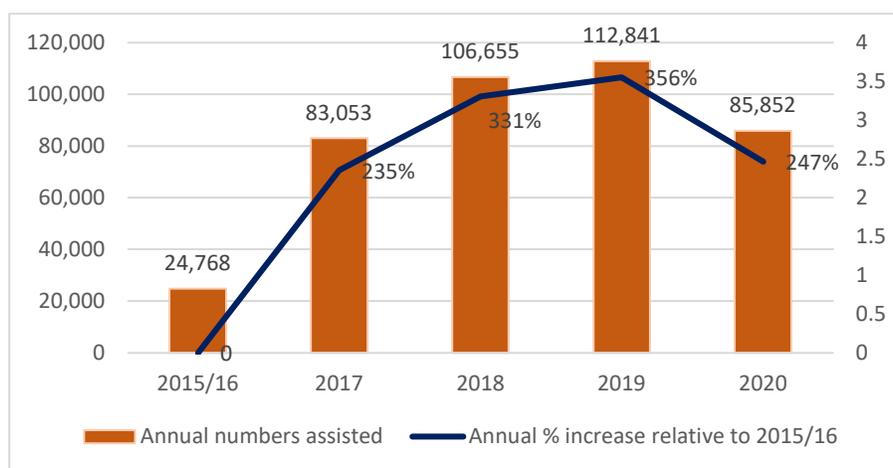


Figure 6.1a: Number of beneficiaries of Legal Aid Services (annual, 2015-2020)

Source: Constructed from data provided by the Legal Aid Board

Legal representation

Legal representations delivered by the Board totaled 68,323 persons during 2015-2020: a total of 5,264 in 2015/16; 14,715 in 2017; 17,250 in 2018; 18,555 in 2019 and 12,539 in 2020 (**Figure 6.1b** illustrates distribution of the number of beneficiaries). Annual percentage increases in the number of beneficiaries in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020 were 180 percent, 228 percent, 252 percent and 138 percent relative to 2015/16, respectively.

The indigents (very poor people) represented in courts in 2020 comprised 9,258 males, 1,453 females and 1,788 juveniles. Juveniles automatically qualify for the scheme without any precondition or without being subjected to “Means Test”, unlike adults; it does not matter whether the child’s income or that of his/her parents or guardians is above the minimum wage or not. Other persons who qualify for legal aid without precondition include disabled persons, war amputees, war widows, aged and retirees. Ideally, those above the minimum wage do not qualify, but many (especially in remote communities) are commonly assisted because of the extremely challenging situations they find themselves in such as the upkeep of their children for which their incomes are not enough address them.

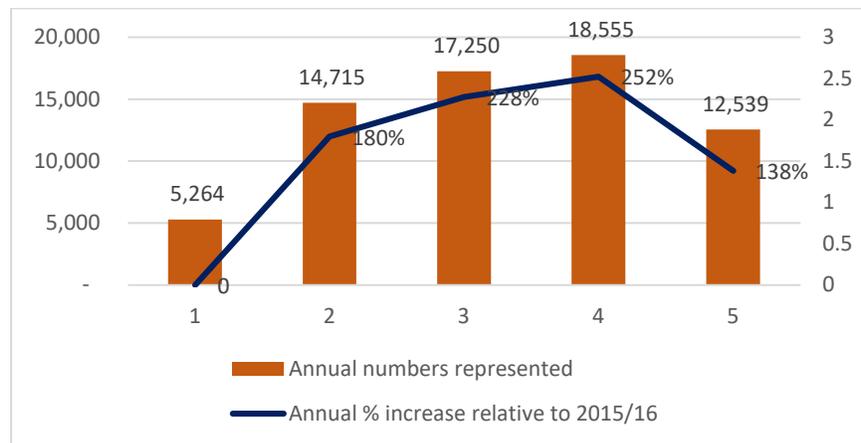


Figure 6.1b: Trends in number of beneficiaries assisted relating to legal representation

Source: Constructed from data provided by the Legal Aid Board

In 2020, the Key Population (groups which are most prone to contracting HIV/AIDS), totaling 303 were rendered legal assistance, including 198 female sex workers, 96 people who inject drugs, and 9 men having sex with men—who are prone to abuses and in certain circumstances not provided free legal services due to prejudices and as a result, they are *left behind* in ensuring access to justice for all.

Among the organisations that service the Key Population that the Board cooperates with in Sierra Leone include: Dignity Association; Society for Women and Aids in Africa; Sierra Leone Youth Development and Child Link; Women in Crises Sierra Leone; and Kakua Hospice. The **Board has 59 Paralegals** deployed in 23 towns and cities including the 16 District headquarter towns in Sierra Leone, visit drop-in centres run by partner organisations on a daily basis to assess their justice needs.

Legal advice and mediation

With regards to providing legal advice and assistance through mediation, as opposed to representation in courts, cases the Board commonly handles here include: civil matters (or matters of non-criminal nature), such as child maintenance, spousal maintenance, inheritance, property matters, labour matters, family and marital disputes; community level disputes and minor criminal matters, such as abusive language, threatening remarks, common assault and fighting. This is aimed at reducing pressure on an already overstretched police force and general court system, thereby promoting peaceful coexistence as opposed to the adversarial nature of the criminal justice system. In all, the Board mediated a total of 184,406 matters under legal advice and mediation, during 2015-2020: a total of 7,794 in 2015/16; 41,592 in 2017; 48,452 in 2018; 49,282 in 2019; and 37,286 in 2020 (annual percentage increases relative to the baseline 20 shown in **Figure 6.1c**).

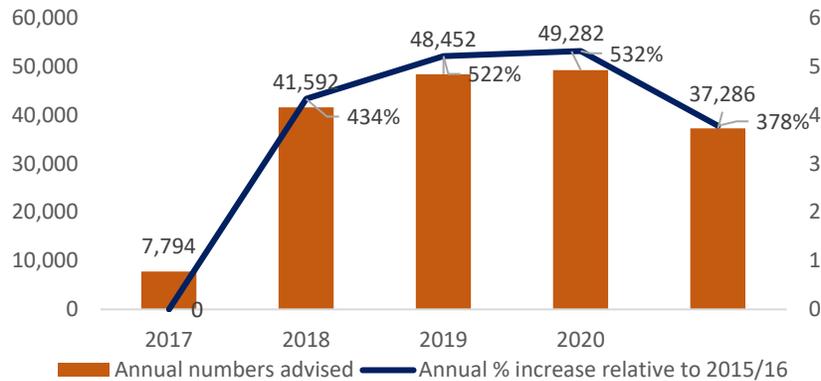


Figure 6.1c: Trends in number of beneficiaries assisted relating to legal advice and mediation
 Source: Constructed from data provided by the Legal Aid Board

Matters/offences for which legal representation and/or advice sought

As indicated in **Figure 6.1d**, *the alleged offences* for which *legal representations* have been provided include: unlawful gathering, loitering and embezzlement, child stealing, threatening to kill, economic crime, gambling, conspiracy to import prohibited drugs, larceny, conspiracy to commit a felony, sexual penetration and trespass. The offences are listed in order of the frequency of legal representation by the Board, with felony, sexual penetration and trespass accounting for the highest while observations; unlawful gathering, loitering and embezzlement the lowest.

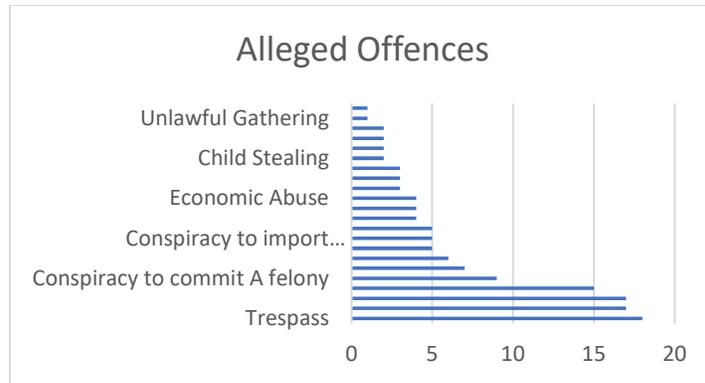


Figure 6.1d: Offenses addressed under legal representation

Alleged offences for which *legal advice* have been provided are generally similar to those for legal representation, as illustrated in **Figure 6.1e**, ranging from unlawful possession of weapons and gathering (the lowest in frequency), to assault and abusive language (the highest frequency).

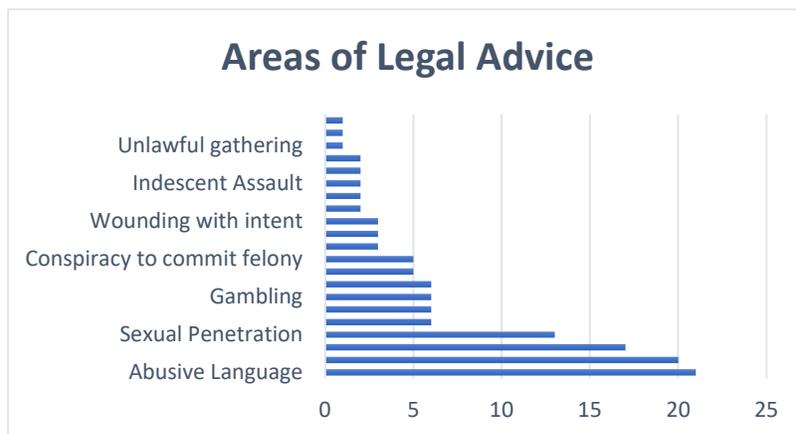


Figure 6.1e: Offenses addressed under legal advice

6.2 Welfare impact of legal representation—Beneficiary level response

Table 6.2 presents basic characteristics of the beneficiaries of legal representation interviewed in terms of sex, age, education, employment, income level and those in extreme poverty (indigence) attended to or not; sampling a total of 153 persons in this rapid impact assessment.

Table 6.2: Characteristics of beneficiaries of legal representations

Characteristics of persons needing support that were interviewed	Observations
Total number of persons surveyed	153
Male respondents	80 (52 percent)
Female respondents	73 (48 percent)
Respondents age 35-60	53 percent
Respondents age 18-35	37 percent

Characteristics of persons needing support that were interviewed	Observations
Respondent age 60+	10 percent
Primary school level	14 (11.76 percent)
Junior secondary school education	9 (7.56 percent)
Senior secondary school education attainment	31 (26.05 percent)
Technical/Vocational level education attainment	29 (24.36 percent)
University level attainment	26 (20.16 percent)
Those reportedly employed	58 (47.9 percent)
Not employed	63 (52.1 percent)
Those with income above minimum wage of Le 600,000	50 (56.8 percent)
Those with income below minimum wage of Le 600,000	38 (43.2 percent)
Indigents (poor) reporting to the Board that were represented	83 (84 percent)
Indigents reporting to the Board that were not assisted	16 (16 percent)

Projected impact on income poverty

From the field, 98 indigents respondents (about 99 percent of the 99 of them interviewed) said they did not pay for *legal representation* provided by the Board. Only one reported payment, which could be an extremely isolated case, suggesting that basically the Board opts to provide free services to everyone eligible for its assistance. The one person that reported payment is said to have paid Le 150,000 (US\$ 15) for assistance. With regard to payment for general legal services, 100 out of 110 respondents (91 percent) said they never made any payment for legal advice, while 10 (9 percent) reported to the negative; which could also generally be perceived as isolated.

A simulation

Suppose on average a person (even being poor) would have to spend, say, Le 2 million (approximately USD 200) to pay for legal representation and/or general legal advice at any one instance. Yet, he or she could save this amount through intervention of the Board with its paralegals and/or their counsels. Given this, the 99 poor persons interviewed could have all saved in total of Le198 million (USD 19,600) in one instance.

From the Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey 2018 (SLIHS2018) providing the current estimate of income poverty levels in the country, the current income poverty level at an estimated 7,534,981 national population is 56.8 percent (equal to 4,279,869 income poor persons in the country).²¹ Extreme poverty is 12.9 percent (equal to 972,013 extremely income poor persons). Essentially, the Legal Aid Board services especially currently target at least 12.9 percent of extremely poor individuals (972,013) nationwide that make up the indigent class in the description of the Board's Policy. Therefore, if all these 972,013 indigents could be provided legal assistance as described above in one instance at the monetary estimate of Le 2 million (USD200) per person, this could save *this leaving no one behind group* a total of Le 1.944 trillion (USD 194.403 million), with which they could invest in farm or non-farm activities to improve their livelihoods, with long-term propensity to contribute to national income and peace and national cohesion.

²¹ See 2018 SLIHS Report (2019, pages li and 16).

6.3 Status of health of beneficiaries before and after legal assistance

Based on the 153 people interviewed during the assessment, those suggesting that their health status was excellent or good after receiving legal representation far exceeded those that said so before receiving the presentation—144 respondents (after assistance), compared to 75 (before assistance), close to 50 percent improvement (**Table 6.3**). It could certainly be expected that there would be improved psychological health to persons receiving such assistance that may otherwise not have the money to hire these services to pursue justice. The positive knock on effect this could have on economic participation and productivity, and hence peace and stability can be tremendous.

Table 6.3: Health status of beneficiaries before and after assistance

Health Status	Before Assistance	After Assistance
Excellent	20	49
Good	55	95
Fair	33	6
Poor	7	3
Missing	38	0
Total	153	153

6.3 General beneficiary perception as to the impact of the Board Legal Assistance Scheme

Of the 153 respondents interviewed, 44 (29 percent) said the scheme excellently impacted on their lives: 55 (36 percent) said it had a very good impact on their lives; 19 (12 percent) good; and 3 (2 percent) poor. This shows a very good public perception about the work of the Legal Aid Board in the country and that of the public. More so, those in the rural areas (the poor in particular) have increased chances of securing sustained justice if massive support can be accorded to the Board. This can have long-term macroeconomic benefit in terms of contribution to revenue generation through improved psychological health in the population to work economically hard, besides the peace and national cohesion and security is strengthened.

6.5 Other areas under SDG 16

Indicator 16.10.2 on Public Access to Information

Sierra Leone has made steady progress in the promotion of public access to information since the enactment of the Right to Access Information Law in 2013 and the setting up of the Right to Access Information Commission in 2014. In an assessment conducted in 2019, we noted that 112 successful *Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests* in the country were made between 2014 and 2019, about 50 percent of which were actually made in 2019 alone. In our assessment of 2020, we noted that 144 FOI requests were made in the whole country, out of which 132 were fully complied with.

The *Proactive Disclosure of Information (PDI)* was launched on 6th December 2018 by the Vice President, and steady progress has also been made on this front since then. In our assessment of PDI in 2019, we noted that out of 10 public authorities that submitted Proactive Publication Schemes, one was fully approved, two were approved with observation, three given conditional approval, and three rejected. In our assessment of PDI in 2020, we noted that out of 20 public authorities that submitted their publication schemes, 10 were approved with observation, 8 given conditional approval, and 2 were rejected. And in our assessment of 20 public authorities, we noted that 13 have *Records Management departments/units*, 15 have *Public Information Officers*, and 15 have *ICT departments/units*.

Furthermore, Sierra Leone has since 2019 participated in an annual UNESCO survey on Public Access to Information, scoring 5 out of 10 on adoption and 4 out of 10 on implementation of the FOI law in the 2020 UNESCO survey. The country also scored 85 percent on FOI in the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) compact assessment for 2020; while it was among 6 countries that co-sponsored the UN Resolution that recognised September 28 as the International Day for the Universal Access to Information on 15th October 2019, a day which has been celebrated in Sierra Leone since 2019.

Increased popularisation, public engagement, and capacity building activities involving state and non-state actors throughout the country over the past two years have contributed immensely to this steady progress the country has made on FOI. However, while we recognise this steady progress, challenges such as limited resources and staffing have impacted the adoption and implementation of the FOI law in Sierra Leone; thus, the need to scale up support for the Commission.

Anti-Corruption Drive

Following the amendment of the Anti-Corruption Act and the establishment of a Special Court within the High Court of Sierra Leone for corruption cases with Five (5) dedicated Special Judges for speedy and efficient trial of corruption offences, the country is now witnessing improvement in corruption indicators and tangible results are recorded in the fight against corruption. Generally, there has been a turnaround in the trial of cases, accompanied with laudable conviction rates, with a total of 775 potential corruption cases were reported in 2020, compared to 603 cases in 2019.

The Afro-barometer report shows that the prevalence of corruption in Sierra Leone has declined from 70 percent during 2015-2017 to 40 percent in 2020, while the Transparency International report shows that the country has jumped two places, from 2019 to 2020. The Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Control of corruption scorecard also shows that Sierra Leone has progressed from 79 percent in 2019 to 81 percent in 2020; an incremental consistency from 2018 to date.

7.

Progress on SDGS 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 12 & 13

7.1 SDG 1 (Ending Poverty) and 2 (Bringing Hunger to Zero)

Generally, the level of poverty incidence (both income and multidimensional) remains high in the country, although there has been some proportionate decline in these indices from 2003 to date. Income poverty measures currently estimates at 56.8 percent as per the 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) report published in 2019. This is higher than the last reported estimates of 52.9 percent in the 2011 SLISH report, although the two estimates are not to be compared:

“The new poverty rate of 56.8% is not directly comparable to the official rate of 52.9% in 2011, due to differences in methodology and setting a new (higher) poverty line for 2018. Adjusting for these changes, we do find that poverty has decreased by 5.6 percentage points.”²²

That is, income poverty would drop to 47.3 percent currently, compared to 52.9 percent in 2011 keeping the same poverty line as in 2011, and from 66.4 percent in 2003/04. Multidimensional poverty has been consistently dropping from 88.2 percent based on national census data of 2003, to 68.3 percent 2015 census data and 64.8 percent based on the country’s 2017 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS);²³ while acknowledging that the current estimate remains high to continue to induce rapid response from the state. The country has especially made substantial reduction in urban poverty, its income estimate currently standing at 34.8 percent compared to 46.9 in 2003/04; against rural poverty at 73.9 percent compared to 78.7 percent in 2003/04—suggesting that poverty remains a rural phenomenon in the country; which is reinforced by multidimensional measure, jumped up from 78.9 percent (based on the 2015 census) to 86.3 percent (based on the 2017 MICS), while urban estimates declined from 44.8 percent (2015 census) to 37.6 percent (2017 MICS). Multidimensional child poverty remains high, although it declined from 77 percent in 2010 to 66 percent in 2017²⁴.

Extreme poverty (a major measure of hunger reduction performance) follows the trend. At national and urban levels, extreme poverty declined from 14.43 and 7.8 percent on 2003/4 SLIHS data, to 12.9 and 3.8 percent on 2018 SLIHS data, respectively; while rural estimates slightly increased from 18.75 percent in 2003/4 to 19.9 percent currently, on 2018 SLIHS data.

On the intermediate performance, in terms of policy deliverables, a lot holds in promise for substantial reduction in poverty at all fronts if the government sustains its ongoing proactive

²² See Sierra Leone 2018 SLIHS Report (2019 page liii)

²³ Sierra Leone National Multidimensional Poverty Report 2019; Sierra Leone 2015 Census Thematic Report on Poverty and Durables

²⁴ Multidimensional Child Poverty in Sierra Leone, GoSL and UNICEF 2019

measure in fighting deprivations and advancing long-term structural transformation strategies. This would include continued prioritisation of SDGs 4 on inclusive education and 16 on justice, inclusive society and strong institutions as discussed above.

A report on Social Safety Net/related interventions under SDGs 1&2

A total of 29,000 World Bank funded beneficiaries (low-income informal sector workers and Micro/Small Enterprises) were provided with financial support at Le1,309,000 per beneficiary, covering locations from the five regions of the country under the first phase of the Emergency Cash transfers (ECT I) during 2019-2020/21—beneficiaries drawn from the capital city of Freetown in the Western Area; Bo City in the South; Kenema City in the East, Makeni City in the North; and Port Loko District in the North-West. With an additional funding of US\$ 5.5 million from the European Union through the World Bank, a second phase of the ECT was extended to 39,000 vulnerable households in the capital city of Freetown. All phases ensured that each of the beneficiary households received a one-off benefit of Le1,309,000, drawn from low-income sector workers in small businesses, tourism and entertainment industry, as well as persons with disabilities (PWDs) begging in the street. Other deliverables included:

- Ensuring during the COVID-19 pandemic-related lockdowns that a total of 10,962 PWDs were provided with GoSL-funded ECT in Freetown and the regional cities of Bo, Kenema, Makeni and Port Loko at Le 250,000 per beneficiary, coupled with other in-kind support.
- GoSL through its National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) signing Financing Agreement of US\$ 30 million with the World Bank for expansion of COVID-Social Safety Net nationwide for 3 years, covering June 2020-June 2023; Phase I targeting 35,000 extremely poor beneficiary households in all 16 districts of Sierra Leone, mostly in the rural areas (32,502 out of the 35,000 households); 2,498 in the provincial towns/cities—the first payment of US\$ 135 (SLL 1,309,000) to each of the beneficiary household already done, of four planned tranches; the last three tranches of US\$ 45 (SLL 435,000) to each to be paid before the end of June 2022, to be accompanied by an additional US\$ 45 (SLL435,000) payment to extremely poor households with PWDs.
- Promoting employment opportunities for the youth during 2019-2020/21:
 - a total of 2,300 of them provided employment support in the rehabilitation of at least a hectare of cocoa and coffee plantations in Kono and Kailahun Districts in the East;
 - supported 3,400 of them for the rehabilitation of approximately 50 wet rice systems covering an area of 250 hectares in Kono District in the East and Falaba District in the North; and
 - supported 3,400 to work in garbage collection and disposal in Koidu City, Kono district.²⁵

²⁵ Extended social action programmes for poverty reduction can be obtained from Sierra Leone's Annual Progress Reports on the country's MTNDP (2019-2023) for 2019/20 and 2020/21 in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development.

7.2 SDG 3 (Inclusive Health)

Within its Human Capital Development flagship programme launched in the last two years, GoSL has also ramped up focus and support for the health sector, especially towards the development of the child.

Over the period 2013-2019/20 the country decreased under-five mortality rate from 156 deaths in 2013 to 122 deaths in 2019/20 per 1,000 live births; infant mortality dropping from 92 to 75 deaths per 1,000 live births during the same period; as well as neonatal mortality rate, from 39 to 31 deaths per 1000 live births. Maternal mortality rate also dropped from 1165 in 2013 to 716 deaths per 100,000 live births during the period. This can be associated with a reduction in stunting among children under 5 years from 38 to 30 percent; wasted children from 9 to 5 percent; and underweight from 16 to 9.9 percent, during 2013-2019/20. However, HIV prevalence somehow increased from 1.5 to 1.7 percent among adults age 15-49 during 2013-2019 (women 2.2 percent in 2019 compared to 1.7 percent in 2013; men 1.3 percent in 2019 compared to 1.1 percent in 2013).

With increased resolve by the government to continually scale up investment in the health sector, especially in the context of advancing its Human Capital Development, increased public investment has been made in this sector, given the following key deliverables produced during 2018/19-2020/21 to advance health outcomes:

- Budgetary allocation to public health sector increased from 6 percent in 2018 to 11 percent in 2020;
- The National Emergency Medical Services (NEMS) established to manage a network of 216 ambulances around the country, to strengthen referral of patients within the country;
- Advanced digitalization of health information systems at CHPs and MCHPs
- Accreditation received for training of surgeons, obstetricians, physicians and pediatricians, and training begun for first set of specialists, while plans advanced to improve condition of service for specialist to make it attractive to the diaspora.
- Public-private partnership encouraged in the sector with the development of appropriate policy; implementation of initiative already because at the largest tertiary hospital (the Connaught Hospital) for pharmaceutical product management.
- The Secretariat Sierra Leone's Social Health Insurance established
- Increased the coordination of NGO operations in the sector through the signing of Service Level Agreement with the Government
- The Health Service Commission completed recruitment of over 4,000 health workers.
- GPS tracking system installed on all drug distribution trucks to increase management of health products across the country

7.3 SDG 5 (Gender)

Gender and women empowerment remain central in the government development policy as expressed in Cluster 5 of the country's MTNDP. Laudable progress has been made in achieving key targets in this domain through various initiatives that were undertaken since the last VNR and before. The status report in the following paragraphs came from information provided by the

Ministry Gender and Children's Affairs towards the 2021 VNR report preparation process based on the country's SDGs Results Framework programmed indicators.

As to the *share of women employed for cash in total number employed in non-agricultural activities* in the SDGs Results Framework, 45 percent is currently receiving cash for work in non-agricultural activities, compared with 41 percent in 2013; their male counterpart's standing at 72 percent. *The percentage of women who have experienced physical violence since age 15* increased from 56 percent in 2013 to 61 percent in 2019. It is be noted that these increases could have been the results of scaled up monitoring of and reporting on these indicators than before, which constitute a success by itself in terms of information gathering on gender related issues, as a leaving no one behind dimension.

About 46 percent of women have experienced *emotional violence*; the most common form of this being insults suffered from their husbands or being made to feel bad about themselves (40 percent), followed by their husband saying or doing something to humiliate them in front of others (33 percent). *The proportion of women experiencing sexual violence* declined from 11 percent in 2013 to 7.0 percent in 2019.

In 2020, GoSL established the Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV) '116' toll-free hotline was to provide counselling and referral services to SGBV survivors, particularly during the pandemic. During the period May-October 2020 following its establishment, a total of 38,607 calls at an average of 7,721 calls per month were logged, by the 116-hotline from May-October 2020. A total 297 incidents of gender-based violence were reported, of which 175 were sexual penetration and 98 domestic violence incidents²⁶.

The Government, however, has established and operationalized six One Stop Centres to provide medical treatment, legal services, and psychosocial support to both male and female survivors of SGBV, reaching out to a total of 1,426 survivors of SGBV, including 12 with disabilities²⁷.

Early marriage has been a major concern for the government and partners, with women generally getting matrimony earlier than men. Currently, over half of women (52 percent) age 20-24 are married, compared with 18 percent for men in the same age group. Furthermore, 83 percent of women age 15-49 have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM), representing a decrease from 90 percent in 2013—FGM occurring mostly within the ages 10 and 14; with 71 percent of women age 15-49 having undergone FGM before age 15.

Out of a total number of 132 elected parliamentary seats, 18 seats are held by females, representing **12.1 percent, with** 2 out of 14 Paramount Chief Members of Parliament being females. We now have 2 out of the 7 Mayors in the 22 Local Councils of the country as females, constituting 28.5 percent; while 1 out of the 21 Chairpersons in these Councils are females, constituting 4.7 percent. And 90 out of the 479 Local Councilors across the country are females, constituting 18.7 percent—this is against Section 95 (2c) of the Local Government Act 2004 providing for a mandatory 50-50 gender parity at Ward Committee levels: “That in addition to the councilor and paramount chief

²⁶ 2020 UN Annual Results Report

²⁷ 2020 UN Annual Results Report

in the chiefdom, the ward committee shall consist of not more than 10 other persons at least 5 of whom shall be women.”

In terms of the “percentage of currently married women that participate in 3 key decision-making processes at home (health care, major household purchases and visit to family)”: The data reveals that 35 percent of currently married women in Sierra Leone participate alone or jointly with their husbands in three specified household decisions, dropping from 2013 (45 percent). And that women are slightly more likely to participate in decisions about major household purchases (47 percent) and visits to their family or relatives (46 percent) than in decisions about their own health care (44 percent). The percentage of currently married women who participate alone or jointly with their husband in all three of the specified decisions declined from 45 percent in 2013 to 35 percent in 2019. Those who do not participate in any of the three decisions increased over the same period, from 31 percent to 43 percent.

Regarding “laws and regulations in place that guarantee women aged 15-49 access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education”: Sexual and reproductive care does remain one of the thirteen policy areas of focus in GoSL’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy. The policy objective of this area of focus is to implement measures to ensure that 60 percent of women and adolescent girls, children and infants have access to health including sexual and reproductive health, cancer and HIV/AIDS by 2025. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development has developed the Sierra Leone National Population Policy 2018 that guarantees women’s access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education.

As to the “unmet demand for contraceptives”: Overall, 46 percent of currently married women have a demand for family planning; 32 percent want to space births and 14 to limit births. Twenty-five (25) percent have an unmet need for family planning (17 percent for spacing and 7 percent for limiting). About 46 percent of the demand for family planning is satisfied, 45 percent of which through use of modern methods.

About “Legal framework (including customary law) in place that guarantees women’s equal rights to land ownership and other entitlements”: Efforts in this direction have been against the background that most traditional laws have not entertained ownership of land by women. Part of the response to this was GoSL’s effort in 2015 to review the National Land Policy that was successfully done. This policy provides for the following:

- Inserting in all relevant legislation effective protection of women’s rights to land and other related resources, that has been on course;
- Enforcing existing laws and establishing a clear legislative framework to protect the rights of women in issues of access/inheritance to land and use of land-based resources, that has been on course;
- Enhancing and guaranteeing women’s access to land and their security of tenure, that has been on course;
- Securing access/inheritance rights of women, especially unmarried daughters in accordance with law, that has been on course; and
- Amending the Provinces Land Act Cap 122 to remove the discriminatory distinction between native and non-native citizens, that is being considered.

Further to the formulation of the policy, Government is also in the process of enacting the Land Commission Bill that would among other things, guarantee women's access and ownership of land in Sierra Leone.

From the above status report on Goal 5, a lot of progress has been made in raising awareness on the need to address gender inequities as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development. While the country still lags behind achieving targets on a number of indicator status, the results shown equally suggest that the government has continued to strongly improve on the information systems and report on gender and women empowerment issues. Indeed, it is encouraging that improvement is recorded on some indicators over time that the state will build on while addressing remaining and emerging challenges.

7.4 SDG 8 (Decent Work)

Efforts to enhance decent work and stop child labour continues to attract government policies, albeit the lack of recent data from child and general labour surveys. The last child labour survey of 2017 records a significant reduction in the percentage of children engaged in child labour from 44.4 percent in 2013 to 29.3 percent in 2017. With the introduction of the Government's free quality education policy and parents being discouraged from sending their children for street trading and other forms of labour tasks, this percentage is expected to drop further.

The government remained mindful that a high-quality and motivated labour force is very strategic to its national economic transformation drive. In this regard, it has increased the minimum wage by 20 percent from Le 500,000 to Le 600,000 to improve the life of workers both in the private and public sectors. Additionally, the labour laws in the country are now stronger, with an existing Comprehensive Decent Work Programme which has led to the development of the Labour Market Information System and the National HIV/AIDS workplace policy. The programme has also facilitated the domestication of International Conventions on the Elimination of Child Labour.

Comments on decent work from district/community level: Some respondents during focus group discussions at district/community level did acknowledge that some jobs at local level have been well paid and attracted young people. However, while some of these activities provide handsome income, they have not been environmentally sustainable and can pose threat to future generation. For instance, some testimonies point to the high incomes young people received from participating in the intensifying timber logging and trade in the country, "albeit to the detriment of the environment."²⁸ They essentially commented that, resorting to some high-income yielding jobs in the rural districts has been the results of unavailability of environmentally decent jobs in light of growing formal job market challenges in the country. Furthermore, some of the job in the rural communities that are high-paying attract child labour. However, it was revealed that there have been several efforts by the government at local level geared towards discouraging child labour in support of child education through joint-monitoring between Family Support Units in the police and the Ministry of Social Welfare decentralised to the district. A particular focus over the period 2019-2020/21 has been on monitoring activities in mining fields and night clubs. The

²⁸ See report submitted by the group of CSOs that coordinated the district/community level consultations on the 2021 VNR process.

establishment of middle-level institutions at district level has helped to address child labour concerns, with many young people now enrolled into vocation and tertiary educational institutions. The Graduate Internship Program supported by the UNDP facilitating placements for youths has been highly complementary, here.

7.5 SDGs 10 (Reducing Inequality)

Inequality is a cross-cutting issue, and so addressing it has been approached from different sectoral, organisational and stakeholder levels. Efforts made in addressing poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG 2), as well as education (SDG 4), gender (SDG 5) and justice (SDG16) as presented above also constitute efforts aimed at reducing inequality (addressing SDG 10). A leading government institution to implement and coordinate national efforts to reduce inequality more directly is the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), whose programme successes were summarised under SDGs 1 and 2 above.

From *district/community level responses*, while inequality was reported to have increased in some districts and communities, it was also noted to have reduced in others through “awareness raising.” The population segments the communities noted to have especially been exposed to inequality concerns *street beggars, orphans, homeless people, and widowed individuals and those struggling to make ends meet*; and that there is also discrimination against women and people living with disabilities (PWDs) in decision making at all levels, including in national, local and traditional (chieftaincy) politics limiting quotas for women and young people generally.

The consultations revealed that “NASCA which is the Implementing Agency for Goal 10 has rolled out the cash support for PWD [People with Disabilities] and the Aged, [although] some of the target beneficiaries were left out.” The social safety net programme of the Commission, agro-support provided by the Ministry of Agriculture and a host of other interventions of government were reported during the district/community consultations as highly contributive in reducing inequality, especially having PWDs and the generally less privileged as priority. The enforcement of the Hands-Off Our Girls Initiative championed by the First Lady was revealed to have served very well in reducing future inequities and inequalities the communities. Following intense advocacy in community, women were reported to have now been allowed to hold positions in traditional village/sections and chieftdom administrations. There is also the encouraging revelation that there has been more women representation than men (6 out of 10 members) in the Peace Ambassadors Committees in all Chieftdoms in some of the 16 districts of the country.

Certainly, there generally remains more efforts to be undertaken in the area of reducing inequality. A range of bottlenecks in women participation in meetings and public forums were still reported during consultation, given the deeply rooted perennial stereotypes that are difficult to circumvent overnight.

7.6 SDGs 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption) and 13 (Climate Change)

With regard to balancing economic and social needs with environmental sustainability, GoSL has scaled up efforts in this direction the last two to three years. It is of the realisation, indeed, that sustainable development cannot be sustainably achieved with regulating and managing

socioeconomic fronts in the process. Accordingly, as part of strategic institutional progress in this domain, GoSL established the Ministry of Environment in 2019 to increase the political investment in the area of ensuring environmental sustainability central in the leaving no one behind. Along these efforts is its establishment of the National Disaster Management Agency as a standalone institution from the Office of National Security

During 2019-2020, the government conducted coastal vulnerability assessments at Municipal and Chiefdom levels in six pilot sites and determined the key climate-sensitive sectors and hazards in the piloted communities. It also assessed the vulnerability of specific economic sectors so as to predict climate change scenarios for the years 2025, 2050, 2100. These assessments revealed that the overall coastal vulnerability ranking for the six communities was at the *medium level* while noting their individual adaptive capacity to be varying according to their specific scores.

During the period under review, the country has undertaken the Sea Level Rise Scenario assessment and set benchmarks for future shoreline positions in the country, leading to the development of sea-level rise scenario maps, thereby providing useful information on the vulnerabilities of coastal resources and infrastructure to inform planning and appropriate programmes and projects for intervention.

As part of efforts to reduce the incidence of flooding and bush fires, the Government has planted about 3,000 trees in three flood-prone communities within the Western Area and undertaken massive community sensitization in these communities. Generally, GoSL is currently pursuing a massive national planting initiative, targeting degraded lands and coastal areas to minimize their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. Between April 2020 to June 2021, the first phase of the project has seen the planting of about 1.2 million trees, and by the end of phase two in June 2023, it is estimated that approximately 3.8 million would have been planted. The project has created over 20,000 temporary and permanent jobs at community levels in support of SDG 1, 2, 8 and 10; while awareness created about the importance of planting trees in communities, giving it the requisite gender considerations.

The period under review has generally seen increased public awareness on environmental challenges such as deforestation, depletion of forest cover, climate change, and bush burning; while GoSL worked with development partners to facilitate sector-specific inclusive dialogue on the new Nationally Determined Commitment (NDC) on Blue Economy, Infrastructure, Tourism, Energy, Fishery, Agriculture and Transport, intending to raise emission reduction targets.

Finally, mindful of the urgent need to strengthen coordination and enhance environmental governance in the country, GoSL has reviewed six (6) key environmental legislations: Wildlife Act of 1972; Environment Protection Agency Act of 2008 as amended in 2010; National Protected Area Authority and Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2012; the Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency of 2017; Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection Authority of 2012; and Forestry Act of 1988. These reviews have informed the formulation and submission of six bills to parliament for their enactment into effective environmental legislations during 2019-2020.

8.

Means of Implementation and Partnership for Development SDG 17

The government remains firm in its efforts to mobilise resources for financing the national development plan and the SDGs despite global and domestic challenges. It undertook various reforms to increase mobilisation of domestic revenues while strengthening international development cooperation to complement national efforts at mobilising resources. Various partners have been active in supporting the country's development agenda, including bilateral and multilateral agencies and non-governmental organisations and the private sector. Efforts have been made to strengthen local government and community development systems for enhanced public service delivery at sub-national level, while strengthening science, technology and innovation, national statistics and monitoring and evaluation. In the following sections, we will present development financing and resource mobilisation reforms and strategies and summary of revenue flow figures during 2019-2020/21, going backwards in trend where data is available; and then discuss efforts at deepening local, district/community level service delivery, ending with advances in statistical system, monitoring and evaluation.

8.1 Domestic revenue reforms

The National Revenue Authority (NRA) made significant progress in getting the *Integrated Tax Administration System (ITAS)* project back on track following the disruption caused by the pandemic in the spring of 2020. The system had been scheduled to go live for the first group of 1,000 large and medium-sized taxpayers in the first quarter of 2021, having conducted training of operational staff and pilot taxpayers in preparation for the launch of the new system. The ITAS will allow taxpayers to access an online NRA portal to register and de-register for taxes, file their returns and receive their payment notices to take to the bank.

The Authority had also advanced work for the rollout of *Electronic Cash Registers (ECR)* for the recording and transmission of *Goods and Service Tax (GST)* related transactions. This will help improve the country's GST compliance rate by automating the printing of GST receipts and transmitting transaction information directly to the NRA to allow it to monitor compliance. The Finance Act 2020 had included the necessary enabling provisions for the ECR programme, alongside the completed draft ECR Regulations 2020. Already, the Authority has received 5,000 ECR (ECR1) devices as well as the necessary back office software, servers and network equipment to allow for the automatic transmission of transactions to the NRA. A technical team has been onsite configuring and installing this equipment, while stakeholder sensitised to this system. A total of about 410 large and medium-sized taxpayers have been expected to be the first cohort beneficiaries to be provided with the devices under the pilot phase, while planning the system roll-out.

Furthermore, the Customs Services Department of the Authority continued to make progress in rolling out an Electronic Single Window system for customs transactions allowing importers to clear goods in 24 hours. The new system is now alive, launched 23rd February 2021, initially covering goods under the duty waiver regime and those under the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS) Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS). Documents necessary

to clear customs will be submitted electronically under this system, linked with systems from other public ministries, departments and agencies involved in the duty waiver and ETLS processes; while it is pleasing to note that the NRA had already completed the development of the system and its testing and training phases.

Other achievements include:

- a. the completion of construction of a *new cargo inspection facility* in 2020 at the Queen Elizabeth II Quay to facilitate cargo handling operations;
- b. The setting up of a *Customs Inland Office in the Makeni, the Northern Region Headquarter City* to increase collection of customs related revenues, ensuring reduction of smuggling of goods and services and related economic transaction; which is critical in reducing informal economic operations costing the state a lot in revenue loss;
- c. This relates to the need for the Authority to rent an *Office Space for NRA Staff at Sanya Town* in Bombali District in the Northern Region to combat smuggling operations along the country's border with Guinea in order to increase customs revenue collections; and
- d. It also opened an *Inland Outstation Office in Kailahun Town in the Eastern Region* to improve tax administration and compliance in this area

8.2 Private sector development

In the last two years since Sierra Leone's 2nd VNR report, private sector development strategy has been conducted within the broad context of address the effect of COVID-19 pandemic to keep the economy floating; while from a long-term standpoint the government had embarked on intensive public-private dialogue series to enhance cooperation between the state and the private sector in mobilising resources for public service delivery, alongside the establishment and running of a National Investment Board in the *Office of the Vice President*.

Within the context of fighting COVID-19 pandemic (more to come on this in the next broad section) to float the economy, the Central Bank of Sierra Leone had cut the Monetary Policy Rate by 150 basis points from 16.50 percent to 15.00 percent by March 2020, adjusting the Standing Deposit and Standing Lending facilities rates downward to 12.00 percent and 19.00 percent respectively. It created a Le 500 billion (about USD 50 million) Special Credit Facility at concessionary interest rate to finance the production, procurement and distribution of Essential Goods and Services; providing foreign exchange resources to support the private sector for the importation of essential commodities; and expanded reserve requirement maintenance period for the commercial banks from 14 days to 28 days. These measures were complemented by an active participation of the Central Bank in the secondary market to inject liquidity into the banking system. Accordingly, the next credit to the private sector which had grown to Le 2,27 trillion (22.94 percent) in 2019, further grew to Le 2.38 trillion (about 4.90) in 2020 despite COVID-19.²⁹

²⁹ Macroeconomic Sector Progress Paper submitted to MoPED towards the preparation of the Annual Progress Report for the MTNDP (2021, pages 24-26).

8.3 Development cooperation and NGO Operations

Since the end of the country's civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone has maintained a good partnership framework with its development partners that has since sustained and effective cooperation and external development support to the country to date, from bilateral front, to multilateral and NGO operations. Various Country Partnership Documents between the Government and partners remained active in the country, ranging from the World Bank and African Development Bank's Country Assistance/Framework Strategy/Papers, to the IMF Credit Facility arrangements and the UN 's Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. On the general donor/external assistance to the country, including operations of NGOs, the Government had strengthened its regulations to ensuring effecting aid and development financing from outside resource, currently implementing a national Development Cooperation Framework guiding donor and NGOs. It continued to dialogue and engage all partners on national development issues within the Development Partners' Committee (DEPAC) meetings, now held at Ministerial (chaired by a Cabinet Minister and Co-Chaired by Development Partners) and at Presidential Level (chaired by the President). Indeed, these arrangements have continued to provide confidence in the government and use of country systems for external financing. And it is worth further mentioning that Sierra Leone has continued to be the Chair of the g7+ group of countries coordinating international efforts to address fragilities issue in these nations since 2014, with a UN Observer Status secured in 2020 (see SDG 16 progress).

8.4 Implementing an Integrated National Financing Framework

Furthermore, Sierra Leone had identified the instrumentality of the Development Financing Assessments (DFAs) and Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs) as critical tools recommended in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development. Without wasting much time following the passing of the SDGs in September 2015, Sierra Leone started the INFF process in 2017/18 with background engagement with partners, being among the very few and first cohort of UN Member States that have designed this too for effective guidance and monitoring financing to date. It conducted a DFA in 2018 to inform the financing of its Medium-Term National Development Plan, identifying 18 broad financing initiatives to pursue, including innovative and non-traditional methods.³⁰ In March 2020, an INFF was designed, identifying specific strategies to implement the 18 financing initiatives contained in the DFA Report. The INFF was developed within the country's Walking Out of Fragility Roadmap formulated in March 2020 to accelerate the implementation of the MTNDP and SDGs. As soon as the integrated financing framework was concluded, the Government, through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, secured funding from the UN Global SDGs Financing Window to implement a key component of the framework, which is *Strengthening Domestic Resource Mobilisation for Financing the SDGs*. This is being implemented in two sub-components: a) strengthening domestic revenue mobilisation through enhancing public-private dialogue, tax education, supporting field revenue collection post established near business operations; and building local/district level capacity for monitoring revenue and expenditure flows; and b) deepening financial digitalisation and literacy aimed at increasing financial including through mobilisation and capturing informal economic transactions into formal financial operations.

³⁰ See Sierra Leone MTNDP (2019-2023)

8.5 Summary of resource flows

Domestic revenue, grants and expenditure

Thanks to sustained development cooperation with our partners and the international community in general for providing revenue cushion following the GDP growth fallout from the pandemic. While the 2020 total revenues (including grants) of Le 7.81 trillion (19.0 percent of GDP) was 6.0 percent lower than the Le 8.30 trillion in the revised budget for the year (20.2 percent of GDP), it was 17.1 percent higher than the Le 6.67 trillion recorded in 2019. The revenue increase during 2019-2020 “was mainly as a result of substantial increase in grant resources from our development partners to mitigate and limit the spread of the virus, manage the economic fallout from the pandemic and expend social programmes to the elderly and vulnerable groups.”

Domestic revenue mobilisation was also laudable despite the COVID-19 challenges, as shown in **Table 8.5** and **Figure 8.5** below. Actual total domestic revenue collected for FY2020 amounted to Le5.5 trillion compared to a revised target of Le5.4 trillion resulting in an excess above target of about Le140.3 billion. Collections from Income Taxes were Le2.0 trillion and above target of Le1.9 billion by Le24.7 billion. Goods and Services Tax was above target by Le23.5 billion with total collections of Le1.0 trillion. Customs and Excise Department collections amounted to Le1.2 trillion compared to a revised target of Le1.2 billion recording a shortfall in performance by Le5.2 billion. Mining royalties and licences amounted to Le254.1 billion compared to a target of Le222.7 billion. Revenues collected from Other Government Departments including TSA Agencies amounting to Le878.3 billion, exceeding the target by 48.8 billion. Road User Charges and Vehicle Licenses amounted to Le118.5 billion compared to Le101.4 billion target, recording an excess of about Le17.1 billion. This can be seen in Table 8.5.

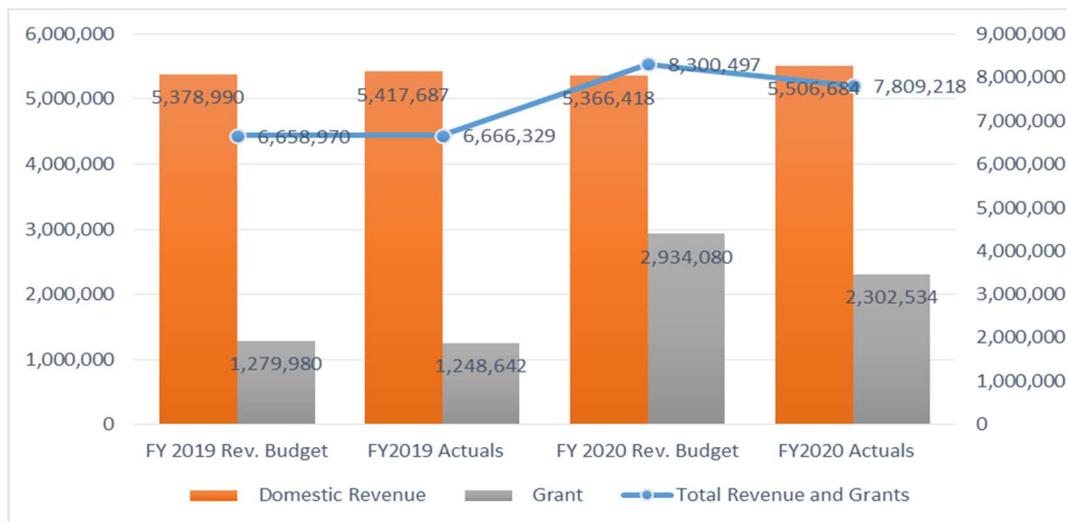


Figure 8.5: Total Revenue and Grant (Million Leones)

Source: Generated by author from the macroeconomic sector paper submitted for the SL-MTNDP 2020 Annual Progress Report

Table 8.5: Domestic Revenue (Million Leones)

Particulars	FY 2019 Rev. Budget Le'million	FY 2019 (Jan – Dec) Actuals Le'million	FY 2020 Rev. Budget Le'million	FY 2020 (Jan – Dec) Actuals Le'million
Total Domestic Revenue	5,378,990	5,417,687	5,378,990	5,506,684
Income Tax Department	1,892,990	1,865,566	1,892,990	1,999,824
Goods and Services Tax	984,000	1,025,196	984,000	1,033,450
Customs and Excise Department	1,281,000	1,332,708	1,281,000	1,000,450
Mines Department	270,404	231,881	270,404	254,120
Other Departments	840,596	856,891	840,596	878,340
Road User Charges	110,000	105,444	110,000	118,500

Source: Ministry of Finance, Budget Bureau and NRA page 18

In addition to general revenue reforms identified above, the National Revenue Authority resource mobilisation drive during the pandemic was anchored on a strategic Business Continuity Plan which allowed the filing of tax returns by emails, engagement with taxpayers online and via SMS to sustain the payment of taxes during the pandemic. The Authority also adopted moral suasion techniques to convince and appeal to taxpayers to honour their obligations rather than having to accrue arrears that will later become burdensome to settle. The results of these were enhanced with the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions later in 2020, leading to increased tax compliance and higher revenue collection in the 4th quarter of 2020

8.6 Government development expenditure and donor/NGOs resource support

This sub-section attempts to presents estimates of development spending on capital projects by the GoSL, compared with general donor support and NGO flows into the country by the Clusters of the SL-MTNDP, aligned to the SDGs for the period 2019-2020, for which data was available.

Government development spending

Government development budget generally shows some resilience in financing from national capital budget, as depicted by **Figure 8.6a and Table 8.6a**, which present rising trend in development disbursement during 2019-2020, from previous years, ranging from a Le 652.73 billion in 2015, to Le 747.13 billion in 2019 and Le 1.34 trillion in 2020. During 2019-2018 that disaggregated data is available, *infrastructural and economic competitiveness cluster (Cluster 3)* of the MTNDP has generally commanded the highest capital financing from the Government budget, followed by *human capital development (Cluster 1)*, all of which impact on various SDGs as the alignment shows in **Table 8.6a**.

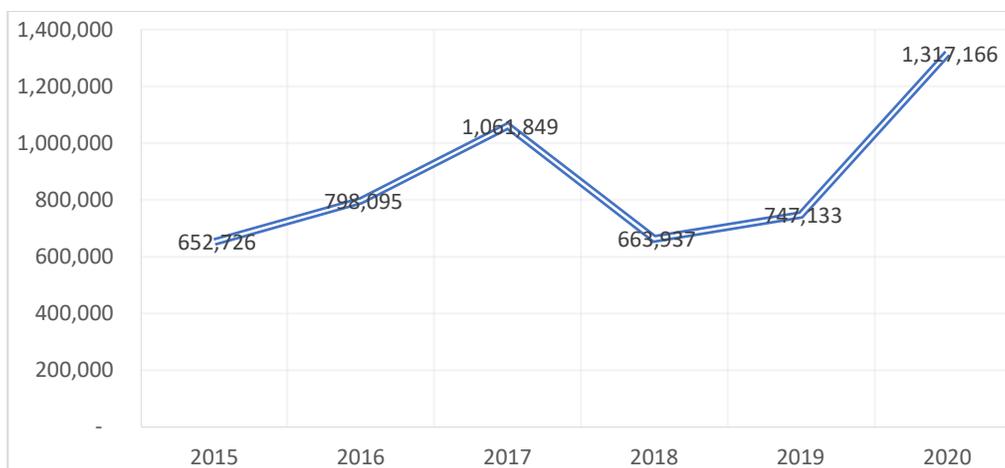


Figure 8.6a: Trend in development disbursement by GoSL 2015-2020

Source: The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

Table 8.6a: Capital Development Spending from Government Budget by Clusters of SL-MTNDP and SDGs 2019-2020

The SDGs (United Nations 2030 Agenda)	S/Leone MTNDP (2019-2023)	2019 Le' M	2020 Le' M	Total
SDGs: 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 15, 17	1. Human Capital Development	44,479	366,327	410,806
SDGs: 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17	2. Diversify the Economy & Promote Economic Growth	9,547	163,592	173,139
SDGs: 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	3. Infrastructure & Economic Competitiveness	592,986	668,384	1,261,370
SDGs: 16, 17	4. Governance & Accountability for Results	83,558	70,937	154,495
SDGs: 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 17	5. Women, Children and Persons with Disability	Na	500	500
SDGs: 4, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	6. Youth, Sports & Migration	Na	12,150	12,150
SDGs: 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	7. Addressing Vulnerability & Building Resilience	Na	2,223	2,223
SDGs: 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	8. Means of Implementation	16,563	33,054	49,617

On the whole, although the *overall fiscal deficit* including grants amounted to Le2.31 trillion or 5.6 percent of GDP, the actual *total expenditure* and net lending amounted to Le10.1 trillion compared to a target of Le10.3 trillion resulting in an under expenditure of about Le198.0 billion. This suggests that spending was carefully managed during 2019-2020, although exceeding revenue flows. Indeed, under SDG 16 where PFM (public financial reforms) are discussed, capturing progress in Audit Service and Anti-Corruption and e-financial governance, Government has generally ensured increased prudence in the use of public resources.

General donor (external) assistance flows

From the **Figure 8.6b** and **Table 8.6b**, while donor flows into the country have generally assumed declining trend over the years, consistent with global ODA decline, the data suggest that financing through development cooperation has been still appreciable during 2015-2020. This is so especially in light of the fiscal challenges posed by COVID-19 in the last (almost) two years, affecting all economies in the world, including principal (traditional) donor countries for Sierra Leone. **Table 8.6b** distributes support across various sectors during 2015-2020.

During 2019-2020, health and then agriculture and energy and power received the highest disbursement. **Table 8.6b** shows the distribution across the Cluster of the Medium-Term National Development Plan, aligned to the SDGs during this period

It should be noted that the figures here do not reflect direct budget support that is supplied through the Consolidated Revenue Fund of the state that is mean’s for various uses, including meeting government recurrent spending. This does not also capture support through NGOs that is captured in the next paragraphs below. The figure presented here were generated by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development through its Development Assistance Coordination Office that runs an online development assistance database—<https://dad.synisys.com/dadsierraleone/#>.



Figure 8.6b: General donor resource flows towards project financing 2015-2020

Source: Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Freetown

Table 8.6b: Donor disbursement trends by sector/project 2015-2020 (in millions USD)

Sector	Disbursed (in Millions USD)						Total 2015-2020	Total 2019-2020
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
Public Financial Management	52.63	10.99	33.06	30.95	64.9	15.75	208.28	80.65
Transparency and democracy	35.76	11.36	14.57	15.46	10.71	6.63	94.49	17.34
Capacity Building of government agencies	49.45	22.24	12.56	35.97	15.59	18.75	154.56	34.34
Security Sector	4.91	2	0.26	0	1.34	1.07	9.58	2.41
Decentralisation	8.82	2.75	1.63	3.69	2.39	0.05	19.33	2.44
Justice Sector Development	6	1.93	1.82	0.83	1.78	0.01	12.37	1.79
COVID-19 Response						9.58	9.58	9.58

Sector	Disbursed (in Millions USD)						Total 2015-2020	Total 2019-2020
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020		
Disaster Relief	0	0	0	3.39	0	0	3.39	0
Private Sector Development	22.99	11.17	18.73	15.92	12.82	11.07	92.7	23.89
Youth Development	2.7	3.43	17.79	0.79	1.41	0.18	26.3	1.59
Agriculture, Rural development and Food Security	58.48	42.48	42.98	56.74	28.48	33.35	262.51	61.83
Infrastructure	31.03	7.8	4.19	33.02	22.58	1.91	100.53	24.49
Macroeconomic Management	113.56	29.63	22.49	91.26	18.1	0.1	275.14	18.2
Housing	0.18	0	0.53	0.88	0	0	1.59	0
Energy and Power	22.38	17.77	15.05	27.59	50.36	20.93	154.08	71.29
Road Network	43.26	60.12	33.99	10.89	7	1.17	156.43	8.17
Transport	0	0	0	2	1.23	0	3.23	1.23
Health	129.12	80.82	101.7	103.6	91.61	80.96	587.79	172.57
HIV/AIDS	0.38	0.37	0.25	1.48	1.07	0	3.55	1.07
Education	37.09	20.55	38.18	53.35	26.65	24.57	200.39	51.22
Water and Sanitation	31.02	26.74	32.2	39.81	23.93	22.24	175.94	46.17
Environment	3.54	2.62	12.5	17.8	9.15	4.43	50.04	13.58
Social Welfare	15.3	1.73	3.49	27.19	4.05	2.83	54.59	6.88
Gender	2.16	4.55	0.68	3.39	4.57	5.28	20.63	9.85
Mineral Resources and Mining	9.28	1.56	0.03	3.02	4.77	2.04	20.7	6.81
Information and Communication Technology (ICT)	0.41	0.76	1.82	0.22	0.38	0.69	4.28	1.07
Ebola Response	373.89	54.65	29.72	3.73	2.16	0	464.15	2.16
Population policy and administrative management					0.18	0.34	0.52	0.52
Total	1054.3	418	440.2	583	407.2	263.9	3166.67	671.14

Source: Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Freetown

Table 8.6c: Donor disbursement by SL-MTNDP and SDGs 2018-2020 (in millions USD)

The SDGs (United Nations 2030 Agenda)	S/Leone MTNDP (2019-2023)	2018	2019	2020	Total
SDGs: 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 15, 17	1. Human Capital Development ³¹	184.14	176.93	137.34	498.41
SDGs: 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 1	2. Diversify the Economy & Promote Economic Growth ³²	21.97	34.26	35.39	91.62
SDGs: 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	3. Infrastructure & Economic Competitiveness ³³	80.09	125.54	35.77	241.4
SDGs: 16, 17	4. Governance & Accountability for Results ³⁴	103.89	149.45	42.26	295.6

³¹ COVID-19 Response, Health, HIV/AIDS, Education, Water and Sanitation

³² Agriculture, Rural Development and Food Security, Mineral Resources and Mining

³³ Private Sector Development, Infrastructure, Energy and Power, Road Network, Transport, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

³⁴ Public Financial Management, Transparency and democracy, Capacity Building of government agencies, Security Sector, Decentralisation, Justice Sector Development

SDGs: 1, 2, 4, 5,10, 17	5. Women, Children and Persons with Disability ³⁵	6.18	7.41	8.11	21.7
SDGs: 4, 10, 11, 13,15, 16, 17	6. Youth, Sports & Migration ³⁶	9.91	7.41	0.18	17.5
SDGs: 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	7. Addressing Vulnerability & Building Resilience ³⁷	14.57	6.53	4.42	25.52
SDGs: 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	8. Means of Implementation ³⁸	2.22	5.00	0.52	7.74

NGO resource flows

Table 8.6d presents resources channeled through NGOs to deliver services to the people. These operations have been critical especially for service delivery at the community level, including places and remote community that many Government institutions could hardly directly reach. As shown in the table, significant resources were received by these organisations commonly from external (donor) assistance not captured in **Table 8.6b (under general donor support)** above. During 2018/19-2020/21, a total of about USD1.36 billion was disbursed through this channel to undertaken development activities by hundreds of NGOs in the country. Human Capital Development Cluster in the Sierra Leone’s MTNDP received the highest disbursement consistent with the Government flagship development priority, as discussed earlier at US\$ 993.58 million during the period reported; following by the Cluster on Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities at US\$ 184.10 million. These figures come from the data that the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development could generate through its NGOs Affairs Directorate.

Table 8.6d: NGO resource disbursements 2018/19-2020/21

The SDGs	S/Leone MTNDP (2019-2023)	2018/19	2020/21	Total
SDGs: 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 15 17	1. Human Capital Development	346.97	646.61	993.58
SDGs:1,2,7,8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14,15, 17	2. Diversify the Economy & Promote Economic Growth	76.79	42.04	118.83
SDGs: 7,8, 9, 11, 13,15 16, 17	3. Infrastructure & Economic Competitiveness	27.31	5.13	32.44
SDGs: 16,17	4. Governance & Accountability for Results	7.07	2.59	9.66
SDGs: 1, 2, 4, 5,10, 17	5. Women, Children and Persons with Disability	29.80	154.30	184.10
SDGs: 4, 10, 11, 13,15, 16, 17	6. Youth, Sports & Migration	0.95	16.28	17.23
SDGs: 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	7. Addressing Vulnerability & Building Resilience	0.00	0.00	0.00
SDGs: 11, 13, 15, 16, 17	8. Means of Implementation	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total		488.90	866.94	1355.84

³⁵ Social Welfare, Gender

³⁶ Youth Development

³⁷ Disaster Relief, Environment

³⁸ Population Policy and Administrative Management

8.7 Strengthening local service delivery system

Service delivery at the local government level has been critical to sustainable development. Strengthening systems at this level is at the centre of localising the SDGs in the country, which GoSL has been mindful of. Since the last country VNR report, a lot of initiatives have been undertaken towards strengthening system at that level. While the Government and development partners have continued to provide recurrent and capital development support to the local council, reforms and capacity building have been on course. The EU is currently providing a huge programme support to six Provincial Local Councils running in millions of US Dollars, principally including Bombali District in the North, Kenema in the East, Pujehun in the South and Kambia in the North-West; while the newly established district of Falaba in the North and Karene in the North-Western Region were also considered in extended assistance. Key reforms undertaken including revision of the 2010 National Development Policy that was done and approved by Cabinet. This has led to the review of the 2004 Local Government Act, that is ongoing.

Furthermore, we witnessed renewed determination to decentralise ownership of National Development Plans in Sierra Leone during 2019-2020. Over a one-year period (October 2019 to October 2020), the GoSL implemented a national project to this end, entailing successive engagements of all 22 local councils in the 16 districts of the country on the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2020), with a view to placing the people in the driver's seat of implementing the Plan. A cross-section of Government Ministers, coordinated by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, engaged representatives of principal local/community development institutions, including traditional leaders, local councillors, women and youth representatives, the disabled, NGOs/CSOs, decentralised Government MDAs and core local council staff on their leading roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the MNTDP, and hence the SDGs and the African Union Agenda 2063; all attended and supported by our Development Partners led by the UN Agencies in the country. A key outcome of these engagements was the re-establishment of the District Development Coordination Committees (DDCCs) to regularly, functionally and sustainably follow-up on and reporting on the implementation of the national development plans and the SDGs. The pilot phase of the DDCCs and roll out to selected districts are currently been supported by UNICEF. An upcoming project supported by the World Bank for Sierra Leone "Accounting Governance for Basic Service Delivery" has included financing for the DDCCs to ensure their speedy revitalisation while the GoSL is institutionalising them the National Budget.

Moreover, within the broad policy and legislative reforms of Government, are advanced plans to roll-out a People's Planning Process model across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone. This is commonly known as the Wan Fambul National Framework, informed by more than five years of a successful pilot of the initiative in four districts by a local NGO in partnership with an American-based international counterpart organisation. It is an inclusive local governance development framework principally focused at catalysing the placement of the people at the centre of development through promoting village/chieftdom level planning (sub-district development system), coming up with plans and projects by the people and led by the people; with the eventual view to integrating this sub-district development system into district and national level planning process. It is essentially meant to deepen the decentralisation system for enhance localisation of the national development plan and the SDGs. The Government within this spirit will be

establishing Chiefdom Development Coordination Units, counterpart to the DDCCs at district level to strengthening sub-national development coordination.

8.8 Science, technology and innovation

Within the country’s Medium-Term National Development, GoS strongly commits, under the Human Capital Development Cluster (Cluster One), as a Key Policy Action, to “improve support to the teaching of science, technology, and innovation at universities and polytechnics through the provision of special resources”; and hence to “establish the Directorate for Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI), initially anchored within the Office of the President” in this direction (Page 49 of the Sierra Leone MTNDP). This has been in sync with the central recognition of STI as a critical determinant of effectiveness in the use of scarce resources in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (Paragraphs 114-124 of the UN Resolution 69/313)—its centrality in enhancing systems efficiency, reporting and accountability for results for which it is part of the SEVEN KEY AREAS OF DEVELOPMENT FINANCING in the Agenda.

Accordingly, the Government, through the Directorate of STI, for instance, has enhanced Public Expenditure Management System through establishment of online platforms for processing of expenditure requests, approvals, reconciliations and returns, in addition to playing the Directorate playing leading role in tracking progress in the implementation of the GoSL’s Human Capital Development flagship initiatives. The Directorate is also part of the Steering Committee for the implementation of the “Strengthening Domestic Resource Mobilisation for Financing the SDGs” project discussed earlier, in view of the digital applications embedded in this project for enhanced domestic resource mobilisation—having a sub-component on *increasing financial digitalisation and literacy within the banking sector to increase financial inclusion; targeting especially the informal sector that continues to account for more than 50 percent of economic operations in Sierra Leone*. The launch of a Blockchain National Digital Identity System in 2019 is a further demonstration of STI in enhancing socioeconomic and public service delivery governance; besides the establishment of a drone delivery corridor for health products that the Directorate facilitated for the rural communities in the last two years (source/webpage). It was also very central in providing online facilitation in the management of COVID-19 movement restrictions and policies, including lockdowns.

8.9 Statistical systems, monitoring and evaluation and public sector performance management

At the same time, GoSL is advancing the national statistical system with support from Development Partners. In the last two years, the Government through the enhanced leadership of the National Statistics Officer (Statistics Sierra Leone) was able to secure a US\$30 million grant from the World Bank under the Harmonising and Improving Statistics in West Africa Project to strengthen the country’s statistical system, including structural transformation of the institution at national and district levels. Of the activities currently supported by this grant is the ongoing Mid-Term Census, the first in the country. This includes the roll-out of a digital census for the first time.

And in the context of improving value for money and fiduciary assurance in the use of public monies, GoSL established a specialised outfit for monitoring and evaluation of strategic projects of the country—the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department—currently housed in the

Office of the President; formerly located in the MoPED. Through this department, a comprehensive national M&E Policy and Operational Manual are now in place; and a process of putting in place a GIS-enabled M&E system that would allow real time, strategic supervision and reporting on project implementation has begun. It works together with the Public Investment Management Department of MoPED in screening capital development project in the National Budget to ensure that any approved project for funding meets minimum viability and value for money condition. Additionally, there is general a general Service Delivery and Performance Management System across the civil service and entire public sector requiring every employee of Government and Government-supported agencies to sign performance manage contracts or undertakings that they are regularly assessed on.

9.

The Covid-19 Response and Recovery Efforts

An extension of Means of Implementation and Global Partnership for Development: SDG17

Sierra Leone was one among the three Mano River Union (MRU) countries in West Africa that was extremely devastated by the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak in the Sub-region during 2013-2016, killing close to 4,000 persons out of more than 10,000 the disease slayed there. In August or 2017, more than 1,000 lives to lost in Sierra Leone (mostly in its Western Area) to landslides and floods. Thus, Sierra Leone has had a very bitter experience with natural disaster in the last one decade. By the end of 2019 to early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world's economy on a scale comparable to the 1930s Great Depression.

Given this rocky recent past with natural calamities before the call of COVID-19, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) did not waste any time in taking proactive steps in responding the global pandemic when it started ravaging the world by the end of 2019. The Government took swift and broad action before the country could record its 1st Index Case on 30th March 2020, about 4 months into the global pandemic.

In particular, our response strategies heavily drew from our experience in the fight against Ebola in 2014-16. We leverage existing structures, partnerships and experience in the EVD response; immediately calling on all Government relevant partners who participated in the EVD fight to support the preparation and implementation of an integrated COVID-19 prevention and response plan for the country. We developed and implemented twin national strategies here:

- a. A National COVID-19 Health Preparedness Response Plan 2020
- b. A Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme 2020.³⁹

A key principle moving from the response to recovery from the pandemic was “ensuring effective response to the crisis within continued implementation of the Sierra Leone’s Five-Year Medium-Term National Development (2019-2023) that had been launched less than one year when the COVID-19 broke out”.

That is, the Government’s conversation around the COVID pandemic has made a lot of reference to the devastation of the EVD 2014-2016, whose related recovery plans crowded out the medium to long term aspirations of Sierra Leone at the time, as articulated in the country’s previous national development plan. Therefore, given that Sierra Leone’s current national development plan, the MTNDP (2019-2023) had only done less than one of its planned five years in implementation when the pandemic eruption, with critical state flagship programmes to inform sustainable transformation of the economy, the general strategic wisdom of the state was to pursue a COVID-

³⁹ These documents can be accessed from the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development in Freetown.

19 recovery that engenders a seamless transition from the response phase into a smooth implementation of the current MTNDP. We, essentially, had not anticipated having a national recovery plan to run parallel to the MTNDP in order not to lose focus of our long-term aspirations, consistent with our commitment to the SDGs, which provides the global framework for LDCs to walk out of fragility. Therefore, our emergency response plans (the country’s Health Preparedness and Response Programme and the Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme whose details will be summarised shortly) more or less defined our recovery paths, and within the continued implementation of the MTNDP.

While this principle was firmly held by the Government, nonetheless, we had worked closely with the UN Country Team in Sierra Leone to undertake a Socioeconomic Impact Assessment for COVID-19 and to prepare a Response and Recovery Plan around the Five UN Global Pillars of: a) Health First; b) Protecting People; c) Economic Response and Recovery; d) Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Cooperation; and e) Social Cohesion and Community Resilience. These Pillars have been consistent with the Government’s emergency response and recovery programmes and its focus on ensuring seamless transition into continued implementation of the Sierra Leone’s MTNDP; which will also be summarised in closing this section.

9.1 The National COVID-19 Health Preparedness Response

To ensure that response strategies to the pandemic were comprehensive, the risks posed were classified into *primary* and *secondary* level risks that were appropriately and timely planned for. As illustrated in **Figure 9.1a**, for primary level risks, the roots of the risks looked for were pulled from tracking infected persons traveling from abroad and going after those undetected in the local communities. We also tried to track persons infected without signs entering the country, while identifying and addressing anomalies in quarantine places carrying high-risk contacts. The major sources of risks paid attention to are airports, land border crossings, quarantine zones, hotels and homes, place of work and crowded spaces like public market.

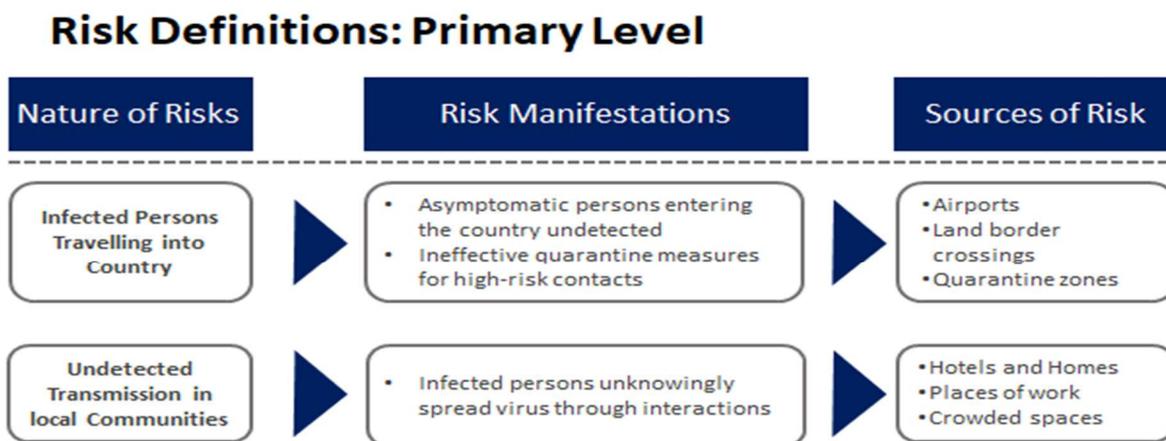


Figure 9.1: Primary level risk to COVID-19 infections
 Source: Sierra Leone National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan 2020

With regard to secondary risk tracking (see **Figure 9.1b**), we had paid attention to analysis of degree of mortality rates against the state of effectiveness of the response system, tracking any alarming spike, while paying attention to the mode of public adoption of behavioural change to control outbreak. We had cared about the capacity to trace contact, to isolate cases, implement health protocols, and bury the dead arising from the virus; constantly checking with the strengthen of public education on the virus and messaging, covering negative media coverage. The sources of risks tracked here ranged from health facilities to communities and social media.

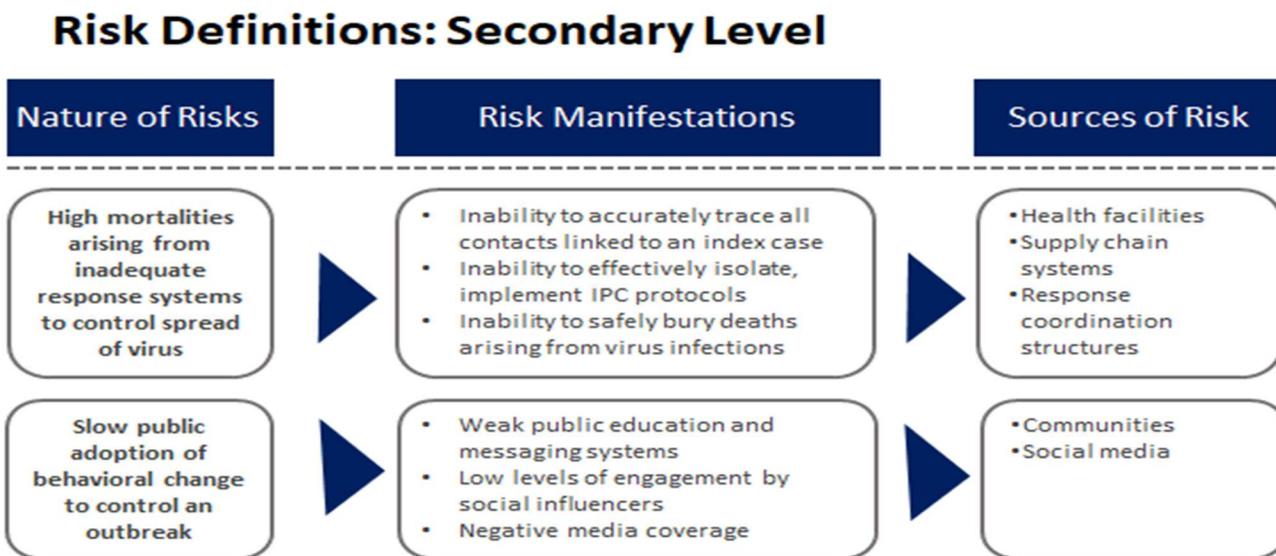


Figure 9.1b: Secondary level risk to COVID-19 infections
Source: Sierra Leone National COVID-19 Preparedness Plan 2020

The overall goal of the Health Preparedness and Response Plan for which specific objectives and immediate/contingent actions were pursued was to adequately prepare to prevent COVID-19 from entering the country or limiting local transmission through containment strategies, drawing from its post-Ebola recovery and sustainable development strategies. Following the end of Ebola in 2016/17, the country became “the first country in the WHO Africa region to fully transform its national disease surveillance system from paper-based to web-based electronic platform.”⁴⁰ It has been using this approved technology to generate and report on “disease surveillance data...in all public health facilities since June 2019.”⁴¹ Before COVID-19 this system had tracked 28 priority diseases in Sierra Leone, “including the conditions in which they could emerge and the probability of their occurrences....During 2017-2019, we recorded an increase in “routine weekly public health reporting from health facilities from 89 to 99 percent.”

⁴⁰ <https://www.afro.who.int/news/sierra-leone-leads-way-africa-fully-functional-electronic-disease-surveillance-system>.

See also Bangura, S. 2020. Compelling Lessons from Mano River Union Disasters: A reflection on deadly Ebola, landslide and floods in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone 2013-17. Page 252. SLWS; Freetown.

⁴¹ Bangura, S. 2020. Compelling Lessons from Mano River Union Disasters: A reflection on deadly Ebola, landslide and floods in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone 2013-17. Page 252. SLWS; Freetown.

9.2 The Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme (QAERP)

Indeed, Sierra Leone was facing serious socioeconomic challenges at the advent of the COVID given, among others, its high degree of integration into the global economy and generally being a commodity exporter and net importer. Nonetheless, in addition to swift financial disbursements to the health sector, the Central Bank timely established a credit facility to finance the production, procurement and distribution of essential goods and services, besides embarking on monetary policy adjustments necessary to buoy the banking system and private sector activities.⁴² Structurally, the QAERP pursued Five Key Results Pillar to stem COVID-19 socioeconomic effects (**Figure 9.2**): a) supply of essential commodities; b) maintenance of local food production; c) continued operations of critical small and medium enterprise; d) prioritising vulnerable populations through social protection; and e) having critical public works sustained to engage especially the youth. Alongside these pillars was a technical group undertaking macro-fiscal recalibrations to inform efforts at maintain macroeconomic stability in the context of COVID financing, while there was also a private sector wide stakeholder engagement.



GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE FOR THE COORDINATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QUICK ACTION ECONOMIC RECOVERY PROGRAMME (QAERP)

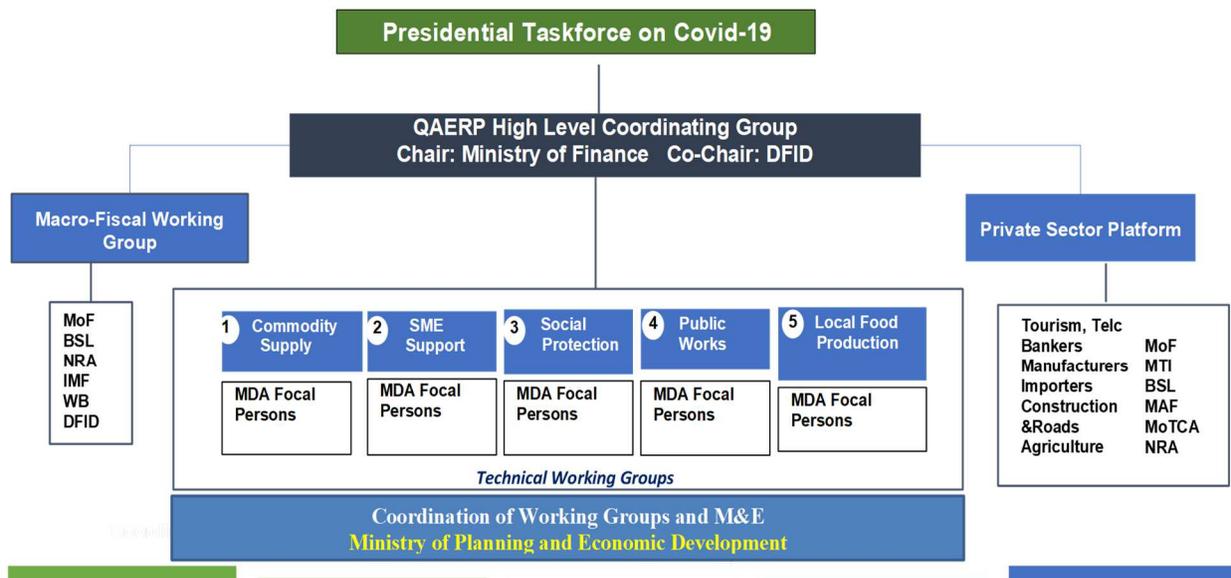


Figure 9.2: Governance structure of the Sierra Leone Quick Action Economic Recovery Plan 2020
Source: Sierra Leone Quick Action Economic Recovery Plan 2020

⁴² African Union (2020, p.29)

9.3 Financing Government Socioeconomic and Health and Response

Health Sector Response Plan

Table summarises planned cost to robustly respond to pandemic within the health sector, capturing Government commitment and partners, featuring the gap needing additional financing in the early stage of the pandemic crisis in the country. Following this table were the immediate response actions financed in the process.

Table 9.3: Summary CoVID-19 GoSL Funded Response Plan (In Billion Leones)

No.	Response Area	National Plan cost	GosL	WB	IsDB	GF	Gap
1	Point of Entry Management	7.33	2.3	3.7	0.5	0.0	0.9
2	Quarantine Management	56.45	14.9	8.0	0.0	0.0	33.5
3	Contact Listing and Tracing/Surveillance	20	4.1	12.6	0.5	0.0	2.8
4	Laboratory Operations	32.9	4.8	0.5	1.1	5.0	21.5
5	Case Management	110	10.0	42.8	0.7	15.0	41.4
6	Information and Social Mobilization	5.7	3	1.1	0.0	0.0	1.6
7	Logistics [Transport and Supplies]	332.22	19.5	10.0	0.0	25.0	277.7
8	ICT Systems	3	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8
9	Security	6	1.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5
		1.6	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.2
		4	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.0
10	Coordination, Command and Control	3.12	2.12	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.1
		6.13	1.13	5.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Total	588.45	65.9	84.7	2.8	45.0	390.1

9.4 Among key measures and deliverables pursued in the Health Response Plan

- a. Increased and Improved COVID-19 testing capacity: testing laboratories have been increased (from three to five) nationwide as well as improvement in laboratory capacity from 200 PCR tests per day in March,2020, to almost 500 PCR test per day in June, 2020) with decrease turnaround time (from 12 hours in March, 2020 to 8 hours in June, 2020)
- b. Increased number of beds (from 30 treatment beds in March, 2020 to over 720 treatment and community care beds in 2020)

- c. Provided psycho-social support to communities and ensured appropriate care, de-stigmatisation as well as community understanding of the virus and how to engage with suspected cases
- d. Supported extensive risk communication and social mobilization campaigns on the use of face masks, social distancing and hygiene practices enabled social mobilization mechanisms at the district level and conducted community-led action training; worked with the media, including social media, to promote consistent messaging on COVID-19, including developing messages for a weekly 'Big Idea' related to COVID-19. These actions have helped to maintain a conducive environment for the response including strengthening social cohesion at community level.

9.5 Economic Response Plan

The total financing requirement estimated for the Quick Action Economic Recovery Programme across its Five Pillars was US\$151.95million. By the end of July 2020, the Government committed US\$91.07million (about 60 percent) of its own resources, partners committed US\$23.354million (about 15 percent) to support the implementation of the programme activities, leaving a gap of about USD -38.9 million.

Among key measures and deliverables pursued in the Economic Recovery Programme

Building and maintaining an adequate stock level of essential commodities at stable prices

- a. The Bank of Sierra Leone launched a credit facility amounting to five hundred billion Leone (Le500 billion) to support production, importation and distribution of essential commodities at concessional interest rate. As at 15th July 2020, 57.4 percent of this facility has been accessed by importers and manufacturers
- b. Tax deferment to manufacturer and importers of essential commodities including allowing importers to use bonds issued by insurance companies in place of commercial bank performance bonds as well as waived the application fee and three-month tax relief to the hospitality and aviation sectors.

Providing support to hardest-hit businesses to enable them to continue operations and avert lay-offs of employees

- a. A national Micro-Finance Programme is being designed and Le50 billion allocated in the Supplementary budget for the implementation of the

Expanding safety nets to vulnerable groups

- a. Expanded the cash transfer programme from 35,000 to 100,000 households, with a dedicated quota for people with disabilities.
- b. Developed emergency cash transfer scheme targeting additional 29,000 beneficiaries, including informal sector workers mostly petty traders, and low paid workers in the tourism and other service industries
- c. Provided in-kind support to more than 11,000 persons with disabilities during the two rounds of lockdown
- d. As part of the Supplementary Budget, Le55 billion has been allocated for social safety
- e. nets covering cash transfers, food assistance as well as salary compensation for three months for workers in the hotel and recreation industry.

- f. Cash transfer programmes are supported by a grievance redress mechanism (GRM) managed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) for transparency and social accountability

Supporting labour-intensive public works

- a. Procurement process for the rehabilitation of about 1,200km of trunk and feeder roads, which is expected to create jobs for nearly 5,000 youths and help link farmers to the market has been completed

Providing assistance for the local production and processing of staple food items

- a. A local food production COVID-19 response plan, focusing on large scale mechanical cultivation of rice and other food crops to boost local production as well as promote livestock production has been developed.

9.6 Other sources of financing and general coordination of response

A lot of contributors to the overall financing of response and recovery could not have been captured here, including NGOs and other institutions. Most resources from partners were repurposed from earlier programmed support before COVID. In terms of coordination of response, there were structures at national and district level, with NGOs operating at sub-national levels integrated into the district level coordination of COVID response efforts.

Additionally, Sierra Leone was classified as being among the special vulnerable countries to benefit from the G20-Paris Club Debt Service Suspension Initiative (amounting to US\$9.7million) which was to suspend the country’s official bilateral debt payments through end 2020. It was also to benefit from a debt service relief of US\$22.7million under the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust. Additionally, in June, 2020, the IMF approved a Rapid Credit Facility of US\$143.2million; while budgetary support was provided as follows: 1. World Bank US\$100 million; European Union Euro 15 million; and African Development Bank US\$24.5 million. This was to create additional fiscal space for government to fund critical interventions that to further mitigate the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic.

9.7 The UN-Driven Response and Recovery Plan for Sierra Leone

In addition to the above response efforts, there was UN-wide response and recovery programme that the Government of Sierra Leone helped put together, guiding the Organisation’s support to the overall country response and recovery from the COVID-19 within continued implementation of the Medium-Term National Development Plan and SDGs. This has been undertaken under five UN Pillars of a) Health First, b) Protecting People, c) Economic Response and Recovery, d) Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Cooperation, and e) Social Cohesion and Community Resilience. This and other efforts discussed above, put together, could be seen to have been effort at recovering the Sierra Leone MTNDP and the SDGs from COVID-19.

Response Pillars	Total Required Resources US\$	Available Resources US\$	Funding Gap US\$
Health First	12,202,707	3,263,984	8,938,723
Protecting People	61,438,000	14,730,000	46,708,000

Response Pillars	Total Required Resources US\$	Available Resources US\$	Funding Gap US\$
Economic Response & Recovery	20,970,000	8,137,000	12,833,000
Macroeconomic Response/Multilateral Cooperation	380,000	140,000	240,000
Social Cohesion & Community Resilience	2,525,000	445,000	2,080,000

Summary

The role of development cooperation under the Means of Implementation and Global Partnership assessed under SDGs 17 was at display here during the COVID-19 response in Sierra Leone, which secured substantial support from the international community, including from NGOs and other partners to mitigate effects, while drawing from its experience in the fight against Ebola during 2014-16.

10.

Conclusion and Next Steps

10.1 Summary of the review process and SDG progress

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, Sierra Leone has been able to conduct a nationwide participatory process leading to the production of its third VNR Report for 2021. All relevant stakeholders were involved in the nationwide data collection and consultations, including representatives from government institutions, parliament, local councils, CSOs, the private sector, the media, research institutions and development partners. Once again, CSOs led collection of data at district and community level. Multilevel, secondary and primary information was generated and the draft report was validated by all institutions involved in the process. This report is especially distinguished by the conduct of rapid impact evaluation on SDGs 4 on education and 16 on justice and strong institutions.

Traditional leaders, school pupils, parents and other local development actors participated in generating testimonies as to how the SDGs have impacted upon their lives, contributing in assessing key policy initiatives such as the Free Quality School Education Programme (under SDG 4) and legal aid assistance (under SDG 16).

District/community level data collection was accompanied by sensitisation on the relevance of the SDGs on community radio, which was also replicated at national level while discussing overall outcome of progress in implementation.

Data and consultations revealed that the country has made significant strides towards achieving SDG targets, such as related to Goal 4 on education and 16 on justice and strong institutions believed to be more central to the long-term transformation of the economy and addressing other SDGs. That increasing support to education and justice can directly and indirectly impact on the lives of the extremely poor not only in-kind but also financially, thereby responding to the welfare needs under other Goals like 1 and 2 on poverty and hunger, 3 on health, 5 on gender and 8 on decent work; even on 12 and 13 on responsible consumption and production and climate change, so that the targets of SDG 17 on means of implementation can also be addressed over time.

10.2 Summary of challenges

The following are a summary of key challenges to overcome going forward:

- a. COVID-19 pandemic was a major bottleneck to the process, causing continuous uncertainties around the VNR processes globally and nationally, besides the financial constraints associated with it.
- b. Resources for the process were extremely limited and came very late to conduct the process within a timeframe that could not allow all the needful for the process.

- c. The digital divide between regions of the country has been a challenge to conduct virtual engagements linking different locations across the country so as to optimise use of the limited resources.
- d. The continued weak state of private sector development with dominant informal economy limits domestic revenue mobilisation to enable the state to meet its financial obligation.
- e. Investment in critical infrastructure (energy, water and science and technology, etc) to boost the private sector remains a challenge.
- f. Limited mobile network coverage in rural areas and financial inclusion continues to remain a critical challenge.
- g. Data systems and reporting in the public sector continues to demand huge investment to transform the landscape to enhance managing for development results
- h. The role of CSOs/NGOs in development remains critical in development processes, but they constrained with required technical and financial resources to increase their contribution to development

7.3 Among key lessons learned

- a. The need remains for the VNR process to start early with the requisite financial resources so that data collection, analysis and production of results can be concluded in time.
- b. Partnerships and cooperation remain a crucial resource for development
- c. Sustainable development requires the deployment of digital solutions across board; critical for building external shock absorbers
- d. A strong political will is crucial to the effective delivery of processes and services
- e. Sustaining efforts at increasing capacity for domestic resource mobilisation is fundamental to the protection of the economy against external shocks.

7.4 Recommendations

Among the key recommendations are the following:

- a. Diversify sources of financing the project and programmes, exploring non-traditional, innovative ways of mobilising resources, while strengthening existing mechanism
- b. Scale up the implementation of the country's Integrated National Financing Framework.
- c. Scale up efforts at de-risking the economy to attract more private investment, strengthening property rights and good institutions; protecting the rule of law, pursuing peace and national cohesion.
- d. Strengthen e-governance in the public sector
- e. Increasing investment in enabling infrastructure, such as energy, water and ICT
- f. Scale up mobile network coverage to increase rural capture in the broadband, necessary for enhancing financial inclusion
- g. Increase fight against corruption and illicit financial flows.

- h. Strengthen development cooperation, ensuring that external support is directed towards building domestic capacity for revenue mobilization, fighting corruption and illicit financial flows.
- i. Scale up government's investment in human capital development, putting education at the centre.
- j. Scale up investment in providing legal aid for the less privileged and poor
- k. Increase support for monitoring and evaluation, national statistical system, and public sector capacity and performance.
- l. Strengthen collaboration with the civil society
- m. Deepen the national decentralisation programme and localisation of the SDGs through scaling up the people's planning process at village and chiefdom levels
- n. Increase engagement with the public on national development issues

7.5 Next Steps

The next steps include:

- a. Organise post-VNR stakeholder engagement on planned actions going forward and lessons learned from voluntary reviews just concluded
- b. Discuss the institution of voluntary local reviews
- c. Increase stakeholder engagement on the Integrated National Financing Framework
- d. Support technical working groups on the SDGs