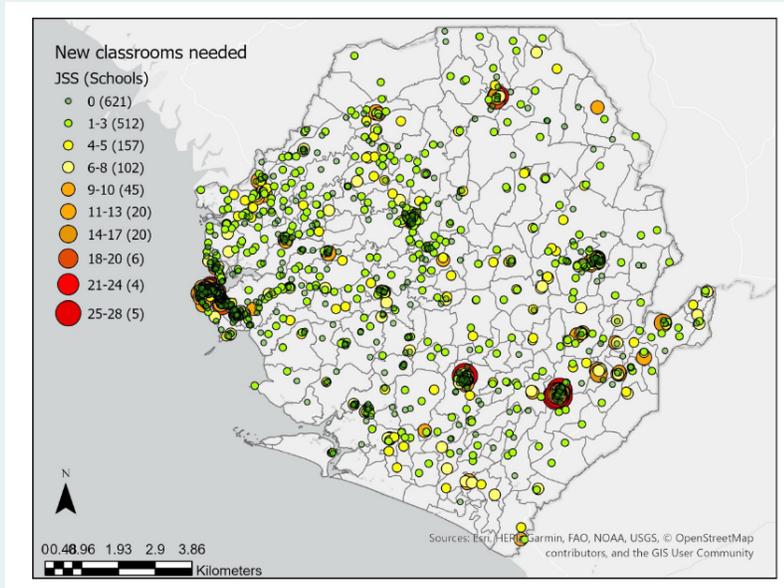


School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy



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FOREWORD

Quality education is multidimensional. At the individual learner level, it enhances the cognitive development of a child and at the societal level, it enables responsible and participatory citizenship that nurtures the creative and emotional development of all. As such, quality education goes beyond the provision of learning materials and the teaching in class. It also ensures that learning takes place in a safe (physical and psychological) and enabling environment. The buildings, classrooms and WASH facilities are crucial elements of learning environments in schools and can be used to influence students' learning outcomes. High-quality infrastructure facilitates this type of learning with better instruction and improvement in overall student outcomes.

Infrastructure is crucial for all development as it plays an important role in the economy and the overall sustainability of a society, from the expansion of roads to the constructions of schools. When equitable access is assured, society benefits from infrastructure since it delivers the services that are necessary for sustainable development. Therefore, for greater impact, sustainable infrastructure needs to be planned, designed, delivered, and managed.

Since His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio pledged to provide Free Quality School Education (FQSE) to all students in Sierra Leone, there has been an increase in school enrolment equivalent to about 10% of the entire population of Sierra Leone. The addition of these approximately 800,000 new learners nationwide has had a strain on the school system. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) which implements the FQSE program has set out the principles that will underpin the Government's work towards improving education: quality teaching and learning; universal access; comprehensive safety; and radical inclusion. To achieve these, a school infrastructure development plan, informed by a detailed catchment area planning is necessary. The combination is what MBSSE has developed as the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy which aims to lay the foundation for increasing access to safe and quality education in an inclusive and needs-based manner.

By definition, a catchment area refers to the geographic area from which a school's pupils or potential pupils may come from. This is typically the nearest and/or most accessible areas surrounding that school. Despite the increase in enrolment, many children remain out-of-school, especially those living in rural and hard to reach areas.

This School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy aims to increase the quality of planning and coordination when implementing civil works and improvements to school infrastructure. This policy is applicable to several school development plans

including the construction of new schools, addition of classrooms or facilities to existing schools, and the renovation/rehabilitation of existing facilities at existing schools.

The policy builds on the foundation of other policies and legislations both locally and internationally that supports school infrastructure as essential for all children to thrive as individuals, and progressive citizens.

There are two main policy statements listed which will help guide the implementation of this policy by MBSSE and its partners:

1. All infrastructure improvement activities, classroom/school development and construction will be informed by the National Development Plan; MBSSE's Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles; and needs-based prioritization analyses.
2. All construction activities will be based on transparent projections of student populations.

Human capital development is at the core of the New Direction Government of Sierra Leone; the MBSSE continues to set forth policies that are intentional in ensuring universal access to quality education for all learners and removing barriers that are based on social class, gender, geographical location, physical and mental disabilities, and other markers of difference and replaced by equal opportunity for all children.



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ACRONYMS/ ABBREVIATIONS

ACRONYM / ABBREVIATION	EXPLANATION
ASC	Annual School Census
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
CRA	The Child Rights Act
DFID	Department for International Development
DPs	Development partners
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
IDA	International Development Association
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JSS	Junior Secondary School
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
MDTF	Multi-Donor Trust Fund
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology
MLGRD	Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development
MTHE	Ministry of Technical and Higher Education
NDP	National Development Plan
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
PqTR	Pupil-Qualified Teacher Ratio
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOP	Standards of Operations
SSS	Senior Secondary School
WAEC	West African Examinations Council
WASH	Water, sanitation, and hygiene
WASSCE	West Africa Senior School Certificate Examination

GLOSSARY OF TERMS / DEFINITIONS

TERM	DEFINITION
Annual School Census (ASC)	A comprehensive data collection exercise conducted by the Ministry of Education each year in every school.
Chieftdom	An administrative geographical unit demarcated within each administrative district with the Paramount Chief (ruler) as the head of the Chieftdom.
Classroom	A physical structure or room within a school where pupils and students are taught. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solid classrooms - Built with cement blocks. • Semi-solid classrooms - Built largely with mud blocks. • Makeshift classrooms – Temporary, made of materials, such as mats and sticks
Double-Afternoon Shift	Refers to schools that operate a double shift system beginning after 12 midday and ending after 5pm.
Double-Morning Shift	Refers to schools that operate a double shift system beginning in the morning around 8am and ending just after 12 midday.
Double Shift Schools	Schools where the school day is divided into two sessions and two groups of students are taught by different teachers and principals.
Gross Enrolment Rate (GER)	Number of pupils or students enrolled in each level of education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population in the theoretical age group for the same level of education.
Geocodes	A set of geographical coordinates corresponding to a location using a global positioning system.
Junior Secondary Level of Education	Generally designed to continue the basic programs of the primary level but the teaching is typically more subject-focused, requiring more specialized teachers for each subject area.
National Primary School Examination (NPSE)	Senior primary school examination to gain admission into the junior secondary school level.
Net Enrolment Rate (NER)	Enrolment of the official age-group for a given level of education expressed as a percentage of the corresponding population.
Out-of-School Children	Children in the official school age group who are not enrolled in school.

Payroll	The total number of teachers or workers employed.
Pupil-Classroom Ratio (PCR)	Average number of students per classroom in a given school year.
School Location (Coordinates)	Location of schools using geographic positioning systems (GPS).
School Shift Status	Whether the school is operating a single or double shift.
Single Shift	A school that operates one school system that starts in the morning and ends in the afternoon.
Shift (School)	<p>A school can either be a single, double-morning shift or double-afternoon shift.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single shift - schools that start operations in the morning and close in the afternoon. No school level or grade operates using the same facility. • Double-morning shift - school levels or grades which operate in a given school facility in the morning and another school level or classes meet in the afternoon for operation. • Double-afternoon shift - school levels or grades which operate in a given school facility in the afternoon and another school level or classes meet in the morning for operation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy is to guide the sustainable and equitable provision of learning environments for all learners in Sierra Leone – from pre-primary to senior secondary. The policy aims to ensure school infrastructure improvements are well planned, and work towards the MBSSE’s guiding principles of improving universal access to quality education, comprehensive safety, radical inclusion, and quality teaching and learning through provision of accessible, safe, and sufficient learning spaces for all children.

In addition, this policy aims to ensure that school infrastructure improvements and planning move beyond individual exercises to one that integrates building and construction with the accompanying workforce needs, joining together future infrastructure investments with the needs of the student population and their current and aspirational enrolment rates; and joining the work of the Local Councils and school proprietors with the ministry’s vision and mission

Finally, it aims to solidify MBSSE’s overarching goal of strengthening education service delivery in Sierra Leone.

In the context of this policy, School Infrastructure refers to the physical buildings and facilities that constitute a school. This includes the classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and other facilities – halls, playing fields, latrines and other recreational facilities, and their access paths.

A catchment area refers to the geographic area from which a school's pupils or potential pupils are from, which is typically the nearest and/or most accessible areas surrounding that school. As children grow and progress through the school system, this area naturally gets larger as bigger schools are required to provide the specialist teachers required for secondary school education. In the Sierra Leonean context, the concept of catchment areas should be interpreted as a way of defining accessibility, rather than a hard and fast rule for allocating places to children in oversubscribed areas.

The School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy refers to three distinct types of infrastructure improvements and differentiates between: (a) construction of new schools; (b) addition of classrooms or facilities to existing schools; and (c) renovation/rehabilitation of existing facilities at existing schools. These are collectively referred to as infrastructure improvements. Where this policy refers specifically to one aspect of infrastructure improvements, this will be specified.

A School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy is needed because the government's flagship programme Free Quality School Education (FQSE) has achieved huge success in increasing enrolment, with almost 700,000 more students enrolling in 2019 compared to 2018, an increase equivalent to almost 10% of the entire population of Sierra Leone. More children means more buildings and facilities are needed. Given the significant need for infrastructure improvements across the country, it is important to carefully prioritize the available resources to meet this need most effectively and equitably. This policy is critical to providing a basis for evidence-based decision making, resource prioritization and implementation for new investments in infrastructure.

The policy is divided into four sections. Section 1 provides the country context and background information on the national, international, and legal contexts of the policy. This section contextualizes the current state of the school infrastructure and the commitments and targets that have been made in this area. It also identifies the policy rationale and objective, scope of the policy, and the four MBSSE guiding principles (universal access to education; radical inclusion, quality learning; and comprehensive school safety). The section ends with a description of the policy development process and a discussion of some of the analyses that have informed the policy design process.

Section 2 lists the two policy statements setting out the processes for school infrastructure and catchment area planning. The rationale for each policy statement and the actions by which the statement will be achieved are also provided in this section.

Section 3 defines the roles and responsibilities of MBSSE and other key stakeholders in the management and coordination of these policy statements. To ensure effective and efficient implementation of the policy, this section also outlines outcomes and key indicators that will provide a basis for evaluation of the success, as well as identification of possible gaps, in the policy and its implementation.

Section 4 outlines the structures and plans that will be put in place to ensure that the policy is implemented, monitored, and reviewed effectively.

This policy is the first step towards improving the quality of infrastructural investments, and will be accompanied by policy guidelines, and standard operating procedures which will be developed to ensure that it is fully implemented. After a five-year period, the policy and its implementation will be reviewed to assess its impact and update as required.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sierra Leone has enormous potential but is facing many economic and social constraints. This is described in more detail in terms of the demographic, economic and educational context below, drawing on the Education Sector Analysis (2020) and the Annual School Census (2019) data.

Sierra Leone has a population of over 7.8 million people and growing at a rapid rate of 2.2% yearly.¹ There has also been a rise in the country's youthful population, with 80% aged 35 and below and more than half of them eligible for education. This puts a huge burden on public resources as the country seeks to develop its human capital, but it also offers an unprecedented opportunity to improve human capital and lay the foundations for future growth and development.

Sierra Leone's economy has continued to progress, even amid the tremendous shocks of health emergencies of Ebola, COVID and mudslide in the recent past decade. Despite the challenges, the economy continued to grow at an average of 4.2% between 2011 and 2017, and 4.7% in the last four years with a corresponding GDP per capita growth of 2%. In terms of resources, the country has seen its revenue triple in the last decade, driven by massive increases in domestic revenue collection, strengthening its ambitious pursuit of financial independence. In 2018, the Government prioritized education in its Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023 titled "Education for Development". The government launched the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative in 2018 and increased the amount of the budget allocated to the education sector to 22%. Notwithstanding the increased education financing, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic is likely to undermine the economic performance gains as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has estimated that Sierra Leone's economy would shrink by 2.3% in 2020.

The introduction of FQSE in 2018 dramatically increased enrolment in Sierra Leone. The total number of pupils enrolled in education increased from approximately 2.0 million pupils to 2.7 million pupils between 2018 and 2019, equivalent to growth of 35%. Any

¹ Sierra Leone 2020. Statista Country Report.

increase of this magnitude is going to place an incredible strain on an education system and infrastructure.

The greatest increase in children enrolment was at the primary level, where an additional 400,630 students enrolled while Junior Secondary (JSS) expanded by 136,185 students and Senior Secondary (SSS) by 98,549 students. While the additional children enrolment is lower in absolute terms at JSS/SSS levels than for primary, they are noticeably higher in relative terms – with a percentage increase of over 41-47% across the full secondary cycle. Equally, the increase in pre-primary enrolment is large in percentage terms, with a 40% increase. These increases have substantial implications for both physical and human resource needs.

Despite the increased enrolment at the different sub-sector education level, some children remain out-of-school. It is, therefore, important that school infrastructure planning consider not just the current enrolment but the population of school going age children who are likely to enter the system in the coming years. These needs can be estimated using the rich data that are now available in Sierra Leone, including the high-density spatial data, the Annual School Censuses, and the upcoming mid-term national housing population census.

Comparing the 2019 Annual School Census data (which includes data on age of enrolled children), against UN population estimates, while the numbers of out-of-school children of primary age are relatively minor, approximately 445,000 of pre-primary age children are out-of-school - with low enrolment of three- and four-year olds, where only 37,000 and 41,000 children are enrolled respectively. Enrolment is higher for five-year olds at 118,000, but this still means that approximately 101,000 five-year-olds are out-of-school. The low level of enrolment in pre-primary has follow-on negative impacts for primary school preparedness.

For those in the above 12 years old school going population, approximately 99,000 children of junior secondary age are out-of-school, and 231,000 children of senior secondary age are out-of-school. It is necessary that plans for future expansion target reducing this in a realistic manner, and, in addition to JSS and SSS infrastructure planning, consider the various pathways available to them (including planning of TVET and other alternative education pathways).

The increase in enrolment because of the FQSE policy places a strain on the physical schooling infrastructure as the national average of students per classroom has increased from 42 in 2018 to 51 in 2019 at primary level, and similarly from 34 to 53 at junior

secondary and 41 to 58 at senior secondary level. These averages mask variation, with class sizes over one hundred in some extremely disadvantaged schools.

Compared to a benchmark of 45 children per classroom, as described within the National Education Policy (2010), the share of schools with students per classroom above this benchmark can be estimated. This is the case for 57% of schools at the primary level, 55% of schools at JSS and 49% at SSS.

There are also challenges in terms of the construction materials and the condition of classrooms. The ASC categorizes state of school infrastructure as solid (cement blocks), semi-solid (mud blocks), make-shift (temporary made mat and sticks) and other. The shares of classrooms that are not built using solid materials is 39% at primary, 22% at junior secondary and 14% at senior secondary.

A greater challenge of school infrastructure is the condition in which those classrooms are. The ASC categorizes each classroom by those that are in 'good' condition and those in need of repair. The share of classrooms described as in need of repair is 58% at primary, 47% at junior secondary and 33% at senior secondary.

This is summarized in Table 1 below; however, this also does not illustrate the variation across the country as these indicators vary significantly and are typically worse outside the Western Area and particularly in the more remote areas of each district.

Table 1: School Infrastructure Capacity	Average Students per classroom		Share of schools with students per classroom above 45:1	Share of classrooms that are not built out of 'solid' materials	Share of classrooms in need of repair
School Level	2018	2019	2019	2019	2019
Primary	42	51	57%	39%	58%
JSS	34	53	55%	22%	47%
SSS	41	58	49%	14%	33%

In addition to planning for the current and future needs, and ensuring classrooms are well repaired, it is important that education sector planning for quality education consider not just the physical infrastructure, but also the education workforce that will staff these schools and classrooms. This is particularly significant in the remote areas of each district with schools that are more than three miles from urban centers (i.e., more than one hour's walk) finding it significantly harder to attract qualified teachers. At the

primary level, the pupil-qualified teacher ratio average is 44:1 at schools that are less than three miles from an urban center, but this increases dramatically to 76:1 for schools that are more than three miles from an urban center. This is similarly the case in terms of the share of teachers on government payroll, the share of female teachers, and the share of STEM subject specialists at secondary level.

Finally, access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) in schools is critical to the student's experience, particularly for girls. To guarantee adequate, proper, and hygienic WASH facilities, draft international guidelines often target that the female pupil per toilet ratio should be at the most 25:1, whilst the male ratio should not be higher than 30:1. However, these targets are currently only met by 13% and 20% of schools respectively. Across both sexes combined, the average number of children per latrine is 87 for primary, 84 for JSS and 125 for SSS. In addition to the low numbers of the latrines, they are often not in good condition. According to the reporting in the ASC, only 60% of the latrines are in good condition.

The government prioritization of education and its flagship FQSE initiative has seen significant increases in public spending on education. In 2019, the government spent a total of Le 1.06 trillion (2.8% of GDP) on teacher/instructor/lecturer salaries, grants-in-aid and tuition grants, purchase of core textbooks and other teaching and learning materials, development and maintenance of infrastructure, and on the overall administration and supervision of education delivery.

In summary, while the Government's effort has led to a successful increase in the number of children enrolling in schools and provided more funding, this has created its own challenges on the physical infrastructure of schools. Ensuring that these challenges in physical infrastructure are met while considering the associated workforce needs is central to this policy.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

According to the 2004 Education Act, the delivery of basic education is a devolved function, governed by the Local Government Act 2004 and implemented by the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (MLGRD). In 2018, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) was split into two ministries—the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) and the Ministry of Technical and Higher Education (MTHE). The delivery of basic and senior secondary education is solely the mandate of the MBSSE and the local government through the local councils, whilst technical and higher education is delivered by the MTHE.

The 2004 Education Act on which the current education system is operated on stipulates that the country's education system is divided into four stages, constituting what is known as the 6-3-3-4 system:

- Pre-primary education offers a three-year socialization and learning cycle for children aged three to five.
- Primary education is a six-year cycle for children typically aged 6 to 11. The entry requirements to this sub-sector are open to all six-year-old children. At the end of the cycle, pupils take a national public examination called the National Primary School Examination (NPSE) conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), which determines eligibility for entry into junior secondary school (JSS). Completion of junior secondary education (children typically aged 12-14) is marked by the taking of the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) in the final year.
- Senior secondary school (SSS) education is three years and is aligned to the theoretical age range of 15 to 17 years old. At the end of the senior secondary level, students take a final regional examination called, the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) to complete their basic and senior education.
- Tertiary education follows secondary education and is offered by polytechnics, professional colleges, and universities. Tertiary education programs lead to a variety of diplomas, certificates, and degrees.

It is important to note that, this School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy focuses on pre-primary to senior secondary education and does not include tertiary education.

1.3 NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

The Sierra Leone Government has made good progress in advancing sufficient school infrastructure. However, there are still persistent challenges, which are confounded by the rapid expansion in enrolments in recent years as discussed in the country context.

Across the country, depending on region, access is still quite unequal, with some schools having an inadequate number and quality of classrooms, latrines, and other infrastructure for the number of children enrolled – and even more noticeable deficits would emerge if all children were to enrol. School infrastructure provisions have often taken place with no standardized guidelines and strategies to support the physical teaching and learning environment.

This national School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy is expected to provide an overarching framework with shared vision, mission, goals, and objectives for

school infrastructural development. The Directorate of Planning and Policy of MBSSE and other partners will coordinate their planning and delivery of services and interventions through the most appropriate platforms so that all Sierra Leonean children can benefit from the goals of FQSE and achieve their full potential.

Since 2007, Sierra Leone has successively developed three sets of Education Sector Plans (ESPs) to provide frameworks for education reform in Sierra Leone (covering the periods 2007-2015, 2014-2018, and 2018-2020). The current ESP (2018-2020) is a transition document between the ESP covering the Ebola recovery (2014-2018) and the next ESP, which is under development and will cover 2021-2025.

As noted in the 2018–2020 Education Sector Plan of Sierra Leone, investing in the quality of education is the most fundamental requirement for accelerating the future growth and development of the country. The 2020 Education Sector Analysis notes that GER at pre-primary is in line with targets in the 2018-2020 ESP and that the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) at junior secondary and lower secondary has exceeded the targets of 75% and 32% respectively within the 2018-2020 ESP.

Several policies and pieces of legislations have been enacted prior to, and since, the previous ESP, which helps guide the main tenets of this document. One of the key rationales for this policy is that it adequately responds to the demand of, amongst others, the following policies, programs, and legal instruments:

- **The Education Act 2004:** This Act states that every chiefdom shall have at least one junior secondary school.
- **The Child Rights Act (2007):** This Act states that every child should have access to health care and a free, basic education and includes a child’s right to adequate classroom facilities, materials and trained teachers.
- **The National Education Policy (2010):** States that schools should conform to minimum stipulated national standards. Specifically, they need to ensure that:
 - Class sizes (or pupil-classroom ratio) do not exceed 45 pupils and teacher: pupil ratio does not exceed 1:45.
 - Ensure all school facilities cater to the needs of all children – boys, girls and those with special needs and ensure every school has library facilities.
- **The Integrated Early Childhood Development (IECD) Policy (2021)** highlights the need for expanding pre-school access, but also noting that having a pre-school in each of the primary schools may not be possible soon due to the extent of the construction needs that would be required.

- **The National Policy on Radical Inclusion (2021):** States that schools will provide safe, inclusive, dignified, and accessible learning environments which meet the diverse needs and life circumstances of all children. This includes ensuring that all schools have appropriate facilities that cater to the separate needs of boys and girls.
- **School Approval Guidelines (2021):** States that all schools should meet basic required building standards and provide adequate and proper hygienic WASH facilities, inclusive of separate toilets for female teachers and girls.
- **Free Quality School Education (FQSE) program (2018):** The objective of this program is to increase nationwide access to quality pre-primary, primary and secondary schooling by removing financial barriers to school enrolment and improving teaching and learning outcomes. It aims that all children be able to successfully complete basic education and be prepared to move on to pursue higher education.
- **The National Development Plan (2019-2023):** This Plan contains infrastructure targets described in more detail in the following section.

1.4 NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The 2019-2023 National Development Plan (NDP) for Sierra Leone is titled “Education for Development”. This has been grounded on renewed optimism as the country’s democracy matures and the strong political commitment to deliver development results that would improve the welfare of Sierra Leone’s citizens.

The plan has been developed by incorporating a range of public participation processes, and it has a holistic economic and social agenda, covering the first five years of a 20-year vision with the goal of achieving middle-income status by 2039. The focus is on sustainability with an appropriate governance framework that would be based on inclusive growth, poverty reduction and a diversified economy. Human capital development has been identified as the main channel through which these goals are expected to be delivered.

The national education plan contains a number of recommended ‘key policy actions’ that relate to the school infrastructure and catchment area planning policy. These are:

- Increase teacher–pupil contact hours by eliminating the two-shift system and building additional classrooms.
- Establish one primary school per administration section; one junior secondary school per electoral ward or chiefdom; and one senior secondary school per electoral constituency.
- Strengthen and expand the school bus system on a cost recovery basis through private participation.

These policy recommendations are taken into consideration in addition to the existing legal commitments (for example the Education Act 2004 requirement that every chiefdom has at least one junior secondary school). Moreover, the intention to strengthen and expand the school bus system highlights the importance of considering the range of transport options whilst considering how to expand access.

1.5 INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT

School infrastructure is globally recognized as essential for all children to achieve their full potential as individuals, and progressive citizens. This is highlighted through its inclusion in a range of international policies and charters, with key extracts included below.

School Infrastructure is widely recognized as being foundational for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2016-2030):

- *Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive, and effective learning environments for all (SDG 4, Target 4A).*
- *By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations (SDG 4, Target 4.5).*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), Article 28:

- *This states that Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and based on equal opportunity, they shall, in particular, make primary education compulsory, available and free to all.*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), Article 24 (1) (2) (3), Article 24: Education:

- *Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion.*

1.6 POLICY RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

This policy aims to increase the quality of planning and coordination when implementing civil works and improvements to school infrastructure, and to ensure all efforts are directed towards a unified goal of equitable access. It will take advantage of recent improvements in the data availability in Sierra Leone and apply new technologies to old ideas, to ensure that the locations and prioritization for improvements are an optimal balance between local and national needs.

This policy fills a gap in coordination and brings together disparate discussions at the national and local levels. It is well timed, with the development of the next Education sector Plan 2021-2025. It also aligns well with the SDG's, specifically SDG 4 which challenges Governments to expand access to all and provide a radically inclusive education and SDG 9, which explicitly refers to building resilient infrastructure. It is formally justified by the national policy context, which commonly refer to infrastructural improvements - including the Education Act 2004 and The Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2007 that promises that every child will have access to health care and a free, basic education – and that education also includes a child's right to adequate classroom facilities, materials, and trained teachers.

The ultimate vision for this policy is that all Sierra Leonean children irrespective of their gender, socio-economic, and cultural status, or other limitations, should have access and complete up to thirteen years of quality basic education age (age 5-18), including children living in remote areas, shall have access to a quality education and an accessible school place.

The Mission is to ensure equitable access to quality school infrastructure and teaching and learning environments for all children, and that any school infrastructure improvements are provided in collaboration with the relevant line Ministries, and other partners in a coordinated manner. Underpinning this is good quality transparent data, meaning that all infrastructure construction and improvement activities will be undertaken through an inclusive, needs-based prioritization exercise.

The goal of the policy is to provide an overarching framework agreeing and highlighting the shared vision, mission, goal, and objectives for civil works and school infrastructure, for the relevant line ministries and other partners to coordinate their planning, financing and delivery of civil works and school infrastructure services and interventions ordered by a clear, inclusive, needs-based prioritization.

This will be done through data-driven decision making, where the identification of infrastructure and civil works needs is based on the Annual School Census data and is accompanied by spatial analysis of catchment areas and school optimization, resulting in better targeted service delivery and education promotion.

Once these needs are identified, the process for strengthening delivery, and prioritizing needs, will be developed in conjunction with relevant partners to ensure an optimal and equitable allocation of resources and reduce schooling deserts.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To establish the processes for coordination between line ministries and other partners in providing equitable and quality civil works and school infrastructure for children.
2. To set up school infrastructure and catchment area planning coordination mechanisms at the national and sub-national levels to facilitate communication, coordination and collaboration in planning, financing and delivery of civil works and school infrastructure services for children
3. To mobilize adequate and growing resources for improving accessibility to quality civil works and school infrastructure services for children, including capacity building.
4. To make education more equitable and accessible by providing adequate educational infrastructure to deliver education effectively and efficiently. These efforts will focus on schooling provision for un-served and/or under-served communities, as well as making educational institutions accessible to all students.
5. To ensure that infrastructure expansion addresses gender, geographical and socio-economic disparities in access.
6. To make school infrastructure more gender-sensitive by planning for adequate numbers of separate sanitation facilities for boys and girls.
7. To join up with other policies to ensure schools follow building standards and construction guidelines.
8. To ensure that school infrastructure and catchment area planning is aligned and integrated with the education workforce and other education sector resources and planning.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE POLICY

This is the first ever School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy in Sierra Leone. This policy builds on the Government's Free Quality School Education and other initiatives, to improve the enrollment, retention, and successful learning outcomes for children.

The scope of this policy extends to *all school infrastructure improvements*, including new construction and existing repairs. This is inclusive of all school levels (pre-primary, primary, junior secondary and senior secondary). This is also inclusive of all school types where the government chooses to invest (including government, government-assisted, mission, community, private schools, and others). This scope extends whether the public

funding constitutes the entirety, or a share, of the overall project funding, and whether the funding is provided by donors.

For implementation, it is important to differentiate between the main types of construction – with the three main types being renovation of existing classrooms; provision of new classrooms/facilities within an existing registered school; and the provision of a new school. This policy covers all three of these aspects.

The policy provisions are aimed primarily at MBSSE, local government officials, schools, and relevant stakeholders. The Planning and Policy Directorate, reporting to the Chief Education Officer (CEO), is responsible for delivery of the policy. Delivery will require collaboration with the directorate of school quality assurance and resource management within the Ministry, other Ministries, stakeholder, partners, and communities to develop policy guidelines and Standards of Operations (SOP) to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of all policies.

The beneficiaries of this policy will be the children of Sierra Leone, communities, parents, and teachers. The goal is the enrolment, universal access, retention, and completion of all students in pre-primary, primary and junior and senior secondary education, regardless of disability, gender, pregnancy or parenting status, geographic location, and socio-economic background.

1.8 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy pursues and directly contributes to the MBSSE guiding principles of universal access to quality and equitable education, radical inclusion, comprehensive safety of all learners, and quality teaching and learning.

Specifically, the policy will contribute to these in the following ways:

Universal access relies on sufficient spaces for all children. Given the constrained financial resources, it is imperative that schools are in optimal positions to maximize their reach. As basic education is a devolved function, there is a risk that planning at the local level leaves gaps at the extremities of the local councils, which are usually furthest away from population centers. By having a clear process to link the national and local planning and infrastructure investments, the policy can help ensure universal access for all.

Comprehensive safety means that the new construction and renovations must be built to standards in line with the School Building Standards, as well as being conducted in safe

locations which are climate smart and with reduced exposure to natural hazards such as landslides, floods or heavy winds. The building standards should ensure that new schools are equipped with quality materials and minimize structural risks; the design will reduce the risks and include evacuation measures for all children. Separate toilets will also improve school safety for girls.

Radical inclusion means that school infrastructure, including existing buildings, classrooms, and WASH facilities, as well as new construction must consider the specific and special needs of children and must be inclusive and gender sensitive. Moreover, radical inclusion means ensuring that all children in Sierra Leone, including those in rural and underserved areas, are provided with access to quality education, through equitable school infrastructure planning.

Quality learning and teaching means ensuring that the buildings are conducive to learning, and children do not arrive exhausted from long journeys to school. Buildings, classrooms, and WASH facilities are crucial elements of learning environments in schools and can be used to influence – from ensuring there is sufficient space for children, to possible redesign of new structures to encourage interactive pedagogy and child centered learning. High-quality infrastructure facilitates better instruction, improves student outcomes, and reduces dropout rates, among other benefits.

1.9 POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

This policy was developed through extensive consultations with MBSSE, development partners and other stakeholders beginning in mid-2020. The policy is based on:

- the assessment of evidence gathered during analysis of the annual school census data and underlying population data.
- consultations with MBSSE, development partners and other stakeholders.
- detailed analytical methods including Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping and geospatial analysis.
- best practices in school infrastructure and catchment area planning from other countries.
- Sierra Leone’s national, international, regional, and sub-regional legal obligations.

The policy was drafted under the leadership of the Ministry for Basic and Senior Secondary Education with important development partners working in Sierra Leone, namely: FCDO (supporting the Education Workforce Initiative that includes the Education Commission, Fab Inc., Educaid Sierra Leone and Pennarth Greene; in addition to supporting Grid-3) and the World Bank.

A key component of this process has involved the use of GIS mapping and geospatial analysis of the annual school census 2018/2019 data. This uses geographic location data such as school locations and population distributions. This has been made possible by the collection of location data during the Annual School Census since 2018, as well as the GIS mapping of population data by Statistics Sierra Leone and WorldPop.

The data enables a broad range of analysis, including the existing mapping of schools in Sierra Leone, coverage of administrative areas and the population that this current distribution enables. It includes considerations of the extent of overcrowding, the quality of facilities and classrooms and the needs for repair. The data allows for analysis of the optimum locations for new school construction, new classrooms and facilities construction in existing schools and repair of existing classrooms and facilities in existing schools and combined with costing data to be able to model the costs of different options.

The policy builds on and is informed by a wide range of analytic reports. Amongst others, EWI's 2020 report on 'Education Workforce Spatial Analysis in Sierra Leone', Grid-3's 2020 report on 'Education Coverage in Sierra Leone', UNICEF, UNESCO and IIEP's 2020 report on the 'Education Sector Analysis' and EPG's 2020 report on the 'Systems-Level Analysis of Education Service Delivery in Sierra Leone'.

This work has involved consideration of catchment areas, a concept that is not typically used in Sierra Leone. This concept refers to the process of understanding, and often assigning, school places based on the location that children live in relative to nearby schools. The policy does not install a specific catchment area process in Sierra Leone, but instead introduces the concept and incorporates several analytical tools from systems where catchment areas are used. This catchment area planning analysis is used to improve the quality of analysis and suitability of school infrastructure planning in Sierra Leone.

A second key component of this process has been the importance of integrating the education workforce within school infrastructure and catchment area planning. This is most important at junior secondary and senior secondary levels, where the requirement for subject specialists, and for schools to offer a range of different subjects for students to study at BECE and WASSCE level, means that a minimum number of teachers are required regardless of the number of pupils that are enrolled.

Modelling this based on a typical timetable, it can be estimated that junior or senior secondary schools, even those with less than 180 pupils, will still require at least eight teachers to function effectively. This modelling is reinforced when looking at the current

numbers of teachers at junior and senior secondary schools in the ASC. Whilst this minimum number of teachers are required within the schools to meet the curriculum and subjects offered, if the number of pupils is low then the actual teaching time and utilization of those teachers is also very low. This makes small school sizes particularly inefficient at the secondary level, an aspect that is also evident internationally.

SECTION 2: POLICY STATEMENTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION TO POLICY STATEMENTS

This policy sets out the principles that will underpin the Governments' work towards improving school infrastructure and catchment area planning. It aims to lay the foundation for increasing access to quality education in an inclusive and needs-based manner. In practice this means shaping the steps that Government will take to actively enable children to enter and remain in school for all stages, in a manner which is suitable to the Sierra Leonean context. This means ensuring that existing and new school infrastructure is safe, climate friendly, and better suited to meet learning needs while systematically reducing geographical barriers to education.

Given the fiscal uncertainty and the need to integrate any future investments into the wider planning and budgetary processes, this policy focusses on how the infrastructure and catchment planning will work going forward. The exact numbers of classrooms needed will be planned in accordance with the National Development Plan and the forthcoming Education Sector Development plan – with the process for how and where they will be prioritized and covered under this plan.

As such, the policy goals will be achieved through the following policy statements:

- *All infrastructure improvement activities, classroom/school development and construction will be informed by the National Development Plan; MBSSE's Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles; and needs-based prioritization analyses*
- *All construction activities will be based on transparent projections of student populations.*

This policy should be read in conjunction with the National Development Plan and the MBSSE's Mission, Vision and Guiding Principles, which set out more information on the specific aspirations around the extent of school infrastructure over the coming years.

2.2 POLICY STATEMENT 1

All infrastructure improvement activities, classroom/school development and construction will be informed by the National Development Plan; MBSSE's Vision, Mission and Guiding Principles; and needs-based prioritization analyses.

Given the scale of the school infrastructure challenges and the limited resources available, there is a need to maximize resources by ensuring that all infrastructure improvement activities follow a clear planning process, in line with agreed targets and principles in the National Development Plan and MBSSE's Vision, Mission and Guiding principles. By doing so, and prioritizing actions, the policy aims to provide the greatest benefits to the largest number of children - particularly those in areas that are currently underserved.

It is important to agree on the processes and analytical techniques that will be used for school infrastructure and catchment area planning. This includes how the status of existing infrastructure is monitored, identifying where existing infrastructure needs renovating; identifying where new infrastructure is needed, and how infrastructure investments are sequenced.

This policy statement will be achieved by:

- Ensuring school infrastructure and catchment planning is integrated into the wider planning system and linked to the annual school census (see also Policy Statement Area Two).
- For each aspect of new school construction, additional construction at existing schools, and renovations at existing schools:
 - Developing and agreeing criteria to sequence where and when infrastructure improvements are made, whilst balancing local needs and national goals
- In addition, setting out clear processes to align the needs of local councils and national priorities for sites of new infrastructure.
- Working with Government to establish available budgets for construction within a given period.
- Establishment of oversight committees between MBSSE and Local Councils to engage partners in school building.

These steps and processes will be set out in more detail in the Policy Guidelines to accompany this policy.

2.3 POLICY STATEMENT 2

All classroom/school construction and development activities will be based on transparent projections of school-age population.

Robust, evidence-based projections of the student population are the building blocks of school infrastructure planning and help us know how many teachers and support staff are needed now and in the future. Forecasting can be challenging, with enrolment and progression choices driven by a range of factors, including distance to schools and household poverty. Schooling is also influenced by other policies, such as radical inclusion, comprehensive safety, and external shocks (such as Ebola and Covid). While enrolment in school is simpler to track and estimate (and captured by the Annual School Census), information on out-of-school children is difficult to track but are necessary for effective policy planning.

By ensuring that projections capture the whole population, where they are and their schooling needs, planning can consider not just current needs, but future needs as more children enroll in schools, stay for longer, and move towards achieving thirteen years of schooling. This policy statement is linked to policy statement one in ensuring that the needs-based prioritization exercise is based on transparent projections of student populations.

This policy statement will be achieved by:

- Clarifying the data sources and processes used for the current school-age population, and their distribution across the country.
- Agreeing on the processes for projecting these school-age populations forward into the future, and the extent of the time that is used for planning.
- Aligning the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy with the Radical Inclusion policy to identify and meet the needs of out-of-school children
- Aligning the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy with the Education Sector Plan, to align estimates of the speed of progress towards goals.
- Incorporating the transparent projections of school-age population into the needs-based sequencing analyses.

The population projection data sources and processes will be set out in more detail in the Policy Guidelines to accompany this policy.

SECTION 3: IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

3.1 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The management and implementation of the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy framework will be led by the Government through MBSSE, local government officials, with engagement from civil society and parents. It will involve working closely with local authorities (who have devolved powers for construction) and with central oversight from MBSSE (necessary to avoid schooling deserts across administrative borders). It will be institutionalized within all levels of MBSSE, who will play a key coordinating role at both the central level (through the Directorate for Planning and Policy) and within the District Education Offices.

Given the wide-ranging nature of this role, MBSSE will work in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development. Additional stakeholders will include the Teaching Service Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, Ministry of Water Resource and Health and Sanitation, Sierra Leone Teachers Union, National Council of Head Teachers and Conference of Principals to engage a multipronged approach to effective implementation. These relationships will be set out in more detail in the Policy Guidelines to accompany this policy.

The Directorate of Planning and Policy (DPP) and the Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management (SQARM) both reporting to the Chief Education Officer (CEO) are responsible for the delivery of this policy. As stated, effective delivery will involve collaboration with other directorates within the ministry, other ministries, stakeholders, partners, and communities. Policy Guidelines and Standards of Operations (SOP) will be developed to ensure effective implementation and monitoring.

As part of the implementation planning, the exact processes and structures for implementation will be agreed, and resourced. This policy is indicative of what these will look like, based on the need to balance the decentralized nature of the education system at primary and junior secondary levels with a need to ensure equity and access for all learners and ensure that senior secondary expansion is well planned.

Overall responsibility for the infrastructure and catchment planning will be led by a small steering committee, hosted in DPP but comprising members from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and representatives of DEOs and Local Councils. They will work to ensure accurate data are available, track central activities and collate

bottom-up activities (such as information from a local council on the establishment of a new school). They will work to ensure that the policy is implemented in line with the agreed policy guidelines.

The key mechanisms, oversight and funding pathways will be described in more detail in the accompanying Policy Guidelines. These are intended to be similar for each of the three types of infrastructure improvement: new school construction, new classroom/facility construction in existing schools, and renovation of existing classrooms/facilities in existing schools.

One of the key sources of differentiation of processes is the pathway of funding for each of these infrastructure improvements. In particular this distinguishes between what is referred to as the 'central' budgets of MBSSE agreed with Ministry of Finance (MoF) and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED) and with donors, as well as the 'local' budgets of local councils.

Where funding is made available centrally then the process will be a variant of these key steps.

- The planning department will collate the available budgets and off-budget financing, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and donors.
- They will draw on the policy guidelines to agree where the funding will be allocated.
- This can be carried out in two ways:
 - 1) as an allocation at the local council level that is then allocated by the local councils, following the policy and policy guidelines at the locations/schools' level; or
 - 2) as an allocation at the location/school level, following the policy and policy guidelines, that is then agreed with the local councils.
- Infrastructure improvements are carried out according to this allocation plan, in coordination with the local councils.

For construction that is done through local councils, drawing on their budgets:

- They will determine the available budgets in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance through the local government finance department and donors.
- Follow policy and policy guidelines to agree where the funding will be allocated. This will be allocated by the local councils, following the policy and policy guidelines, at the locations/schools' level, that is then agreed with the DPP.

- In particular, the DPP aggregates these plans and checks for accessibility gaps, to be factored into planning prioritization.
- Infrastructure improvements are carried out according to this allocation plan.

The local councils and the DPP and SQARM, each have important perspectives in these processes. The local councils bring the greater knowledge of the local context, whilst the DPP has a whole-country perspective that is important in ensuring that equitable access is achieved across the country, including along the boundaries of local councils and other administrative areas.

Stakeholders, Roles and Responsibilities

This policy will be adopted and implemented in collaboration with the stakeholders, whose roles and responsibilities are outlined below. As this is evolving research and focused on the key principles of providing school infrastructure and catchment area planning, this list is not exhaustive and can be updated in the Policy Guidelines and during the review period stated in this policy.

- A. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) at the central level (led by the Directorate for Planning and Policy) will:
- Appoint a National Focal Person to coordinate the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy processes, including policy improvement and implementation.
 - Establish a steering committee, hosted in DPP or SQARM and led by the National Focal Person, and regularly meeting
 - Strengthen the Directorate of School Quality Assurance and Resource Management and Directorate of Planning and Policy with necessary staff and resources
 - Advocate for adequate public financing for ensuring there are sufficient spaces for all children.
 - Implement construction Minimum Standards in all building works
 - Coordinate with the TSC in planning the education workforce needs for any new and expanded schools.
 - Support and ensure the adequate provision of other resource needs for new and expanded schools including textbooks, lab equipment, ICT equipment and other learning materials.
 - Collaborate with other line Ministries, in particular the Ministry of Lands, Housing, and the Environment, to agree and update basic minimum standards for the establishments of schools.

- Ensure core infrastructure data is collected in a consistent manner across each year of the Annual School Census to enable analysis of changes over time
 - Ensure this policy, and related planning, is integrated into the wider planning system within the education sector, including processes such as the Education Sector Plan, the Radial Inclusion Policy, annual budgeting, local government budgeting and sensitizing local government, donors, communities, religious organizations, and private school owners.
 - Engage with MBSSE District Education Offices, Local Government in the development of clear, transparent criteria to decide the sequencing of where and when infrastructure improvements will be made
 - Set out these processes within the accompanying Policy Guidelines
 - Engage with the Ministry of Finance to understand the available central government budgets for infrastructure improvements each year
 - Follow the agreed processes to agree where both the central/ funding will be allocated, whether across or within local councils.
 - Support the District Education Office and Local Councils with the processes for deciding the sequencing of where and when this budget will be used for infrastructure improvements within local government budgets, and allocated central government infrastructure budgets
 - Design and share a template for DEO's to fill in on the infrastructure improvement activities
 - Key data that this will include will be set out in the Policy Guidelines
 - Receive the completed information and compile into a national dataset
 - After the following annual census, compare the extent that these intended actions have been achieved, and consider the potential barriers that have affected infrastructure improvements and how these could be alleviated, particularly if there are discrepancies between intentions and actions
 - Incorporate these transparent population projections into the sequencing processes – and sensitize DEOs and Local Councils on the methods and purpose
 - Set out the appropriate data sources, processes, and timelines within the accompanying Policy Guidelines
- B. The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) at the district level (through the District Education Offices) will:
- Engage with MBSSE at the central level on the development of clear, transparent criteria to decide the sequencing of where and when infrastructure improvements will be made
 - Work with local councils to understand the available local government budgets for infrastructure improvements each year

- Engage with local councils and DPP to follow the processes for deciding the sequencing of where and when this budget will be used within local government budgets, and allocated central government infrastructure budgets
- Establish an Infrastructure Oversight Committee in collaboration with the Local Council. This Committee will have responsibility for overseeing all infrastructure improvements within the Local Council area. This includes being aware of all planned infrastructure improvements being undertaken with non-government funds, as well as following the processes for deciding the sequencing of where and when government funds (central and local government) will be used.
- Engage and reach out to schools and stakeholders (such as potential school promoters including communities, religious organisations, and private promoters)
- Compile lists of new school building/ new facility building in existing schools and existing facility renovation expected with the next year (that funds are already identified for) within the DEO area
- Share this information with the MBSSE at the central level within required timeframes and in the required consistent format for centralized collation.

C. The Teaching Service Commission will:

- Serve as an advisory body to the Minister on all matters pertaining to the workforce needs of new and expanded schools

D. The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, and Local Councils, will:

- Provide the technical direction in which the Local Councils (LCs) can be engaged in promoting the goals in the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy
- Promote and coordinate community involvement in the precise locations of new construction
- Ensure access to safe drinking water, peri-urban water supply, environmental health care
- Ensure integration of new and expanded schools in Plans and Budgets of all local governments
- Monitor the implementation of the policy at local government level
- Ensure availability of land for establishment of school and recreation facilities for children at local government level.
- Engage with MBSSE on the development of clear, transparent criteria to decide the sequencing of where and when infrastructure improvements will be made
- Engage with the Ministry of Finance and the DEO to understand the available local government budgets for infrastructure improvements each year

- Engage with the District Education Office and DPP to follow the processes for deciding the sequencing of where and when this budget will be used within local government budgets, and allocated central government infrastructure budgets
 - Engage with the DEO in the establishment of an Infrastructure Oversight Committee (described above).
 - Support the DEO in the engagement and collection of information on planned infrastructure improvements within the local council area
 - Provide school transportation options
- E. The Ministry of Finance will:
- Ensure that infrastructure costs and associated workforce and other resource costs in relevant ministries are accommodated in the national budget.
 - Engage in discussions around the available central government and local government budgets for infrastructure improvements each year
- F. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development will:
- Engage in discussions around the implementation of domestic capital development funds
- G. The Ministry of Works and Infrastructure will:
- Collaborate on the development of basic minimum standards for school construction work.
- H. The Ministry of Water Resource and Ministry of Health and Sanitation will:
- Promote environmental sanitation, including safe drinking water sources
- I. Statistics Sierra Leone will:
- Support in the provision of accurate population projections
 - Support in the provision of accurate geospatial data and shapefiles for relevant administrative boundaries
- J. Sierra Leone Teachers Union, National council of Head Teachers, and Conference of Principles will:
- Engage in coordination meetings as part of their role in education networks in providing access and quality education
- K. Concerned Families, Parents and Guardians
- The contributions of families, parents and guardians are crucial in the following areas:
- Ensuring schools adhere to building standards through School Management Committees
 - Participate in local discussions on optimal school placement
 - Support initiatives for safe transport if needed
- L. Schools and stakeholders (including both current and potential school owners and including communities, religious organisations, and private owners) will be encouraged to:

- Inform District Education Office of their planned infrastructure improvement activities in the coming year, within requested timeframes
- Ensure any new and expanded facilities are aligned with the Governments school infrastructure planning and minimum standards.

3.2 MONITORING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

As part of the process for developing the policy guidelines, clear structures and plans will be put in place to ensure this Policy is implemented, monitored, and reviewed effectively. This will involve considering ways of strengthening the national capacity of MBSSE by adequately resourcing and staffing the Directorate of Planning and Policy.

MBSSE at the central level (led by Directorate of Planning and Policy) will:

- Ensure core infrastructure data is collected in a consistent manner across each year of the Annual School Census
- Engage with the Ministry of Finance to understand the available central government and local government budgets for infrastructure improvements each year
- Make allocations for the central government budgets across local councils, and/or proposes a list of schools in that council to benefit
- Design and share a template for DEO's to fill in on their intended infrastructure improvement activities (that funds are already identified for)
- Receive the completed information and compile into a national dataset
- After the following annual census, compare the extent that these intended actions have been achieved
- Develop Policy Guidelines

MBSSE at the district level (through the District Education Offices) will:

- Establish oversight committees between DEO and Local Councils and regularly meeting
- Share compiled list of infrastructure improvements expected with the next year (that funds are already identified for) in consistent format
- Support Local Councils to confirm the list of proposed schools to benefit from central budgets
- Support Local Councils to follow Policy processes for infrastructure improvements from local council budgets and fundraising, and central budgets that have been allocated but schools not identified

Local Councils will:

- Engage with MBSSE and DEOs on the list of infrastructure improvements expected with the next year (that funds are already identified for)
- Confirm the list of proposed schools to benefit from central budgets
- Follow Policy processes for infrastructure improvements from local council budgets and fundraising, and central budgets that have been allocated but schools not identified

3.3 EVALUATING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

The Planning and Policy Directorate, reporting to the Chief Education Officer (CEO), who is the professional and technical head of MBSSE is responsible for delivery of all policies. This includes collaboration with other directorates within the ministry, other Ministries, stakeholders, partners, and communities to develop guidelines and Standard of Operations (SOP) to ensure effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all policies.

Key outcome indicators will provide a basis of evaluating the progress, success and possible gaps in the policy and its implementation. These will be finalized, but could include:

- Appointment of a National Focal Person to coordinate the School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy processes,
- Establishment of a steering committee, hosted in DPP and led by the National Focal Person, and regularly meeting
- Establishment of oversight committees between the DEO and Local Councils and regularly meeting
- Extent of local councils' and DEO's engagement in the processes set out in the policy and policy guidelines, including across each of the budget pathways, and the compilation of annual infrastructure plans
- Extent of school owner's engagement in the processes set out in the policy and policy guidelines, including collecting information on their planned infrastructure improvement activities in the coming year, and ensuring any new and expanded facilities are aligned

3.4 POLICY REVIEW

The School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning policy will be reviewed by the MBSSE and relevant stakeholders every five years to ensure its continued scope, relevance to context and regulations and alignment with updated scientific research evidence. The policy may be reviewed sooner than five years if needs be. The policy

review process will follow the standard review procedures established within the MBSSE.

SECTION 4: POLICY CONCLUSION

4.1 POLICY CONCLUSION

The first year of the Government of Sierra Leone's flagship Free Quality School Education initiative has seen a significant increase in enrolment. This has increased the pressure on the system, which was already facing challenges in terms of school infrastructure – requiring both expansion and renovation - and equitable access to trained teachers, and subject specialists.

This policy aims to deal with issues relating to how the Government can ensure that the provision of a school physical infrastructure required to provide quality education to all children is well planned, consultatory and helps make the best use of limited resources. It deals with the processes for how this can work – including alignment with the National Development Plan and the sector planning processes, which will set the specific targets for the numbers of schools to be rehabilitated and/or built.

These issues are interlinked with many other areas of planning and budgeting and should be placed within the context of wider planning efforts, notably those being undertaken in the Teaching Service Commission to ensure the workforce is of sufficient numbers and quality.

There are many questions, and possible solutions to the challenges faced in providing education for all and expanding access to higher levels of education. The aim of this policy is to make the best use of resources, which is even more relevant when budgets are constrained. Ensuring equitable allocation of funding to infrastructure is key to ensuring an efficient and equitable allocation of resources across the country.