



**Statement by His Excellency, President Julius
Maada Bio on the National Launch of the Free
Quality School Education (FQSE) Programme
Teaching and Learning Materials and Core
Textbooks, Freetown, 9 January 2019.**

The Honourable Vice President

The First Lady of the Republic of Sierra Leone,

The Speaker of Parliament,

Chief Minister,

Ministers of Government

Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps

The Honourable Chief Justice,

The Mayor of the Municipality of Freetown,

Heads of International Institutions,

Heads of Parastatals,

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fellow Sierra Leoneans,

Two of Africa’s most inspirational figures believed in and spoke to us through their lives and in their words about the power of education.

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” Nelson

Mandela;

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating.

Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family” – Kofi Atta Annan.

When I staked my presidential campaign on “human capital development” as one of my national priorities, a few, (very few) opposition politicians thought that I was clueless, too daring, and too brave. When I proposed giving every

Sierra Leonean child access to free quality education, they pilloried and laughed at the idea. But the majority of Sierra Leoneans believed in my vision and voted me President. This free quality education programme is for every Sierra Leonean. It is not for one region, one tribe, one political party; it is for every Sierra Leonean who wants an education.

When I launched the free quality education programme, they did not only wish for it to fail; they engaged actively in misinformation campaigns to scupper the programme. But what kind of Sierra Leonean are you if you do not believe that we must give our children access to

quality education? What kind of Sierra Leonean are you if you do not believe that we must give our children a competitive edge in the global marketplace with a good education? Educating our children is not politics; it is an obligation; it is our sacred duty. So to those detractors and those who secretly wish for the Free Quality Education programme to fail, please recognize that the future of our children is above politics; the future of our nation is above politics; By investing in the education of our children, we are investing in the future of our nation. Human capital is the most valuable resource in any nation. When one develops the human being through quality

education and training, good health and well-being, and proper nutrition, one develops the most invaluable resource base for generating development and growth.

We have done more since the formal launch of the Free Quality Education programme. My government has allocated over 21% of the national budget to education and human capital development. We have fast-tracked much needed infrastructural and sector governance reforms. Our Free Quality Education programme continues to be predicated on its five core elements:

- a. **ACCESS** – ensure that every student regardless of economic status and especially gender and disability gets access to quality education,
- b. **QUALITY AND RESOURCES** – provide adequate school infrastructure, teacher training, teaching materials, learning resources, and training in delivery methods,
- c. **RETENTION** – Keep children in school through student-centered interventions including nutrition programmes, general WASH programmes, community engagement (especially in changing

cultural attitudes to girl-child education, early marriage and disability), and strengthening strategic partnerships with donor and international institutions whose programs promote retention and persistence in school,

d. **COMPLETION** – Implement policies that will reduce drop-out and attrition rates, and,

e. **POST-COMPLETION** – Provide career and skills-training pathways consistent with the unique development needs of our country.

So here we are again this morning, with a big help from our friends, UKAID/DFiD, making steady progress. We are providing teaching and learning materials including core textbooks, free of cost, to millions of Sierra Leonean children in government and government-assisted schools. For primary schools (English, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies); Junior Secondary Schools (English, Mathematics, Social Studies/Civic Education and Sciences); and for Senior Secondary Schools (English and Mathematics).

Let us be proud of this moment as Sierra Leoneans and let us celebrate this moment with gratitude to our international partners.

We have eliminated another impediment to learning, success, and achievement for our children. A textbook to a child is like a cutlass to a farmer. Without a cutlass, a farmer cannot farm. Without a textbook, students cannot learn and achieve their full potential. Students from impoverished families or those with differential learning disabilities now have access to the same materials as high achieving students. It also eliminates the need for supplementary learning materials that the majority of hardworking parents could not afford in the past.

Now, there is content coherence. What students need to learn and achieve, and what skills they should demonstrate upon completing each module are all laid out. For teachers, the lesson plans set goals for teaching and learning, provide a road map for instruction, and suggest helpful classroom practices and classroom interventions that could help children learn. To my mind, these rigorous standards mean that teachers will now work to improve their instructional techniques in order to prepare students for assessment examinations.

Students and parents must also play their part in working to meet those standards.

These teaching and learning materials challenge all of us who have a stake in raising the standards of education in this country.

For our partners and potential partners, we must continue to collaborate, sustain, and elevate assistance with the production of learning materials, training capacity and providing technical assistance, and supporting various aspects of the core elements of the Free Quality Education programme whether it be in access, quality and resources, retention, completion, or in post-completion.

To our communities, let us continue to own the Free Quality Education programme and stay fully invested in the managing, supervising, and supporting each element of the programme.

Parents have a responsibility to comply with the guidelines set in collaboration with school authorities and the community to care for, handle, and keep the free teaching and learning materials.

My Government has not stopped at the procurement of the materials, we have also put in place arrangements to ensure that the TLMs and Core textbooks are quickly and efficiently delivered to the districts and the schools. We have also put in place arrangements to minimise

pilferage/theft. Be warned - anyone found stealing any of the TLMs and/or Core textbooks will face the full penalty of the law and will be publicly disgraced. In order to safeguard and ensure that textbooks are properly used and kept in good condition for at least 3 years, textbook handling guidelines have been put in place. The guidelines cede responsibility to schools, pupils/students, and parents for the use and upkeep of core textbooks provided by my Government. Amongst other things, the policy requires students/pupils and/or parents to replace all damaged core textbooks. The Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education will provide more details.

To our teachers' Union and other stakeholders, let us continue to support the development of the profession and maintain all its best ethical and professional practices. It is our biggest contribution to nation-building and let us embrace the opportunity to serve our nation with pride and dignity.

But as a man who has developed a habit of asking questions, I have a few general questions that I want all of us to reflect on and use for further enriching the quality and value of the Free Quality Education Programme.

1. For the teachers and administrators, how do we adapt our teaching of the core textbooks to different learning abilities and styles? How do we promote critical enquiry and exploration in learning?

2. For the teacher training institutions: will teacher training institutions keep the foregoing question in mind when they develop their teacher-training and development curricula? Can in-service teacher training institutions and bodies elevate the quality of teaching through research and adoption of best practices?

3. For our education researchers and administrators – will they engage in periodic

reviews of these core textbooks? Will they research, measure, and evaluate the efficiency of the teaching methods and the teaching materials? Will they develop supplementary teacher-targeted material?

4. To our innovators, when can we begin to leverage new education technologies to reduce the costs of producing and distributing teaching and learning materials? Is there a place for digital textbooks, telephone delivered texts and podcasts, e-learning, or other interventions tailored to improve learning?

Let me end by saying that this is another milestone reached in the process of transforming education in

Sierra Leone. We will continue to invest in our nation's human capital development because we believe that this is the most certain pathway to prosperity and development. Let us therefore stay committed and focused on surmounting our challenges, reflecting on what we could do better, and working harder still to make Sierra Leone an even better nation.

With this, I now formally launch the provision of free teaching and learning materials in support of the Free Quality Education programme.