

US\$17.2 million Global Partnership for Education grant in Sierra Leone launched

Freetown, January 30, 2019 – Fostering the Government’s commitment to the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) initiative, President, H.E. Rtd. Brig., Dr. Julius Maada Bio today officially launched a program financed by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE). GPE Chief Executive Officer, Ms. Alice Albright, along with representatives of other education partners and senior government officials, attended the event.

The grant of US\$17.2 million aims to increase equitable access to education and improve learning outcomes for approximately 1 million girls and boys in public pre-primary and primary schools, with a focus on the most vulnerable children.

In his address, the President noted that the GPE Program being launched was not only “aligned with our FQSE endeavours....” but would also “have a positive impact on schooling as a whole as it addresses the source of much of our later learning challenges”

“This is a windfall for the children of Sierra Leone and our Government is extremely happy about it especially because it coincides with the launch of the Free Quality School Education initiative for primary, junior and senior secondary pupils in the country”, said **Hon. Alpha Timbo, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education**. *“This grant will help children achieve their potential, which contributes towards achieving the country’s educational outcomes that have been set in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.”*

“Sierra Leone has been a GPE partner since 2007 and engaged in the important process of building an education system that supports all of the country’s children,” said **Alice Albright, Chief Executive Officer, Global Partnership for Education**. *“This latest funding will be key to making further progress for the youngest learners in reading and writing and increase access to early childhood education, which is the foundation for lifelong learning, for thousands of children.”*

The grant will help improve student’s reading and mathematics skill in the early grades; expand early childhood development (ECD) opportunities to reach approximately 10,000 more young children; improve early grade reading and

mathematics instruction skills of 17,000 teachers; provide teaching and learning materials; and improve decentralised monitoring, data collection and management, including the establishment of a Learning Assessment Unit within the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE).

According to recent survey data, only 11.5 percent of children aged 3 to 5 year old children are attending pre-primary school. Whilst 82 per cent of all 6 to 11 year olds attend primary school. Primary school completion rate is 67 per cent but the junior secondary completion rate is only 49 per cent. While there is gender parity in attendance at the pre-primary, primary and junior secondary levels, more boys than girls complete junior and senior secondary education.

Over the past decade, Sierra Leone has made progress in getting more children into school by constructing and rehabilitating schools, procuring reading/teaching and learning materials as well as disbursing performance-based grants. Other areas supported by previous grants of the Global Partnership for Education include funds to support the establishment of the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) to oversee teacher recruitment, development, deployment and overall teacher management including the establishment of TSC offices at district level.

With regard to the establishment of TSC District Offices, and strengthening of District Education Offices, H.E. the President commended the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and his Deputy for "...devolving greater authority and responsibility to the district level."

The GPE funding is based on Sierra Leone's Education Sector Plan (ESP), harmonised with other education priorities, plans and policy documents of the Government of Sierra Leone as well as support being provided by education partners and donors such as UK Aid (DFID), World Bank, European Union, Government of Ireland and UNICEF.

DFID is currently the coordinating agency for the GPE programme with responsibilities that include promoting sector coordination in close collaboration with the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education and key education stakeholders.

Mary Hunt, DFID's Head of Office, said, "It is a top priority for the UK to see all children, especially girls and those with disability, access quality education. The UK makes a major contribution to the GPE and we are pleased to see that a significant amount of this funding has been mobilised to help the Government of Sierra Leone deliver on its commitment to give all children a chance to reach their potential".

UNICEF has been designated as GPE grant agent by the Government and in collaboration with the MBSSE will oversee programme implementation. This includes ensuring that progress is on track, funds are appropriately disbursed and utilised to support approved activities, as well as reporting implementation progress regularly to the Government of Sierra Leone and the GPE Secretariat.

“The grant could foster significant change in the educational development of the country and improve results for children in line with the government’s Free Quality School Education initiative,” said **Dr Hamid El-Bashir, UNICEF Representative to Sierra Leone.**

The drive and determination of the Government to ensure successful implementation of the programme, and the Free Quality School Education initiative as a whole, was nicely summarised by the last few words of the President’s launching statement: “For my people, my children of Sierra Leone, I have chosen light over darkness, learning over ignorance!”

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