

SIERRA LEONE 2024 VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW REPORT



Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Sierra Leone



MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Sierra Leone 2024 Voluntary National Review Report



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Acronyms

ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
ACR	Annual Compliance Report
ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CRVS	Civil registration and vital statistics
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDCC	District Development Coordination Committees
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ECT	Emergency Cash Transfers
FOI	Freedom of Information
FQSE	Free Quality School Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HLPF	High Level Political Forum
HIV & AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus & Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IOM	International Organization for Migration
INFF	Integrated National Financing Framework
MCC	Millennium Challenge Corporation
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
MoPED	Ministry of Planning and Economic Development
MTRS	Medium Term Revenue Strategy
MTNDP	Medium-Term National Development Plan
NCRA	National Civil Registration Authority
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NaMED	National Monitoring and Evaluation Department
NCPD	National Commission for Persons with Disabilities
ND-GAIN	Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NMP	National Migration Policy
NORM	National Outcome Routine Mapping
PWD	Persons Living with Disability
PSSNYE	Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment
RAIC	Right to Access Information Commission
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based Violence
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSNP	Social Safety Net Programme
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education Training
UN	United Nations
UNCT	United Nations Country Teams
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Funds
UNICEF	United Nations Children Emergency Funds

VIONET	Volunteers Involving Organization of Sierra Leone
VLR	Voluntary Local Review
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	World Food Programme
YESP	Youth Employment Support Project



Table of Contents

ACRONYMS	2
FOREWORD TO THE REPORT	5
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	6
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT	7
1. INTRODUCTION	11
SIERRA LEONE STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT	11
2. METHODOLOGY AND PROCESS FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE REVIEW REPORT	13
2.1 COORDINATION OF THE REVIEW PROCESS	13
2.2 CONSULTATIONS AND DATA COLLECTION	13
3. POLICY AND ENABLING ENVIRONMENT	15
I. ENSURING OWNERSHIP OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE VNRs	15
II. INTEGRATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN NATIONAL FRAMEWORKS	16
III. INTEGRATION OF THE ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, AND ENVIRONMENTAL DIMENSIONS	17
IV. LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND	19
V. INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS	23
VI. SYSTEMIC ISSUES AND TRANSFORMATIVE ACTIONS	24
4. PROGRESS ON THE GOALS AND TARGETS AND EVALUATION OF POLICIES AND MEASURES TAKEN SO FAR 25	
4.1 RESULTS OF EVALUATION SYNTHESIS	25
4.2 PROGRESS ON THE SDGs INDICATORS	37
SDG 1: END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE	37
SDG 2: END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVE NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE	38
SDG 3: ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES	39
SDG 4: ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL	40
SDG 5: ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS	42
SDG 6: ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL	43
SDG 10: REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES	45
SDG 13: PROMOTE TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS	51
SDG 16: PROMOTE PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL, AND BUILD EFFECTIVE, ACCOUNTABLE, AND INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS AT ALL LEVELS	53
SDG 17: STRENGTHEN THE MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND REVITALISE THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	64
5. NEW AND EMERGING CHALLENGES	67
6. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION	67
7. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS	72
ENHANCING AND ACCELERATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA	73
SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES	74
KEY LESSONS LEARNED	74
RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION PLAN	75
8. REFERENCES	76
9. ANNEXES	77

Foreword to the Report

The 2024 Voluntary National Review for Sierra Leone is the country's fourth national review on the SDGs, following previous reviews in 2016, 2019, and 2021. The country has been very active in the SDG review and follow-up processes and presented an SDG Acceleration Roadmap in September 2023 which prioritised *goals one, two, and ten* as the most imperative for sustained poverty reduction and socioeconomic transformation of the country.

This year's review process coincides with the commencement of the implementation of the new Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030. We have therefore demonstrated that the leading Sierra Leone SDG Acceleration commitments and the rest of the 2030 agenda are relentlessly pursued within the framework of the New Plan, which is framed around the government's Big Five Game Changers.

The 2024 VNR Report for Sierra Leone also provides an in-depth review of seven SDGs, including the three priority goals: Goal 1 (ending poverty), 2 (zero hunger), 5 (gender), 10 (reduced inequality), 13 (climate change), SDG16 (justice, peace and inclusive society), and 17 (means of implementation).

The review process was based on inclusive participation, drawing from the full participation of stakeholders to generate sector data and ascertain SDGs policy impact on the ground. Participants for the various consultations were drawn from government ministries, departments, and agencies; parliament, local councils, civil society organisations, people living with disabilities; the private sector, the media, research institutions, and development partners. We effectively utilised the Civil Society Organization-integrated platform to conduct local-level community mobilisation and to collect SDGs-related data and success stories from all parts of the country.

To ensure an evidence-based report is produced, we specifically synthesized a total of twenty-one existing evaluation and assessment reports. We also undertook a basic assessment of the well-being and situation of individuals with disabilities, gauging the impact of social protection interventions on their lives and livelihoods. For migration, we conducted joint assessments of the general status of migration governance in Sierra Leone.

The report generally sheds light on the numerous policy and institutional initiatives for accelerating the SDGs implementation, as well as presenting progress on some indicators and targets. We further underscored the crucial role of adequate funding for accelerating the SDG implementation which has been underwhelmed in the face of the multiple and overlapping global socioeconomic crises. The entire review process was constrained by the lack of recent data to track national progress on most of the indicators and targets.

This review, therefore, underlines the government's innovative strategies to address the financing challenge through scaling up the implementation of the Integrated Financing Framework, developing and implementing a climate finance strategy, and supporting the optimal implementation of the country's blue economy strategy.

Let me thank all those who participated in this exercise, including our esteemed development partners, more so the UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, and IOM, who provided both technical and financial resources for the process. We are grateful to the civil society organisations, private sector representatives, central government institutions, parliament, and people living with disabilities.

Hon. Ms. Kenyeh Barlay

Acknowledgment

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Development is extremely grateful to all stakeholders who participated in the preparation of Sierra Leone's fourth Voluntary National Review Report on the implementation of the SDGs. We are particularly indebted to the Honourable Minister of Planning and Economic Development, **Madam Kenyeh Barlay** for her leadership and strategic guidance throughout the review exercise. Our profound gratitude is extended to the Parliament of Sierra Leone, especially the *Development and Planning Committee* for providing the political endorsement and actively participating in the stakeholder consultation sessions. This review report would not have been possible without the invaluable inputs of the Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, local councils, non-governmental organisations, and Civil Society actors. Indeed, the various sector actors were very instrumental in pulling relevant sector data and reports that enriched the report.

The Ministry highly appreciates Statistics Sierra Leone and the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department for providing technical guidance in the review process, including data collection and analysis. The *Sierra Leone Civil Society Integrated Platform for the SDGs*, deserve a special commendation for their active role in the process, including leading the local-level data collection and consultations across the 16 districts of the country with limited resources.

The government of Sierra Leone is profoundly grateful to the United Nations Country Team namely, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) for the financial and technical support in the entire review process. In addition to the UN agencies, we express immense gratitude to Sightsavers Sierra Leone for their technical and financial support, which has been instrumental in complementing the government's efforts during the 2024 VNR exercise. We also recognize the contribution of the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities, especially the executive Secretary **Mr. Saa Korteque**.

Finally, the commitment and hard work of the Department of Planning, Policy and Research staff in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development deserve special recognition. They were instrumental in coordinating the various stakeholder engagements, consolidating sector data and reports, and producing the report.

Highlights of the Report

The Sierra Leone 2024 Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the SDGs was conducted as part of the country's continued commitment to effectively leverage the instruments of the VNR to showcase progress and ascertain the impact of policies and strategies on the ground. The process also covered an assessment of the policy and institutional environment for implementing the SDGs, including the alignment of the goals with the New Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030.

The report accentuates the Medium-Term Plan as the anchor for operationalising the SDGs on the ground. The Medium-Term National Development Plan will guide the Government's strategic policy direction for the next six years and operationalize the Sierra Leone SDGs Acceleration Roadmap.

As a fourth-time participant in the VNR process, the 2024 VNR process in Sierra Leone assessed the impact of SDGs policy interventions on the well-being of all people, especially those living with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The outcome of these assessments has provided critical insights into the country's development trajectory and the effectiveness of various strategies in achieving the SDGs. This year's review builds on the lessons learned and the progress made in previous reviews, assessing progress amidst significant global socio-economic challenges, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic instability, and climate change impacts.

Methodology and Process

The Sierra Leone 2024 VNR process was based on broad stakeholder participation and done within the context of implementing our national development plan. The review attracted the active participation of government ministries, departments, and agencies, the parliament of Sierra Leone, civil society/non-governmental organisations, UN country Team, local councils and traditional leaders/community people, persons with disability, women and youth people, media, and the private sector actors.

This multi-faceted approach was lead by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, closely working with insightful technical inputs from Statistics Sierra Leone, the National Monitoring and Evaluation Department, and the UN Country Team—UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA and IOM. Several technical working sessions and stakeholder consultation workshops were held, including civil society-led community engagement with local and chiefdom authorities. In addition to the extensive desk reviews, an evaluation synthesis was done to ascertain the SDGs Policy impacts on the welfare of the people.

Progress on the goals

Priority Goal One: No Poverty

Although there is no recent data to assess progress on income poverty, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) headcount estimates show a slight decline in the incidence of poverty from 64.8 percent in 2017 to 58.0 percent in 2019. The study also found multi-dimensional

poverty to be largely a rural phenomenon, with the western area rural and urban the least poor regions in the country. The implementation of several social protection schemes such as cash transfers and the Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment for extremely poor households are helping to reduce extreme poverty and enhance economic stability.

Priority Goal Two: Zero Hunger

Using published reports, the general level of food insecurity was found to be deteriorating during the period under review, with the proportion of the national population who are food insecure increasing from 57 percent in 2020 to 82 percent in February 2024 (according to the WFP assessment). The ensuing high cost of living of the multiple and overlapping global socioeconomic shocks has pushed several households into food insecurity.

Goal Three: Health

On SDG3, the government of Sierra Leone has strengthened the implementation of the Free Health Care Initiative, and national budgetary allocation to the health sector increased from 6% to 11.6% during 2019-2023. These policy efforts have positively impacted health indicators, particularly maternal mortality, which decreased from 717 deaths in 2019 to 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020, and life expectancy increased from 53 to 61 during 2017-2023.

Goal Four: Quality Education

Education accounts for 21 percent of the national budget, mainly supporting government-free quality school education and radical inclusion programs. The study shows that early childhood education or primary school attendance jumped from 13.7 percent in 2016 to 24 percent in 2022; gender parity in primary school improved from 1.01 in 2016 to 1.04 in 2021,

Goal five: Gender equality

The government has instituted significant legislative reforms towards mainstreaming gender equality in the national development planning process, with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act 2022 produced. Subsequently, the country has made excellent progress towards the targets of gender equality and women empowerment as the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament improved from 12.3 percent in 2013 to 28.2 percent in 2023, and a drastic increase in female representation in ministerial cabinet positions over 30 percent. Also, the government has promulgated several policies, strategies, and legislations towards gender empowerment.

Goal six: water and sanitation

The proportion of household members with an improved drinking water source without E. coli increased from 13.9 percent in 2017 (using the 2017 MICS data) to 45.1 percent in 2019. Access to basic water supply services reached 62.6 percent of the population, with access for 79.4 percent of people living in urban areas and 54.5 percent for those in rural areas. Progress is also noted on the policy, legislative, and institutional front.

Goal ten: inequality

Here, we assessed the impact of social protection schemes on the welfare of people living with disabilities (PWDs) and found out that several beneficiaries have graduated from extreme

poverty to the level of economic independence. PWDs continue to access free healthcare services, including eye health. There is an increasing sense of recognition for PWDs in society. For migration governance, the government and partners continue to improve the policy and regulatory environment, while support is provided for migrant returnees to resettle into society.

Goal thirteen: climate change

Since its establishment in 2021, the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has facilitated the adoption of strategies to increase risk awareness and bolster institutional capacities for the climate actions outlined in the National Adaptation Plan, including restoration of its forest and tree cover. In 2022, Sierra Leone's environmental performance index score for air quality was estimated at 21.60 with a rank of 151st out of 180 countries, jumping 10 places from a score of 161 in 2020. The country remains highly vulnerable to climate change and has low readiness to confront the accelerating threat of climate change, ranking 166th out of 185 countries on the ND-GAIN (2021) Index.

Goal sixteen: Justice, peace and security

Sierra Leone is doing a commendable job, securing a UN Security Council Non-Permanent Seat and participating in the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State-building. The Justice sector's continued reforms are fundamental catalysts for promoting sustainable peace and development, guaranteeing and protecting citizens' human rights. The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board continues to provide access to justice for underprivileged persons, with a significant increase in beneficiaries (from 13,180 in 2021 to more than 15,000 in 2023). It has embraced the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism for speedy out-of-court settlement of cases. The Government has advanced the constitutional review process, launched a new Government White Paper, and abolished the death penalty.

The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) considers access to information essential for good governance and a critical enabler of the SDGs. A marked increase in Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and proactive disclosure of information was recorded, with a score of 98% on FOI in the 2022 Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Global Scorecard. The recent launch of the Digital Access to Information Platform will significantly improve public access to information.

Goal 17: means of implementation and Global Partnership for Development

Like many other underdeveloped countries, Sierra Leone faces funding constraints in implementing the SDGs, mainly due to multiple global crises since 2020. To address these challenges in the new national development plan, which has an estimated ***financing gap of US\$2.56 billion***, the government will explore innovative financing instruments, including the Sierra Leone Integrated National Financing Framework, and strengthen development cooperation.

Among the lessons learned

The 2024 VNR process for Sierra Leone started very late due to the country's engagement in the formulation of the current MTNDP 2024-2030. This late starter badly affected the review process, including the limited time to access all relevant evaluation reports for a better-

informed review report. Also, partnership and development cooperation are increasingly becoming unpredictable, thereby requiring the Government to allocate sufficient funds for the VNR process and general SDG implementation

Challenges to the SDGs

Data systems and reporting capacity remain challenged. The lack of current data to provide status updates on the indicators owing to the differential timing of this current round of reporting with the frequency and timing of the different surveys conducted by the national statistical office. The late commencement of the review process was a major challenge which put additional pressure on the technical team.



1. Introduction

This is the fourth Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation in Sierra Leone, following previous reviews in 2016, 2019, and 2021. Since the launch of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, the country has actively leveraged the SDGs reviews and follow-up instruments to showcase progress and ascertain the impact of policies and strategies on the ground.

The first VNR in 2016 reported the initial efforts to mainstream the goals, while the second review in 2019 highlighted progress on the SDGs goals and targets since 2016 and presented key policy and institutional reconfigurations in the national development processes, largely informed by the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan of 2019-2023. The third review in 2021 presented the SDGs policy impact on the welfare of the citizenry, and the national COVID-19 response and recovery mechanism.

Building on the experience of those previous reviews, the 2024 VNR is being conducted to continue tracking the SDGs policy impact on the ground, despite the multiple socioeconomic crises faced by the global economy. The Sierra Leone 2024 VNR Report will particularly assess progress on the Sierra Leone SDGs Acceleration Road Map¹, and the strategies it has laid out in the new Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan, MTNDP 2024-2030 to accelerate progress in achieving the goals by 2030. On this note, and consistent with the theme and guidelines for the 2024 HLPF, the report will provide an in-depth review of seven SDGs—SDG 1 (*no poverty*), SDG 2 (*zero hunger*), SDG5 (*gender equality*); *SDG10 (reduce inequality)*; SDG 13 (*climate action*), SDG 16 (*peace, justice, and strong institutions*), and SDG 17 (*partnerships for the Goals*).

Sierra Leone Strategic Policy Context

In September 2023, Sierra Leone produced its UN SDG Acceleration Roadmap which prioritised goals **one, two, and ten** as the most imperative for sustained poverty and inequality reduction and socioeconomic transformation in the remaining years of the 2030 agenda. The roadmap outlined national SDG investment commitments which, together with the rest of the 2030 agenda, are pursued within the framework of the country's new MTNDP 2024-2030. To ensure sustained and coherent development focus in the national transformative acceleration agenda for food security, human capital development, and job creation, the MTNDP 2024-2030 timeline is aligned with the Sierra Leone UN SDG Acceleration.

As the overarching national development framework, the new MTNDP is structured around ten broad policy results areas—the Government's Big Five Game Changers and five critical enablers of the Big Five. Three of these Game Changers—***Feed Salone, Human Capital Development, and Youth Employment Scheme***—align with the Sierra Leone SDG Acceleration commitments and SDG14. ***Feed Salone*** is the Government's flagship programme for attaining food security, boosting economic growth, and reducing poverty. The strategic priority on food security is underpinned by the desire to improve the country's grim food

¹ In 2023, Sierra Leone presented its SDG Acceleration Roadmap to the UN

security situation, which has especially worsened following the outbreak of COVID-19 and the Russia-Ukraine war. Since 2020, the proportion of the population with severe food insecurity has been in double digits, estimated at 12 percent in 2020, 11 percent in 2022, and 12.9 percent in 2023. The implications of this high state of food insecurity for the macroeconomic, social, and democratic stability of the state, have prompted the government to prioritise national food self-sufficiency issues in its 2030 agenda, resulting in increased national budgetary allocation to agriculture from 2.1 percent in 2023 to 7 percent in 2024.

The second big five game changer of *human capital development* signals that Sierra Leone will continue to scale up investment in crucial human capital development areas in Sierra Leone's long-term socioeconomic transformation and development. Building on the gains made in the previous national development plan of 2019-2023, the strategic objective of the Human Capital Development results area is to deliver inclusive skills and a healthy population for 21st-century demands. The country will pursue specific strategies for accelerating progress in education, health, water and sanitation, housing, gender and women empowerment, the welfare of children, the aged, and persons with disabilities, land, housing, and urbanisation challenges.

The Game Changer Three on “*Youth Employment Scheme*” aims to address the challenges associated with the country's youth bulge by providing a minimum of 500,000 jobs for young people over the next five to seven years, with at least 30 percent representation of women. This broad results area of the national plan will be catalysing democratic sustainability, economic productivity, and national security.

The remaining two game changers; *Infrastructure, technology and innovation* and *Transforming the Public Service Architecture* are highly indispensable in ensuring the effective delivery of the 2030 targets. To provide the requisite building block and accelerate the implementation of direct actions under each of the big fives, five special enablers have been carefully conceptualised as follows: Scaling up efforts to diversify the economy (enabler 1); Governance and accountability (enabler 2); Advancing climate resilience and environmental action (enabler 3); Gender mainstreaming (enabler 4); and Financing, partnership for implementation & risk management (enabler 5).

The national plan is also operationalised through several sector strategies and programmes such as the Sierra Leone Blue Economy Strategy (2022-2030). The blue economy strategy is a medium-term framework for guiding the optimal and sustainable utilization of the country's abundant oceanic and aquatic resources, in tandem with Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030.

These strategies are aligned with the SDGs and they accelerate the implementation of the global agenda and the MTNDP.

2. Methodology and process for the preparation of the review report

The methodology employed in this national review exercise was informed by the UN Guidelines for the 2024 review process, and consistent with the Sierra Leone approach of inclusive participation in the national planning process.

2.1 Coordination of the review process

The 2024 Sierra Leone VNR process was based on broad stakeholder participation, led by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (MoPED), with the technical support of Statistics Sierra Leone, the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency, UNICEF, UNFPA, and the UNDP.

To effectively guide and provide technical oversight for the review process, a Technical Committee was formed, comprising MoPED, Statistics Sierra Leone, and the National Monitoring and Evaluation Agency. The committee met regularly to guide the review process, including data collection, the rapid evaluation exercise, and updating the Sierra Leone SDGs Results Framework, and discussing other technical issues. The committee also discussed the shape and structure of the VNR Report and agreed on the roadmap for the review process. A sub-committee of MoPED and the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) guided the process of a separate study on the status of disabilities and vulnerabilities.

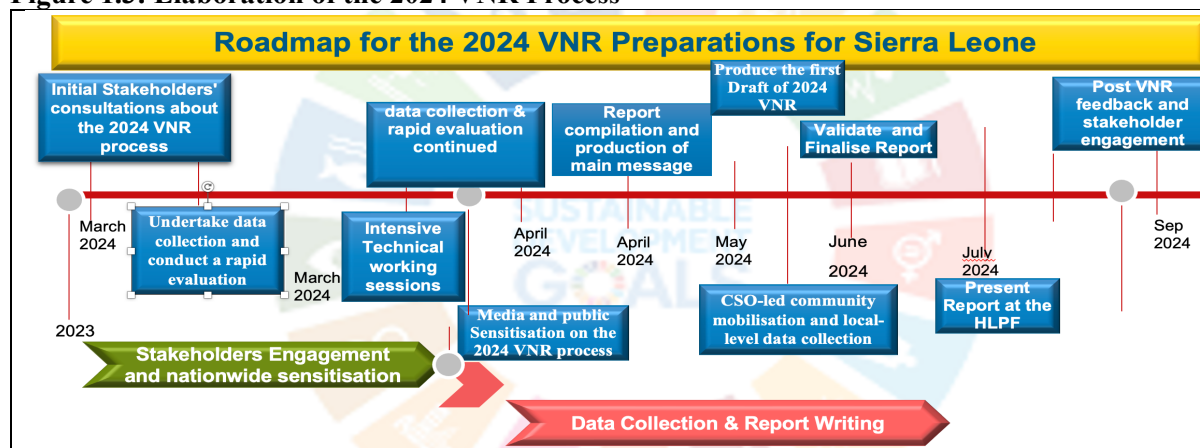
2.2 Consultations and Data Collection

The process effectively commenced with a general stakeholder consultation workshop, with stakeholders largely drawn from Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA), parliament, the United Nations Country Teams (UNCT), civil society (including women and youth groups and persons with disabilities), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), private sector and the media.

The workshop sensitised stakeholders about the new national development plan as the framework for implementing the SDGs in the next seven years, informed them about the VNR process, and sought their perception of the impact of SDGs interventions on their welfare and the level of inequality. Separate consultation sessions were organised for the Parliament, governance institutions and Civil Society Organization (CSO); migrant returnees, wilder stakeholders on the Global Compact on migration; persons with disability and other vulnerable groups; regular media updates; and a number of several technical working sessions.

In the spirit of ensuring no one is left out of the VNR process and to promote inclusive participation, we utilized the CSO structure—the Integrated CSO platform on the SDGs—to carry out local-level awareness campaigns and to collect SDG-related data and success stories from all parts of the country. The actual review phase was preceded by a debriefing meeting with the Civil Society Integrated Platform on the SDGs to inform them about the planned approach to the review.

Figure 1.3: Elaboration of the 2024 VNR Process



To ensure an evidence-based assessment, we reviewed and synthesized existing assessment and evaluation reports to enrich the report. This rapid assessment was focused on SDGs interventions implemented under ten SDGs: SDG 1 (*no poverty*), SDG 2 (*zero hunger*), SDG 3 (*good health*), SDG 4 (*quality education*), SDG5 (*Gender equality*); SDG 6 (*water and sanitation*), SDG10 (*reduce inequality*); SDG 13 (*climate action*), SDG 16 (*peace, justice, and strong institutions*), and SDG 17 (*partnerships for the Goals*). We also conducted a separate study on the welfare and status of disabilities and vulnerabilities in the country, ascertaining the impact of policy interventions on their welfare.





The entire review process heavily relied on sector-level data and various thematic reports. The technical team developed a data collection instrument for sector-level data collection, which was completed by the MDAs and returned to MoPED. Intensive technical sessions were held with government MDAs to review the data and update the Sierra Leone SDGs results framework.

3. Policy and Enabling Environment

This section presents national progress on a) ensuring ownership of the SDGs and the VNR process; b) Integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in National Frameworks; c) Integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions; d) Leaving no one behind; e) Institutional mechanisms for implementing the goals; and f) Systemic issues and transformative actions.

i. Ensuring ownership of the Sustainable Development Goals and the VNRs

Since the launch of the 2030 agenda in 2015, Sierra Leone has consistently promoted national and regional ownership of the SDGs, as echoed in our previous VNR reports of 2019 and 2021. In addition to those initial efforts in 2016 through 2021 (when Sierra Leone’s last VNR was done), we have mainstreamed the SDGs in all national development discussions.

As part of SDGs localization efforts, we have successfully conducted three Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) on the SDGs in Pujehun, Kambia, and Bonthe districts. A key part of these local reviews was the sensitisation of stakeholders, including traditional leaders, and local council authorities on the goals, and their implementation arrangement at the local and community levels, deepening local knowledge and enhancing ownership of the goals. The parliament of Sierra Leone—represented by the development and planning committee and the respective district parliamentary caucus—was also part of each local review process. Furthermore, as a crucial part of the Joint SDGs Funds Project on strengthening domestic resource mobilization, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development undertook regular media sensitization of the public on the SDGs and national development plan.

In partnership with the Volunteers Involving Organization of Sierra Leone (VIONET Sierra Leone)—a national network of volunteer groups—, regional stakeholder sensitization

workshops and media engagement were organized on the Sierra Leone Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF). The campaigns called for increased mobilization of local resource for financing the SDGs and local community development programmes.

In preparing the Sierra Leone SDGs Acceleration Roadmap for presentation at the 2023 SDG Summit in New York, over 100 participants were brought together to discuss SDG needs for the remaining years of the 2030 agenda. This was a nationwide consultative process, including central and local government practitioners, development partners, civil society, parliament, private sector representatives, and academia.

Also, as part of the 2023 Global Goals Week of Action in Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and the UNDP partnered with VIONet Sierra Leone, to organise an SDG Floating Parade. Similar to the roadmap preparation, the parade brought together stakeholder actors from government institutions, the UNCT, the private sector, civil society and volunteer groups, and the media.

These events increased public awareness of the Sierra Leone SDGs Acceleration Roadmap, continued to sustain national knowledge of the goals, and encouraged private sector interest in the SDGs.



As already noted above, we effectively utilised the Integrated SDG Platform for CSOs' to conduct nationwide community mobilisation and collect level data on the SDGs. Since its establishment during the 2019 VNR process, the platform has been a major channel through which the government has engaged and coordinated with the ever expanding CSO groups on the SDGs.

ii. Integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in National Frameworks.

In Sierra Leone, we continue to anchor the implementation of the 2030 agenda on the national development plan as the framework for operationalising the sustainable development goals on the ground. At the outset of preparing the Sierra Leone SDGs Acceleration Roadmap, we ensured complete alignment of the *three priority SDGs* and the entire roadmap to the Big 5 Game Changers of the Government.

The preparation of the SDG Acceleration Roadmap coincided with the initial policy discussions on the successor Medium-Term Plan for 2024-2030, for which the government had identified its Big 5 Game Changers as the overarching strategic framework for consolidating and accelerating efforts towards achieving its middle-income status by 2035.

Table 1: Priority SDGs derived from the consultations

Three priority SDGs most strategic for Human Development
SDG1: Ending poverty
SDG2: Zero Hunger
SDG10: Reduced Inequality
Enablers/multipliers/catalysts for goals 1, 2 & 10
SDG4: Quality Education
SDG7: Affordable & Clean Energy
SDG8: Decent Work & Economic Growth
SDG9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure
SDG16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions

Figure 1.1: Linking the Government Big five Game Changers to the SDGs



Unlike the previous Sierra Leone Medium-Term Plans, the implementation timeline for the new plan is strategically extended to 7 years to align it with the country’s UN SDG Acceleration Roadmap 2024-2030. Thus, to ensure coherence, logic, and effective reporting on their implementation, we have integrated the SDGs outcomes framework into the operational (results) structure of the MTNDP.

We have recently produced a Standardised Template and Guidelines for reviewing and formulating local council plans, which requires all 22 development plans to integrate the SDGs. This is in addition to successfully integrating the SDGs into four new local council plans in 2022.

iii. Integration of the economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

For a country that is highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change and both man-made and natural environmental hazards, we have continued to integrate the three dimensions of

sustainable development at all levels of the national development process. As illustrated in Table 2, our current Medium-Term Plan for 2024-2030 has carefully integrated sustainable development's economic, environmental, and social policy dimensions, and they appear to be indivisible. The social dimension is fully covered under the policy results areas of the first game changer (*Feed Salone*), second game changer (*human capital development*), third game changer (*youth employment scheme*), fourth game changer (*transforming the public service architecture*) first enabler (*diversifying the economy and promoting growth*), second enabler (*governance and accountability*), and fourth Enabler (*gender mainstreaming*). The economic dimension is covered under policy results areas of the first game changer (*feed salone*), third game Changer (*youth employment scheme*), fourth Game Changer (*infrastructure and technology*), first Enabler (*Diversifying the economy & promoting growth*), and fifth Enabler (*Financing, partnerships and implementation, and risk mitigation*). The environmental dimension is accounted for under the policy results area of the first Game Changer (*Feed Salone*), fourth Game Changer (*infrastructure and technology*), and third enabler (*Advancing climate resilience and environmental action*).

Table 2: linking the MTNDP 2024-2030 to the 2030 Agenda

Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024-2030)	UN Sustainable Development Goals	Sustainability Dimension (Economic, Social & Environmental)		
The Big Five Game Changers				
Feed Salone	Goals 1, 2, 3, 8, 12, 15 & 17	Economic Dimension	Social Dimension	Environmental Dimension
Human Capital Development	SDGs: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11 & 17		Social Dimension	
Youth Employment Scheme	SDGs 1, 4, 8, 10 & 17	Economic Dimension	Social Dimension	
Technology, Innovation and Infrastructure	SDGs: 7, 9, 11 & 17	Economic Dimension		Environmental Dimension
Transforming the Public Service Architecture	SDGs 4, 8, 10, 16, & 17		Social Dimension	
The Enablers				
Diversifying the Economy and Promoting Growth	SDGs: 1, 8, 9, 14 & 17	Economic Dimension		
Governance and Accountability	SDGs: 10, 16 & 17		Social Dimension	
Advancing Climate Resilience and Environmental Action	SDGs: 7,11,12, 13, 14 & 15			Environmental Dimension
Gender Mainstreaming	SDGs 5, 10 & 17		Social Dimension	
Financing, Partnerships for Implementation and Risk Management	SDGs 1 & 17	Economic Dimension		

Source: Author's construct based on the Sierra Leone MTNDP 2024-2030

After the June 2023 general elections, a *Presidential Initiative on Climate Change, Renewable Energy, and Food Security* was established to complement and reinforce political will for

supporting national, sectoral, and local efforts to reduce the risks and impacts of climate-related disasters. Additionally, the government of Sierra Leone, with the support of the UNDP, has developed a national Blue Economy Strategy along with a comprehensive Action Plan to implement the strategy. The secretariat for the blue economy, along with its technical and ministerial steering committees, will oversee the efficient and sustainable use of our abundant oceanic and aquatic resources for achieving sustainable development. A National Development-Induced Resettlement Policy has been formulated, and the National Climate Change Policy reviewed and updated, all aimed at delivering climate-resilient development services.

iv. Leaving no one behind.

In this section, we provide status updates on the principles that Sierra Leone considers to be critical in addressing the concept of leaving no one behind². Like the previous VNRs of 2019 and 2021, this update presents progress on the key issues in pursuing the welfare of the vulnerable and high-risk groups in society.

(i) *Addressing Socioeconomic Participation and Inclusiveness*

Inclusive participation in political and socioeconomic activities has been the hallmark of our resilient post-war governance system, crucial in consolidating peace and social cohesion for more than 20 years. In June 2023, the country conducted another peaceful presidential and general election, the fifth post-civil war election, in which every citizen was freely allowed to participate. The election produced a record number of female candidates, resulting in 30 percent of female representation in Parliament and 28 percent of the cabinet from less than 15 percent in 2018. Additionally, the Elections Commission of Sierra Leone has strengthened its Inclusion Policy, making it easier for PWDs to participate in elections.

In preparing the current medium-term plan, a historic nationwide youth and school children consultations were held on their needs and aspirations, in addition to the active participation of youth. Given the large youth population—with *75 percent of the national population below the age of 35*—, the operationalisation of a strategic policy result area for youth employment scheme and realisation of the targeted 500,000 jobs will significantly enhance inclusive socioeconomic participation. Efforts to strengthen decentralisation saw the review of the Local Government Act 2004 and the development of a Decentralisation Policy and Local Government Act 2022. To deepen the local planning process, MoPED, through the new plan will facilitate the roll-out of the People’s Planning Process (Wan fambul framework) to village/ chiefdom planning, which has been successfully piloted in four districts. The sustained operations of the District Development Coordination committees have enhanced inclusive participation in the local development process.

² Pages 14-16 of the 2016 Sierra Leone Voluntary National Review Report presented the key areas that Sierra Leone considers to be crucial in addressing the leave the one behind concept

(ii) Addressing issues of disability and stigmatization

The Government recognizes that Persons living with disabilities (PWDs), who account for about 2 percent of the national population, are among the poorest and most deprived in society. On this note, the GoSL remains committed to pursuing the welfare of PWDs in adherence to the principle of *leaving no one behind*, and to protect their rights, and give meaning and dignity to their lives. The MTNDP has particularly articulated special policy actions for scaling up policy development and implementation for this special segment of the population. As part of this review process, a special study is undertaken on the welfare of persons with disabilities. Detailed reports and analysis are presented under progress on the goals.

Overall, we have witnessed a remarkable improvement in policy and institutional support to Organisations for People Living with Disabilities (OPD). These supports have been translated into well-organized and structured disabled governance architecture, thereby increasing the streamlining of interventions and collaborations. Public institutions are gradually becoming disabled-friendly and accessible. Key examples are the State House, the House of Parliament, and the Freetown City Council office. The National Civil Registration Authority now has a disability-sensitive policy, that makes it possible, for the first time, the inclusion of a braille feature on the National Identity Card.

Social protection measures for vulnerable people, such as support from the Ministry of labour and Social Security, and direct cash transfers from the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), for which over 35,000 PWDs have benefited since 2020, and there are plans to scale up the support. The cash transfer programmes have been quite helpful in cushioning the severe impacts of the multiple and overlapping crises such as the covid-19.

The government's policies on providing assistive devices and technology for PWDs are also making gains. In addition to the sustained support of the social safety net programme that the NaCSA leads, the village, loans, and savings associations scheme has been introduced to empower vulnerable women.

With economic empowerment support to organisation of persons with disabilities in productive activities, a good number have graduated from extreme poverty. For example, the Christian Blind Mission engaged in soap making and the women with disability in hairdressing for which considerable progress is recorded in graduating their partners.

Among the remaining challenges are poor access to public transport services for PWDs and poor coordination of multiple data collection processes and actors in PWDs-related operations.

(iii) Strengthening the justice system and tackling the welfare of the incarcerated

The Justice sector's continued reforms are fundamental catalysts for promoting sustainable peace and development, guaranteeing and protecting citizens' human rights. Also, the Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board continues to provide access to justice for underprivileged persons, with a significant increase in beneficiaries (from 13,180 in 2021 to more than 15,000 in 2023). The board has embraced the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism for speedy out-of-court settlement of cases to reduce the backlog of cases in the court system. The Justice Sector has made significant efforts to strengthen the paralegal system with more investments made in

training and deploying more than 70 paralegals across the country, especially in remote areas, introducing the judicial week and circuit courts.

Since the last Sierra Leone review in 2021, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone has been graded “A” status for the third consecutive time by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights. The government of Sierra Leone has made progress in implementing the recommendations of the Universal Period Review (UPR) by advancing the constitutional review process with the launch of the Government White Paper and has abolished the death penalty. Once completed, we will have a new National Constitution that is results-oriented, inclusive, and peaceful. Details on this will be covered under progress on goal 16.

(iv) Addressing food insecurity, extreme poverty, and rural development

At the height of the COVID-19 outbreak, Sierra Leone’s food security situation worsened. The WFP-led Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis estimated that food insecurity rose from 57 percent in 2020 to 73 percent in 2022. Furthermore, despite the enormous potential for domestic food production, the country’s overreliance on the international market for the supply of the country’s staple food, especially rice, implies we remain highly susceptible to external shocks. This prompted the Government to rethink policies for a resilient national food production system, conceptualizing the Feed Salone initiative as the Government’s Government’s flagship programme for attaining food security, boosting economic growth, and reducing poverty.

Other areas of notable progress towards addressing food insecurity and extreme poverty include an increase in annual national rice self-sufficiency from 61 percent in 2018 to 75 percent in 2022; an increase in rice yield from a national average of 1.1 ton/ha to 1.78 tons /ha; Procured and provided 410 tractors and power tiller to establish 15 machine Rings in a Public Private Partnership model; Provided \$10 million Agriculture Credit Facility at a single digit interest rate to the private sector; Developed a 30,000 ha irrigation schemes in the main rice cultivation regions of the country; enacted the Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute (SLARI) Act 2023; and expanded mechanization to boost local food production during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, as noted above, social protection support for poor and vulnerable groups has been scaled up, leading to more poor/vulnerable individuals graduating from extreme poverty details provided under updates on the goals).

(v) Island, coastal communities, and people behind the road

Sierra Leone has an extensive coastline, with a total of 7 coastal districts and a number of riverine communities whose lives and livelihoods are often impacted by the unforgiving impact of climate change and adverse weather conditions. According to the Sierra Leone Blue Economy Strategy, there is visible evidence of coastal erosion and physical alteration and degradation of habitats in some coastal communities in Sierra Leone. To respond to these challenges and safeguard the welfare of coastal and riverine communities, the government has instituted several policy interventions. The MTNDP 2024-2030 for example, has a dedicated policy results area, *enabler three for Advancing Climate Resilience and Environmental Action*,

in addition to several sector climate and environmental-related strategies and programmes. Within the framework of this plan, the Presidential Initiative for Climate Change and Renewable Energy will advance policy advocacies to protect coastal erosion, and degradation and minimize landslides. Also, the 2022 Voluntary Local Review Report for Kambia district recommended that for riverine communities such as Yeliboya that are at risk of being below sea level, government and local council development strategies must immediately provide for their needs, if we are not to risk leaving behind a whole set of communities. As part of support for coastal community livelihoods during 2019-2023, a total of 70 new fishing boats with accessories were provided to the 7 coastal districts of Sierra Leone, generating 1,400 male and female direct beneficiaries engaged in the fisheries sector.

Additionally, the Sierra Leone Blue Economy Strategy Action Plan, among many other strategies also outlines a range of strategic interventions, including advancing marine spatial planning (MSP) and instituting an integrated coastal and marine area management, promoting the resilience of coastal communities, and promoting economic diversification, developing coastal, aquatic, and eco-tourism opportunities, and developing a strategy for sustainable sand, seabed, coastal mining, erosion.

Partners and NGOs such as Goal Sierra Leone have proactively acted to operationalize the blue economy strategy, with a project aimed at strengthening the livelihoods of coastal communities. (details are provided under goals 13 and 14).

(vi) Natural resource management

Mindful of the crucial role of natural resources in creating economic growth and prosperity for the people, the country consistently prioritizes sustainable management and optimal utilisation of its abundant environmental and natural resources in successive national development plans. In the current plan, this is adequately addressed in the current national plan—Enabler 1.3 (*Value addition and efficient management of natural resources*) and Enabler 3.1 (*Building national environmental resilience*) of the MTNDP. Also, as stated in the 2019 and 2021 VNR reports, the state continued implementing the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative principles, leading to improved financial transparency and accountability.

Other areas of progress include increased mining revenue contribution to total national revenue increased by 46 percent during 2018-2022; the 2009 Mines and Minerals Act was reviewed and enacted into the Mines and Mineral Development Act 2022 which seeks to improve provisions for the socio-economic benefit of the country; and ensuring that at least 20 percent royalty for a district mining development fund be allocated to the affected districts through the District Councils, inter alia. Payment of a 3 percent export levy on the value of artisanal diamonds to the Diamond Area Community Development Fund (DACDF) to promote rural development and improve the primary livelihood of diamond-mined communities.

(vii) Data capability

Sierra Leone recognizes the importance of data as a powerful resource that drives change and catalyses action in development processes. Since 2018, the national statistical system and data availability have been strengthened, including the completion of various surveys to enhance

data availability. These include the 2021 Mid-Term Population and Housing Censuses, the 2019 Demographic and Health Statistics, the 2020 Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey, the 2019 Child Multidimensional Poverty Index, the 2023 National Multidimensional Poverty Index, Census of Business Establishment 2022, the 2023 National Time-Use Survey, and the Annual Agricultural Surveys. With the planned Integrated Household Survey and the Multiple Indicator Cluster in 2024 and the General Population and Housing Census in 2025, disaggregated data will significantly improve for informed policy decisions and progress assessment.

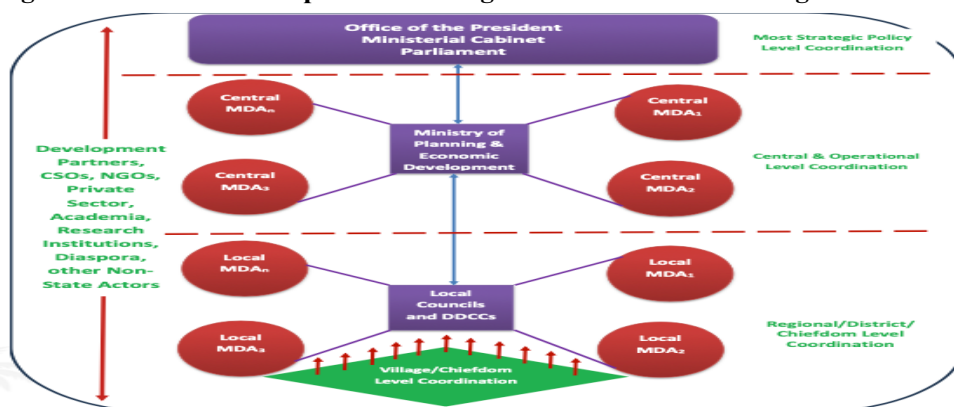
v. Institutional mechanisms

As noted earlier, the SDGs are implemented within the framework of implementing and reporting on the national development plan. This is to ensure coherent, harmonized, and aligned national development efforts for accelerated transformation and human centered development.

Within the existing framework of the national development process, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development coordinates the implementation of 2030 agenda in Sierra Leone. The Ministry ensures continued integration of the Agenda and the SDGs into the strategic plans of Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), and local councils, as well as the regular progress reporting on the goals through the annual progress report on the MTNDP 2024-2030 and their respective reporting demands. The Standardised Local Council Planning Guidelines and Template ensure the integration of the MTNDP 2024-2030 and the SDGs into the local council plans, and there is a comprehensive follow-up and review mechanism at both national and local levels.

As illustrated in Figure 2, Sierra Leone operates a two-tier planning system, with the sectors implementing programmes and projects at the center/national level. At the local level, the devolved functions of Government MDAs, local councils, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and CSOs are at the heart of implementing different programmes and reporting on them accordingly. The District Development Coordination Committees (DDCCs) across the country deepen the decentralisation system for enhanced localisation of the national development plan, the SDGs, and the AU agenda 2063. They effectively coordinate district-level activities undertaken by local councils across the sixteen administrative districts of the country.

Figure 2: National Development Planning and Coordination Arrangement



Source: Adapted from the Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan (2024-2030)

At the center level, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development is currently reviewing the Sierra Leone Development Cooperation Framework (DCF) to reinstitute sector working Groups for facilitating the coordination and alignment of partner supports to the National Plan and the SDGs. These coordination structures meet regularly and periodically at the national/central levels, providing an efficient platform for facilitating planning, effectively coordinating, and reporting on progress in the implementation of the national development plan and the SDGs.

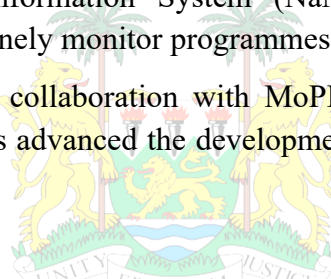
Statistics Sierra Leone provides regular support relating to the management of the Results Framework and coordinates vital national surveys for measuring progress on the indicators.

Monitoring and evaluation

We have done alignment to effectively integrate the results of the SDGs into the results framework of the MTNDP 2024-2030, to ensure coherence and effectiveness in their implementation and reporting. **Table 2** above (*under economic and social integration of the 2030 agenda*) demonstrates the linkage between the Sierra Leone MTNDP and the 2030 agenda.

The National Monitoring and Evaluation Department (NaMED) conducts general monitoring in line with the Results Framework, the National M&E Policy, and the National Monitoring and Evaluation Management Information System (NaMEMIS). However, government ministries and local councils routinely monitor programmes, projects, and policies.

Also, Statistics Sierra Leone, in collaboration with MoPED, with the support of the UN Resident Coordinator's Office has advanced the development of an SDGs online Monitoring Portal.



vi. Systemic issues and transformative actions

Sierra Leone faces numerous systemic issues in implementing the SDGs, including polarized political environment, insufficient infrastructure, and pervasive poverty. The legacy of civil war and the Ebola epidemic left the nation with weakened institutions and significant economic challenges. Governance issues, such as corruption and limited administrative capacity, further impede progress, making it difficult to mobilize resources effectively and implement policies at a large scale. Further to this, the country's infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, is underdeveloped, hindering access to essential services like healthcare, education, and clean water.

The main structural issues facing the state's effort at implementing the SDGs are macroeconomic challenges relating to continued weak macroeconomic fundamentals, expenditure and debt management bottlenecks, and building a capable and high-performing public sector with the requisite absorptive capacity. The country remains highly susceptible to external shocks. While Sierra Leone and other least-developed countries were recovering from the scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic and staying the course of implementing development programmes, the global economy was struck with another disruption, the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War, which caused energy and food prices to soar at an unprecedented pace. The recovery efforts are further disruptively marred by the rising global geopolitical tension and

uncertainties. The combined effects of these crises have badly affected progress towards SDG targets.

Navigating these challenges, the country has been undertaking several initiatives to strengthen its institutional frameworks and enhance infrastructure. Laudable reforms are being pursued, backed by sustained political will and follow-up mechanisms. The government has implemented its Medium-Term Revenue Mobilization Strategy to modernize revenue generation and expand the fiscal space. Efforts are being made to combat corruption through more stringent oversight and transparency measures. Infrastructure projects aimed at improving roads, electricity, and water supply are being prioritized to facilitate better access to services. Additionally, there is a concerted push towards developing robust data collection and monitoring systems to ensure accurate tracking of SDG progress. By fostering partnerships and leveraging both domestic and international resources, Sierra Leone aims to create a more conducive environment for sustainable development.

4. Progress on the Goals and targets and evaluation of policies and measures taken so far

Sierra Leone remains resilient in implementing the SDGs, making key headways at both the policy front and in results areas, even in the face of multiple challenges. This section, therefore examines the Country's progress on the SDG targets and indicators, focusing on ten goals (goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 16 & 17) and 30 indicators for which data is available for this round of reporting. The session will also present progress at the institutional and policy fronts which could be the springboards for delivering on the SDGs target. The achievements outlined in this report are based on the outcome of the evaluation synthesis, thematic studies, desk reviews, and stakeholder inputs, including the local-level data collected by the CSOs.

4.1 Results of Evaluation Synthesis

In order to produce an evidence-based VNR report, we synthesised existing evaluation and assessment reports to gauge the impacts of SDGs policy interventions on the welfare of the people. A total of 21 evaluation reports were synthesised, largely drawn from the UN country team-supported interventions and the government lead policy interventions (a list of evaluation reports synthesised are attached as Annex A1).

The findings were catalogued into eight thematic areas as follows: *social protection, early childhood development, gender mainstreaming, climate action, youth employment, health and nutrition, disability inclusion, and governance*. Each thematic area is analyzed in terms of policy impact, case studies, and overall progress, providing an overview of Sierra Leone's journey towards achieving the 2030 targets. A comprehensive evaluation report is attached as an appendix. The following is an analysis of the key findings of the evaluation study.

i. Thematic Area 1: Social Protection and Vulnerabilities (SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG10: inequality)

Since the end of the civil war, Sierra Leone's social protection policies and interventions have been historically focused on reducing poverty, enhancing resilience among vulnerable population, and providing essential support during emergencies and crises. The key policy instruments include cash transfers, social safety nets, and targeted interventions for specific groups such as children, women, the aged, and people living with disabilities. The National Social Safety Net Program and the Emergency Cash Transfers (ECT) programme are prominent examples.

- a) **Cash Transfers and Social Safety Nets:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ECT programme provided financial support to 39,000 beneficiaries, including informal sector workers and low-paid workers in the service and tourism industries. This support helped to cushion the severe economic hardship caused by the pandemic. Also, the Social Safety Net Programme (SSNP) has significantly increased its coverage, with the percentage of household members receiving social transfers rising from 56.02 percent in 2016 to 87.1 percent in 2023.

The Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment (PSSNYE) scheme, which was launched in 2022 has improved economic inclusion and enhanced access to public works in urban areas.

- b) **Community Development and Infrastructure:** Targets poverty reduction and improving the well-being of communities by providing them with access to socio-economic opportunities and capacity-building services. Since its inception, the project has completed 22 community sub-projects, with 10 ongoing and 41 more to commence.

Beneficiaries: The Social Safety Net Programme has primarily targeted female-headed households, with over 90 percent of beneficiaries being women, and PWDs accounting for 14 percent. The programme targets extremely poor households that live on less than \$1 a day. Youth employment is supported through the PSSNYE support for 7,000 youth in rural areas and 6,000 youth in urban areas with immediate employment opportunities, grants, and training. It provides economic inclusion support to 15,000 extremely poor households, with 60 percent of beneficiaries being women. The regular cash transfers are provided to 15,000 extremely poor households, with 30 percent of beneficiaries being women and persons with disabilities.

Impacts: The implementation of social protection programmes has significantly reduced extreme poverty and vulnerabilities in Sierra Leone, although recent data is lacking to assess the impact on general poverty.

The key areas of noticeable impacts are:

- a) **Economic Stability:** The cash transfer programmes have provided immediate financial relief to vulnerable households, enabling them to meet their basic needs and invest in small businesses. This has led to improved economic stability and reduced poverty levels.
- b) **Health and Education Outcomes:** Social protection initiatives have positively impacted health and education outcomes. The additional household incomes have

positively impacted household expenditure for health and education while community infrastructure projects have facilitated improved access to health services.

- c) **Resilience to Crises:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, social protection programs like the ECT helped to mitigate the economic impact on vulnerable populations, cushioning heightened food insecurity and financial distress.
- d) **Employment and Income Generation:** The project has created employment opportunities for thousands of youths, contributing to economic stability and reducing poverty levels among the targeted population.
- e) **Enhanced Skills and Capacity:** The provision of training and economic inclusion support has improved the skills and capacity of young people, enabling them to *participate more effectively in the labour market and generate income.*
- f) **Community Development:** The project has also supported community infrastructure development, improving access to essential services and enhancing the quality of life for residents in targeted areas.

Conclusion: The PSSNYE project demonstrates the effectiveness of targeted social protection measures in promoting economic inclusion and reducing poverty among vulnerable populations in Sierra Leone. The project's comprehensive approach, which includes cash transfers, training, and public works, has contributed to significant improvements in economic stability and well-being for beneficiaries.

Overall impact on SDG one: Sierra Leone's *Social Protection programmes* have made considerable progress in reducing extreme poverty, as indicated by the increased coverage and effectiveness of initiatives like the SSNP and PSSNYE. However, challenges remain in ensuring the sustainability and reach of these programmes.

ii. Thematic area 2: Early Childhood Development (SDG 3: Good health & well-being and SDG 4: quality education)

Early Childhood Development (ECD) policies in Sierra Leone have been multifaceted, focused on improving access to quality early childhood education, health, and nutrition services. The government and development partners have implemented integrated ECD programmes to enhance child development outcomes through the following key initiatives: the establishment of early childhood education centers; the implementation of nutrition programmes; and the strengthening of child protection frameworks. This model has been implemented in targeted districts to improve child development outcomes.

- a) **Access to Early Childhood Education:** Between 2017 and 2022, there was a substantial increase in the number of pre-primary schools from 1,218 to 1,999, and enrollment rates for preschool-aged children also increased significantly during this period, reflecting the government's commitment to expanding early childhood education.

Investments in early childhood education facilities, especially in underserved communities, have been critical. Also, with the introduction of the government Free Quality School Education (FQSE) programme, the number of schools benefiting from the school feeding programme increased from 1,047 in 2020 to 1,289 in 2022, enhancing both enrollment and retention rates.

The program also involved training for early childhood educators, providing learning materials, and establishing ECD centers.

- b) **Child Health and Nutrition:** Health and nutrition services, including immunizations and feeding programs, were integrated into ECD centers. The coverage of essential health services, including immunizations, has improved. The establishment of one-stop centers for comprehensive child health services has also contributed to better health outcomes for children.

With the consistent and effective implementation of the programme, the country has witnessed a reduction in the prevalence of stunting among children under five from 38 percent in 2013 to 23 percent in 2021.

- c) **Child Protection:** The government has enacted several child protection laws and policies, including the Child Rights Bill and policies to combat child trafficking and gender-based violence. These frameworks aim to protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. The establishment of governance institutions such as the National Commission for Children and other child protection institutions has strengthened the overall child protection system. These institutions coordinate efforts to ensure the safety and well-being of children, particularly those in vulnerable situations.

Impacts: The implementation of early childhood development programs has significantly improved educational and health outcomes for children in Sierra Leone:

- a) **Enhanced Health and Nutrition:** The reduction in stunting and improvements in immunization coverage have contributed to better health outcomes for young children. These improvements are essential for cognitive and physical development, reducing the likelihood of long-term health issues.
- b) **Improved Educational Access:** The increased availability of pre-primary education and supportive policies have led to higher enrollment rates and better preparedness for primary education. This foundation is crucial for long-term educational success and cognitive development.
- c) **Educational Gains:** Early exposure to structured learning environments has improved cognitive and social skills, preparing children for primary education.
- d) **Strengthened Child Protection:** The robust legislative framework and support systems have provided a safer environment for children, reducing the incidence of abuse and exploitation. This has created a more supportive and secure environment for children's growth and development.

Conclusion: The comprehensive ECD program in Sierra Leone demonstrates the importance of an integrated approach to early childhood development. By combining efforts in education, health, and child protection, the programme has significantly improved the well-being and prospects of young children in Sierra Leone.

The overall impact on SDG 4 and SDG 3: Sierra Leone has made considerable progress in early childhood development, with significant improvements in educational access, child health, and protection. The overall rating for SDG 4 and SDG 3 is substantial progress, with ongoing efforts needed to address remaining challenges and ensure sustainable development for all children.

iii. Thematic area 3: Gender Mainstreaming (SDG 5: Gender Equality)

Gender mainstreaming policies and interventions in Sierra Leone have been focused on several strategic areas, including political representation, economic participation, and addressing gender-based violence (GBV). Legislative reforms and targeted programmes have played a crucial role in these efforts, including enhancing their participation in decision-making processes.

- a) **Education and Empowerment:** Programmes aimed at increasing girls' enrollment in schools and providing vocational training for women have improved educational and economic outcomes. The FQSE programme has been particularly effective in increasing girls' access to education.
- b) **Legislative Reforms:** Implementation of laws and policies to protect women from violence and discrimination has enhanced women's rights and safety. Efforts to combat gender-based violence have included public awareness campaigns and support services for survivors. The GEWE 2022 was introduced to address gender disparities and to promote the rights of women and girls in Sierra Leone. The Act aims to enhance women's participation in political, economic, and social spheres.
- c) **Economic Opportunities:** Initiatives supporting women's entrepreneurship and employment have increased women's participation in the workforce and leadership roles. Programs providing financial literacy training and access to microcredit have empowered women economically. The provision of vocational training programmes has equipped women with skills in various trades, while microfinance initiatives have provided financial support for women entrepreneurs. Also, mentorship and networking opportunities have been established and provided to support women's professional development.

Impacts: The implementation of gender mainstreaming programmes has had profound impact on gender equality and economic empowerment for women in Sierra Leone. These could be summarised as follows:

- a) **Increased Representation:** Since the implementation of the GEWE Act, there has been an increase in the number of women holding political offices, with notable improvements in cabinet positions and parliamentary representation (details will be provided under progress on goal 5).
- b) **Economic Empowerment:** Women's access to financial services has significantly increased, contributing to greater economic participation and reduced poverty levels among women.
- c) **Reduction in Gender-based violence:** With the implementation of the GEWE Act and punitive measures, there is a sharp reduction in GBV cases, providing better protection and support for survivors.
- d) **Community Engagement:** Empowered women have taken on leadership roles in their communities, promoting gender equality and social change.

Conclusion: The GEWE Act 2022 has been instrumental in advancing gender equality in Sierra Leone. The development of a GEWE policy will the implementation of the Act further enhance gender mainstreaming and contribute to achieving SDG 5.

The economic empowerment programs for women have greatly improved their financial status and autonomy in Sierra Leone, leading to enhanced individual livelihoods and contributing to broader social and economic development

Overall impact on SDG 5: Sierra Leone has made substantial progress in gender mainstreaming, with significant improvements in political representation, economic participation, and reduction in GBV. The overall rating for SDG 5 is substantial progress with ongoing efforts needed to fully achieve gender equality by 2030.

iv. Thematic area 4: Climate Action and Blue Economy (SDG13: Climate action and SDG14: Blue economy)

Climate actions and blue economy policies in Sierra Leone have been focused on enhancing climate resilience, promoting renewable energy, and ensuring sustainable management of natural resources, improving resilience to climate change impacts, and leveraging the economic potential of the marine sector. Key governance and policy development are the establishment of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, the development of a National Blue Economy Strategy, and various projects aimed at conservation and sustainable resource use. Strategic areas of development include:

- a) **Climate Resilience:** In 2021, Sierra Leone established a separate Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to provide political leadership and policy direction in environmental governance. The ministry has since facilitated the review of key legislations to enhance compliance with climate change and environmental sustainability requirements. The **National Climate Change Policy** was reviewed and updated to align with current climate challenges, emphasizing sustainable practices and resilience building at local and national levels.

Community-based adaptation projects which involved reforestation, flood management, and the development of early warning systems, have enhanced the resilience of coastal and rural communities to climate impacts.

- b) **Blue Economy:** Sierra Leone has developed a Blue Economy Strategy with a comprehensive Action Plan, a secretariat established to coordinate the implementation of the action plan.
- c) **Marine Protection:** Efforts to increase marine protection include maintaining the number of forest reserves and conservation areas, as well as advancing marine spatial planning and integrated coastal and marine area management.
- d) The Mangrove Restoration Project was initiated to address the degradation of coastal ecosystems in Sierra Leone. Mangroves are vital for coastal protection, biodiversity, and supporting local livelihoods through fisheries.

Impacts: The implementation of climate action and blue economy initiatives has had a significant impact on enhancing environmental resilience and economic development in Sierra Leone, summarised below:

- a) **Improved Environmental Governance:** The establishment of the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change has strengthened environmental governance, leading to better policy implementation and compliance.

- b) **Economic Diversification:** The Blue Economy Strategy has created opportunities for economic diversification, promoting sustainable exploitation of marine resources and contributing to fiscal stability through domestic revenue mobilization.
- c) **Resilience to Climate Change:** Enhanced climate resilience initiatives have reduced vulnerability to natural disasters and improved the adaptive capacity of communities. For instance, the number of functional co-management committees on forestry and wetland conservation increased from 37 in 2018 to 75 in 2023.
- d) **Renewable Energy:** Investments in solar and wind energy projects have increased access to clean energy, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and contributing to environmental sustainability.
- e) **Sustainable Fisheries:** Policies promoting sustainable fishing practices and marine conservation have protected biodiversity and supported livelihoods dependent on marine resources.
- f) **Environmental Restoration:** Through the Mangrove Restoration project, significant areas of mangrove forests have been successfully restored, enhancing coastal protection and biodiversity.
- g) **Livelihood Improvement:** Restored mangrove ecosystems have increased fish stocks, providing sustainable income sources for local fishers and supporting food security.
- h) **Community Engagement:** The involvement of local communities in restoration activities has fostered a sense of ownership and stewardship, ensuring the sustainability of conservation efforts.

Conclusion: The Mangrove Restoration Project has demonstrated the effectiveness of community-based environmental conservation initiatives. By restoring critical coastal ecosystems, the project has provided both environmental and economic benefits, contributing to climate resilience and sustainable development in Sierra Leone. Also, the Blue Economy Strategy illustrates the potential for sustainable economic development through the responsible utilisation of marine and aquatic resources.

The overall impact on SDGs 13 and 14: Sierra Leone has made significant strides in advancing climate resilience and promoting the blue economy, with substantial progress in environmental governance and sustainable resource management. The overall rating for SDGs 13 and 14 is substantial progress with ongoing efforts needed to enhance climate resilience and fully implement the Blue Economy Strategy.

v. **Thematic area 5: Migration and Youth Employment (SDG 8: decent work & economic growth and SDG 10: reduced inequalities)**

Migration management and youth employment policies in Sierra Leone are focused on creating job opportunities, enhancing technical and vocational education, managing regular migration and promoting safe and decent migration practices. Among the key initiatives include the Youth Employment Support Project (YESP), migration governance, and various vocational training programmes.

- a) **Youth Employment:** to respond to and provide for its youth bulge, the government has crafted its youth employment scheme as one of its big five game changers. Also, the YESP is creating job opportunities and providing vocational training opportunities for young people in both urban and rural areas, focusing on those most at risk of unemployment and irregular migration.

Investment in **Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET): Increased** investments in TVET to provide skills training for youth to enhance their employability has resulted in the establishment and expansion of vocational training centers, targeting both urban and rural youth. The National Youth Service Scheme has been instrumental in providing employment opportunities for university graduates. Between 2019 and 2021, 1,200 graduates were recruited, with 67percent gaining permanent employment at their internship institutions.

- b) **Migration: The Sierra Leone migration policy has been developed.** Programmes promoting safe and legal migration channels have been implemented to protect young migrants from exploitation and abuse. These initiatives have included awareness campaigns, training of border operatives, legal assistance and support services for returnees.

Impact: The initiatives aimed at improving youth employment and managing migration have had mixed impacts, with some successes and ongoing challenges

- a) **Employment Opportunities:** The creation of job opportunities through public and private sector initiatives has employed many youths, but the high unemployment rate indicates that more needs to be done. For example, the government has projected the creation of 500,000 jobs by 2030, with 150,000 from public sector projects and 350,000 from the private sector.

The YESP significantly reduced youth unemployment by providing immediate job opportunities in various sectors, including construction, agriculture, and services.

- b) **Skills Development:** TVET programs have improved the skills and employability of many youths, but challenges remain in terms of infrastructure, funding, and public perception of vocational training.
- c) **Migration Management:** Awareness campaigns and legislative measures have helped to reduce the incidence of irregular migration and human trafficking, but the underlying economic drivers of migration persist.

Conclusion: Continued investment in TVET infrastructure, training programs, and public-private partnerships remains essential to achieving the ambitious job creation targets set by the government. By providing job opportunities and vocational training, the economic prospects of young people have improved while the pressures of irregular migration have reduced.

Overall impacts on SDG 8 and 10: Sierra Leone has made significant progress in enhancing youth employment and managing migration, with substantial efforts in TVET and legislative and governance measures against irregular migration. However, challenges remain in fully

addressing youth unemployment and the drivers of migration. The overall rating for SDGs 8 and 10 is moderate progress with a need for sustained efforts and investment.

vi. Thematic area 6: Health and Nutrition (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being)

Efforts to improve health and nutrition in Sierra Leone have focused on enhancing healthcare access, reducing malnutrition, and combating communicable diseases. Among the key programmatic areas are: strengthening the Free Health Care Initiative (FHCI); national immunization campaigns; targeted maternal and child health programmes; community-based nutrition programmes; and improving the healthcare infrastructure. The national immunization programme has increased vaccination coverage, reducing the incidence of preventable diseases among children. The community-based nutrition programmes have targeted malnutrition among children and mothers, including the distribution of micronutrient supplements and therapeutic feeding programmes for severely malnourished children. The 2021 Sierra Leone National Nutrition Survey assessed the nutritional status of children under five and women of reproductive age across the country.

Investments were made to upgrade and expand healthcare facilities, including the establishment of new hospitals and clinics in underserved communities. The vaccination programmes, including the introduction of the Human Papilloma Virus vaccine and the expansion of malaria prevention measures, have further supported health improvements.

Impact: The implementation of health and nutrition programmes has significantly improved health outcomes in Sierra Leone:

- a) **Increased Life Expectancy:** Life expectancy increased from 53 years in 2017 to 61 years in 2023 due to improved healthcare services and infrastructure.
- b) **Reduced Child Malnutrition:** The decline in stunting, wasting, and underweight among children under five indicates improved nutritional status, which has positive long-term effects on child development and educational outcomes.
- c) **Improved Maternal Health:** The significant decline in maternal mortality rates reflects better access to and quality of maternal healthcare services, including increased skilled birth attendance and antenatal care visits. The maternal mortality rate decreased significantly from 1,165 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013 to 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020.
- d) **Skilled Birth Attendance:** The proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel increased from 59.7 percent in 2013 to 87 percent in 2019.
- e) **Antenatal Care:** The percentage of pregnant women making at least four antenatal visits increased from 76 percent to 79 percent between 2013 and 2019.
- f) **Enhanced Disease Control:** Efforts to control malaria and improve vaccination coverage have reduced the incidence and prevalence of communicable diseases, contributing to overall better health outcomes.
- g) **Communicable Diseases:** for HIV/AIDS, the coverage of interventions to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV is estimated at 69 percent, with 4,549 out of 6,600 HIV-positive pregnant women receiving treatment in 2022.

Despite progress, vertical transmission of HIV remains high at 15.79 percent, leading to significant child mortality.

Malaria prevalence reduced from 40 percent in 2016 to 22 percent in 2021, with the government planning to introduce a malaria vaccine for children under two years by 2024.

Conclusion: The concerted efforts in improving maternal and child health have yielded significant results in reducing mortality rates and improving overall health outcomes in Sierra Leone. Continued investments in healthcare infrastructure, skilled health personnel, and preventive care are essential to sustain these gains and accelerate progress on SDG 3 targets.

Overall Rating of SDG 3: Sierra Leone has made considerable progress in improving health and nutrition, with significant reductions in maternal and child mortality and improved nutritional outcomes. The overall rating for SDG 3 is substantial progress, with ongoing efforts needed to address remaining challenges and further enhance healthcare services.

- **Maternal Mortality:** The maternal mortality rate decreased significantly from 1,165 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013 to 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020.
- **Neonatal and Infant Mortality:** Neonatal mortality reduced from 39 per 1,000 live births in 2013 to 31 per 1,000 live births in 2019. Similarly, infant mortality decreased from 92 per 1,000 live births to 75 per 1,000 live births over the same period.
- **Stunting, wasting, and underweight:** The prevalence of stunting among children under five decreased from 38percent in 2013 to 23percent in 2021; wasting reduced from 9percent to 5percent; and underweight prevalence decreased from 16percent to 14percent during the same period.
- **Anaemia:** The proportion of anaemic children aged 6-59 months decreased from 80 percent in 2013 to 68 percent in 2019. However, anemia in women of child-bearing age increased slightly from 45 percent to 47 percent during the same period.

vii. Thematic area 7: Education and Skill Development (SDG 4: Quality Education)

The state's strategic focus on human capital development saw the launch of the government FQSE programme in 2018, which focused on increasing access to education, improving the quality of teaching, and providing vocational training to equip youth with market-relevant skills. These initiatives aim to reduce educational disparities, enhance employability, and support economic growth. Three broad categories of Education and Skill Development intervention were assessed during this round of SDG review:

- a) **Free Quality School Education (FQSE):** The FQSE programme enhances access to education through the provision of tuition fee grants, textbooks, and teaching and learning materials for primary and secondary school pupils, in addition to the school feeding programme. Teacher training and infrastructure development were integral components of the program to enhance education quality. This initiative could be largely credited for the increase in school enrollment and retention rates, particularly among girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- **Vocational Training:** Vocational training centers have been established to equip youth with marketable skills, enhancing their employability and supporting economic

development. The programme focuses on trades such as carpentry, plumbing, and information technology.

- **Adult Literacy Programs:** adult education and literacy programmes target out-of-school youth and adults to improve literacy rates and provide them with second-chance education opportunities. The programmes have been crucial in improving the skills and economic opportunities of the participants.

Impact: The implementation of education and skill development programmes has had a significant impact on improving educational outcomes and enhancing employability in Sierra Leone:

- a) **Increased Access:** Enrollment rates increased significantly, particularly among girls and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Between 2021 and 2022, the number of approved schools increased by 12 percent, from 8,676 to 9,706 schools, school enrollments increased by 7 percent from 3,131,440 in 2021 to 3,343,470 in 2022.
- b) **Increased Educational Attainment:** The rise in primary school completion rates from 49 percent in 2018 to 90 percent in 2021 demonstrates the effectiveness of policies aimed at improving access to education. More children are now completing their education, laying a strong foundation for future learning and development. The significant increase in school enrolment and completion rates could also be attributed to the provision of scholarships and financial aid to pupils.
- c) **Improved Quality of Education:** Teacher training and curriculum development initiatives have contributed to better educational outcomes. Students are receiving a higher quality education that is more aligned with market demands, enhancing their skills and knowledge. According to the 2022 Annual School Census, the percentage of qualified teachers for their respective levels dropped from 67 percent in 2021 to 62 percent in 2022.
- d) **Improved Learning Environment:** The construction and refurbishment of schools provided a better learning environment for students. Modern classrooms, adequate sanitation facilities, and access to learning materials contributed to improved educational outcomes and student well-being.
- e) **Reduced Gender Disparities:** Targeted scholarships for girls helped reduce gender disparities in education. More girls were able to attend and complete school, empowering them with the knowledge and skills needed for future opportunities. The Gross Completion Rate (GCR) for primary school was 101 percent in 2022, higher for girls (104 percent) than for boys (97 percent), indicating significant progress in educational attainment for girls.
- f) **Enhanced Vocational Skills:** The increase in vocational training enrollment from 12 percent in 2010 to 24 percent in 2019 highlights the success of skill development programmes. These programmes have equipped young people with practical skills, improving their employability and economic prospects.
- g) **Economic Growth and Employment:** the initiatives for educating and developing skills in youth have led to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce,

positively impacting the labour market. Young people with vocational training and practical experience are better prepared to enter the labour market and contribute to the economy.

- h) **Community Support:** The programme also benefits from strong community support, with parents and local leaders actively involved in promoting education.

Conclusion: The FQSE programme has successfully addressed major barriers to education in Sierra Leone, significantly increasing enrollment and improving the quality of education. Through the FQSE programme, the programme has laid a strong foundation for the country's educational development.

viii. Thematic area 8: Governance and Institutional Strengthening (SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)

Governance and institutional strengthening policies in Sierra Leone have focused on enhancing transparency, accountability, and public service delivery. Key initiatives include anti-corruption measures, judicial reforms, decentralization, enhancing public service delivery and capacity-building programmes.

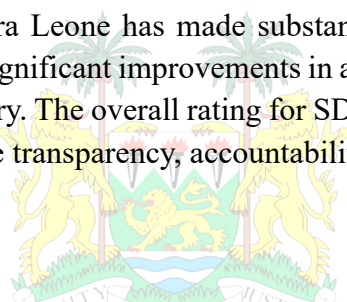
- a) **Strengthening Anti-Corruption Measures:** The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has implemented various initiatives to combat corruption, including public awareness campaigns and stringent enforcement of anti-corruption laws. The implementation of the 2023-2028 National Anti-Corruption Strategy emphasizes a preventative approach to curb corruption. These efforts have increased transparency and reduced instances of corruption in public administration. On **Control of Corruption**, significant progress has been made in the fight against corruption.
- b) **Judicial Reforms:** Access to justice has been improved by establishing magistrates and high courts in all districts. The Legal Aid Board has expanded its services, with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms resolving 98,651 disputes in 2022 alone. A special court has also been established for trying perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence.
- c) **Decentralization:** The government has deepened decentralization to improve local governance and service delivery, empowering local councils and communities. This approach has enhanced the responsiveness and effectiveness of local governments
- d) **Capacity Building:** The capacity-building programmes have enhanced the skills and effectiveness of public servants and institutions. These programmes have focused on improving administrative competencies and service delivery.
- e) **Public Service Delivery:** The **Public Financial Management (PFM) reforms** have improved fiscal discipline and transparency, with payroll controls improved from a score of 'D+' in 2017 to 'B+' in 2021. Continued reforms and implementation of PFM strategies will enhance public trust in state institutions.

Impact: The implementation of governance and institutional strengthening programmes has had a significant impact on public trust, judicial efficiency, and the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone:

- a) **Enhanced Public Trust:** the states have witnessed a decline in the perception of corruption and increased public trust in institutions. According to the 2022 Afro Barometer report, the country's public perception of corruption declined from 70percent to 40percent over a few years
- b) **Judicial Efficiency:** The establishment of new courts and expansion of legal aid services have improved access to justice, particularly in rural areas. The ADR mechanisms have provided swift, cost-effective resolutions to disputes, further enhancing judicial efficiency.
- c) **Reduction in Corruption:** The ACC's comprehensive strategy and its focus on prevention and education have contributed to a notable reduction in corruption and improved Control of Corruption indicator.

Conclusion: The ACC's strategic approach and collaboration with various stakeholders have effectively reduced corruption and enhanced public trust in Sierra Leone's institutions. The success of the ACC demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to combating corruption and building strong, transparent institutions. By raising public awareness and enforcing anti-corruption laws, the ACC has contributed to stronger governance and institutional integrity.

Overall Rating of SDG 16: Sierra Leone has made substantial progress in governance and institutional strengthening, with significant improvements in anti-corruption measures, judicial reforms, and public service delivery. The overall rating for SDG 16 is substantial progress with ongoing efforts needed to enhance transparency, accountability, and public trust.



4.2 Progress on the SDGs Indicators

In this session, we attempt to provide status updates on the SDG indicators to the extent possible. The lack of current data could not permit comprehensive status updates on the SDGs indicators. This huge data gap is due to the differential timing of this current round of reporting with the frequency and timing of the different surveys conducted by the National Statistical Office.



SDG 1: End Poverty in all its forms everywhere

i. 1.2.1 Proportion of national population in multi-dimensional poverty

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) headcount estimates show a slight decline in the incidence of poverty from 64.8 percent in 2017 to 58.0 percent in 2019.

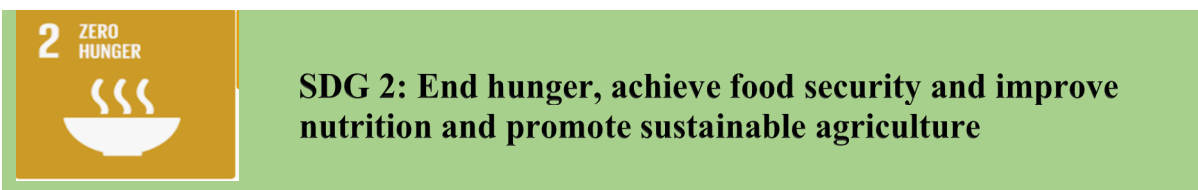
The Sierra Leone National MPI, which is based on the Global MPI concept, was created to depict the country's specific context and development priorities. The national MPI is 0.322

(a slight decrease from 0.343 in 2017), implying that, on average, multidimensionally poor people in Sierra Leone face 32.2 percent of all possible deprivation that could be experienced if all individuals were multi-dimensionally poor and deprived in all indicators.

We also note that multi-dimensional poverty is largely a rural phenomenon, with the western area rural and urban the least poor regions in the country.

The findings of the MPI provide insightful information at national and district levels, with wide-ranging policy implications for the implementation of the SDGs and the National Development Plan. It shows that despite progress in other areas, poverty in Sierra Leone remains high, and hence one of the most serious challenges the country is facing today.

The lack of recent data could not permit us to account for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.



Sierra Leone has implemented several policies and programmes aimed at achieving food security and improving nutrition. These initiatives focus on increasing agricultural productivity, enhancing resilience to climate change, and providing social safety nets to vulnerable populations (details are in the evaluation report in session 4.1).

The overall performance on the indicators for this goal was difficult to ascertain due to the lack of recent data. The last national comprehensive survey report was produced in 2019. Therefore, progress could only be extensively traced at the policy front and the outcome of the evaluation synthesis.

A key area of progress is that programmes aimed at increasing agricultural productivity have been implemented, including the distribution of improved seeds, fertilizers, and farming equipment. These efforts have contributed to enhanced food production and availability which could impact progress on the indicators.

Indicator 2.1.2: Prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the district

Using published reports, the general level of food insecurity was assessed, especially to account for the impact of the global high food prices and multiple shocks on the state of food security in the country. The data shows that the prevalence of food insecurity in the country deteriorated during the period under review, with the proportion of the national population who are food insecure increasing from 57 percent in 2020 to 82 percent in February 2024.

Table 4.2: State of Food Insecurity Score (%), 2020-2024

No	Food insecurity	2020	2022	2023 September	2024 (February)
1	Food insecurity	57%	73%	80%	82%
2	Severe Food insecurity	12%	11%	28%	18%
3	Moderate Food insecurity	46%	62%	52%	64%

The ensuing high cost of living of the multiple and overlapping global socioeconomic shocks has pushed several households into food insecurity. This is untenable and therefore requires strategic policy shifts by both the Government and partners.

An important opportunity is the policy shift of the Government to prioritise agriculture as the flagship state initiative called ‘*Feed Salone*,’ with great emphasis on national development policy on supporting agriculture and fishery. Consequently, the national budgetary allocation to agriculture has increased from 2.1% in 2023 to 7% in 2024.

Going forward with feed salone flagship programme and to stimulate domestic food production and demand, the Government is promoting institutional feeding programmes for schools, hospitals, correctional services, fire force, the military and police.



On SDG3, the government of Sierra Leone has strengthened the implementation of the Free Health Care Initiative, national budgetary allocation to the health sector increased from 6% to 11.6% during 2019-2023, recruited more healthcare workers, and established four dialysis stations. These policy efforts have positively impacted health indicators, particularly maternal mortality, which decreased from 717 deaths in 2019 to 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020, and life expectancy increased from 53 to 61 during 2017-2023. Among the indicators with positive millstones are:

- i. **Indicator 3.1.2: Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel** increased from 59.7 percent in 2013 to 87 percent in 2019. Also, the proportion of births delivered in a health facility jumped from 54.4 percent in 2013 to 88.6 percent in 2019.

As discovered from the three local reviews, the good performance in the **Proportion of births delivered in health facilities** could be attributed to the imposition and enforcement of community bylaws against delivering babies outside of a certified health facility. This by-law was endorsed by the paramount chiefs, who are ensuring its implementation to the letter.

- ii. **Indicator 3.2.1: Maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births** decreased from 1,165 deaths in 2013 to 443 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2020
- iii. **Indicator 3.2.1 Under-5 mortality per 1,000 live births (g7+)** decreased from 156 deaths in 2013 to 122 in 2021

- iv. **3.3.2 Incidence of tuberculosis per 100,000 population** decreased from 304 in 2013 to 289 in 2021
- v. **Indicator 3.8.3 Healthy life expectancy at birth (years)** increased from 53 to 61 during 2017-2023.

Other indicators with positive progress are neonatal mortality rate dropping from 39 to 31; the under-five mortality rate decreasing from 156 to 102.9 per 1000 live births; and the prevalence of underweight among children under five dropping 16.4 to 12, all over the period 2013 to 2021. The period 2013-2021 also saw the country reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDs, Malaria and TB as follows: the incidence of HIV /AIDS per 1000 uninfected population decreased from 0.95 to 05; TB incidence per 100,000 persons decreased from 313 to 298 2021; and the malaria incidence per 1000 population decreased from 419 to 330. During the period under review, the *percentage of the eligible population with HIV having access to Anti-Retroviral Treatment* increased from 13 percent in 2013 to 61 percent in 2021, and the Prevalence of underweight among children under 5 decreased from 16 to 12 percent in 2021.

Additionally, the health sector has witnessed significant progress in improving access to affordable healthcare, both at policy and operational levels despite the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between 2018 and 2021, a good number of health facilities across the country were rehabilitated (from 1,397 in 2018 to 1,569 by 2021) and health infrastructure increased. The government also trained and posted over 5,000 healthcare workers, while 8,700 Community Health Workers were recruited, representing a 50 percent increase during 2018-2021. Additionally, cervical cancer screening facilities were established in 8 health facilities in the country.

However, the delivery of good healthcare services continues to be challenged, particularly in privately owned health facilities, where the free healthcare interventions for PWDs and other marginalised and vulnerable people are not covered.



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

The Free Quality School Education Programme was introduced with increased government spending on the educational sector to more than 20 percent since 2019. The Government of Sierra Leone continues to prioritize investment in human capital development for long-term socioeconomic transformation. Since the last Sierra Leone VNR Report of 2021, the education sector has received a 21percent of the national budget to support free quality school education programme, radical inclusion programme, and foundational learning, which led to increased enrollment and completion rates at all levels while achieving gender parity in primary and junior secondary schools.

This session therefore provides a status update on the indicators and targets for goal four. Based on the available data (the Annual School Census data for 2021 and 2022—the last

comprehensive demographic health survey report was produced in 2019), progress was ascertained on a total of three indicators, each disaggregated by sex, and analysed as follows:

i. Indicator 4.2.2 Participation rate in organised learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex

The percentage of children in the relevant age group attending an early childhood education programme or primary school increased from 13.7 percent in 2016 to 24 percent in 2022. According to the 2021 Annual School Census report, the pre-primary gross enrolment rate was 23 percent, 26 percent for girls and 25 for boys.

ii. Indicator 4.5.1 Parity indices (female/male) for all levels of education

Gender parity was achieved and exceeded at the primary school level between 2016 and 2021, with a score of 1.01 in 2016 and 1.04 in 2021, indicating that more girls than boys attended primary school during the review period. At the lower secondary level, there were more girls in school in 2021 with a score of 1.03, improving from 0.95 in 2016

At the senior secondary level, parity was almost achieved with a score of 0.9 in 2021, a marked improvement from 0.85 in 2016.

iii. Indicator 4.6.1: Proportion of the population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional (a) literacy and (b) numeracy skills, by sex

Adult female literacy rate (literacy rate ages 15+) decreased from 43.8 percent in 2013 to 33.8 percent while the *adult male literacy rate (literacy rate ages 15+)* recorded a significant improvement from 43.2 percent in 2013 to 67.6 percent in 2019³.

Other areas of progress and Innovative Initiatives toward meeting the targets for SDG 4

As noted under the evaluation results, targeted financial aid and scholarships, especially for girls have helped to reduce economic barriers to education and gender disparities in education. Also, the Government's *Radical Inclusion Programme* in education has enabled marginalised individuals to gain access to schools. According to the annual School Census of 2022, a total of 44,792 pupils with disabilities (ranging from visual, hearing, learning, physical, and speech impairments), enrolled at various levels of schooling across the country. Of this total number of children, about 4 percent were enrolled in pre-primary school; 62 percent in primary school; 24 percent in junior secondary school; and 10 percent in senior secondary school. An estimated 27 percent of these children were visually impaired, followed by those with disabilities related to hearing (21 percent), learning (20 percent), speech (18 percent) and other physical impairments (14 percent).

The Radical Inclusion programme also allowed girls to continue with their schooling during and after pregnancy, giving them a second chance at education. The assessment therefore reported a total of 1,289 pregnant school girls enrolled, of which 570 (45 percent) were enrolled in junior secondary school (JSS 2 & 3) and the least reported for primary school class 4 with

³ World Bank Development Indicators data bank

just 6 girls (0.5 percent). At each school level, the highest numbers of pregnant girls were found in the last grades (Class 6 for primary, JSS3 for junior secondary and SSS3 for senior secondary). The mean ages of pregnant girls in schools were reported as Primary – 15 years, JSS – 17 years and SSS – 19 years. The minimum ages of the pregnant girls were reported as 12 years for Primary, 12 years for JSS and 14 years for SSS.

In addition to the *Radical Inclusion programs and Foundational Learning*, the passing of the Basic and Senior Secondary Education Act 2023 and the new Education Act 2023 present the main potential in basic education. Also, the passing of the new School Feeding Policy to improve the feeding of children in schools as well as the introduction of civics in the education curriculum serves as **opportunities** for maintaining attendance and retention in schools.

Areas that require urgent attention

- i. In order to sustain the progress and enhance the quality of education, the increases in school enrolment must be accompanied with the increasing availability of schools and classrooms. This will overcome the problem of overcrowding in schools.
- ii. As noted by the three VLRs, government should increase the supply of *Teaching and Learning Materials* and learning infrastructures in remote communities.



SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

A total of three indicators are reported on in this assessment, and progress was made on all three indicators as analysed below. Details are found in the results framework.

- i. **Indicator 5.3.2: The proportion of girls and women aged 15-49 years who have undergone female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM)** remains unchanged since the 2021 report.
- ii. **Indicator 5.2.1b. The proportion of women and girls aged 15-49 years subjected to sexual violence by their spouse in the previous 12 months** reduced by 32 percent in 2022 from 60.7 percent in 2019. During 2019-2022, sexual and gender-based violence was drastically reduced. Of the 2762 SGBV cases reported in 2022, 45 percent were peer-to-peer sexual activity, captured as rape due to the Law, which otherwise would not have been included in the figures.
- iii. **Indicator 5.5:1: The proportion of seats held by women in national parliament**
Sierra Leone has made excellent progress towards the targets of gender equality and women empowerment as the proportion of seats held by women in the national

parliament improved from 12.3 percent in 2013 to 28.2 percent in 2023, and a drastic increase in female representation in ministerial cabinet positions over 30 percent.

Additionally, the last five years saw the continued promulgation of several policies, strategies, and legislations by the government of Sierra Leone, including the 2019 amendment of the Sexual Offences Act 2012; the National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage 2018-2022; the Hands Off our Girls campaign launched and led by the Office of the First Lady in 2018; Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy 2020; National Male Involvement Strategy for the Prevention of Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Sierra Leone 2020; National SGBV Response Strategy 2012-2023; National Referral Protocol on GBV to include school-related GBV 2022; and the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022. Relatedly, the government continued the implementation of the Free Healthcare programme for pregnant women, lactating mothers, and under-five children nationwide, and provided scholarships for women studying science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) subjects. Women now have the right to own land as provided for by the new National Land Commission Act 2022.

With the passage and implementation of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022, the country's position on the gender inequality index is expected to significantly improve. Likewise, the proportion of children whose births are registered in the first year jumped to 93 percent in 2019 from 77.3 percent in 2013.

Other areas of progress include:

- i.* Established 8 One Stop Centres (OSC) to provide survivor-centered comprehensive services. The OSCs are in Moyamba, Pujehun, Koinadugu, Kailahun, Port Loko, Karena, Bonthe and Western Area (King Harman Road). The OSCs are providing free medical, psycho-social, and other support services for survivors of SGBV
- ii.* Established a Toll-Free Rape Help- Line (116)
- iii.* Developed a GBV Information Management System to improve the coordination of services for survivors and address issues around the availability of reliable data.
- iv.* Reviewed National Referral Protocol on Gender-Based Violence to include school-related gender-based violence.
- v.* Established 4 SRH Hubs in Koinadugu District to provide access to adolescent-friendly SRH services including family planning and treatment of STIs.
- vi.* Scaling Business Development for women Empowerment in Falaba district

6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION



SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

The lack of data could not permit extensive reporting on this indicator, with only three indicators assessed in this round of SDG review, and a marginal improvement is recorded on

the three indicators analysed. A concerted effort is therefore required to ensure the targets of goal six are met in the country.

i. Indicator 6.1.1: The Proportion of the population using safely managed drinking water services.

The percentage of household members with an improved drinking water source without E. coli increased from 13.9 percent in 2017 (using the 2017 MICS data) to 45.1 percent in 2019.

However, according to the 2022 Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) National Outcome Routine Mapping (NORM) survey (the first-ever survey), only 10.6 percent of the population have access to improved, protected water supply within the premises, with 18.3 percent in urban areas and 4.9 percent in rural areas.

Access to basic water supply services reached 62.6 percent of the population, with access for 79.4 percent of people living in urban areas and 54.5 percent for those in rural areas.

ii. Indicator 6.2.1a: The Proportion of households with improved sanitation facilities improved from 21.6 percent to 64.9 percent between 2013 and 2019.

iii. Indicator 6.2.1b: The proportion of the population using safely managed sanitation services, including a hand-washing facility with soap and water improved from 10.6 percent in 2013 to 16.5 percent in 2019. The NORM survey shows that the proportion of the population with access to Safely Managed Sanitation is 13.6 percent

Over the past five years, several important milestones have been achieved in the water and environmental sanitation sector. These include the establishment of the National Water Resource Management Agency and the review of key provisions in the Guma Valley and Sierra Leone Water Company Acts. In 2024, the Western Area Peninsular Water Fund was established and launched as a multi-stakeholder process for water resources management. Additionally, 554 water kiosks, 55 boreholes, and 270 public stand posts were constructed and became functional by 2021, serving about 784,000 people per day in the capital city of Freetown. In Bo, Kenema, and Makeni cities, the average population accessing safely managed water stood at 69.6 percent by 2021, serving a total population of 348,247 out of 500,446 in the three municipalities combined. These milestones can be attributed to major reform processes in the sector, in addition to the Heads of States Initiative for Water and Sanitation which the country as strongly showed interest in with the the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) partnership.

Despite these achievements, there are still unaddressed bottlenecks related to financing to accelerate and broaden access to underserved populations. There are also concerns about weak institutional and human resource capacities to fully deliver, as well as the challenge of operating an aging water infrastructure for the nation's capital that has exceeded its original design for the population size.



SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

The welfare of people Living with Disabilities and other Vulnerable Groups: ascertaining the impact of social protection interventions on their welfare

In collaboration with the NCPD, a short assessment was done on the welfare of PWDs, gauging the impact of policy interventions. The objective of this study was to assess the various categories of social protection schemes they receive and how those supports are impacting the level of inequality in the country. In addition to desk reviews and policy expert interviews, MoPED and Sightsavers Sierra Leone organised a one-day consultative workshop with PWDs. The workshop broadly sensitised them about the SDGs and the 2024 VNR process, gauged their perception and level of satisfaction with the various social protection schemes and interventions. The workshop was climaxed by focus group discussion and presentation by the PWD participants, which collectively enriched the short study. The following is a highlight of the key findings of the study. A detailed report is attached as Annex 2B.

The level of inequality and the social protection schemes

Based on the perception of the PWDs, the level of inequality between PWDs and the rest of the population in Sierra Leone is historically high, although the Government and partners have made tremendous strides to bridge this gap. For instance, since 2019, social protection schemes like the Direct Cash transfer to poor people including PWDs, the OPD support and individual support to PWDs across the country are all deliberate attempts by the Government and partners to address the gulf of inequality in earning income and living independent lives.

As earlier noted under the evaluation synthesis (please refer to session 4.1), government policies such as the Radical Inclusion Policy have made strategic actions to reduce the deep-seated inequality between the rich and those from deprived communities and families including persons with disabilities.

Figure 10.1: Cross Section of PWDs during the one-day Consultative Workshop



The study identified the following existing social protection schemes for PWDs in Sierra Leone:

- i.* Social Safety Net, implemented by the NaCSA
- ii.* Livelihood Scheme for PWDs
- iii.* Social Income for Vulnerable
- iv.* Provision of Health Services

A summary of the social protection policy interventions for PWDs are

- i.* Implementing cash transfers to people with disabilities through NaCSA
- ii.* Productive Social Safety Net and Youth Employment
- iii.* Access to national health care schemes for PWDs and other vulnerable groups such as individuals with albinism, little people, and epilepsy. The Government also facilitates access to Health care Services by Mercy ship for PWDs
- iv.* Radical Inclusion Policy: The government's radical inclusion policy allows pregnant girls, including those with disabilities, to attend school.
- v.* The Free Quality School Education, with a disability scholarship covering primary school to university, and the Post-School Policy for PWDs
- vi.* The enactment and implementation of the GEWE Act which also addresses the right and welfare of PWDs.
- vii.* : Through the Sexual Offence Act of 2022, the government and partners are providing capacity-building support for women and girls living with disabilities, especially survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Highlight of impact areas identified

- i.* The participants identified that these policies had improved their lives by 30%, especially in health (goal 3) through Quality healthcare Assistive Technology policy.
- ii.* Through the economic empowerment programme, an estimated 10 percent of individuals including PWDs have graduated from extreme poverty through the various interventions
- iii.* About 35,000 people were reached by the NaCSA lead Direct Cash Transfer project over the past four years. Supported by the World Bank, those quarterly cash transfers are designed to lift vulnerable groups out of poverty.
- iv.* At least 10,000 PWDs were provided with COVID-19-related support, including food and protective equipment, while another set of 10,962 was provided with emergency cash transfers during the pandemic.
- v.* The Ministry of Social Welfare also has direct support to vulnerable homes including homes for the aged. The UNDP and other groups like Social Income Sierra Leone are also providing monthly support to PWDS and other vulnerable groups in Sierra Leone.
- vi.* In promoting sustainable and inclusive local economic development, the UNDP, through its targeted intervention, is transforming the lives of PWDs, ensuring their active participation in economic activities, and promoting resilience. One such intervention is the Human Security Project, funded by United Nations Human Security

Trust which has empowered individuals with disabilities to overcome barriers and reshape the narrative of exclusion.⁴

- vii. On the reduction of environmental vulnerability, the UNDP supports land reform policy implementation in partnership with the Government of Sierra Leone and the private sector to improve access to land for women and PWDs; rehabilitate and protect mangrove ecosystems, reduce deforestation and land degradation, manage the use of community natural assets and support sustainable livelihoods; support the expansion of sustainable ecotourism for job creation; and support development of renewable, affordable and efficient energy solutions through private sector partnerships.⁵

Update on Eye healthcare for PWDs

Sierra Leone recognizes the high prevalence of eye disease and visual loss among the low-income strata of the people, which requires strategic policy attention. Access to good-eye healthcare is a crucial element in bridging the inequality gap for PWDs. With the support of Sightsavers, the Ministry of Health in 2021 developed the first-ever *National Eye Health Policy* in Sierra Leone which presents a significant shift in the approach from prevention of blindness to ‘eye health for all’. The policy provides a framework for universally accessible, affordability, and inclusive quality eye health services that are of acceptable standards. This policy, therefore, incorporates the need for the promotion of healthy eyes, prevention of eye diseases, early identification, and quality medical and surgical care as well as appropriate rehabilitation and provision of assistive devices.

Given the cross-cutting nature of the interventions prescribed in the eye health policy, the Ministry of Health has established coordination mechanisms at the National and district levels to bring the different entities together for the realisation of this policy. With the implementation of this policy, eye health indicators are now included in the Health Management Information System which will enhance data availability on these indicators.

Additionally, Sightsavers Sierra Leone continues to support free eye health-related interventions across all regions of the country for PWDs and other marginalised and vulnerable persons, including the Western Area Eye Care Project at Connaught Hospital commonly known as ‘Eye Clinic; the Western Area Rural Eye Care Project at Jui Government Hospital; the Northern Area Eye Care at the Government Hospital in Makeni; and Southern Province Eye project at the Bo Government Hospital; and the Eastern Province Eye Care Project at the Kenema Government Hospital. The project supports free eye care units within the headquarters towns for PWDs, including other marginalised and vulnerable persons. It also includes the deployment of cataract surgeons in government hospitals and ensures the successful mainstreaming of all eye health staff into the government service scheme to ensure sustainability. Each centre has a special fund, ***Patient care costs*** to cater for vulnerable

⁴ Inclusive progress - UNDP's local economic development interventions transform the lives of persons with disabilities. | United Nations Development Programme

⁵ [Sustainability and Inclusive Local Economic Development | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](https://undp.org)

individuals who cannot afford the cost of eye health services, including the cost of eye surgery, consultations, and medication. Since 2021, over 760,000 patients (persons with disabilities and other marginalised and vulnerable groups) have benefited from this patient care cost⁶.

Remaining challenges include

- i.* Challenges within the health sector remain accessibility, affordability of certain diagnostic facilities, and the provision of assistive devices to PWDs across the country.
- ii.* Learning institutions still need to work on implementing inclusive policies across the board
- iii.* Investment in direct disability interventions is limited
- iv.* Lack of compliance by MDAs and other non-governmental organizations
- v.* Lack of adequate support to coordinating institutions like the NCPD.

10.7 Facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies

As part of the 2024 VNR process, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the lead UN migration agency, conducted joint assessments of the general status of migration governance in Sierra Leone. The assessments included desk reviews, consultative sessions with migrant returnees, and other general stakeholder consultation on migration governance architecture in Sierra Leone and their implications for the governance system. The process also coincided with a training workshop for government officials on the Global Compact on Migration (GCM) and how it can be integrated into Sierra Leone’s National Planning process and reported on effectively. Despite the limited available data to effectively assess progress on the migration-related indicators and targets, the exercise has brought the significant role of migration in national development to highlight the importance of integrating migration into development policy discourses.



Broad Context

In the era of unprecedented mobility of people, the need to facilitate orderly, safe, regular, and responsible migration and mobility is becoming increasingly relevant. The need to face the challenges and

to maximize the opportunities that this mobility brings has been recognized with the inclusion of migration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which highlights the positive

⁶ Sightsavers Sierra Leone annual report on report on the implementation of eye health project

contribution of migrants to inclusive growth and development. The central reference to migration in the SDGs is target 10.7 on facilitating “*orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies*”.

Migration Governance in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is characterized by significant irregular migration patterns, mostly male youth seeking enhanced socioeconomic opportunities abroad, with irregular migration a major outlet for Sierra Leonean youths. An estimated 57 percent of Sierra Leoneans across all age groups have considered emigrating to some degree, with economic considerations cited as the most important push factor.

Also, migrant returnees and border community stakeholders express limited economic and social opportunities and the social norms that limit youth participation in community decision-making, as drivers of emigration stakeholders.⁷



Sierra Leone is a major

country of origin for migrants ending up in vulnerable situations and being assisted to return to their country of origin by the IOM. From January 2017 to February 2024, the country received more than 10,000 returnees. Also, in the period 2023 to June 2024 alone, a total of 1,563 adults (536 female, 1,027 male) and 401 children (194 female, 207 male) have been assisted to return home safely, and IOM continues to support a high number of assisted voluntary returns in 2024. Based on IOM data for Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) operations, Sierra Leone falls within the top 4 West African countries for assisted returnees.

Trafficking in Persons (TiP) is another highly concerning category of migration in Sierra Leone. According to an IOM report, there are widespread practices of child trafficking in the country, as well as a trend of forced labour trafficking of Sierra Leonean nationals to other West African countries, the Middle East, and Gulf regions. The country has been identified as a source country for adults and children trafficked under different forms of exploitation, including labour and sexual exploitation. In 2023, IOM assisted the safe return of 136 Victims of Trafficking (VoTs) and 11 Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASC).

Despite the existing challenges, Sierra Leone has made significant strides towards effective migration management. The following legal and policy documents outline the key of migration

⁷ Irregular Migration, Human Trafficking and People Smuggling in Sierra Leone: A report of the Joint field assessment by International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Office of National Security (ONS); May 2017.

governance instruments of the Republic of Sierra Leone, as well as the areas with potential for further development, as assessed by the Migration Governance Indicators 2020.⁸

- i. The National Migration Policy (NMP) 2022:* Addresses key migration issues as prioritized in the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2019–2023, now 2024–2030). In the current MTNDP 2024–2030, one of the focus areas of the Big five Game Changers of the Government is on the *Youth Employment Scheme* which has a special policy results area on managing migration which aligns with the NMP. The NMP adopts a gender-sensitive approach and aims to strengthen migration procedures, prevent irregular migration, combat trafficking in persons, and protect the rights of migrants.
- ii. The National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP) 2018:* The objectives of this policy are to
 - a) Establish institutions for the coordination and administration of labour migration issues;
 - b) Develop mechanisms protecting migrant workers and their families;
 - c) Enhance mechanisms for maximizing the developmental impacts of labour migration;
 - d) Improve labour market and migration information systems and data collection for better migration management; and
 - e) Reduce “brain drain” and increase “brain gain” for the country.

The NLMP and NMP contain sections intended to improve the Government’s response to migrants’ vulnerability to trafficking in Sierra Leone and abroad. Both policies include the objective to protect migrants in vulnerable situations, especially children and women, against trafficking and smuggling. They seek to combat trafficking through public awareness-raising campaigns and enhancing the capacity of law enforcement agencies to deter and prosecute migrant smugglers and traffickers.

- iii. The Anti–Human Trafficking and Migrants’ Smuggling Act 2022:* Established the Anti-Human Trafficking Taskforce Secretariat with a mandate to coordinate the activities to inform advocacy, policy intervention, and programme management on anti-human trafficking in person (ATIP) activities by all stakeholders. The Act provides stronger measures to prevent, and protect victims of trafficking, as well as to prosecute offenders.
- iv.* Sierra Leone has endorsed the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM). In November 2023, the country joined the GCM Champion Countries Initiatives, further recommitting to strengthen GCM implementation in Sierra Leone.

Key areas of gaps for improvement in the national migration governance architecture

- i.* The Government of Sierra Leone does not regularly collect data on migration. In collaboration with partners, the government only collects a few data on migration, including the number of victims of trafficking (VOTs), the age and sex of migrants, migrant communities and their countries of origin. Other available data on migration in Sierra Leone has been collected by IOM and other United Nations agencies. To strengthen migration data in the country, there are ongoing plans to expand the scope of work of the Sierra Leone National Coordination Committee on Migration Data, led by Statistics Sierra Leone, to improve on the collection, consolidation, analysis and dissemination of migration data in Sierra Leone.

⁸ [Migration Governance Indicators Profile 2020 | The Republic of Sierra Leone | IOM Publications Platform](#)

- ii. Sierra Leone has long-standing gaps in integrated border management, including inadequate border monitoring, border security, and border control staffing and enforcement. However, the Government is in the final stages of finalizing the Integrated Border Management Strategy which will contribute to an improvement in border management. Additionally, the Strategy will contribute to the development of comprehensive policy guidelines on migration for border management officials, as well as enhance their capacities to effectively manage the country's borders.
- iii. There is no inter-governmental institution for migration issues, its establishment is a key priority under the NMP. An inter-governmental institution on migration will strengthen interagency cooperation through regular exchanges of information, to enhance good governance and management of migration by reviewing existing legislation and establishing the necessary institutional framework for the effective coordination and administration of migration issues, and to improve mechanisms for harnessing and maximizing the developmental impacts of migration.
- iv. There is no evidence of policies focused on migrant integration in the country. The government will work towards developing a government framework for the reintegration of returned migrants and raising awareness through public education on the risk of irregular migration and human trafficking. The government will ensure the involvement/participation of migrants and migrants/returnees' associations, in decisions affecting their lives, including in the implementation and follow up of the National Migration Policy
- v. The Government, with the support of international organizations, has engaged civil society organizations on migration issues on an ad hoc basis. Sierra Leone's engagement with the private sector has also not focused on migration. The government will work towards fostering cooperation with the private sector and civil society organizations, including the diasporas to promote skills transfer from Sierra Leonean professionals living abroad to their counterparts back home. Additionally, the Government will continue to strengthen programmes to allocate resources for the implementation of local economic development opportunities to reduce inequalities between rural and urban areas.

13 CLIMATE ACTION



SDG 13: Promote Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Sierra Leone is a party to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). As noted in the 2021 VNR Report, the Government has created a special Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to provide the lead policy direction in the country's climate resilience and environmental action.

Since its establishment in 2021, the Ministry and its line agencies have partnered with international organisations and adopted strategies to increase risk awareness and bolster

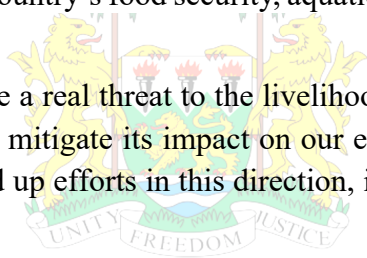
institutional capacities for the climate actions outlined in the National Adaptation Plan, including restoration of its forest and tree cover.

Among the key achievements is the review of key legislation to enhance enforcement and compliance with climate change and environmental sustainability-related requirements. A National Development-Induced Resettlement Policy was formulated, while the National Climate Change Policy was reviewed and updated. The country has also developed a National Framework for Climate Services (NFCS), and an NFCS strategy and action plan for delivering these services. In 2022, Sierra Leone's environmental performance index score for air quality was estimated at 21.60 with a rank of 151st out of 180 countries, jumping 10 places from a score of 161 in 2020.

However, according to the Afrobarometer Special survey on climate experience in Sierra Leone, while awareness of climate change is increasing, knowledge of climate change is still limited among most Sierra Leoneans, especially those in remote and hard-to-reach areas. Most of those who have heard of climate change say it is worsening their quality of life.

The country remains highly vulnerable to climate change and has low readiness to confront the accelerating threat of climate change, ranking 166th out of 185 countries on the ND-GAIN (2021) Index. Furthermore, according to the African Development Bank, extreme heat and rising sea levels, recurrent storms, floods, droughts, coastal erosion, mudslides, and other climate disruptions threaten the country's food security, aquatic life, biodiversity, and sustained livelihoods.

Climate change continues to pose a real threat to the livelihoods of the people which requires collective efforts to adapt to and mitigate its impact on our environment. The government of Sierra Leone has therefore scaled up efforts in this direction, including the following strategic actions:



- i. implement the third phase of the Tree Planting Project by planting the remaining 2.2 million trees in addition to 2.8 million trees already planted during the first and second phases of the project
- ii. developed the National Forestry Inventory of Sierra Leone to update the 1975 Inventory.
- iii. implement the Sustainable and Integrated Landscape Management of the Western Area Peninsula Forest National Park to protect globally significant biodiversity, safeguard ecosystem services and discourage land degradation activities
- iv. develop a Domestic Measurement Reporting and Verification Framework for effective monitoring and reporting on climate actions; and
- v. commence the development of Sierra Leone's first Biennial Transparency Report consistent with the Paris Agreement on the global response to the threats of climate change.

Furthermore, the ***Presidential Initiative on Climate Change, Renewable Energy, and Food Security*** has critical workstreams to support national, sectoral and local efforts to reduce risks and impacts of climate-related disasters. As articulated in the MTNDP, Box 4.13 below presents clear *goals* and *specific actions* of the Initiative to provide support in this area.

Box E.1: Presidential Initiative—Reducing risks and impacts of climate-related disasters, such as greenhouse emissions, droughts and floods on communities and infrastructure.

Goals

1. Adaptation priorities in all districts identified and prioritised and Climate Action Committees (composed of men, women and youth) established, providing data and information for early warning systems by 2030
2. By 2030, at least 30% of households are better able to cope with climate change impacts due to implementation of locally led and focussed adaptation projects
3. Improved climate information system for local communities leading to at least 30% of households using the information in their climate risk management decisions by 2030
4. By 2030, climate action and climate governance is devolved to all 395 wards through mobilisation of resources for financing Locally Led Climate Action (FLLoCA) Programme.
5. By 2030, at least households in urban areas recycling waste, especially plastics, through viable private sector led green investments

Specific actions

1. Build the capacity of communities to take ownership and participate in climate adaptation and mitigation interventions, adopt sustainable practices and climate-smart technologies.
2. Develop standards and guidelines for the sustainable management of forests
3. Advocate for policies to protect coastal erosion, degradation and minimize landslides.
4. Support the integration of climate change adaptation strategies into the health sector
5. Conduct feasibility of sustainable waste collection and recycling in urban areas
6. Advocate for the construction of coastal sea walls especially along degraded sea fronts in Freetown.

Source: Adapted from the Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan, 2024-2030 (Page 170)

Among the remaining Challenges encountered in this policy area include: limited resources and general institutional capacity to implement critical programmes/projects, high levels of poverty and food insecurity that put pressure on land resources to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for the population, inadequate infrastructure, lack of education and awareness about environmental hazards and climate change vulnerabilities, weak regulatory enforcement, high population growth and urbanisation, limited access to clean energy, fragile ecosystems, biodiversity loss, and ineffectively coordinated approach to environmental governance.

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS



SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

The need to sustain peace and accelerate an inclusive governance system with equitable access to justice remains a central policy initiative for Sierra Leone's transformative and sustainable development drive. After being an accelerator SDG for the first half of the 2030 agenda, goal 16 has been further identified as an ancillary SDG for the remaining years of the 2030 agenda.

Since the last review in 2021, the country in 2023 held a peaceful general multi-tier election, the fifth post-war general election. Sierra Leone is doing a commendable job on the SDG16 front, securing a seat in the non-permanent category of the UN Security Council for the 2024-2025 cycle, after more than 50 years when the country was first obliged that opportunity. The state also actively participates in the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and State-building and has participated in peace-keeping missions abroad.

In the 2023 Global Peace Index, Sierra Leone was ranked the 3rd most peaceful country in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 47th globally with a score of 1.8. Except for a few elections and politically related skirmishes, Sierra Leone has not recorded any armed conflict during the period under review. The following, therefore, presents a highlight of the progress areas on this goal:

The *Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion* was established in 2021 and it has since been very instrumental in promoting dialogue among political parties and facilitating peace mediation and reconciliation. Following the 2023 general elections, the commission played a pivotal role in addressing post-election disagreements, mediating peace between the two major political parties, and supporting the implementation of the tripartite agreement on electoral reforms and management.

Similarly, the Political Parties Act No. 25 of 2022 was enacted, leading to the transformation of the Political Parties Registration Commission to a *Political Parties Regulation Commission* to effectively regulate the conduct and activities of political parties. These efforts resulted in an increase in political accountability and transparency in political parties to 40% in 2023.

Despite the democratic gains recorded so far, there is an increasingly worrying polarization and politicization of all facets of the Sierra Leonean society. The seemingly unending intolerance, intimidation, and drive to polarize the electorate, has rendered the political environment unpleasant. Elections are gradually becoming a source of tension, mistrust, and lack of confidence in state institutions, particularly the Electoral Management Bodies, the Judiciary, and the security sector.

Progress on the security front

In its quest to strengthen the country's peace, security and stability, the Office of National Security (ONS) adopted a multi-agency approach to coordinate the national early warning and early response (EWER) mechanism. The EWER is geared towards identifying, preventing and responding to any issues that have the proclivity to undermine security at national, provincial, district and chiefdom levels. The following presents a summary of the key interventions undertaken concerning the peace and security of the state: a) created a safe, secure, and peaceful environment for the successful conduct of the June 24th 2023 multi-tier elections; b) combating criminality and other illegal practices led to some key interceptions involving military fatigues, medical drugs, illicit drugs, and expired drinks at various locations including the Freetown International Airport; c) conflict prevention and resolution efforts to enhance peace, security and maintenance of the rule of law; and d) developed a Regulatory Guidelines for protective security of Government MDAs and Critical National Infrastructure.

Successful locally-based conflict prevention is the Community-Based Dispute Resolution Services such as the *Kolhat Barray Approach*, which was piloted across 60 communities in 21 chiefdoms in Pujehun, Tonkolili, and Western Rural District suggests

- i. Indicator 16.1.3: Proportion of population subjected to (a) physical violence, (b) psychological violence, and (c) sexual violence in the previous 12 months*

Based on the findings of the CSO-led nationwide community engagement, the country has made inroads in addressing violence in all its forms, including sexual and gender-based violence. Progress has been noted especially in areas such as:

- a) The establishment of an integrated violence prevention and response command center at the district level, staffed with law enforcement agencies, medical personnel and community health workers for timely response in the investigation, protection, arrests and referrals
- b) Heightened public education on the laws protecting women and children has further increased the number of incident reports based on innovative approaches that the newly established Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs and the Family Support Units of the Sierra Leone Police introduced.

SDG 16.3 on 'promoting rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice'

The Justice sector's continued reforms are fundamental catalysts for promoting sustainable peace and development, guaranteeing and protecting citizens' human rights.

A. Justice Sector Coordination Office

The Justice Sector Coordination Office (JSCO) plays a pivotal role in advancing the implementation of SDG16 in Sierra Leone. The office facilitates policy development, planning, and coordination within the justice sector, including integrating SDG 16 indicators. Since 2021, the justice sector has developed and implemented of several policies and programmes.

- I. **Developed a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework for Reporting SDG 16+: with Policy Guidelines for Reporting on SDG 16** developed in 2022, this framework allows for the systematic tracking of progress toward SDG 16 and related targets.
- II. **Developed the Diversion and Alternative to Detention Framework** for children in conflict with the law in Sierra Leone. The passing of the revised CRA 2007 into Law which has legal provisions for the implementation of the framework to reduce the number of children in detention facilities and provide them with rehabilitation and support services.
- III. **Operationalisation of the Local Courts Administration:** Strengthening local court administration improves access to justice at the grassroots level, especially in rural and remote areas where formal justice institutions may be lacking Plans are advanced to operationalise the local court administration, with both recurrent and development budgets submitted to the Ministry of Finance.
- IV. **Development of the Justice Sector Web portal:** This platform provides the government and development partners progress and general development in the justice system of Sierra Leone.
- V. **Development and implementation of five-year Justice Sector Communications Strategy** to help in solving the sector's communication deficiencies, and restoring public trust in the justice sector.
- VI. **Conducted a Justice Needs Survey** which has helped to identify the specific justice needs and challenges faced by marginalized groups in Sierra Leone, such as women,

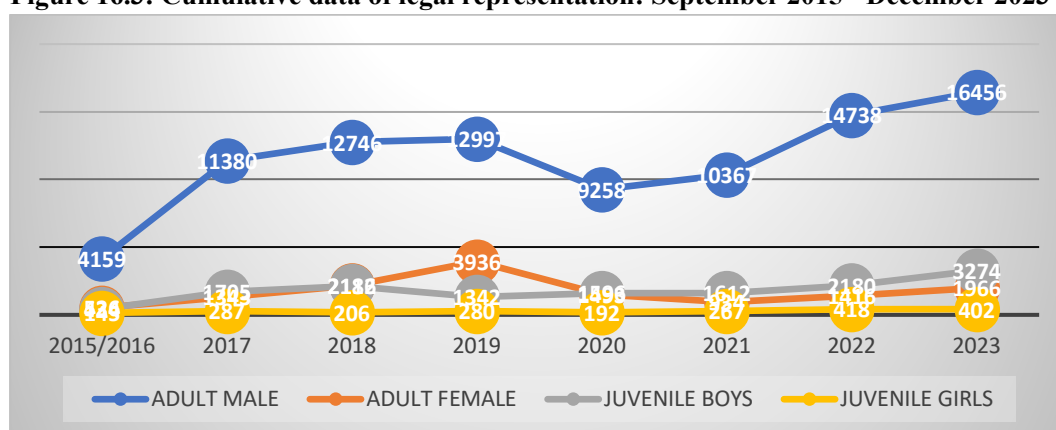
children, PWDs, which informs the formulation of targeted interventions to address the barriers to accessing justice that these groups face.

B. Providing legal services for indigents

The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board (LAB) continues to provide access to justice for underprivileged persons, with the total number of beneficiaries increasing from 13,180 in 2021 to more than 15,000 in 2023, and the Board has embraced the Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanism for speedy out-of-court settlement of cases.

- i. **16.3.2 Unsentenced detainees as a proportion of the overall prison population** decreased from 29.5 percent in 2021 to 21.7 percent in 2023/2024
- ii. **Indicator 16.3.7 Proportion of persons on remand without indictment in the capital of Freetown** decreased from 54 percent in 2022 to 14 percent in 2023.

Figure 16.3: Cumulative data of legal representation: September 2015 - December 2023



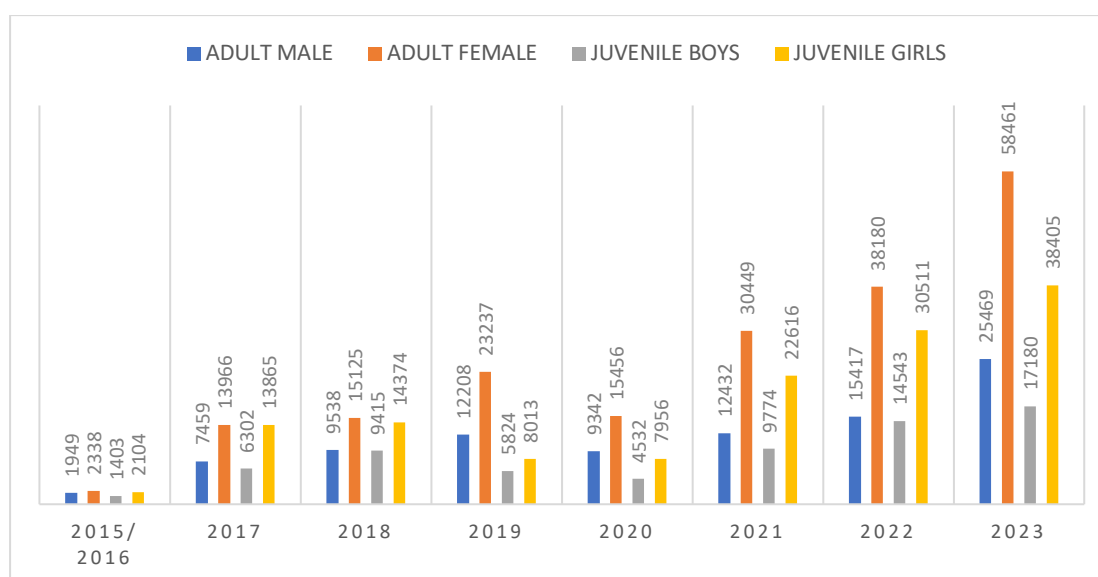
Source: The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board, 2024

Since the inception of LAB in 2015, a total of 2,371,165 persons including foreign nationals have benefitted from the scheme, with 182,168 in 2021, 238,590 in 2022 and 1,537,238 in 2023.

These numbers include indigent accused persons brought before the Special Criminal Sessions, Criminal Sessions/Call Over, and Prison and Circuit Courts around the country. The Special Criminal Sessions are held in areas without a Resident Judge.

On **Legal Advice and Representation**, the Board also provided legal assistance and legal representation to 164 elections-related offenses, including 4 suspects arrested by Police in Port Loko District for protesting without lawful authority; 16 in the Western Area Rural District for unlawful protest; 13 in Bo District for Arson, 10 tried at the Pademba Court No.1 in Freetown and 7 in Port Loko.

Figure 16.4: Cumulative data for legal advice and assistance: Sept. 2015 - Dec 2023



Source: The Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board, 2024

On *Juvenile Justice*, access to justice for Juveniles has been expanded through the designation of a Juvenile Legal Aid Counsel, with two remand homes in the country (one in the capital Freetown and the other in Bo). The Board ensures juveniles are not held in adult cells or remanded in correctional centers for adults.

Also, free legal advice and representation, and legal assistance are provided, in addition to monitoring of detention facilities to address justice needs, mediation of civil and minor criminal matters involving juveniles and diversion of minor criminal offenses.

Figure Table 16.4: Cumulative data legal education: Sept. 2015 – Dec. 2023

Cummulative Data: Sept. 2015 - December 2023					
Category	Adult		Juveniles		Total
	Male	Female	Boys	Girls	
Legal Education					
2023	791,967	486,246	51,326	46,086	1,375,625
2022	41,191	30,452	26,313	23,231	121,187
2021	34,188	23,213	19,918	16,398	93,717
2020	14,847	11,852	6,014	3,314	36,027
2019	19,254	14,262	7,481	4,007	45,004
2018	14,528	12,702	7,212	6,511	40,953
2017	9,668	8,773	3,985	4,320	26,746
2015/2016	2,556	3,605	2,099	3,450	11,710
Total	928,199	591,105	124,348	107,317	1,750,969

Source: Sierra Leone Legal Aid Board, 2023 report

On *Alternative Dispute Resolution/Mediation*, the number of beneficiaries have increased since 2021, as follows: 75,271 in 2021; 98,651 in 2022 and 139,515 in 2023. The matters mediated include child maintenance, spousal maintenance, inheritance, property, debts, family

and marital matters, labour, land matters and minor community level disputes such as disrespect for local authorities, fines for behaviours considered to be against the rules and by-laws, petty theft, fighting and insults and disorderly behavior. A total of 39,866 people benefitted from mediation of elections-related disputes in the June 2023 elections.

In conclusion, access to justice has been increased, including for people in remote areas through the provision of legal services (legal advice, legal assistance and legal representation) to those who cannot afford to pay for these services or hire a lawyer. This include the provision of legal assistance to suspects under police investigations to ensure their rights are respected through the approach of the investigation, condition and period of detention, contacting and preparing witnesses and securing bail.

Advancing Human Right Issues

Significant progress is recorded in implementing the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review, with the constitutional review process a new Government White Paper launched, and the death penalty abolished.

Additionally, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, in its quasi-judicial exercise has been remarkable in investigating and addressing complaints of human rights, with over 350 complaints addressed, conducted at least one public hearing and one public inquiry on labour-related rights. Key success stories included: The Commission's first public hearing dealing with a complaint received from 235 Ex-servicemen of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) in the matter of Blamo Jesse Jackson and 234 others against the RSLAF and Ministry of Defence (MoD), which was held in August 2011. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone was graded "A" status for the third consecutive time by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights.

African Peer Review Mechanism Lead Targeted Review

As part of its commitment to addressing governance challenges in AU member states, the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), in collaboration with the government of Sierra Leone has conducted two targeted reviews in Sierra Leone. The first review in November 2020 was on ***Health Governance and Covid-19 Response***. The second review in November 2022 was on ***Unconstitutional Change of Government***. Each of these Reviews recommended a National Plan of Action which were effectively integrated into the national development plan.

Through these governance assessments, Sierra Leone has consistently featured among the top performing African States, as well as the resilience to face the multiple challenges.

The reviews identified good practices, which are shared with other APRM member states, including the recognition and protection of fundamental rights and freedoms, the review of the constitutionality of laws, the control of constitutional amendments, and institutions supporting constitutional democracy and accountability. One important good practice the APRM reviewers commended Sierra Leone for is the the abolition of the death penalty (the libel legislation). Also, key lessons and gaps identified have collectively informed the their respective national action plan.

Indicator 16.9.1: Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority

The performance on this indicator has been quite impressive with the proportion of children whose births are registered in the first year jumped to 93 percent in 2019 from 77.3 percent in 2013.

Since 2020, the National Civil Registration Authority (NCRA) has been working to modernise civil registration and to ensure the issuance of multi-purpose National Identity Cards, Birth Certificates, Death Certificates, Marriage Certificates, Adoption Certificates and other identity documents. Below are some of the progress areas:

- i. The NCRA has commenced piloting of the Modular Open-Source Identity Platform (MOSIP) to ensure a nationally owned identity systems.
- ii. Also, a state-of-the-art Integrated CRVS System has been established which has helped to modernise and improve civil registration and identity management services as the best source of continuous and up-to-date information on birth, death, and population statistics.
- iii. The country has successfully established a state-of-the-art Tier III compliant Primary Data Centre (PDC) infrastructure to ensure uninterrupted access to CRVS and ID services in the country.
- iv. In 2022, a securitized Births and Deaths registration certificate was introduced, linked to the IDMS system with the provision of NIN for every registrant. The new system reduces the occurrence of fraudulent documentation for births and deaths and enhances the electronic archival of records on Registrants.

Remaining Challenges

Remaining and emerging challenges include:

- i. The poor internet connectivity and electricity constraints the use of the electronic system; paucity in the registration of certain vital events such as Death, especially in and outside of health facilities, automating Vital Events registration.
- ii. The lack of adequate knowledge and skills of Vital Statistics Staff on data collection and analysis to generate CRVS reports.
- iii. Inadequate knowledge of the public on the importance of registration of vital events including births, deaths, marriages, and divorces,
- iv. The limited knowledge and capacity in determining cause-of-death and autopsy

Goal 16.10.2 Universal Access to Information

With the historic repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel Law in 2020, press freedom in Sierra Leone has significantly improved, and there have been no reports of journalists being jailed for doing their job. The Government of Sierra Leone considers universal access to information as essential for good governance and a critical enabler of the SDGs. The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) in Sierra Leone strives for public access to information, viewing it not only as an end in itself but also as a means to various ends. Universal

access to information creates an environment where human rights and governance-related targets can be achieved, thereby making it a critical enabler of the SDGs.

The recent events of social unrest and disruption of the governance system (the August 2022 multiple and violent youth demonstrations and confrontations with state security officers as an example) in the country illustrate the power of misinformation and disinformation when there is an information gap, especially from state authorities.

On this note, this VNR provides a detailed assessment of Sierra Leone’s adoption and implementation of right-to-access information practices, and the progress on public Access to Information (SDG 16.10.2). The assessment is also believed to provide insightful policy recommendations for both state and non-state actors on how information could be leveraged to deliver on the 2030 agenda.

The assessment shows that the country continues to adopt innovative approaches to improving public access to information, including the recent launch of a *Digital Access to Information Platform* in 2024. The platform is set to enhance public access to information and improve disclosure of information. Other areas of progress are as follows:

- i. Sierra Leone recorded a marked increase in Freedom of Information requests and

proactive disclosure of information and scored 98 percent on FOI in the 2022 MCC Global Scorecard. From Table 16.5, the number of successful FOI requests without the intervention of the RAIC increased from 174 in 2021 to 19,261 in 2023.

Table 16.5: Freedom of Information Requests without the intervention of the RAIC

Regions	Annual Compliance Report (ACR)-FOI requests		
	2021	2022	2023
Western	123	12,147	18,050
Northern	25	240	362
Eastern	11	121	238
Southern	15	400	611
Total	174	12,908	19,261

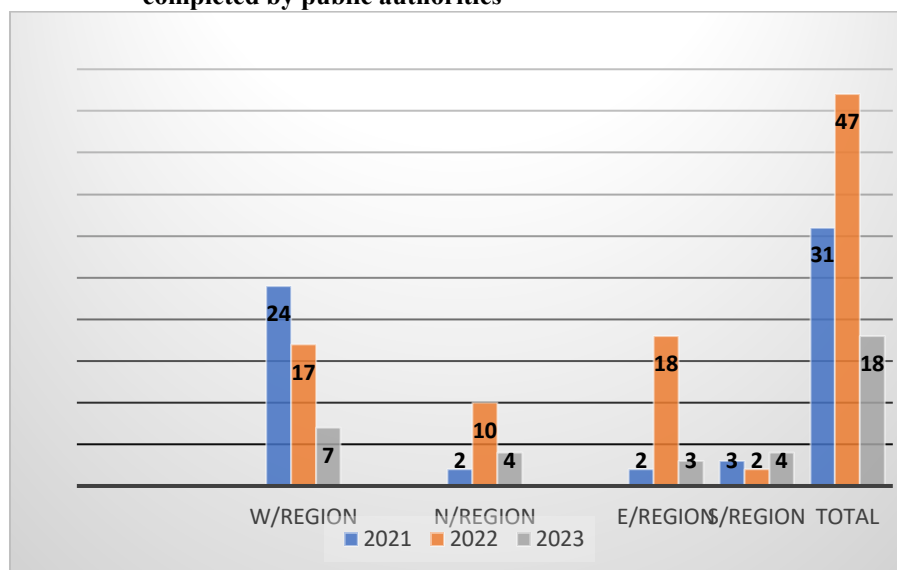
Source: Right to Access Information Annual Report, 2023

- ii. In the 2022 World Press Freedom Index, Sierra Leone was ranked 46th out of 180 countries, with a score of 71.03, improving from the 61st position with a score of 73.65 in 2013. This impressive performance is partly due to the repeal of the Criminal Libel Law, and the passing of the Independent Media Commission Act 2020.
- iii. The number of requests for information from public officers skyrocketed from 339 in 2021 to 13,016 in 2022 and 19,399 in 2023.
- iv. As of December 2023, 53 (34 percent) government MDAs completed and submitted the Annual Compliance Reports, marking improved compliance from 26 percent in 2022.
- vi. The number of FOI requests made across public offices rose dramatically from 339 in 2021 to 13,016 in 2022 and 19,399 in 2023. Out of the 19,399 requests in 2023, 19,367 were provided, with only 6 cases denied because they were deemed to fall under the exempt information as stipulated in sections 12 to 26 of the RAI Act of 2013.

vii. Out of the 6 complaints, 5 were resolved and one is pending further review and action.

Regarding the Proactive Disclosure of Information Publication Schemes submitted by public authorities, although there is an increase between 2021 and 2022 from 31 to 47, it dropped to 18 in 2023. The western region continues to account for the highest disclosure of information.

Figure 16.5: Proactive Disclosure of Information Publication schemes completed by public authorities



Source: Right to Access Information Annual Report, 2023

The following is a summary of the progress areas and initiatives undertaken towards achieving SDG 16.10.2 targets:

- i. In its effort to increase public knowledge in access to information, proactive disclosure, and efficient records management, the Commission undertook robust consultative engagements with MDAs. This is to create an understandable and supportive working relationship with the institutional leadership, the lower cadre of staff who deal with freedom of information requesters, and their other administrative and professional staff.
- ii. With the support of the World Bank, the Commission has set up Open Data Resource Centers in its four regional offices to raise public awareness about the Commission's mandate and to increase public access to information that public authorities have proactively disclosed.
- iii. In March this year, the RAIC launched its upgraded website at the Digital Access to Information (ATI) on the RAI Regulations platforms workshop and piloted to some MDAs, Journalists, and Non-State Actors.
- iv. Since 2021, the commission has included in its annual reports the Monitoring and Annual Compliance Report (ACR) and Proactive Disclosure of Information (PDI) Publication schemes. This ensures that government MDAs present a report to the Commission on their annual compliance in keeping with Section 41 of the RAIC Act.
- v. Going forward, the Digital ATI will be popularised, focusing on the RAI Regulations platforms. A social media forum has been established to accommodate more inputs towards the upgraded RAIC Website and to ensure public authorities understand its detailed contents for information requests.

Some high profile cases of FOI requests

- i. **Sinkunia Hospital Nurse In - Charge Falaba District:** On the 8th of September 2023, a Community Health Worker requested information from the Nurse In - Charge at the hospital on the quantity of food for malnourished children supplied by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation to the hospital and the list of the beneficiaries. The information requested by the CHW was successfully released on the 5th October 2023 and the commission was notified by the nurse in charge via a phone call.
- ii. **M & E Officer Agriculture Office Koinadugu District:** On the 11th September 2023, a group of farmers made an FOI request to the M & E Office asking for information about the total fertilizers sent by the Ministry of Agriculture for farmers in koinadugu district. The M& E officer compiled the document and made it available to the farmers on 26th September 2023.
- iii. **Halloway and Partners FOI request to the National Civil Registration Authority:** A request for information dated 30th March, 2023, was made relating to the verification of the authenticity and details of civil registration and national identification of Adama Daoh for a matter which was being heard in the High Court of Sierra Leone. The NCRA on the 25th of April 2023, certified that the lady was registered with NCRA by providing a certificate of registration and citizenship to Halloway and Partners. The requested information was provided without the need for RAIC's intervention.
- iv. **Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah Esq. Request for Information to the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone:** The information request was made on the 28th of July, 2023, to the Chief Electoral Commissioner of the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone, demanding a legible hard or electronic copy of the Certified and Verified District Level Results of the Presidential, Local, and General Elections Held on the 24th of June, 2023.

On the 22nd of August 2023, he made an application to the RAIC to review the decision of the electoral commission refusing to answer to his request 28th of July 2023. The RAIC then wrote a letter to the electoral commission reminding them of the provisions of the RAI Act 2013.

A response was subsequently sent to Augustine S.S. Marrah Esq. by the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone dated 30th of August 2023, stating the following:

- a) *Section 92(1) of the Public Elections Act (PEA) 2022 which requires the District Returning Officers to compile and certify summaries of all polling station results in the respective districts.*
- b) *Section 92(2) which requires district returning officers to give certified copies of the summary results to observers or counting agents.*
- c) *The Commission complies with the RAI Act 2013, by publishing certified copies of summaries of all results on the ECSL website.*

On the 18th of September 2023, the electoral commission wrote another letter to the requester assuring him of the Commission's preparedness in compliance with Section 51,52(b) and 92(2) of the Public Election Act, 2022, concerning the publication of the 24th of June 2023 Election Results. And that the commission is compliant with provisions enshrined in the RAI Act 2013 and will continue to execute its mandates as

provided by law. In response to this the Requester thanked the commission for its intervention.

Remaining Challenges

Remaining and emerging challenges include:

- Poor commitment and compliance by heads of Public Authorities to disclose information
- The challenge of continuity due to the frequent changes of institutional focal points
- Funding and capacity constraints for the commission, thereby limiting its expansion and coverage
- Information technology and communication inadequacies and risks.

SDGs Target 16.5: Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms

Sierra Leone’s efforts in combating corruption have seen the country continue to perform well in international indices like Transparency International and the MCC Scorecard. As shown in Table 16.6 below, the MCC Control of Corruption scorecard shows that Sierra Leone progressed from 79 percent in 2019 to 81 percent in 2020; an incremental consistency from 2018 to 2021. It then declined to 79 percent in 2022 and 76 in 2023. In 2022, the Afro Barometer showed that public perception of corruption in Sierra Leone declined to 40 percent from 70 percent only a few years ago. With a special court being established for a speedy trial of corruption cases, more prosecutors have been appointed to handle corruption cases. In the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index (TI-CPI), the country also maintains its 2021 score of 34 in 2022, which is above the Sub-Saharan average of 32, and scored 35 in 2023—the highest the country has ever recorded since the CPI rankings began. In the TI-CPI, the country also maintained its 2021 score of 34 in 2022, which is above the sub-Saharan average of 32 and the highest the country has ever recorded since the CPI rankings began. The index ranked **108** out of **180** nations, improving two places from 110 in 2022 and nine places from its 2021 ranking of 117. Also, in the Transparency International Corruption Survey rankings, Sierra Leone moved from 119 in 2019 to 108 in 2023 moving 11 places down in ranking out of 180 countries surveyed.

Table 16.6: Sierra Leone’s Performance in international Corruption indices, 2019-2023

Index	Score/Rank				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Millennium Challenge Corporation Scorecard	79%	81%	83%	79%	76%
Transparency International Corruption Perception Survey	119 (ranking)	117 (ranking)	115 (ranking)	110 (ranking)	108 (ranking)
Transparency International Corruption Perception Index	33 (score above Sub Sahara average)	33 (score above Sub Sahara average)	34 (score above Sub Sahara average)	34 (score above Sub Sahara average)	35 (score above Sub Sahara average)

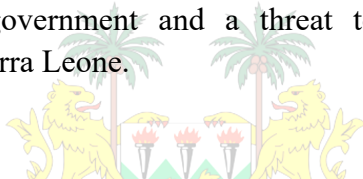
Source: Autho’s construct based on several global reports

Since 2018, the ACC has increased the amount of funds recovered and paid to the consolidated Revenue fund from 20 percent to 50 percent in 2023.

As part of the Anti-Corruption Commission's (ACC) Strategic Plan 2023-2026, the commission has established a new framework to ensure accountability and transparency in the public sector in the form of a National Public Sector Transparency and Accountability Initiative to subject the public sector to more scrutiny by civil society and development partners. The Commission also has the "Anti-Corruption Non-Prosecution Policy," a set of guidelines to aid prosecutors in deciding whether a particular matter should be prosecuted (charged to court or not). This policy and the 2019 Amendment have provided a workable and viable alternative to some of the challenges of anti-corruption prosecution.

Both the 2019 amendment and the Non-Prosecution Policy, have generally enhanced the fight against corruption by making it possible for the Commission to hit the corrupt where it hurts most – their pockets, without court order; recovering what has been stolen from the people of Sierra Leone in addition to other consequences. Following the 2008 Amendment ACT of 2019, the ACC is reviewing Section 89 of the Anti-corruption Act 2008 to make provisions for plea bargaining.

Despite these gains, corruption and illegal financial flows remain a challenge to the effective and efficient functioning of government and a threat to the socio-economic growth, development, and stability of Sierra Leone.



17 PARTNERSHIPS
FOR THE GOALS



SDG 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development

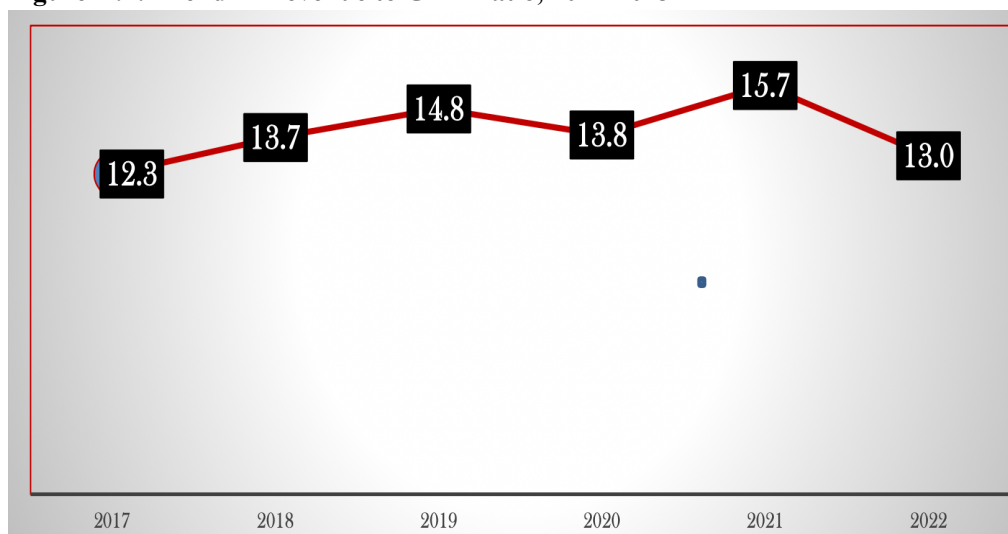
At the launch of the previous Sierra Leone MTNDP 2019-2023 in February 2019, the Sierra Leone economy was on a promising trajectory for sustained economic growth and revenue mobilisation to finance public development programmes. Growth had increased to 5.3 percent in 2019, from 3.5 percent in 2018. However, following the outbreak of COVID-19 and its related national mitigation measures, state revenues dipped precipitously, leading to an increase in fiscal deficit.

i. Indicator 17.1.1 Total Domestic Revenues as % of GDP (g7+)

During the period under review, domestic revenue increased moderately from 13.8 percent in 2018 to 14.8 percent of GDP in 2019 before declining to 13.8% of GDP in 2020. As already mentioned, the fall in revenue was largely due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and its attendant restrictive measures which affected revenue collection. In 2021, domestic revenue recovered strongly, reaching a peak of 15.7% of GDP. This record revenue performance could be attributed to the one-off payment of royalties of US\$20 million (0.47% of GDP) for a stockpile of iron ore tailings exported by Marampa Mines in that year. With the fallout from the Russia-

Ukraine war and the lingering effect of COVID-19, the gains in domestic revenue were reversed to 13 percent of GDP in 2022 and estimated to be 13.1 percent of GDP in 2023.

Figure17.1: Trend in Revenue to GDP Ratio, 2017-2023



Source: Adapted from the Medium-Term Revenue Strategy 2023-2026, Ministry of Finance

As part of the Government's broad policy efforts to improve the revenue situation and expand the fiscal space, the Medium-Term Revenue Strategy (MTRS) 2023-2027 was developed and approved by the Cabinet in April 2023. Together with the Finance Act 2023, the MTRS implementation commenced in 2023.

Through the MTRS, the Government will pursue the following tax policy and revenue administration measures as articulated in the 2024 Finance Act:

- a)* harmonization of the final withholding tax rates for capital income comprising dividends, interests, and royalties at a rate of 15 percent. Rental income tax will remain at 10 percent and Capital gains tax at 25 percent.
- b)* adjusting the GST registration threshold to NLe500,000 from NLe100,000.
- c)* increase the specific excise duty on petroleum products to a fixed rate of NLe2.40 per litre for diesel and NLe2.80 per litre for gasoline to internalize the external costs of fuels. This implies that the excise duty rate will no longer be used as an adjustor to subsidize fuel prices.
- d)* imposing a specific excise tax on plastics at the rate of NLe16.0 per kilogramme, to protect the environment.
- e)* imposing an excise tax on gambling and casino services at a rate of 10 percent of net betting revenue.
- f)* restoring import duty on imported rice at the rate of 5 percent in 2024 to be increased to 10 percent in 2025 to support local production of rice. The proceeds of this tax will be ring-fenced in the Agricultural Development Fund and used to support the Feed Salone Programme.
- g)* restoring import duty on iron rods at 10 percent from the current rate of 5 percent and on imported cement at 20 percent from 10 percent to encourage domestic production of these imported commodities. The additional amount collected will be deposited

into the Infrastructure Development Fund to support the implementation of infrastructure projects.

- h)* restoring import duty on cooking gas at 5 percent to encourage domestic production.
- i)* imposing an ad valorem export royalty on timber exports based on the value of timber products in addition to the current fixed charge of US\$3000 per container retained as a minimum; and
- j)* imposing an Education Levy of one percent of the value of all contracts for the supply of goods and services and works as a final withholding tax to support investments and predictable financing in the education sector.

ii. Indicator 17.4.1 Debt service as a proportion of exports of goods and services

The past few years have seen the national public debt stock increasing owing to several factors, including the lower-than-expected revenue performance to finance public programmes, depreciation of the national currency, and rising interest rates. As aptly noted by the MTNDP 2024-2030, multiple and successive shocks and policy slippages have heightened public debt vulnerability, with the country classified to be a high risk of both external and overall debt distress.

Given the projected sharp decline in government financing requirements, the stock of public debt is projected to moderate to 93.8 percent of GDP in 2023 from 99.0 percent of GDP in 2022.

To manage the public debt situation, the Government in 2023, adopted an updated Medium-Term Debt Strategy (MTDS) which is aimed at inter alia, limiting domestic borrowing in line with programme projections; limiting external borrowing in line with programme ceilings; continuing to seek grant financing or borrowing concessional loans to finance investments in key sectors of the economy, especially infrastructure⁹.

Among the key targets for reducing the debt sustainability risks in the MTNDP 2024-2030 is to reduce the public debt from 98 percent of GDP to a sustainable threshold of 70 percent of GDP¹⁰.

iii. Indicator 17.8.1: Proportion of individuals using the Internet

The number of internet users increased from 307,000 people in 2017 to approximately 2.67 million people as of June 2022.

iv. Indicator 17.8.3: Proportion of the population with mobile phones

Similar to other indicators, data limitations could not permit a comprehensive status update on this indicator. On this note, the proportion of the population using mobile phones remains the same as in the 2021 report, recorded at 42.5 percent in 2013 and 65 percent in 2020.

This notwithstanding, the Communication, Technology, and Innovation sector, has in the past five years, received significant institutional and policy attention, leading to a major progress

⁹ The MTDS is obtainable at the Ministry of Finance

¹⁰ Page 156, Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030, The Government of Sierra Leone

towards the 2030 agenda. On the institutional front, the Government in 2019 established the Directorate of Science, Technology, and Innovation in the Office of the President to provide the highest political support for digitalisation in the country, and a separate ministry in charge of Technology and Innovation was established in 2023. Other areas of progress include a) enactment of the Cybercrime Act 2021; c) launch of the national digital development policy; d) enactment of a new Communications Act 2022; e) advancement of the Digital Infrastructure of the economy; f) extension of the National Fibre backbone to five more districts, and construction of district metro rings for last mile government services.

Among the remaining challenges is the high cost of digital services, especially mobile data and voice services.

5. New and emerging challenges

As already mentioned, the implementation of the SDGs continues to be challenged by the rising global geopolitical tension and the ensuing macroeconomic uncertainties. The uncertain global economic environment and high food and energy prices continued to weigh on economic growth in 2023.

The high rate of drug addiction and misuse among the youth has emerged as a national security concern that needs concerted efforts to address as a matter of urgency. In November 2022, this alarming rate of the spate of consumption of dangerous drugs, especially among the youth, prompted the Office of National Security to meet with other stakeholders to find practicable solutions to the scourge of drug abuse in Sierra Leone. The widespread consumption and abuse of narcotics minimises their chances of getting skilfully employed. To tackle this rising menace head-on, the government's third big Five Game Changer on *Youth Employment Scheme* has programmed a special policy result area for Addressing drug and substance abuse. Other national institutions such as the Ministry of Social Welfare and the National Drugs Law Enforcement Agency are also implementing strategic programmes in this direction. These include establishing rehabilitation centers for drug addicts; livelihood support for persons living with disability; and cracking down on youth in drug abuse.

Sierra Leone remains highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change and extreme weather conditions. Climate change effect negatively disrupts the farming calendar thereby increasing the country's vulnerabilities to, especially food insecurity.

6. Means of implementation

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes the crucial roles of inclusive participation from a wide- range of stakeholders and effective development cooperation for delivering on the goals. It is on this note that the Sierra Leone SDG Acceleration Roadmap and the MTNDP 2024-2030 emphasised the strategic role of strenghtened development cooperation

and stakeholders' mobilization for accelerated delivery of the SDGs. The MTNDP 2024-2030 has laid out the platform for advancing implementation of the SDG as summarised below.

As already established, the first half of the 2030 agenda and the previous national development plan 2019-2023 were challenged by financing constraints, largely due to the multiple crises faced by the global community since 2020. At the Global level, for instance, SDG investment requirement has risen from \$2.5 trillion before COVID-19 to more than \$ 6 trillion annually to date, thereby making financing and implementation particularly daunting for least developed nations like Sierra Leone. The current Sierra Leone MTNDP has an estimated **financing gap of US\$2.56 billion** for seven years.

Thus, drawing from the aforementioned experience and the lessons learned, the Government will optimise key principles for guiding national efforts toward the 2030 agenda. These are:

i. Exploring innovative financing instrument

Given the financing requirement to deliver on the MTNDP and the SDGs by 2030, and the projected domestic revenue (domestic revenue strategy already discussed under goal 17), the government will strengthen the implementation of the Sierra Leone Integrated National Financing Framework (INFF), which has multiple innovative financing instruments for both public and private financing options.

The Public Investment Programme (PIP) framework which consists of the Domestic Capital Expenditure estimates is the vehicle through which capital projects outlined in the National Development Plan are funded. The PIP framework is processed and managed by the Public Investment Management Directorate of MoPED. Key areas of progress

- a) comprehensive Public Investment Management Assessment leading to the production of the National Public Investment Management Policy to guide the operations of this system, including the formulation of capital projects
- b) a National Public Investment Management Operational Manual developed and PIP cascaded to local councils

Through the effective utilisation of these instruments, the resource envelopes for PIPs will be clearly ascertained, and funding gaps identified and better managed.

On the INFF front, the government of Sierra Leone has traditionally prioritised domestic revenue mobilisation through key policy reforms, including measures to strengthen the country's tax administration and revenue collection. Sierra Leone has used the INFF approach since 2020 when the country's INFF was developed, informed by the 2018 National Development Financing Assessment.

Through the implementation of INFF *Joint SDGs Funds Project on strengthening domestic resource mobilization*, the capacity of local councils to effectively mobilise local revenue has been enhanced and advocacy on tax compliance intensified both at the local and centre levels. The role of the SDGs Ambassadors proved handy in local advocacy on tax compliance. The implementation of the INFF initiative has helped expand the tax base by formalizing the informal sector and extending the Social Security Scheme to cover informal sector workers. This has led to improved financial inclusion, digitization, and financial literacy.

In 2023, through the INFF initiative, the government and the UNDP completed two key Studies: i) **Assessing diaspora investment potential in Sierra Leone** to look beyond remittances, focusing on diaspora bonds and other Investment options, and ii) **Undertaking an SDG Investor Mapping** to inform the government and partners on the sectors that can be prioritised for increased private sector investment. The outcomes of these studies will guide key strategies to scale up financing for the SDGs in the country.

Also, since 2022, Sierra Leone has scaled up efforts to harness the country's blue economy potential, developing a Blue Economy Strategy with a comprehensive National Action Plan. In addition to optimised climate finance mechanisms, this will be crucial in advancing the Government's climate resilience, energy transition, and sustainable food system agenda. The Blue economy strategy prescribes several climate finance-related instruments such as the blue bond, green bond, and initiatives such as carbon sequestration. We believe that optimizing these climate finance mechanisms will be crucial in advancing the country's climate resilience, energy transition, and sustainable food system agenda.

Going forward with the new plan implementation, MoPED, in partnership with Fambul Tok will continue to roll out a *people-centred local development financing framework*, targeting the participation of village and chiefdom communities through a *people-planning process* model commonly referred to as the *Wan Fambul Framework* in the local parlance. Principally informed by local social cohesion and peacebuilding entry points, the framework is a community development financing model that has been successfully piloted by Fambul Tok in four chiefdoms. Fambul Tok is a national NGO specialised in community peace constellation, community mobilisation and chiefdom planning process.

As part of the Innovative Financing mechanism, the government has instituted initiatives to maximise revenues from the management of National Mineral Resource Wealth. The Sierra Leone Mines and Minerals Development and Management Corporation has, therefore, established a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), the Mineral Wealth Fund Sierra Leone Limited, to manage the commercial and business interests of the Government. This will ensure the efficient management of the country's mineral resources to maximise revenues from the mining sector. Under this arrangement, the Government will no longer depend solely on the 3 percent royalty levied on mineral exports but will also collect revenues on the income earned by the SPV through its investments in key mining projects across the country. The revenue generated by the Corporation will be deposited into the Transformational Development Fund for the financing of transformational projects described in the Public Financial Management Act 2016.

Also, the Ministry of Finance through its recently established Climate Finance Unit will coordinate and facilitate the mobilisation of international public and private climate finance to complement domestic resources in the fight against climate change, and to support the SDGs implementation. Additionally, the Ministry will collaborate with the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change to develop policy frameworks and regulations relating to climate finance as follows:

- a) develop a Climate Finance Strategy.

- b) develop a Carbon Market and Non-Market Trade policy framework to facilitate Sierra Leone's participation in the international carbon market, which will complement climate finance mobilisation efforts, locally and internationally
- c) introduce Climate Budget Tagging to track and trace Government expenditures on climate change. This will provide evidence to development partners on the national commitment to the fight climate change and encourage them to provide additional financial and technical support; and
- d) undertake a Climate-Sensitive Public Investment Management Assessment (C-PIMA) with support from the IMF to inform Government decisions on investing in resilient infrastructure.

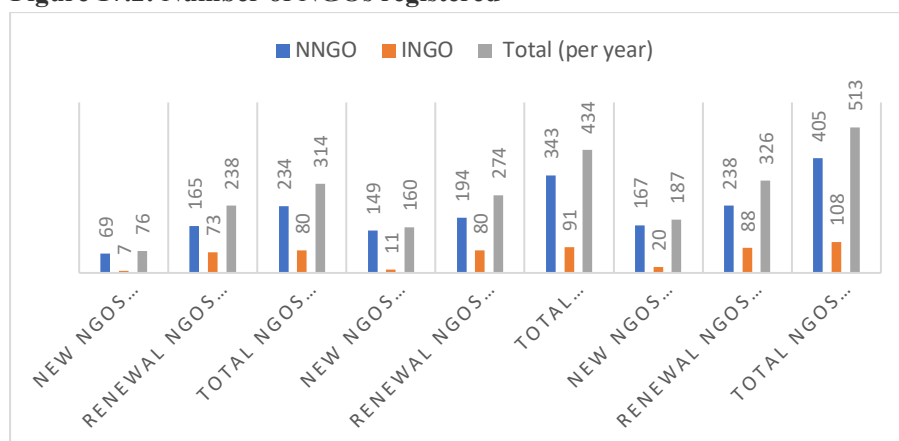
ii. enhancing development cooperation

Development assistance is increasingly becoming sector or programme targeted, with the gap between commitment and actual amount disbursed increasing over the years and widening by the global economic upheaval. Although development assistance remains unpredictable and fluctuates in volume, it remains crucial to Sierra Leone's development aspirations. For the remaining period of the 2030 agenda, the strategic objective of the government of Sierra Leone for development cooperation is to “encourage joint programming and division of labour among donor agencies to reduce fragmentation and duplication of activities”. To this end, the government will review and strengthen the operation of the Development Cooperation Framework for effective sector coordination, monitoring, and reporting of donor agency operations. Also, MoPED is currently working on organising a Consultative Conference to mobilise partnerships and resources for the implementation of the new MTNDP.

As noted in the 2021 Sierra Leone VNR Report, *Non-Governmental organisations (NGO)* are a medium through which a great share of external assistance is being channelled¹¹. During the period 2019-2023, the coordination of NGOs was strengthened, leading to progress in some areas. Among the key areas of progress are a web-based database of NGO operations by sector, region, and district/communities developed; a partnership mapping system was put in place, key NGO platforms such as for WASH, health and education sectors were well-coordinated with regular meetings held; and the NGO Regulatory Framework was revised for the period 2023-2028. As illustrated in the chart below, the period saw an increase in the number of NGOs registered from 314 in 2019 to 513 in 2023.

¹¹

Figure 17.2: Number of NGOs registered



Source: NGO Directorate, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development

Going forward with the SDGs Acceleration roadmap and the MTNDP, the Government will scale up the coordination of NGO operations through the digitalising the NGO registration and information management system, strengthening spot visit and monitoring of NGO operations, strengthening the operational capacity of NGO Desk Officers across sectors and district, and strengthening the alignment of development assistance and NGO operations to the MTNDP.

iii. Strengthening the private sector for trade and sustainable development

The review notes that progress in this area has been sluggish and there is more room for improvement. For instance, the share of manufacturing in GDP only increased from 2 percent in 2019 to 8 percent in 2020 and 10 percent in 2023, while the World Bank Doing Business ranking for starting a business improved from 81 to 51 out of 190 countries. Other areas of major gains are the review of the national industrial and cooperative policies, the special economic zone policy drafted, and the agribusiness policy and national trade policy and strategy were developed and approved by the cabinet. Also, the National Micro Finance MUNAFA fund was rolled out, targeting 5,328 beneficiaries for loans; 10 financial service providers were recruited, and 1,000 SMEs owned by women trained in business development services.

While these developments were geared towards reviving the private sector, and repositioning Sierra Leone to harness emerging opportunities in the Global Market, there remain crucial challenges to overcome. These challenges include limited access to finance and general macroeconomic development challenges of exchange rate fluctuations and inflation.

iv. Promoting volunteerism as a cross-cutting means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda

The government of Sierra Leone and its development partners fully recognize the crucial role of volunteerism as a powerful and cross-cutting instrument for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The country has an existing legal and policy environment that encourages the spirit of volunteerism among civil society and youth to contribute to the development process. Among

key legal and policy instruments for promoting volunteerism are the recently launched National Volunteering Policy, the MTNDP (2024-2030), and the National Youth Service Strategy and Roadmap for Implementation. The National Volunteering Policy serves as a framework for the engagement of volunteers and the promotion of volunteerism throughout the country. Its primary objective is to bolster the role of volunteers and Volunteer involving organisations in contributing to national development. A major organisation that actively works with the Government of Sierra Leone and partners in promoting volunteering in Sierra Leone is the VIONet.

As a network of Volunteer involving organizations, VIONet provides a platform for: i) collective and coordinated answers and joining initiatives for volunteerism; ii) exchanging information and experience on volunteerism and policy-related initiatives and ideas; iii) strengthening its membership; iv) supporting local and international campaigns; and v) improving regional networking and solidarity activities. The key areas of intervention are education, environment, climate change, health, hygiene and sanitation, disaster management, Employment and skills development, peace and security, youth and women empowerment, gender equality, food security and nutrition.

To leverage the potential of volunteerism as a cross-cutting means of implementing the 2030 Agenda, the government of Sierra Leone, Volunteer-related organisations, and other partners will continue to mainstream volunteerism in key strategies, programmes, and policies. Tools will be developed, and partnerships and capacities built to enhance the recognition and promotion of volunteerism, and the measurement of its contributions to the SDGs achievement in the country. Existing volunteering initiatives and programmes will be strengthened, and more investment will be made to maximize the mobilization of national and international volunteers to contribute to national development programmes, and peacebuilding efforts and enhance knowledge transfer.

7. Conclusion and next steps

This report presents the findings from the 2024 Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Sierra Leone. The review process covered the Sierra Leone Strategic Policy Context and the policy and enabling environment for implementing the goals in the country, including the national development coordination architecture.

The Medium-Term National Development Plan 2024-2030 is the main vehicle for operationalising the 2030 agenda and the SDGs on the ground. We have carefully aligned the Medium-Term National Development Plan with the SDGs, especially the Sierra Leone SDG acceleration Road Map.

We also undertook an analysis of the country's progress on the goals and targets, especially the priority goals for the 2024 HLPF process. Given the absence of recent data to ascertain progress on the indicators and targets, progress was ascertained on a total of thirty-seven indicators from

eleven goals. A major part of this analysis covered the progress at the policy and institutional fronts, albeit not necessarily counted as indicators.

The review also undertook a synthesis of existing evaluation and assessment reports to gauge the impact of SDGs policy interventions on the welfare of the people. Another important aspect of the review process is the use CSO structures to undertake district-level mobilisation and local level data collection. A key component of each district level mobilisation and local-level data collection was accompanied by sensitisation on the relevance of the SDGs on community radio. This strangled the whole country approach to the process.

The review shows that progress towards the SDGs targets have been slow and sluggish, and many instances, reversed due to the multiple and overlapping socioeconomic shocks face by the global economy.

Enhancing and accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

The 2024 VNR exercise sheds light on the means of implementation in the country and acknowledges that funding challenges will remain if innovative mechanisms are not put in place.

In this regard, the government will pursue the implementation of the Sierra Leone Integrated National Financing Framework, which has multiple innovative financing instruments while intensifying the fight against corruption and illicit financial flows. As noted in the *Financing and Financing, Partnerships for Implementation and Risks Management* of the MTNDP, all of these initiatives will be accompanied by a range of additional policy measures, including¹²:

- i. Rebranding of Sierra Leone as a destination for investment
- ii. Implementing the Sierra Leone Blue Economy strategy and its related financing instruments such as the blue bond, carbon finance, and climate finance strategies
- iii. Strengthening the mechanism to access climate finance for the implementation of climate change interventions
- iv. Supporting the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement
- v. Rationalise the Public Investment Programmes. Getting priorities and sequencing right is extremely critical in the efficient use of resources for transforming the economy
- vi. Strengthen external relations and economic diplomacy will position the country to attract increased foreign investments and partnership opportunities that will provide much-needed resources to fill the financing gap of **US\$2.56 billion for the MTNDP**

¹² Page 189, Sierra Leone MTNDP 2024-2030

Summary of challenges

1. The late commencement of the review process was a major challenge which put additional pressure on the technical team
2. Resources for the process were extremely limited and arrived very late, making it impossible to complete all necessary tasks within the available timeframe.
3. The country's weak private sector continues to constrain revenue generation, thereby limiting the fiscal space for SDGs implementation
4. The Sierra Leone Economy is yet adequately diversified and remains highly vulnerable to external shocks
5. Data systems and reporting capacity remain challenged. The lack of current data to provide status updates on the indicators owing to the differential timing of this current round of reporting with the frequency and timing of the different surveys conducted by the national statistical office.

key lessons learned

Several important lessons can be gleaned from the 2024 VNR process, providing valuable insights for future efforts.

- i. One critical lesson is the importance of integrating local contexts and priorities into the national development agenda. Tailoring strategies to the specific needs and challenges of the local communities has proven to be more impactful in addressing the needs of the people and enhancing local ownership.
- ii. The 2024 VNR process for Sierra Leone started very late due to the country's engagement in the formulation of the current MTNDP 2024-2030. This late starter badly affected the review process, including the limited time to access all relevant evaluation reports for a better-informed review report.
- iii. While partnership and development cooperation remains crucial, the unpredictability of partner resources should be a reminder for state actors to allocate sufficient funds for the VNR process and general SDGs implementation.
- iv. Data gaps remain a binding constraint in the implementation of the SDGs. Data is indeed a powerful resource that drives change and catalyses action in development processes – policy design, planning, monitoring, and evaluation.
- v. The poor performance on the indicators amid the ongoing macroeconomic challenges calls for additional and sustainable funding opportunities to enhance transformational national development.
- vi. It also brings to the fore the critical role of international cooperation and partnerships. Achieving the SDGs necessitates adequate funding, technical expertise, and capacity-building support from the global community, including north-south and south-south partnerships. Sierra Leone's performance on the goals underscores the value of leveraging international partnerships to mobilize resources, share best practices, and enhance local capacities.

- vii. The need for private sector development and partnership with private sector operatives is glaring

Recommendations and action plan

Key recommendations for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs in Sierra Leone within the framework of the MTNDP 2024-2030 and the Government's 5 game changers are:

1. Accelerate the implementation of the country's Integrated National Financing Framework.
2. Support Statistics Sierra Leone to provide accurate, clear, and timely data from censuses, surveys, and administrative records on social, health, demographic, economic, and financial activities of the state.
3. Leverage the country's demographic dividend, the blue economy and the African Continental Free Trade Area potentials to be the mainstay for the SDGs, putting in readiness for off-the-shelf bankable projects.
4. Explore funding and partnership opportunities for the Sierra Leone Blue Economy Strategy and optimise the climate finance opportunities
5. Scale up sensitivity to climate resilience, renewable energy, gender, and youth development.
6. Scale up efforts to attract more private investment, strengthen property rights and good institutions; protect the rule of law, pursuing peace and national cohesion.
7. Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Governance institutions to plan, execute, and monitor SDG-related activities effectively, while implementing robust mechanisms to combat corruption and ensure transparency in resource allocation and usage through regular audits and public disclosure of progress
8. Strengthen tax systems and public financial management to increase domestic revenues, while simultaneously seeking support from international donors and development partners to align aid with national priorities and build local capacities through public-private partnerships.
9. Intensify Civic Engagement and Participation, especially the active participation of civil society organizations, local communities, and marginalized groups in the SDGs implementation process.

The next steps include:

1. Organise post-VNR stakeholder engagement on the lessons learned from the voluntary reviews process and the outcome of the 2024 HLPF.
2. Develop key action points with specific timelines for addressing the key issues emerging from the Review process
3. Institute Technical and Steering and Steering Committees on the Integrated National Financing Framework
4. Organise a technical meeting for the statistics Sierra Leone on how to address and close the huge data gaps for the SDGs

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9. Annexes.

Annex 1: Data Collection Instrument

Annex A1: A list of evaluation reports synthesized

Annex 2B: Report on the Welfare of People Living with Disabilities and other Vulnerable Groups: Ascertaining the impact of social protection interventions on their welfare

