



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Radical Inclusion Policy for pregnant schoolgirls and parent learners

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Sierra Leone

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

The Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) is accountable for policy implementation and will ensure leadership and oversight of the implementation process

5. Key words (5-15 words): Please add key descriptive words around aims, modalities, target groups etc. *

Gender equality, adolescent pregnancy, parenting learners, policy, inclusion, SDG4, SDG5, Sierra Leone

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Approved in April 2021, the National Policy on Radical Inclusion in schools aims to provide a roadmap for the day-to-day operations of schools to ensure inclusion and positive experiences for all students regardless of their gender and status in society. The policy emphasizes the inclusion of marginalized groups: pregnant girls and parent learners, children with disabilities, children from rural and underserved areas, and children from low-income families. It provides guidelines for decision-making and streamlining processes so that schools throughout Sierra Leone are accessible to and inclusive of all children without stigma, harassment, intolerance, and exclusion of any kind.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

The policy focuses on marginalized students, especially girls who are pregnant or have been pregnant and are parent learners.

In 2013, Sierra Leone ranked among the ten countries with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in the world. Of girls aged 15–19 years, 28% were pregnant or had already had a birth. Adolescent pregnancy was believed to increase during the Ebola epidemic; in one survey rates rose by up to 65% in some of the most-affected areas of Sierra Leone – although these numbers were disputed by the government.

Beyond the significant health impacts, adolescent pregnancy is one of the leading causes of girls dropping out of school, impacting livelihoods and limiting socioeconomic opportunities for girls, their families and their societies. Moreover, a ban established in 2014 by Sierra Leone's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology on visibly pregnant girls' return to school or sitting of exams further created a barrier to their education.

However, this decision was challenged in the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS) Court of Justice, which ordered the immediate overturn of the policy in December 2019.

In March 2020, the Government overturned the policy with immediate effect. This decision provided the basis for a policy on radical inclusion and comprehensive safety of all children in the education system.

A radical inclusion policy was adopted in March 2021. This policy aims to support girls who are or have been pregnant, and parent learners to stay in school.

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation?

*

The policy is based on:

- the assessment of evidence gathered during the situational analysis exercise noting the current state of educational marginalization of certain groups in Sierra Leone.
- extensive national dialogues with constituencies across the country before and during the development of the policy.
- existing best practices in inclusive education policy.
- Sierra Leone's national, international, Regional, and sub-Regional legal obligations

The goal of this policy will be achieved through the following four sub-objectives:

- Create inclusive learning environments.
- Target support to vulnerable learners.
- Engage families and communities.
- Enable policy environment and effective implementation.

The policy aims at:

1. Supporting beneficiaries' individual needs through:

- The facilitation of access to sexual and reproductive health services, including the provision of comprehensive sexuality education at school and in the community
- The creation of leadership programmes to boost girls' confidence and to empower girls.
- Allowing pregnant girls to return to school after giving birth and supporting them to stay in schools.
- The recruitment and training of women teachers who will serve as role models for girls.
- The provision of bridge programmes that prepare pregnant girls, lactating adolescent mothers, and out of school children to re-enter formal schooling.
- The deployment of non-teaching staff and classroom assistant to provide additional support in classroom
- Provision of tuition waivers in government and government assisted schools
- Development a Toolkit for Supporting Pregnant and Parent Learners for supporting pupils who are or have been pregnant, and parent learners, to be utilized by: schools; teacher-counsellors; and the pregnant or parent learner's named support person.

2. Tackling stigma and challenging norms through :

- appropriate involvement and engagement of children and adolescents to maximize their own learning and prompting attitudinal change in the classrooms.
- parent volunteers acting as community champions.
- community engagement opportunities.
- school Management Committees (SMCs) and Boards of Governors (BoGs): as the formal bridge between schools and communities, these committees will play a role in dealing with stigma and negative perceptions against marginalized children.
- different community-based structures such as the Community Child Welfare Committees.

3. Fostering an enabling policy environment through strong national leadership, civil society engagement, local ownership

The policy is expected to be implemented during five years. After five years, there will be a policy review to assess the sustainability of the policy.

The management and coordination of the implementation is primarily be led by the government through the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), local government officials, civil society and school authorities. The MBSSE will work in concert and partnership with other relevant actors within government such as the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development, Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Health and Sanitation, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Teaching Service Commission and Ministry of Finance.

This policy is financed through, an IDA US\$50 million grant and US\$15.97 million equivalent from FCDO, Irish Aid, and the EC through a World Bank-administered Sierra Leone Education Multi-Donor Trust Fund, focusing on addressing education sector challenges and transforming the education system over the long term.

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

The policy is expected to be implemented during five years. After five years, there will be a policy review to assess the sustainability of the policy.

Because the practice is in its inception phase, the activities are yet to begin, and no assessment has been carried out so far. It is an important first step, though, in ensuring girls' right to education.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

The activities are yet to start. However, after five years of implementation, a policy evaluation will be conducted to assess the sustainability of the policy and review what needs to be changed so that implementation can be improved and enhanced.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

Although, this policy is in its initial implementation phase, it represents governments engagement towards radical inclusion and gender equality in education. The policy paves the way for governments in the region to include justice and equity in their education programs.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

A Step in the Rights’ Direction: Advocacy, Negotiation, and Money as Tools for Realising the Right to Education for Pregnant Girls in Sierra Leone During the Ebola Epidemic:

https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-97637-2_26L

Lifting ban on pregnant girls in schools:

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)30856-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)30856-4/fulltext)

Sierra Leone: implementation of Beijing education commitments at the national level, 1995-2020, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374503>