



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.) *

Institution building for teacher professional development in Sierra Leone

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

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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) *

European Commission - Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA)

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

Teaching Service Commission, professional development, teaching standards, teaching, teachers, pre-service, in-service, certification, institution building, mentoring, recruitment, deployment

6. What makes it a best practice? *

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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 Teaching Service Commission in Sierra Leone was created by the government as a response to long-standing institutional weaknesses around the teaching profession. It was given the role of taking over responsibility for human resource functions, with the goal of creating a highly professional semi-autonomous institution as a way to move toward a merit-based approach to human resources management. These were a widely acknowledged barrier to improved management and service delivery in the sector that had resulted in extremely weak institutional governance of teacher deployment, recruitment and professional development. Records-keeping was done by hand, with limited quality control, leading to ineffective career development for teachers and poor management of key functions such as pensions. In addition, more than half of all primary school teachers were recruited and managed directly by communities and were not on government payrolls or records. There was little information available about the quality of the teacher work force and no agreement on professional standards. A wide range of organisations at the central and districts levels held overlapping responsibilities for teacher support.

At the time the EU sector support programme was being developed, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) was not functional. It had almost no staff, little budget and no equipment. Initial selection of the heads and deputy heads of TSC departments was carried out, however, little further development of the TSC had occurred. A technical assistance programme and a programme estimate in support of the education sector in Sierra Leone were created with the intent of revitalising teacher support and building the capacity of sector institutions at the central and decentralized levels. These two components (TA and programme estimate) operated alongside a general budget support/state-building programme which included education indicators that addressed staffing levels and gradual operationalization of the Teaching Service Commission.

The Teaching Service Commission led the overall process with support from the EU TA team. The first steps were to bring together key stakeholders at all levels of the system to develop an agreed set of professional standards. The process involved the teacher training colleges, the teacher unions, Ministry of education personnel at the central and district levels, parents, NGOs and development partners. This approach had the advantage of getting broad-based buy-in from the very start and placed the TSC in a position to be seen as collaborative and able to listen, and yet capable of getting things done. It achieved the dual objective of establishing an agreed set of goals around teaching, while also creating a shared process that proved applicable to subsequent follow-up activities. Further, the exercise led to a shared vocabulary around responsibilities and goals; it marked the emergence of the TSC as a key institution within the education system.

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?

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The Technical Assistance programme began in February 2017 and ran until April 2022. It was carried out in 4 of the 16 districts in Sierra Leone, although some of the activities were national in scope and yet others were taken to scale by other development partners. Programme preparation took place in the aftermath of the Ebola crisis that closed schools in Sierra Leone in 2014 and 2015, and the period of programme implementation included another set of school closures in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This led to the postponement of some activities which were ultimately carried out virtually.

However, the consensus around what are widely seen as a strong set of professional standards led to broad engagement on a set of follow-up activities. Stakeholder consultations were again held to redesign the syllabi in the Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) to reflect the new standards. A number of additional activities were undertaken concurrently. A teacher certification programme was developed, gaining strong support from management and from the teachers' unions. A comprehensive human resources manual was developed. The professional standards were extended to include standards for teacher supervision, which led in turn to creation of a 'whole school' approach to instructional supervision, and the training of school principals in the use of the standards. Other activities that grew out of the focus on professional standards included development of a mentoring programme for new teachers and development of new evaluation tools based on the standards. Three completely new TTC courses based on the standards were developed around teaching of initial literacy and numeracy, as well as sciences.

Other stakeholders in the reform process included relevant ministry departments, teachers and school leaders, institutions at central and local levels involved in school administration, the Teachers' Union and other representative bodies, national NGOs and communities and parents.

This EU support was provided in complementary fashion with other development partner engagement. GPE provided significant financial support that enabled the staffing and initial functioning of the TSC. The World Bank and DfID helped to scale up the training of school principals and teachers to national scale. The overall EU programme for the sector had a budget of 29 million euros, which included a separately managed TVET component and a Programme Estimate under which, among other activities, 100 primary and junior secondary schools were renovated and equipment and teaching and learning materials were developed and distributed.

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 key outputs produced over the course of this project were the National Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders, the Human Resources Manual for Teachers and School Leaders, and the National Teacher Policy. These elements have led to significant improvements in teacher management—notably in records management and in recruitment and deployment of teachers under the government payroll; there is anecdotal evidence to suggest some improvements in teaching practice, but no evaluation of classroom practice has been carried out to date (a planned evaluation was delayed by the pandemic). Teacher Training Colleges have been enabled to share best practice and new courses focused on foundational learning. They have been given support to establish Teacher Resource Centres with a strong digital component and community outreach. The TSC is now adequately staffed at the central level, and also has district offices set up in all 16 districts of the country.

The process of institution building is ongoing. Clear progress was achieved as noted in this case study, but important challenges remain. The community-school teachers (outside of the government payroll) have not yet been integrated into the functioning of the ministry, and while they have been included in in-service training, their participation remains sporadic. The improvements in pre-service professional development seen under the project have not yet been extended to in-service professional development in a consistent manner. There are still too many overlapping jurisdictions, and the system remains fragmented. An example is that the teacher training colleges now come under the responsibility of a newly created Ministry of Technical and Higher Education rather than the Teaching Service Commission. Nonetheless, an important shift has taken place. Human Resources processes have been digitized and operate far more effectively and transparently. The teacher training colleges have closer communications with one another than in the past, with aligned course offerings and a new focus on learning outcomes and classroom practice. Most importantly, the Teaching Service Commission is now a functional institution that has assumed responsibility for management of the teaching force. It has become a stabilizing force within the sector and is well positioned for supporting ongoing improvements in access and quality well into the future.

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? *

This good practice case is most notable for its support of a government-led reform process. It demonstrates that the path to achieve transformational change is through consensus-building, institution-strengthening, and the setting of clear and achievable standards. It focuses, not on production of discrete outputs but on building strong sectoral institutions through which key outputs and outcomes can be sustainably delivered beyond the project lifespan. This case also demonstrates the value of taking the time to build in a participative approach which involves all key stakeholders from the start. By early 2019, just two years into implementation of the programme, the Teaching Service Commission took over all responsibility for teacher management and teacher human resources management in Sierra Leone. The role of TA in this case has been to support and respond to the TSC, which has led the process. Scalable, transformational change in the teaching profession needs this kind of government-led institutional reform, and development partner support needs to be responsive to this.

A key lesson learned regarding in-service professional development is that the role of the TSC may need to be revisited. The TSC can help to create the guidelines for facilitators and teacher trainers, but it does not have the capacity to manage and supervise all in-service support. This will require the creation of a network of service providers. The pilot exercise supported under this project regarding Saturday classes demonstrated that there is high teacher demand for professional development and significant existing capacity among potential service providers. Many NGOs and faculties of education currently offer teacher professional development programs, but there is no coordinating structure—which the TSC could help to establish and support.

This case also demonstrates the need for consistent, long-term engagement in the policy dialogue. For instance, despite its many achievements, no specific in-service training programme was developed to upgrade community-school teachers. This was a reflection of the reality that the TSC had limited focus on these teachers, which it saw (and continues to see) as lowering overall professional standards, and the government was concerned that upgrades would lead to pressure to support these teachers through government payrolls. The EU and other partners have long called for development of a pathway to integrate community schools and teachers into the public education system. This needs to be seen as a continuing priority, with the policy dialogue going forward informed by a deeper understanding of the reasons behind the constraints and concerns of both the TSC and the government.

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)? *

Transformational change within the teaching profession, i.e., substantive improvements in results-focused teaching combined with transparent human resources management practices, requires strong institutions. This means institutional reform and system strengthening that links national level systems for teacher management and quality assurance to the changes at scale that are needed in schools and classrooms.

Teacher professional development in Sierra Leone has taken a significant step forward with the emergence of the TSC as a strong independent institution for the revitalization of the profession. Gains have been most prominent for pre-service programmes where new courses, increased support for classroom practice, and greater sharing of good practices among the teacher training colleges are reason for real optimism. The new Teacher Resource Centres have the potential to further increase the relevance of pre-service teacher training and to usher in the digital age. These gains should now be extended to in-service training so that teachers’ professional development can present a unified whole and help to move Sierra Leone beyond its current two-tiered public sector/community-school structure which has significantly impeded greater progress toward overall learning goals.

EU engagement has focused on responding to government-led institutional reforms, ensuring ownership of the new processes, and a participative approach for developing new standards and quality control. Going forward, a continuing robust engagement by the EU in the policy dialogue within the sector will be needed to ensure that the professional development gains achieved to date are extended to all teachers, and that the institutional strengthening seen in the emergence of the TSC can be broad-based enough to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to learn.

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. *

EU. 2020. Mid-term evaluation of the project: Support to the Education Sector in Sierra Leone. Final report. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/412424_final_report.pdf

EU. 2022. Technical Assistance in support of the education sector in Sierra Leone. Final Report. <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/bbep.pdf>

UNESCO. 2020. Republic of Sierra Leone: Education sector analysis: assessing the enabling environment for gender equality. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375434>