

SIERRA LEONE

STATUS REPORT

ON

**YOUTH AND ADULT EDUCATION
ISSUES, TRENDS, CHALLENGES**

PREPARED

FOR

**THE CONFINITEA VI AFRICAN PREPARATORY
CONFERENCE**

NAIROBI: 5 - 7 NOVEMBER 2008

**THEME: "THE POWER OF YOUTH AND ADULT
LEARNING FOR AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT"**

1.0. **Background and context**

At the time of the Fifty International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) in Hamburg 1997, Sierra Leone was embroiled in what has been described as, a brutal civil war. The causes, course and consequences of the war have been critically analysed; see for example, Abdullah I. (ed.) (1997), Gberie, L. (1999), Richards P. (1996), Zack - Williams A.B, and S.P. Riley (1993).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was established after eleven years of war concluded that, years of bad governance, endemic corruption and denial of basic human rights “created the deplorable conditions that made conflict inevitable”. (Report of the Sierra Leone TRC Vol.1).

As the war ravaged the country and brutalized its people, delegates at the conference in Hamburg were discussing issues that were pertinent to preventing wars and promoting the culture of peace. Building the defences of peace in people’s minds, according to UNESCO, is a sure way of preventing wars. The culture of peace is a set of convictions, a morality and an individual and collective state of mind, a way of being, acting and reacting (UNESCO).

The culture of peace assumes a democratic culture which is a precondition for sustainable human development.

1.1. **New Education Trajectory**

It was during the civil war in the early 1990s that a new education system for Sierra Leone was unveiled. The new system (the 6-3-3-4 system of education) was grounded in a new education policy (1995) and a plan of action (1997-2006). The new education system was necessitated by the need to widen access to educational opportunities for all-children, youth and adults. In particular it sought to address the critical issue illiteracy which was a serious impediment to human and overall national development. For the first time in the history of educational development in Sierra Leone, adult and non-formal education received official policy recognition (GOSL, 1995).

The transformation of the education system was partly a response to the political and economic situations which led to the outbreak of war and also to the demands of the Education For All (EFA) movement that called for a renewal of education system and by extension a rethink of what was taught and learned. The EFA conference in Jomtien in 1990 greatly impacted on the education reforms in Sierra Leone. These reforms were to shape the education landscape after the war.

2.0. **Post-Conflict Educational Development**

Sierra Leone is a post-conflict country engaged in reconstruction of the educational system ravaged by the civil war. Educational institutions, programmes and services are currently being renewed. The priority of the Government, since the end of the war, had shifted from emergency rehabilitation programmes to designing and implementing sustainable long-term development policies, plans and capacities. These are evidenced by a number of legal and institutional reforms including the following:

- Declaration of Free Primary Education by 2000

- Establishment by Act of Parliament of the National Council for Technical, Vocational and other Academic Awards (NCTVA) by 2001. The NCTVA is mandated to set examinations and ensure parity of esteem for technical and vocational training.
- Establishment by Act of Parliament of regional polytechnics with the aim of diversifying human resource development for various vocations and careers. The Polytechnics Act of 2001 established five polytechnic institutions.
- Reform of tertiary education with the enactment of the Tertiary Education Act in 2001.

Although these reforms were, in general, significant it was the Education Act, 2004 that leveraged adult and non-formal education to a position of official and legal prominence. The Act makes provision for an autonomous Non-Formal Education Council, and provided impetus to the many Non-Governmental and Community-Based Organizations that had implemented various adult and non-formal education programmes throughout the country. A study by Ekundayo - Thompson, Lamin, Turay and Musa (2006) identified and analysed various literacy and adult education programmes in a post-conflict situation. The study identified five types of programmes with various combinations as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1: **Types of adult and other out-of-school education programmes implemented by 2001.**

Programme Type	Regions of Implementation				Total
	Western Area	Northern Province	Southern Province	Eastern Province	
Adult literacy only	68	22	43	69	202
Vocational skills training only	12	38	20	1	71
Non-Formal Primary Ed. (NPSE)	4	9	15	-	28
Adult Literacy and Vocational Skills Training	83	34	59	90	266
Adult Literacy and NFPE	5	5	3		13
All Types	172	108	140	160	580

Source: Ekundayo-Thompson J.D., Lamin, M.B., Turay E.D.A., Musa, OB (2006)

Other programmes implemented during the war included:

- The Literacy and Civic Education for Women
- The Accelerated Literacy Programme
- Literacy in Indigenous Languages
- Functional Political Literacy and Civic Education

These programmes and the experiences generated during the war largely determined the nature, objectives and scope of the current landscape of literacy and adult education programmes. The current programmes can be put in one of the following four categories.

1. Pre-war initiated programmes
2. War-related problem/need oriented programmes
3. Social issues response programmes
4. National development-policy related programmes

The increasing levels of poverty and the policy responses including the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) have largely determined the trend towards vocational literacy and literacy and livelihood.

2.1. Poverty Alleviation and Literacy/Adult Education Programme Responses

The Government's Poverty Reduction as elaborated in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (GOSL, 2004) has undoubtedly influenced the design and delivery of adult education programmes.

The Government has given 'top priority to adult and non-formal learning' as reflected in the goal of the Education For All (EFA) National Action Plan, to achieve an overall adult literacy rate of 50 percent by 2015. The following are identified as priority areas of intervention:

- Identification and rehabilitation of existing adult education centres and Community Education Centres (CECs)
- Construction of additional buildings for adult and non-formal education
- Deployment of an adult education officer to each of the 18 inspectorial districts

- Establishment of a National Council for Adult and Non-Formal Education. (This has already been done as provided in the 2004 Education Act)
- Recruitment training and payment of 1,050 literacy and continuing education personnel
- Preparation and distribution of learning materials and provision of furniture and equipment
- Integration of occupational skills into the literacy curriculum (Bennel, Harding and Rogers-Wright)

3.0. **Political Will for Literacy**

The Government has committed itself to reducing the high rate of adult illiteracy. According to the 2004 Population and Housing Census (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2006), the national literacy rate improved from 13 percent in 1985 to 39 percent in 2004. Although the rate of increase is a mere 26 percent in nineteen years, it is somewhat significant given the largely voluntary nature of adult literacy provision which is generally small in scope. For example, two of the key providers of literacy reached only 5,020 learners in five years (1998 – 2003).

The Islamic Development Bank-sponsored Illiteracy Eradication Project (IEP) provided learning opportunities for 5,140 learners between 2003 and 2005. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology)

A “Small is Beautiful” approach to illiteracy eradication is untenable given the high rate of illiteracy especially among women. Table 2 indicates the current literacy situation.

Table 2: **Literacy by Sex**

	Literate	Illiterate	NS
Both	39%	60%	1%
Males	49%	50%	1%
Females	29%	70%	1%

Source: 2004 Population and Housing Census Analytical Report on Education and Literacy Republic of Sierra Leone, 2006

There are regional variations with the Northern and Eastern Provinces registering higher illiteracy rates as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: **Literacy Rates by Regions**

Region	Literacy Rates		
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Total (%)
Eastern	40	22	31
Northern	43	20	31
Southern	45	25	34
Western Area	62	57	65
National	49	29	39

Source: 2004 Population and Housing Census

Whereas, the Western Urban Area and Bo Town have literacy rates of 68 percent and 64 percent respectively, Koinadugu, Pujehun and Bonthe Districts have literacy rates of 21 percent, 26 percent and 27 percent respectively.

What can be concluded from the above analysis is that, there is a need for large scale literacy provision and positive discriminatory measures to address the regional and gender disparities.

4.0. **Project Orientation**

The current provision to eradicate illiteracy is project oriented. Since the end of the war projects to eradicate illiteracy have been sponsored by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Africa (BREDA) and the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ).

The Unesco-sponsored Vocational Literacy Project which is currently being implemented by the Ministry of Education of Education, Youth and Sports (MEYS) has adopted the modular approach to developing learning materials in Literacy, Numeracy, Gender and Vocational Skills. Two hundred and fifty teachers were recently trained to teach 2,500 learners in 30 community education and vocational skills training centres. A micro credit component will soon be integrated into the project after the learners have acquired competencies in literacy, numeracy, vocational skills and gender orientation.

5.0. **The Youth Dimension in Literacy and Adult Education Provision**

According to the 2004 census, 40 percent of Sierra Leoneans aged 6 to 29 years have never attended school or have never received formal school education. Regional variations for those who have never been to school are also discernable as Table indicates:

Table 4: **Non School Attendance of 6 to 29 years olds by Regions**

Regions	Percentage of Never Attended School
Eastern	41.9
Northern	49.6
Southern	41.6
Western Area	20.6

Source: 2004 Population and Housing Census

There was and still is a large out-of-school population in Sierra Leone. In 2003, there were between 350 to 400,000 children who were out of school i.e. those who never attended school and those who dropped out of school prematurely. The Integrated Household Cluster Survey conducted by Statistics Sierra Leone in mid-2003 indicated that 38 percent of females and 31 percent of males aged between 5 and 17 had no formal education. This meant that around 570,000 school-aged children have never attended school (315,000 females and 255,000 males).

In response to the growing out-of-school youth population the Government formulated a national youth policy in 2003 which was later accompanied by a national youth programme. There is also a proliferation of technical and vocational institutions throughout the country responding to the educational needs of young people. In 2004 the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) undertook a survey of Tech-Voc Institutions and identified six major types of institutions offering technical and vocational education at different curricular levels. The survey recommended expansion and growth of technical vocational education. (German Technical Cooperation, 2005).

Youth (ages 15 – 35) constitute a large proportion of the population of Sierra Leone. During the civil conflict, many youths (mainly the unemployed and unschooled) joined the fighting forces and unleashed a reign to terror on unarmed civilians. They underwent violent radical transformation (GOSL, 2005: xv). At the end of the war 72,490 ex-combatants were disarmed and 71,043 including 6,844 child soldiers were demobilized.

The discourse on youth appears to be generating a consensus on the notion of youth which goes beyond the legal definition that is age bound. Youth is a situationally constituted and configured perception which differs according to time and

place. In defining youth the following perspectives should be taken into account:

- Youth as socio-cultural position
- Youth as societal-generational process
- Youth as socio-political construct (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh, 2006)

A study on the measures to address youth marginalization in Sierra Leone (Ekundayo-Thompson, 2008) found that the legal and programmatic measures in the National Youth Policy and National Youth Programme have not been effective in addressing the causes and consequences of marginalization. Illiteracy, poverty and unemployment are characteristics of youth, especially those in the street. Youth involvement in measures to address marginalization should be at the highest level of strategic thinking, planning and programme execution. The youth problem is a potential security problem which could degenerate into a crisis.

6.0. **Challenges for Youth and Adult Education**

An enabling policy and legal framework for literacy and adult education has been created. The Constitution of Sierra Leone and the Education Act provide the legal basis for provision of literacy and adult education. Section 9 (1) is a statement of the Government's intention to "*direct its policy towards ensuring that there are equal rights and adequate educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels.*"

Sub-section 2 commits the Government to strive to eradicate illiteracy by providing free adult literacy programmes.

This firm commitment is underscored in the Address of the Head of State to Parliament that, **an extensive adult literacy programme will be implemented to eradicate illiteracy.** The challenge therefore is to ensure that there is a match between policy on the one hand and action on the other.

Literacy and adult education have not received the attention and priority action which they deserve in the recently published *Education Sector Plan* (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2007:60). This might detract from the political will and strong commitment for literacy and adult education which is already apparent. At the end of the day policy commitment should be seen in financial commitment. There is an urgent need therefore, for a strategic plan with funding commitments to ensure that the literacy rate is increased and that many more Sierra Leoneans have the reading, writing and numerating competencies.

Another key challenge is to create strong partnerships for literacy and to mobilize financial resources that are commensurate with the tasks of reducing the high illiteracy rate namely:

- quality training of literacy and adult education teachers
development of appropriate teaching and learning materials
- Instituting policy for teacher certification and remuneration
- Accreditation of literacy and adult education providers

With respect to the youth a number of measures to address youth marginalization have been initiated in collaboration with development partner agencies. The key challenge is to create an environment for investment to generate employment opportunities and at the same time empower the youth with skills for sustainable self-employment. Education and training

programmes specially designed for and with the youth are critical needs. Gbla's assertion that the pool of unemployed and unemployable youth in the country has the potential of undermining the sustainability of peace (Gbla 2007:26) represents an urgent call to action.

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