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**“Transformative Action for Inclusive,
Resilient and Sustainable Communities”
(2024 – 2028)**

**ACTIONAID SIERRA LEONE
COUNTRY STRATEGY PAPER IV**



A Participant of the AEMAG Project

Foreword

It is gratifying to present you our fourth Country Strategy Paper (CSP IV) “**Transformative Action for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Communities**” indicating ActionAid Sierra Leone’s (AASL) aspirations and commitment to work in Sierra Leone for the next five years (2024-2028). The development of this strategy involved extensive consultations with our multiple stakeholders including community people, staff, partners, donors, relevant Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Local Councils, Board and General Assembly members. AASL will continue to work over the years taking sides with our compatriots who are living in poverty due to the denial of their human rights and social injustices.

AASL will focus on three priorities with more focused programming interventions around Inclusive Education, Inclusive and Participatory Governance for Sustainable Development, and Climate Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods. This is in response to the challenges and many lessons learnt, and emerging contextual issues in alignment with the Government’s National Development Plan, Sustainable Development Goals, and our collective global priorities.

Sierra Leone continues to grapple with many development challenges relating especially to funding fully its development priorities and heavily depends on external funding from donors and multi-lateral partners. The narrow income base and huge domestic and external debt servicing further challenge citizens’ access to basic services (such as education, health, water, and sanitation). Other key challenges to contend with include sociocultural practices, climate change, and weak state institutions. Related specific issues from the above challenges include violence against women and girls, access to justice especially for women, moderate women representation in leadership and decision-making processes at local and national levels and inadequate response to emergencies. ActionAid believes that the State’s responsibility to respond to these challenges are not to be considered as privileges to the citizens but as RIGHTS they are endowed to enjoy as human beings and as people living in a democracy. In this strategy, we have committed ourselves to work towards “**(Transformative Action for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Communities)**”.

In the next five years, AASL will work towards achieving social justice by working with partners, coalitions, self-organized groups, social movements and support people living in poverty to confront unequal and unjust powers that lead to denial of rights; challenge all forms of violence against targeted and excluded women and girls; improve public accountability for the provision of responsive public services; and advance responsive humanitarian action prioritizing women and girl’s safety, participation, leadership in emergency preparedness, response and prevention.

On behalf of the Board and Management of ActionAid Sierra Leone, we would like to express our profound gratitude to our constituents, partners, media, relevant MDAs, local councils in our operational districts, and civil society organizations for the support and partnerships we have enjoyed over the years. We invite you to join us in this ambitious journey of **(Transformative Action for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Communities)** for our compatriots.

Board Chair
Simitie Lavelly Esq.

Executive Director
Foday Bassie Swaray

Table of Content

1. Acronym
2. Executive Summary
3. Background
4. Introduction
5. Major successes, challenges, and learnings from CSP III (2018-2023)
6. Success from CSP III
7. Challenges from CSP III
8. Major learnings
9. The Process of Developing CSP IV
10. Political Context
11. Economic Context
12. Socio-Cultural Context
13. Inequalities in Sierra Leone
14. Gender Dimension in Sierra Leone
15. The Context of Education
16. The situation of Health
17. The context of Climate Change and Environment
18. The Context of Young people
19. The Context of Civil Society Organization (CSOs)
20. Who we are
21. Our Theory of Change
22. Our Programming Approach
23. Human Right Based Approach
24. Our work with Women and Girls
25. Working with Young People
26. Partnership and Alliance Building
27. Integrating Safeguarding into our Programming
28. Our Participatory Methodologies
29. The Transition from CSP III and Alignments with ActionAid Global Strategic Priorities
30. Our Transition into Country Strategy Paper IV
31. Country Strategy Paper IV Alignment
32. Programme Priorities
33. Programme Priority 1: Inclusive and Empowering Education to foster diverse opportunities
34. Programme Priority 2: Inclusive and Participatory governance for sustainable development
35. Programme Priority 3: Climate resilience and sustainable livelihood
36. Strategic Anchors
37. Strategic Anchors 1: Programme effectiveness and monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
38. Strategic Anchor 2: Fundraising and Communication
39. Strategic Anchor 3: Financial Management and Information Technology
40. Strategic Anchor 4: Human Resource, Organizational Development and Governance
41. Strengthening Women's Leadership
42. Safeguarding embedded into our work, culture and ethics
43. Staff Efficiency, well-being, and flexible ways of work
44. Strengthening Governance

I. Acronym

AA	ActionAid
AAI	ActionAid International
AASL	ActionAid Sierra Leone
ACC	Anti-Corruption Commission
AP	Affiliate Programme
CRC	Constitutional Review Committee
CREP	Claiming Rights to End Poverty
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSP	Country Strategy Paper
DESA	Department for Economic and Social Affairs
EGAP	Enhancing Governance and Accountability to end Poverty.
EU	European Union
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
FSU	Family Support Unit
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFMF	Global Financial Monitoring Framework
GIZ	German International Cooperation
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GST	Goods and Services Tax
LFPPM	Local Financial Policy and Procedures Manual
MDA	Ministries, Department and Agencies
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PATEP	People's Action to End Poverty
PPRC	Political Parties Regulation Commission
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLTU	Sierra Leone Teachers Union
RAF	Resource Allocation Framework
SIF	Strategic Implementation Framework
SLLC	Sierra Leone Labour Congress
SSS	Senior Secondary School
NEW	National Elections Watch
NUS	National Union of Students
UNFPA	United Nations Funds for Population Activities
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Associations
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WELD	Women Empowered for Leadership Development
YwD	Youth with Disabilities

II. Executive Summary

ActionAid Sierra Leone (AASL) has developed and worked with three distinct Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) from 2007 to 2023: “Enhancing Governance and Accountability to End Poverty” (EGAP) that spanned from 2007 – 2012; “Claiming Rights to end Poverty” (CREP) 2013 – 2017 and “Enhancing Peoples Action for Social Justice” (EPAS-J) 2018 to 2023. Between 2007 and 2011, AASL went through a major transition – moving its Programme from a Country Programme to Associate Programme and later to Affiliate Programme, which occasioned the institution of a Governance structure (Board and General Assembly). This CSP IV titled “**Transformative Action for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Communities**” 2024-2028, builds on gains in the previous strategies seeking to strengthen the power in people to fight for a just transition in an environment of climate and economic uncertainties. CSP IV aligns with the current Government of Sierra Leone’s National Development Programme (NDP), Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), AAI Global Strategy and the Strategy Implementation Framework (SIF).

Whilst the contextual issues may not be too different, in designing our programming for the next five years, we also considered the new or changing political, social, and economic conditions that emerged from our reviews and reflection processes. This Strategy has three broad priority strands and six focus areas – clearly indicating AASL’s programming dimension for the next five years (2024 to 2028). These programme priorities, their focus areas, and organizational strategic anchors to ensure the achievement of a clear and measurable theory of change are stated below:

Priority 1: Inclusive and empowering education to foster diverse opportunities.

Focus Area 1: School systems strengthening and improvement of learning environments for quality educational outcomes.

Focus Area 2: Skills training opportunities for women and girls.

Priority 2: Inclusive and participatory governance for sustainable development.

Focus Area 1: Strengthen and capacitate young people and women led Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) for effective participation in governance processes.

Focus Area 2: Influence accountable public service delivery.

Priority 3: Climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods

Focus Area 1: Sustainable community based resilient livelihood programmes.

Focus Area 2: Community led resilience actions against climate induced disasters and emergencies.

The Organizational Strategic Anchors include:

Programme Effectiveness, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)
Fundraising and Communication

Financial Management and Information Technology

Human Resource, Organizational Development and Governance

Significant to this strategy is our programming approach constituting: Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA); Feminist Leadership; Women’s Right and Young People; Safeguarding; participatory methodologies; and partnership over the strategy period.

Chapter One

1.1 Background

ActionAid Sierra Leone officially commenced its programme in Sierra Leone in 1988 as a Country Programme established by ActionAid UK.



A sponsored child in Tonkolili District

During this period, there was no specific Country Strategy Paper (CSP). Instead, programmes and projects were guided by the ActionAid International Global Strategies such as Moving Forward in the 90s, Giving People's Choices, Fighting Poverty Together, Rights to End Poverty and Accountability, Learning and Planning Systems (ALPS) etc. Stewardship was under ActionAid UK and all Assets and decisions were made by them.

From 2007 to 2011, AASL went through a major transition – moving its programme from an ordinary Country Programme to Associate Programme and later to Affiliate. This was occasioned by the institution of a Governance structure (Board and General Assembly). With this, ActionAid Sierra Leone (AASL) developed its first Country Strategy Paper

titled “Enhancing Governance and Accountability to End Poverty” (EGAP) that spanned from 2007 – 2012 which mainly focused on addressing Governance challenges that contributed to the 11 years civil conflict. By the end of 2012, we transitioned into a second Strategy titled “Claiming Rights to end Poverty” (CREP) from 2013 – 2017. This second strategy mainly focused on promoting among other things the empowerment of citizens to claim their rights to public services. From 2018 – 2023, a third CSP titled “Enhancing Peoples Action for Social Justice” (EPAS-J) leveraged on people power, actions to address inequalities and promoting a more just and equitable society. Building on previous strategies, this CSP IV titled “**Transformative Action for Inclusive, Resilient and Sustainable Communities**” builds on gains in previous strategies, strengthens the power in people to fight for a just transition in an environment of climate and economic uncertainties.

1.2 Introduction

This CSP anchors on the successes, challenges, and learnings from the previous CSP “Enhancing People’s Action for Social Justice”. It connotes context related issues and makes required alignments with Sierra Leone’s Development Agenda and the ActionAid International Global Strategy. This Strategy has three broad Priority strands and six focus areas – clearly indicating AASL’s Programming dimension for the next five years (2024 to 2028). The priority and focus areas are anchored on organizational priorities to ensure the achievement of a clear and measurable theory of change.

Significant to this strategy is the programming approach including Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) and Feminist Leadership. It also captures Women’s Right and Young People, Safeguarding, our participatory methodologies, and partnership vision within the five years period. In line with the Country model review, it presents an idea of our footprint and financial sustainability.

1.3 Major successes, Challenges, and learnings from CSP III (2018 – 2023)

1.3.1 Successes from CSP III

- Through constant engagement on women empowerment, women have increased confidence and self-esteem to speak out, to contribute to the household, to take leadership and to work together with their spouses.



Women's Right Focal person and members of VSLA in Tonkolili District

- AASL has several policies and system management practices. These policies, systems, procedures, and management practices put the organization on its toes in the discharge of its responsibilities. These policy documents are regularly updated to stand the test of time and maintain best practice. In very many ways, these documents have helped shape and strengthen the organizational behavior and protect its image as an effective and efficient organization.

- Our financial management and information technology improved significantly. During this period, the Affiliate

Programme was upgraded from the use of SUN system version 4.4 to a cloud based Global Financial System (GFS) decentralised in our regional offices. This contributed to timely generation of reports and response to queries.

- During CSP III, AASL improved on its Internet system from 5 Mega Bytes (MB) to 15 MB in the Head Office and from 1 MB to 2 MB at the Regional Offices.
- Our work with local partners helped in the development of national capacity in advocacy, campaigns, and development management. The partners are based in the communities and will remain in the localities using their acquired skills and knowledge to work with the people. The partners will use the training and skills acquired to advocate and campaign for better services for their communities.
- AASL effectively and collaboratively worked with MDAs, local councils and other NGOs/CSOs in its interventions specifically in policy review, budget advocacy and the review of the 1991 Constitution with other CSOs making landmark contributions to national development.
- AASL invested in changing the status and conditions of women through awareness raising, Village Savings and Loans Associations (VLSAs) training, business development, agriculture etc. Agricultural activities have helped increase incomes, contributed to local economy, provided employment for women and youths, and provided other livelihoods opportunities. The VSLA has empowered more women, improved their status in society, increased incomes and built their self-esteem.



A member of VSLA holding members' contribution books

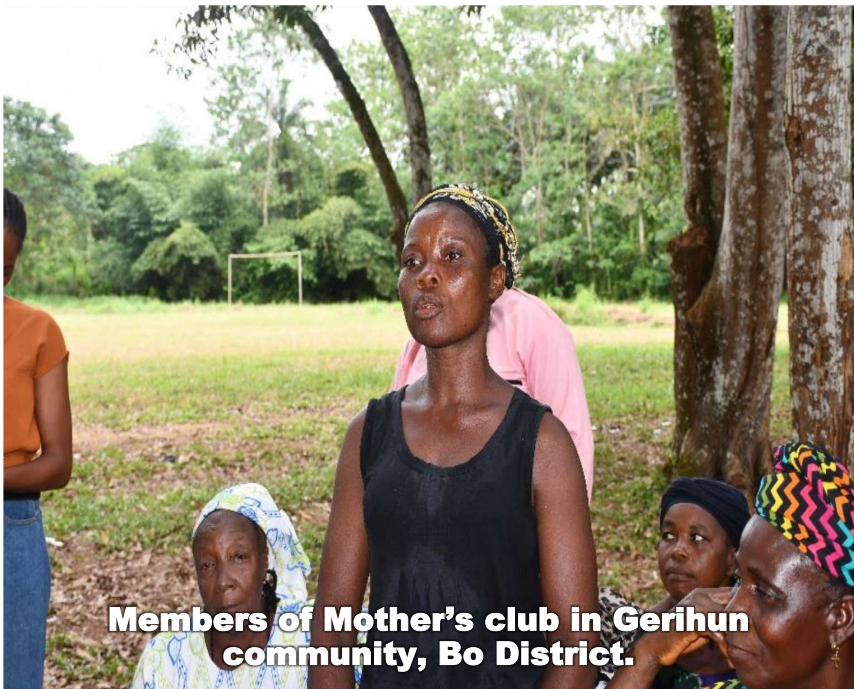
A remarkable policy work through the establishment of networks, our work with civil society coalitions promoted good governance to some extent and major campaigns such as Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Youth participation in democratic processes, Radical Inclusion Policy contributed to national gains which resulted based on our collective contributions.

1.3.2 Challenges from CSP III

- Funding crises at all levels due the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia/Ukraine war disrupted implementation plan to fully actualize the strategic objectives of the CSP. This resulted in several programme reviews and adaptations to align with prevailing context.
- The general economic situation was unfavourable with continuous inflation rate fluctuations, exchange rate problems which led to the local currency depreciation, high imposition of taxes which affected the CSP original operational plan.
- Sierra Leone's rooted cultural, traditional, customary, and some religious barriers impede women advancement in leadership, governance, and the ability to show their fullest potential.

1.3.3 Major Learnings

- Building a diversified workforce from different ethnic, religious, and gender background makes AASL unique and serves as an example of an organization that is inclusive and non-discriminatory.
- Establishing and implementing strong internal financial control mechanisms, do not only ensure project funds are prudently expended and safe but also results in cost-effectiveness, value for money and the efficient utilization of available resources.
- It is critical to involve local communities in the design and implementation of programmes, fostering community ownership which is critical for sustainability of the gains made and outcomes achieved. The programme approach involving a wide diversity of local players made it easier for results to be accepted, enhanced ownership and for outcomes to be sustained.



Members of Mother's club in Gerihun community, Bo District.

- Implementing programmes of this nature through partner institutions that have the necessary competences and on-the-ground experience, and with each responsible for activities at the appropriate scale, is a useful cost-effective approach to implementation and sustaining results.

1.4 The Process of Developing CSP IV

AASL completed a detailed midterm review in 2021 and an end line evaluation in 2023. These reviews provided critical information and emerging issues in our operating context. The review processes were undertaken by a diverse team including a Strategy Reference Group (SRG) who were mainly staff from various units and departments of AASL; a Governance Reference Group (GRG) made up of Board and General Assembly members, and a team of AA Federation members who provided distant support throughout the process.

A strategy development framework was developed with clear timelines and deliverables submitted to the Board for approval to kick- start the entire process. The development of CSP IV was informed by the mid and end term evaluation of the current strategy titled: “Enhancing People’s Action for Social Justice” 2018 – 2023, Sierra Leone’s contextual analysis, AAI Global Strategy, and international thematic policies/SIF 2. AA Federation and some countries provided support during the development of the Strategy.

Following the completion of CSP III evaluation and context analysis, a strategy conference was held bringing together all staff, partners, and members of the Governance Reference Group. A conference which lasted for



A woman farmer in Bo District

two days, ended with a clear roadmap on this strategy. The Staff Reference Group (SRG) and a Consultant Facilitator went into CSP IV write-up. A zero draft of CSP IV was produced, which was shared with Thematic Specialists in the GS such as Education, IHART (for the emergency/resilience building priorities), AA Federation and few countries within the federation for review and feedback. Initial feedback from AA Federation members and other sources

were incorporated and a second review meeting was held to produce the first CSP IV draft. The first draft was shared with the GRP for feedback and comments captured into the second and final CSP IV draft that was submitted for approval to the Board.

Chapter Two

The Sierra Leone context

2.1 Political Context



Peace Ambassador during Peace conference in Western Area

In the life of CSP 3, Sierra Leone has conducted two democratic elections in 2018 and 2023. Both elections were the fourth and fifth competitive post-war elections and the second and third to be supervised by the Electoral Commission of Sierra Leone (ECSL) and national institutions. These elections marked a significant step forward in Sierra Leone's democratic consolidation. Despite efforts to promote peaceful campaigns, the run-up to these elections saw high political tensions and some incidents of violence,

primarily due to non-compliance with the ECSL's campaign calendar, defacing of posters and other campaign materials, intimidation of female candidates, the use of tribal or ethnic campaign arguments, and isolated cases of hate speeches on a limited number of local radios¹. The June 2023 elections were fraught with many challenges including accusations of lack of transparency, rejection of elections results and boycott from governance until a peace was brokered by the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Commonwealth and the country's newly established Peace Commission.

Sierra Leone implemented several election reforms within the last five years which include the Public Elections Act, 2022, the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC) Act 2022, and various constitutional amendments were enacted by parliament.

These legislations replaced constituency elections with Proportional Representation, requiring political parties to nominate members who will represent them as candidates from across Sierra Leone's 16 districts. This system requires that each district was assigned number of seats based on the population data of the mid-term census report of 2022. In the District Block System, the Member Parliaments (MPs) for the seats won by a political party is determined by the ECSL from a list of the candidates submitted by the political party before the election. The law additionally mandated a minimum of 30% nomination of women by political parties. However, the provision only guarantees nomination but not an election. The block system requires each political party to submit a list of

¹ EU Elections Observer Monitoring Report, 2023

candidates that is at least double the number of seats allocated to the district (with one female for every three candidates) to enable vacancies in Parliament to be filled by ECSL when vacancies occur.

The Political Parties Act (2022) was also reviewed and provides for the registration of political parties and the control of political party behaviour by the Political Parties Regulation Commission (PPRC). The statute empowers the PPRC to regulate, supervise, and monitor political parties to ensure they follow the law. This Commission can now examine and deregister political parties, unlike in the past.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Act translated into having 30.4% elected women in the Parliament of Sierra Leone, up from 14.5% in the previous election. Women candidates acquired 41 of the 135 available seats with similar trend at district and municipal Council levels. In Moyamba for example, 8 female councillors (36.3%) were inaugurated into office as compared to just 2 in the previous elections. Similarly, Kono District Council elected 6 female councillors from a total of 25 making 24% which stands below the 30% threshold in the GEWE Act 2022. In contrast to these, the tradition around chieftaincy continues to debar women's ambition to lead. In the same elections, only one woman was indirectly elected to the additional 14 seats designated for local leaders known as Paramount Chiefs who represent the 14 provincial districts. Thus, overall, current proportion of women in parliament is 28.2% out of a total of 149 seats. Whilst it indicates significant progress, it also shows the rooted nature of patriarchy in our culture and tradition thus limiting women leadership across all levels.

A Cyber Security and Crime Act (CSCA) enacted in 2022 to put undue restrictions on freedom of expression online. This Act is challenged by concerns relating to the vague definitions of various cybercrimes that does not align with international standards leaving room for politicians and law enforcement bodies to exert pressure on critical voices.

Whilst freedom of expression and association continue to be opened and tolerated, the right to peaceful protests is still a challenge. The country has a plethora of independent newspapers and dozens of private radio and television outlets. In 2022, the

government repealed Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act, which criminalized libel and sedition and replaced it with the Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act.

The above-mentioned challenges have implications on the work of AASL and therefore will require further advocacy work from AASL, CSOs and other like-minded organizations.



A Woman farmer in Rolunk Community, Bombali District

2.2 Economic Context

Sierra Leone continues to grapple and is faced with significant and unprecedented overlapping economic challenges amplified by multiple shocks including associated global economic uncertainty, culminating into weak domestic economic activity, rising inflation, exchange rate depreciation, high interest rates and higher debt levels and vulnerabilities. The crisis has worsened food poverty negatively impacting on especially the poor and underprivileged.

After growing by 3.6% in 2022, and despite the expected increase in agricultural output, the projected growth of 2.7% in 2023 is undermined. The uncertainty in the global economy, higher food and fuel prices, exchange rate depreciation, weak purchasing power and tight fiscal stance weighed down growth in 2023. Inflation continued to rise during the first half of 2023 reaching 44.8% in June 2023 from 37.1% in December 2022 driven largely by the pass-through effect of higher global food and energy prices, and the continuous weakening of the Leone².

However, the Sierra Leone economy is expected to remain resilient over the medium-term. Growth is projected to increase to 4.7 percent in 2024 and 5.2 percent in 2025, driven by increased investment in agriculture, mining, and continued recovery in the services sector³. The economy of Sierra Leone is not diversified as it mainly depends on mining and agriculture which continues to be government's main source of revenue since independence. Mining contributes 0.7% to GDP, and constitute 65% of export earnings, and 3% to employment in 2018⁴. Whilst the sector lacks accountability, the need for heavily sophisticated machinery makes it difficult for the common Sierra Leonean to deeply get involved in exploration beyond artisanal. The lack of policy implementation and high level of corruption allow for huge illicit mining hence reducing the chances of government to raise enough revenue. Above all, large mining especially in Kono District in the east, Moyamba District in the South and Tonkolili District in the North has caused enormous deforestation, water contamination, land grabbing etc hence worsened land access, water impurity and exacerbation of human rights abuses.

Sierra Leone has long been a highly indebted poor country and currently categorized as high-debt-risk country implying, the likelihood of repaying is uncertain. According to the Government of Sierra Leone Total Debt Stock, the amount of debt in 2020 was 3,001USD billion and was projected to 3,038USD by

the end of 2023⁵. With an annual repayment of 16% of the country's GDP⁶, it remains imperative that public service financing becomes under siege thereby wrecking the actualization of policy commitments worsening poverty and conditions of living. The implications associated with such range from community dependency on not-for-profit making organizations like ActionAid who are also faced with funding crisis in responding to the numerous needs of the people.

One way to cushion this economic moribund is to invest in agriculture in a way that the country can export surplus commodities thereby increasing the possibilities of increasing the availability of foreign currencies beyond the employment it would create and bring more monies in the pocket of the poor. However, the lackadaisical nature of many and the lack of nationalistic mentalities will only make this projection a mere dream. Research done by the Sierra Leone Netherlands Business and Culture Council in 2017 revealed that the tropical climate and abundance of water in Sierra Leone makes it an excellent location for growing crops year-round. Nonetheless, the agricultural sector is not developed up to capacity. It is reported that 80% of foodstuffs consumed in the country are imported. Yet of the estimated 5.4 million hectares of fertile arable land, 75% remains uncultivated. The land is suitable for the cultivation of a wide range of crops including rice (the country's staple food), cassava, maize, millet, cashew, rubber, ginger, vegetables, fruits, and sugarcane; cash crops such as cocoa, coffee, and oil palm; and the rearing of livestock. The sector is dominated by smallholder subsistence farmers utilizing local traditional tools with outdated methods and limited farm inputs. In the 2022 Global Hunger Index (GHI), Sierra Leone ranks 112th out of 121 countries with a score of 31.5 indicating a level described as serious. If the country should grow its food and feed itself and export surpluses to boost the economy, a more radical action is required by government and development actors.

² Supplementary Government Budget and Statement of Economic and Financial Policies; 2023

³ Government of Sierra Leone Budget and Statement of Economic and Financial Policies for the Financial Year 2024

⁴ International Trade Administration – US Department of Commerce

⁵ GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE. TOTAL DEBT STOCK 2020 TO 2025

⁶ The Vicious Cycle, connections between the debt crises and climate crisis; 2023

The uncontrollable local currency depreciation to major international currencies including the US Dollar, Great

British Pounds, and Euro from 2020 to 2022 led to high inflation rate and overall hardship. Government hence pursued a currency re-denomination with the hope to address the economic situation. Despite this action, the situation did not improve and majority among citizens according to a recent IGR Report confirmed that the economy is moving to the wrong direction.



Youth Activists during Soft Launch of the "Fund our Future" campaign

2.3 Socio-cultural Context

The socio-cultural context is categorised in four separate blocks viz: Inequalities, gender, education, and health as detailed in the subsections.

2.3.1 Inequalities in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is characterized by high poverty (59.2% in 2021)⁷, income inequality (Gini coefficient of 0.357 in 2018), and high youth unemployment (70%), compounded by skills mismatch⁸. The trend keeps increasing showing a massive gap between the rich and poor and men and women. In 2018 for example, just 10% of the wealthiest Sierra Leoneans accumulate almost half of the national income at 46.2% as opposed to 50% of the poorest who accumulate just 16%. Unfortunately, this gap between the rich and the rest has only been increasing



Participants of the commemoration of IWD Match in Bombali District

2.3.2 Gender Dimension in Sierra Leone

In terms of Gender Inequality, women and girls are disadvantaged in the social, economic, and political realms. UN Women report 2020 shows that the literacy rate for men is low, 51.6%, but for women it is much lower, 34.9%. Gender-based violence and child marriage are common and continue to be of serious and urgent concern. As they often come out as survivors of Gender Based Violence (GBV), in some cases, they had lost their lives in silence.

⁷ <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi> (The most recent survey data that were publicly available for Sierra Leone's Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) estimation refer to 2019)

⁸ Sierra Leone's Economic Outlook 2023

Studies carried out by Purposeful Sierra Leone published in September 2021 indicates that out of a sample of 2,239 girls aged between 13 and 19 years that were interviewed from six districts, of which 57% have given birth to at least one child during the period of the outbreak. In Moyamba, the study observed that in one day of data collection, 90% of the girls they spoke to were mothers. According to the Ministry of Social Welfare (2022 to 2023) in Kono district, over 200 girls get married before they turn 18. Bombali district confirmed 169 physical and 1,522 sexual violence cases (credit: Rainbo Centre in Bombali). According to Rainbo Initiative in 2019, Sierra Leone recorded 3,701 sexual assault cases with 598 pregnancies, 4 HIV positives, and 255 successful prosecutions from only five of the 16 districts in Sierra Leone. Between January and May 2020, a total of 1,272 sexual assault cases with a total of 217 pregnancies and 932 STIs. From October – December, 3548 GBV and related cases were reported with 3 months and 100 years old as the youngest and oldest survivors. This is a situation that requires more resources and attention from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) if the rights of girls should be protected.



Beyond the scope of GBV interventions, AASL will seek to pursue the processes of enabling a change in the discriminatory social norms that negatively impact on the lives of girls and women. Both young women and young men face extraordinarily high levels of unemployment and poverty and are underrepresented in political life. When there are cuts to public spending, it is more of women and girls who lose access to educational institutions and frontline jobs and who, from out of necessity, resort to assuming poorly paid or unpaid care roles. While more women than men voted in the last national election in 2018, only about 12% of parliamentary seats are held by women, reflecting cultural norms about gender roles and unequal access to resources and time, and concerns about violence that could be directed at women aspirants and candidates. Youth as a group are also disadvantaged across all sectors, despite representing a large majority of the population.

AASL will work with women and girls supporting them to provide the opportunity to raise their voice and increase their agency by bringing in other actors and networks that support women’s movement at local and national levels. This is intended to bring about well sensitized and enabled women groups demanding change and influencing their inclusion and participation in local and national structures charged with the responsibility of decision making.

2.3.3 The context of Education

Sierra Leone’s educational system attracted massive investment by government since 2018 and for the first time in the democratic history of the country, the sector was allocated with a 21% of the National Budget⁹ in 2019 which further increased to 22%¹⁰ in 2020. This massive investment in the sector culminated to increased basic school enrolment across levels. Thus, while seeming massive investment in the sector has culminated to increased basic school enrolment across levels compared to previous years, the increased allocations fall short of meeting the requirements of the rising school populations in terms of both materials and personnel.

⁹ Government Budget and Statement of Economic and Financial Policies for 2019

¹⁰ Government Budget and Statement of Economic and Financial Policies for 2020

In the last five years, school growth and expansion has been encouraging. In the first year in the implementation of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) – i.e., from 2018 to 2019, the total number of schools reported was 10,747 which increased to 12,466 in 2022, marking a 19% increase in the number of schools¹¹ making way for colossal school enrolment increasing from 1,982,475 to 3,343,470 making a 69% increase between 2018 and 2022. Despite the increased enrolment at the different levels of education, some children remain out-of-school.



Sponsored children during a Reading circle session

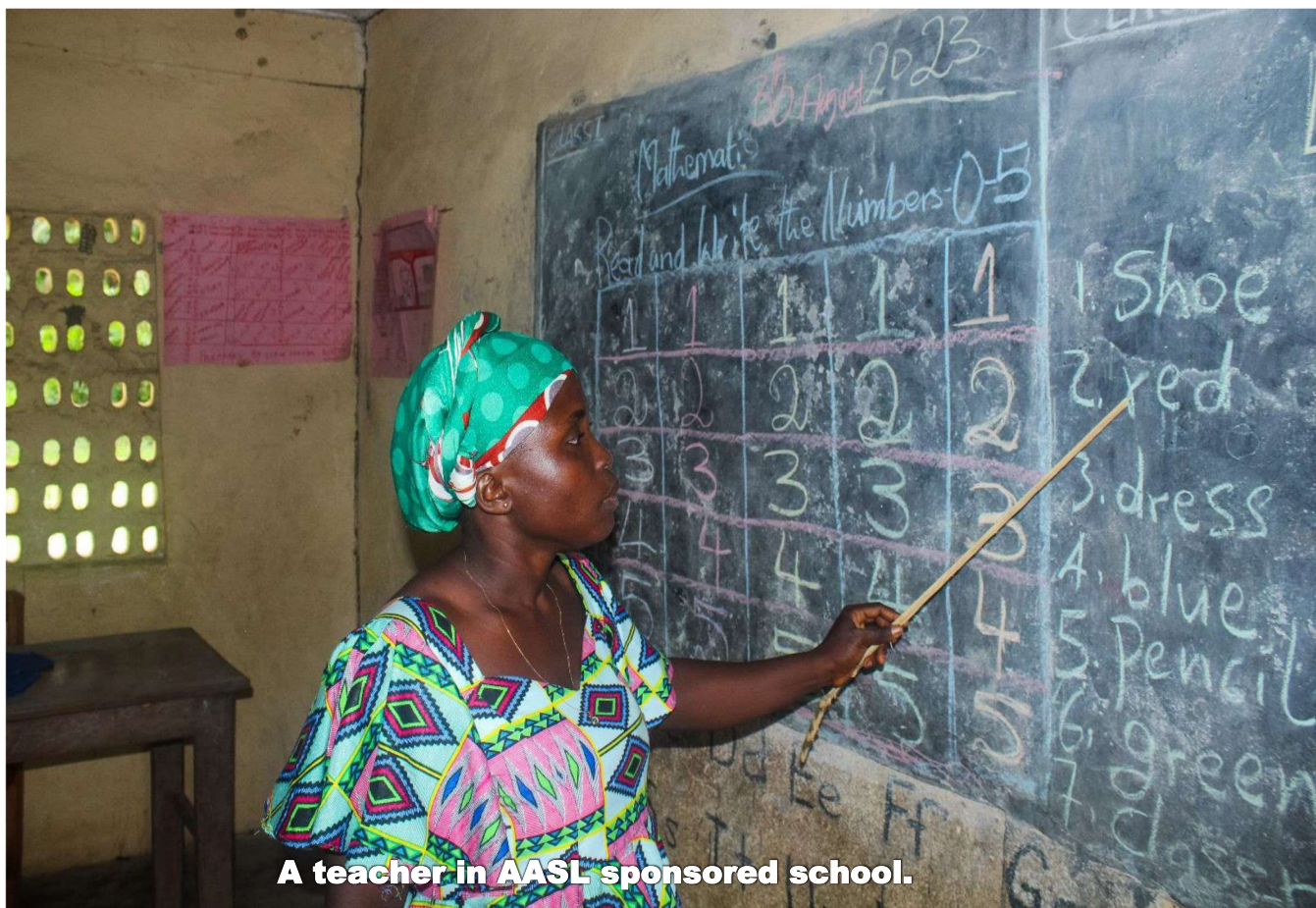
In 2017, prior to the introduction of FQSE in 2018, almost one fifth (18%) of children aged 6-11 years old were out of school. Of children of JSS-age, 45% were attending primary school, and almost one fifth (19%) were out of school altogether, with only 36% attending JSS in-line with their age-group.

The increase in enrolment resulting from the Free Quality School Educational system meant that more schools and teachers are required. The physical schooling infrastructure however does not match the growing number of enrolments as the national average of students per classroom increased from 42 in 2018 to 51 in 2019 at primary level¹², and similarly from 34 to 53 at junior secondary and 41 to 58 at senior secondary level. These averages, with class sizes over one hundred in some extremely disadvantaged schools contradict international standards. This is a threat to the quality of future service delivery with an offshoot of appalling products who are to take over critical leadership positions in all walks of life. A greater challenge of school infrastructure is the condition in which those classrooms are. The Annual School Census of 2022 categorizes each classroom by those that are in 'good' condition and those in need of repair. The share of classrooms described as in need of repair is 58% at primary, 47% at junior secondary and 33% at senior secondary. AASL will intensify its advocacy drive and work with its partners: Global Education Campaign and Education for All (EFA) for more targeted investments in the Education sector that address this challenge of infrastructure to enhance quality education.

¹¹ Annual School Census Report 2022

¹² School infrastructure and catchment area policy 2021

A more significant challenge faced by the Government is the affairs of teachers needed to tally with the massive growth and development in the educational sector. Teacher quality is waning thereby grossly undermining the delivery of quality education. A joint study conducted by UNICEF and IrishAid indicated that just 61% of primary school teachers are trained and, across the entire teaching workforce, nearly one third are unqualified and more than half are not on the government payroll¹³. These issues are compounded in rural areas where there are higher numbers of unqualified and volunteer teachers.

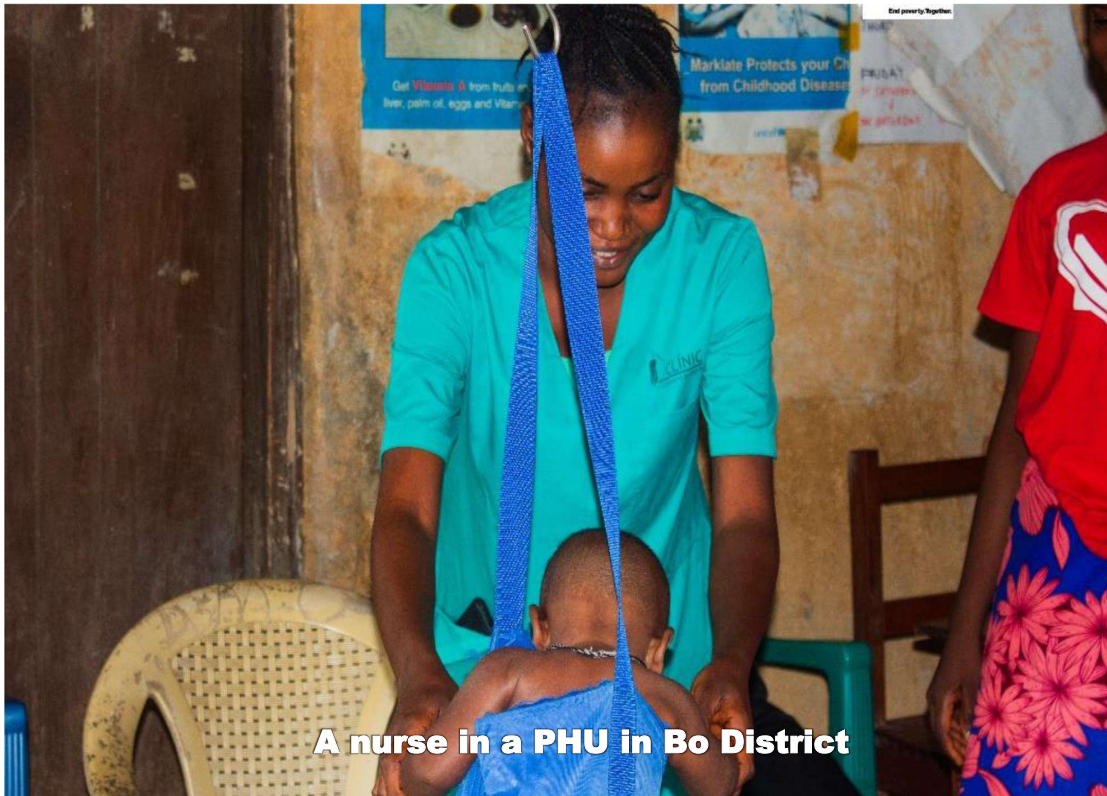


Within the context of a very low national revenue base seeking to address the basic needs of the respective social sectors, including education, are the IMF/World Bank policies which require explicit ceilings for public sector wages calculated at the percentage of wages in relation to total public wages. In the fold of 61% of trained and qualified teachers as mentioned above, an impactful portion of this figure is not in the payroll. These policies are in alignment with the country's Extended Credit Facility (ECF) arrangement with the IMF to finance policy priorities of the National Development Plan (NDP).

AASL will therefore continue to advocate for policy changes in relation to improved teacher motivation and capacity development, especially for teachers in hard-to-reach and remote rural areas through collaborative engagements with local and international development partners and relevant government agencies such as the Teaching Service Commission.

¹³ Out-Of-School Children study Sierra Leone 2021

2.3.4 The situation of Health



A nurse in a PHU in Bo District

Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) presents the urgent need to achieve good health and wellbeing by 2030. Sierra Leone is far from achieving this; therefore, needs a serious revamp. The sector is challenged with not only infrastructure, but it is extremely under-resourced with

personnel, equipment, and essential drugs. Life expectancy is around 50 years and key health indicators show that Sierra Leone remains a country with high mortality and fertility rates and significant morbidity from preventable causes like malaria and malnutrition. There is relatively low health service coverage combined with a high out of pocket health expenditure. Health services in the country are mostly delivered through a public system with 3 levels (Peripheral Health Units (PHUs), district and regional and tertiary hospitals). The country's health systems have many challenges especially in the areas of leadership and governance, financing, human resources, and drugs, supplies and equipment.

Qualified and experienced health workers' availability with a balanced skills-mix is central to the provision of essential health services. Presently, the country has less than 650 medical doctors, implying 1:11,613, which is far below the 1:1000 persons as prescribed by World Health Organization (WHO). To achieve Universal Health Care standards, Sierra Leone requires slightly over 7,548 doctors¹⁴. The situation is even worse for nurses and midwives.

Within a growing context of disease outbreaks in Sierra Leone coupled with disasters and emergencies triggered by climate anomalies, the level of risk and vulnerabilities continue to not only increase but overlaps with and wreck performance in other sector performance including education and livelihood. ActionAid Sierra Leone is hopeful that government will provide the enablers to improve performance of the sector.

¹⁴ ActionAid Sierra Leone Public Sector Wage Bill Report 2023

2.4 The context of Climate Change and Environment

Sierra Leone is endowed with valuable natural resources including minerals such as diamonds, gold, bauxite, iron ore rutile and a host of high-grade forest products including timber. However, the irrational use of the environment and natural resources over the years have resulted in environmental degradation leading to flooding, windstorm, landslide, erosion, wildfire, mudslides etc. This has and continues to have devastating impacts on



Policy and Advocacy Manager of AASL during the Soft Launch of the “Fund our Future” campaign

sustenance and livelihood issues and the economy of the country. Similarly, cutting down of trees in catchment areas have culminated in water stress particularly in the western area which hosts close to two million people. In Sierra Leone, and the world over, increased poverty and population pressures continue to cause environmental problems with profound implications including deforestation and land degradation. Deforestation caused by human settlement and agriculture has increased susceptibility to landslides and flooding, hampered ecotourism opportunities, and with significantly impacted water supplies in most part of the country. Farmers have limited access to capital and crop insurance making it more difficult to manage climate-related hazards than in more developed markets. Extreme weather conditions continue to cause significant damage to the nation's often neglected infrastructure.

Prior to the recent legal reforms, chiefs were the legal custodians of all land in the district, determining who should own and control land. The recently enacted Customary Land Rights Act 2022 has instituted limited reforms and granted women equal land rights. However, these structural requirements are yet to be established limiting its implementation. Many of the individuals whose rights it endeavours to protect do not yet comprehend the law, especially women and young people whose access to and control over land is further limited. Rural communities rely primarily on agriculture for subsistence. However, limited access to financial support, affordable labour, technical expertise, markets, and credit have prevented smallholder farmers from realizing their maximum potential. This has a potential to affect the actualization of government flagship programme on Agriculture and food security (Feed Salone). This is an opportunity for AASL who primarily works with young people, women and PWDs to contribute to food production using agro-ecological farming practices.

Climate change is affecting the world today and is largely caused by human emissions of greenhouse gases. Changes to the earth's climate have included warming of the atmosphere and oceans, reduced snow and ice, a rise in the level of the oceans, and changes in rainfall patterns and climate extremes.^[1] Many of these changes are unusual and unprecedented in the last decades. Examples of current impacts include the likely increase in frequency of heat waves and storm surges which are already higher due to ongoing sea level rise. In addition, climate change threatens marine ecosystems and fisheries, with severe implications for coastal communities and decreased food security. At the global and regional level, this is worrying signs and poses a threat to global and regional action to end poverty. Thus, ActionAid is poised through its Global Campaign Strategy to addressing the crisis from a justice perspective both at micro and macro levels.

Sierra Leone's vulnerability to climate-related hazards is exceptionally high and the country's low level of human development makes it difficult to transition to a climate-resilient economy. Numerous fatalities and economic losses have been caused by climate-related shocks. Because of high precipitation and storm surges along the coast, floods and landslides are common throughout the rainy season in Sierra

Leone, wreaking havoc on agricultural production, infrastructure, people's homes, public health, and biodiversity along the coast. The country's dependence on rain-fed agriculture makes it more susceptible to rising temperatures and severe weather. Invariably, an increase in the already poverty levels in the country has consequences on AASL's overall strategic objectives. It means mobilizing more resources to respond to the many affected by climate change. This clearly opens a window of opportunity for AASL to dive into the climate change domain to mobilize resources that would assist the many affected by the hazards of climate change. It means AASL would have to work and support movements at the local and national levels that can address those injustices, building resilience amongst the most vulnerable, ensuring redistributive mechanisms for adaptation, loss, and damage, and facilitating a just, green, and feminist transition. We will facilitate linkages from national to regional and international levels to amplify the agency of those impacted by the climate crisis.

2.5 The Context of Young People



Youth during Peace Conference in Kambia District

Youth (18 – 35 years) make up 30% of Sierra Leone's population and constitute approximately 49% of the country's labour force. Their role in triggering the country's socio-economic stability through growth and development cannot be overemphasized. However, and for many years now, youths in Sierra Leone have succumbed to be infantilized and ultimately absorb marginalization and molestation. For so long, the helm of politics has been described as one steered by the ageing population even though the recent trajectory shows a reversal giving hope to the youths in occupying leadership positions in governance. The act of

having the aged occupying the governance of Sierra Leone over the past decades undermined the Sierra

^[1] Environment Progress News, 2021

Leonean youth's agency. Systematic social injustice coupled with the patriarchal culture and tradition has continued to deny them a sense of identity and a voice in their communities.

This, in part, formed the basis of grievance and frustration that led thousands of youths to participate in harmful drug intakes, thuggery and dangerous clique posing enormous threat to the Sierra Leonean society.

This has severally provoked violence and unrest having significant implications for peace and security in the country.

The eleven years brutal civil conflict (1991 to 2002) attracted thousands of youths who became fire-arm fighters, exposed themselves to harmful substance intake, immoral behaviors, killings and looting of property. The scars continue to manifest among young people in the current socialization mix; without recourse threatening state security and peace. It has become apparent that the challenges that led to

the involvement of youth in armed groups and the historical legacies of the 11 years civil conflict have remained largely unaddressed. This is because the country is still trapped in the post-conflict trajectory and has not succeeded in overcoming its historical legacies. As such, a significant percentage of the country's youthful population grapples with poverty, destitution, and unemployment. These factors continue to undermine their relationship with and confidence in the state.

Over the last two decades, the continued failure of the state to constructively engage young people and support them has led to the re-engineering of the social space. The youth have turned to using music or other forms of art as mediums of venting their grievance and frustrations through social media handles.

They use "Ataya" Bases, and ghettos as social mobilization points discussing their fears, doubts, and aspirations. Alternatively, they join local gangs and cliques as a means of gaining identity and confidence, which the state continues to deny them¹⁵. This failure by the state reflects even more negatively on female youth, with persistently high rates of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, engagement in other unconventional means of livelihoods. Failure to address safeguarding concerns has meant sexual and gender-based violence continues to be rampant. Emanating from this analysis, young people have no hope and opted to migrate into Europe where they think life could be better for them.

Despite the challenges, the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) and its development partners have invested massively in the establishment of pro-youth systems and policies. Unfortunately, over the years, many of these investments have targeted just a small fraction of the country's youth. Additionally, the interventions have not been gender-inclusive, insufficiently addressing the internal diversity of youth. In fact, many of these interventions have treated the "youth" as a homogeneous population. Failure to understand the differences in needs for female and male youth, Youth with Disabilities (YwD) and youth living in the most remote rural areas with limited opportunities.

The fact that youths constitute over 53% of the country's population, possess tremendous energy and zest to deliver on national services and are deeply rooted in communities' means, AASL will therefore continue to strengthen them into its advocacy and campaign work and make them become meaningful contributors to the nation's development trajectory.

¹⁵ Bangura, Ibrahim. 2016. We Can't Eat Peace: Youth, Sustainable Livelihoods, and the Peacebuilding Process in Sierra Leone. *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, 11:2, 37-50

2.6 The context of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)



CSO Representatives and Staff of EU funded project

The institution of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Sierra Leone has historically been weak and lacked coordination since independence but made remarkable progress, becoming active and vibrant throughout the 90s. During this period, movements such as the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC), the National Union of Students (NUS), and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) were progressive and stood the test of time in representing the voiceless in the political history of Sierra Leone. For example, the NUS had been critical of the ruling government.

However, they were not as influential and active as they have become since 2002. CSOs only became particularly active during and after the conflict.

The civil society space is currently interlocked with countless complexities with contradictory agenda of purpose. The tendency for many CSOs to accept government positions regardless of its implication on citizens and the public is highly likely. It is believed that some civil society organizations are created by political regimes, and thus lack autonomy, credibility, and neutrality. This manifested an irony of the situation characterized by the fact that these civil society groups are aware of the need to hold public officials accountable, but chose not to do so, because of their individual selfish interests. One, could therefore, observe that at a certain period in the socio-economic and political development of Sierra Leone, civil society movements did not contribute to influencing improved democratic space. Instead, it is witnessing shrinking space resulting from political alignment and political biasness which is weakening the strength of civil society to represent citizens in governance spaces. Additionally, CSO face the specific challenges including lack of coordination and collaboration leading to fragmentation; lack of sustained funding opportunities undermining their operations to advance voice; efforts by government to introduce restrictive policies aimed at regulating CSO operations.

Overall, the years of deep-seated mistrust between civil society and government are not improving in the country. This was manifested during the last elections (June 2023) when some CSOs were branded as agents of political parties (either the ruling party or opposition).

This limits CSOs ability to organize and mobilise on a common public interest issues especially in promoting good governance, the fight against corruption and in holding government to account in the delivery of public services.



Handing over of Start-up Kits to girls supported through the AEMAG Project

AASL will deliver in partnership with like-minded organizations including community-based structures, CBOs, Local and National NGOs, CSOs, Coalitions, Alliances and Movements etc. This partnership approach strengthens our accountability to the poor and other stakeholders. It is therefore not an option but an integral part of our strategic focus.

Chapter Three

3.1. Who we are.



ActionAid Sierra Leone is a member of the global federation of ActionAid working to achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication. In our work to eradicate poverty, we will take into cognizance issues around gender equity with regards to access to services. We have operated in

Sierra Leone for over 35 years with strong knowledge of the complexities of poverty due to our rootedness in the communities, our relationship with stakeholders at all levels and the networks and coalitions we have been part of.

Our work has been clearly identified with our commitment to put women in the centre of everything we do which gives us the space to build solidarity with social movements and other interest groups to achieve social justice and gender equality. As an Affiliate Member of the Federation since 2011, our dual identity continues to provide the opportunity to deepen our legitimacy in the country while playing an active role in supporting federation wide processes and programmes. Drawing learning's from our programmes over the years, our work will be guided by human rights-based approach by building power from below through empowerment, solidarity, campaigning and advancing rights-based alternatives from a feminist perspective. We work in all the five regions (Southern, Northern, North-West, Eastern and Western Area) of the country and in eight districts (Bo, Bombali, Kambia, Kono, Karene, Moyamba, Tonkolili and Western Area), out of 16-administrative districts in Sierra Leone.

Our Vision: A just, equitable and sustainable world in which every person enjoys the right to a life of dignity, freedom from poverty and all forms of oppression.

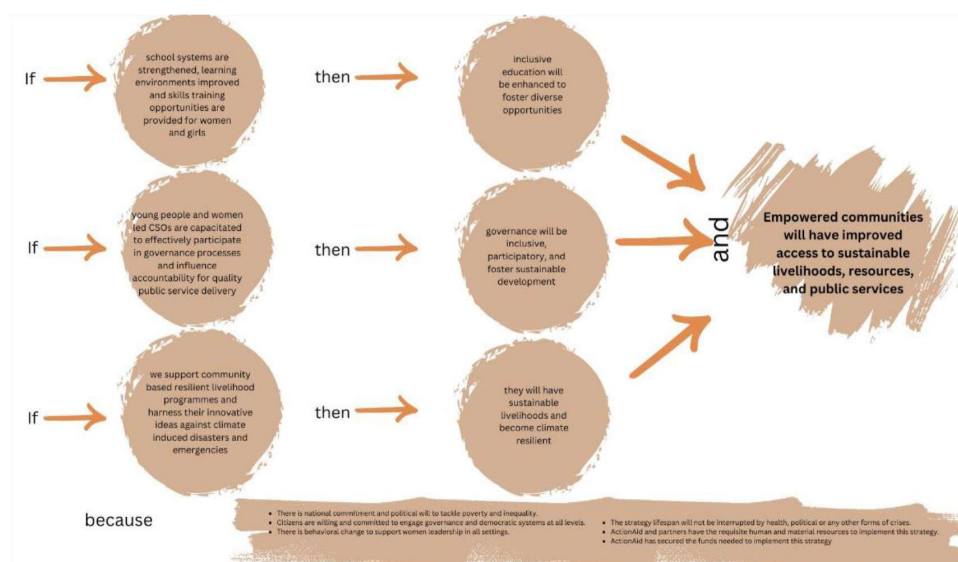
Our Mission: To achieve social justice, gender equality and poverty eradication by working with people living in poverty and exclusion, their communities, people's organizations, activists, social movements and supporters.

Our Values

- I. **Mutual respect**, requiring us to recognize the innate worth of all people and the value of diversity.
- II. **Equity and Justice**, requiring us to ensure the realization of our vision for everyone, irrespective of but not limited to: gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, race, ethnicity, caste, class, age, HIV status, disability, location, and religion.
- III. **Integrity**, requiring us to be honest, transparent, and accountable at all levels for the effectiveness of our actions and our use of resources and open in our judgements and communications with others.
- IV. **Solidarity** with People Living in Poverty and Exclusion will be the only bias in our commitment to the fight against poverty, injustice, and gender inequality.
- V. **Courage of conviction**, requiring us to be creative and radical, bold, and innovative – without fear of failure – in pursuit of making the greatest possible impact on the causes of poverty.
- VI. **Independence** from any religious or political party affiliation.
- VII. **Humility** recognizing that we are part of a wider alliance against poverty and injustice.

3.2. Our Theory of Change

ActionAid believes that change is possible, and it comes from the power in people. We believe that poverty and injustice can only be eradicated through the agency of individual and collective actions (especially women and young people) to shift unequal and unjust power relations (visible, hidden, and invisible). Therefore, we will support people living in poverty and exclusion to confront unequal and unjust powers that lead to denial of rights and challenge all forms of violence.



We are confident that we can contribute to achieving social justice and poverty eradication in Sierra Leone through people's power. Thus, when school systems are strengthened, learning environments improved and skills training opportunities are provided for women and girls, then inclusive education will be enhanced to foster diverse opportunities; when young people and women led CSOs are capacitated to effectively participate in governance processes and influence accountability for quality public service

delivery, then governance will be inclusive, participatory, and foster sustainable development; when we support community based resilient livelihood programmes and harness their innovative ideas against climate induced disasters and emergencies, **then** they will have sustainable livelihoods and become climate resilient. To enable this change, we will anchor on effective monitoring evaluation accountability and learning, robust fundraising, impact reporting and communication, improved financial management and information technology and a well capacitated human resource, strategically oversighted by an active Board.

We assume that:

- There is national commitment and political will to tackle poverty and inequality.
- Citizens are willing and committed to engage governance and democratic systems at all levels.
- There is behavioural change to support women leadership in all settings.
- The strategy lifespan will not be interrupted by health, political or any other forms of crises.
- ActionAid and partners have the requisite human and material resources to implement this strategy.
- ActionAid has secured the funds needed to implement this strategy.

However, AASL agrees that change is not linear and that the processes that lead to it are prone to backlashes but our deep rootedness in the communities where we work, the unwavering support from the ActionAid global federation and our courage of conviction to challenge unequal power relations will consolidate all efforts for social justice.

3.3. Our Programming Approach

Linked with the federation wide approach and principles, ActionAid Sierra Leone believes that poverty is a denial and violations of rights mostly entrenched into laws and policies, institutions and structures, culture, traditions, and religious perceptions and believes. These are the shapers of attitudes and behaviours thereby creating eminent barriers of inequality across levels. Our approach therefore looks at Human Right Based Approach (HRBA) and Feminist Leadership – uncovering intersectionality for a clearer understanding of deep structures to inform actions. In our application of these broad approaches, we will deliberately target women and girls – putting them at the centre in all that we do, ensure young people occupy the driving seat for change. Doing so, we will build Partnership, alliances, coalitions, and movements clearly positioning our uncompromised safeguarding principles in our work. These key approaches are provided in the infographic diagram below:



3.3.1 Human Rights Based Approach

Poverty arises because of the marginalization and discrimination associated with human rights violations. This approach centres on active agency; supporting people living in poverty (particularly women and young people) to become conscious of; and be able to claim their rights by holding duty bearers to account. It flows from our values and our strategies and builds on international human rights law but goes beyond a legal or technical approach to rights.

We place people living in poverty and exclusion, particularly women and young people, at the centre of our HRBA. We believe that people can only claim and protect their rights when they organize themselves and mobilise as a constituency, aware of their rights, and conscious of why their rights are being violated. They need the tools, knowledge, and capacities to advance their case. But raising awareness and mobilization are not enough on their own. We need a wider movement to challenge the structural causes of poverty and injustice, and shift power – and this creates a vital role for solidarity action between citizens at all levels. In our HRBA, we think and act globally and locally. The roots of a human rights violation at the local level may lie elsewhere in a complicated and inter-connected global system. For example, people living in poverty in Kono might be thrown off their land to make way for exploration of minerals by multi-national corporations thereby affecting access to land and by extension shrinking chances of community livelihood activities. In building our programmes and campaigns we need to be aware of how the local links with the national and global. And we need to reform institutions at every level, working collectively as a federation. The AAI Human Rights Based Approach 2020 will continue to complement this CSP. Within the life span of this five years strategy; we will deliver services with a right based lens, promote capacities, document, and generate evidence of poverty, raise local consciousness, and facilitate networks, coalitions, and movements of young people to champion advocacy actions across levels to restore dignity and reduce poverty.

3.3.2 Feminist Leadership

AASL is motivated by Feminist Leadership Programming Approach and strongly promotes fairness, justice, and equity; strive to keep issues of gender, race, social class, sexual orientation, and ability at the forefront. **POWER** plays a crucial role in Feminism; it can either be an enabler or an impediment depending on its use. AASL is aware of power and will make it a mainstay; make analysis of visible, invisible, and hidden powers and how they stifle basic rights. As leadership wheels the element of power from a feminist standpoint, it enables us to identify holders of power and the injustices and oppressions they orchestrate. Therefore, AASL and partners are inspired to facilitate the development of a more inclusive and holistic communities mainly women and young people who will lead to translate POWER into positive outcomes especially for the powerless and destitute. We will focus on individuals, micro-level entities, the larger societal or macro-level social justice concerns as a path in desiring to bring marginalized voices to the centre of the conversation. Our top ten Basic Feminist Principles characterized our behaviors, attitudes and believes.

It will further shape our programming to dismantle critical barriers that affect the prosperity of people living in poverty. This CSP leverages on the AAI Feminist Leadership principles but to be well situated into the context of Sierra Leone, it will adapt its content as much as possible throughout the life of the CSP. This approach has been in use by AASL and AA federation for quite a long period with tremendous successes from within ActionAid and the public domain. We will continue to build staff, partners, Board, Assembly and community capacities through training and awareness programmes, speaks about its principles in our programme execution, meetings, workshops, and engagement with our service providers.

3.3.3 Our work with Women and Girls

Women and girls in Sierra Leone are fraught with issues of multiple discriminations and violations in all spheres ranging from governance, local level decision-making and the exemption to wheel power. They are confronted with several abuses making them susceptible to risks of trauma, psychological and emotional disorder. We recognize that women and girls living in poverty face further marginalization and experience multiple denials of rights due to their socially ascribed role and positions, continued denial of access to education, land and other productive resources making them more vulnerable to violence, health complications, survivors of disasters and emergencies and poverty and exclusion. AASL will deliberately works with women and girls in all its strand of programme priorities. We will invest in building women and girls' leadership and expand their influence in leading change in their personal, private, and public life. We will also organize women and girls build their active agency, structures, and institutions to embark on awareness for consciousness of their specific



MEAL Manager and Girls supported through the AEMAG Project during monitoring visit

oppression and to understand the role of culture, tradition, and religion into issues of power and discriminations. Finally, we will seek equity in recruitment and work to ensure that AASL and partner staff have the skills and political commitment to support the leadership of women and girls living in poverty and exclusion in asserting their rights.

Women's Right was a standalone strand of our work in CSP III, but we realized with clear evidence from the midterm and end line evaluations that women and girls' issues are connected to every component of our work – from Education to Governance, to Climate Justice issues, livelihood, and other associated key deliverables. Noting this, we believed more grounds would be broken if we have women and girls mainstreamed in all our Priority Areas and Anchors to address poverty and injustices. In this regard, we will deliberately target women and girls in all three Priority Areas of the CSP without recourse. We will apply the same approach to our Organizational Anchors to cement the course as a signature.

3.3.4 Working with Young People



Young People at Peace Conference in Bombali District

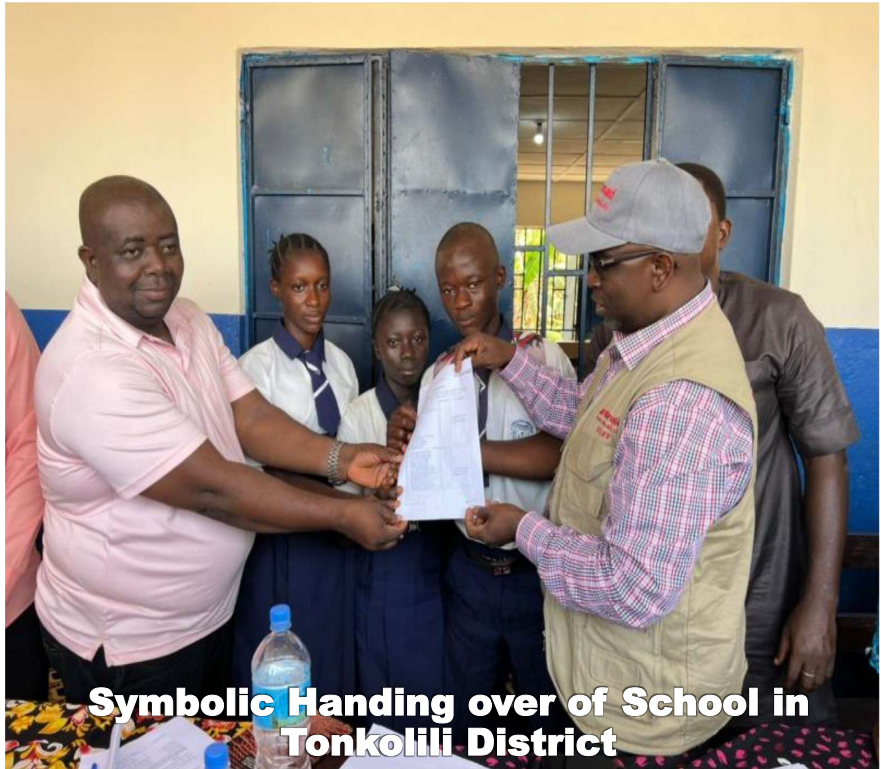
Sierra Leone is characterized by a bulging youth population with 1.7¹⁶ million young people between the age of 18 – 35 years 60% of the youth population structurally unemployed and they are unable to provide sufficiently for themselves and their families. The UNDP report provides startling information which depicted young people in education as failing with 37% of school age perceived to be illiterate. This basically imply that young people are constraint with social protection issues both on the demand side and the opportunity cost of lost economic production and contribution to revenue generation.

The condition of the young people especially women are tangled into multiple barriers to meet their basic needs hence addicted to harmful drug intake, perpetration of violence, and illegal migration among others. AASL sees young people as the drivers of change by leading coalitions, alliances, and building movements for a system change for justice. We will work with young people across our geography, programme cycle and advocacy work as a way of making change happen. Our experience in working with young people was masterclass in CSP III. Our Activistas, Peace and ACDEC Ambassadors, Global Platform initiative was commendable. Our CSP IV will build on these high scores by strengthening these youths' initiatives but more so, expanding the Global Platform Youth Programme into the rest of our geographical locations. As youths form most of the country's population and have the energy and zest to deliver on national services making it be rooted from communities, AASL will have them into its advocacy and campaign work and make them contributors to the nation's development trajectory.

¹⁶ A Blueprint for Youths Development; UNDP 2014 - 2018

3.3.5 Partnership and Alliance Building

A core principle of ActionAid's approach is working in partnership. Partnership is an overarching and necessary strategy that cuts across geographies and levels (from local to international, projects and programmes) in which ActionAid's mission work is facilitated and implemented. The Partnership approach empowers poor people and their organizations, and this requires building a global partnership and movement against poverty that connects issues and geographies at all levels. Through partnership we reaffirm legitimacy — (AASL does not replace local initiatives but strengthen and contributes to them) for wider learning and sharing of skills and



Symbolic Handing over of School in Tonkolili District

knowledge. Therefore, our programme work cannot be delivered alone. We will deliver in partnership with like-minded organizations including community-based structures, CBOs, Local and National NGOs, CSOs, Coalitions, Alliances and Movements etc. This partnership approach strengthens our accountability to the poor and other stakeholders. It is therefore not an option but an integral part of our strategic focus. Because our HRBA Approach, National and Global development agendas promulgate PARTNERSHIP, we will continue this sense of direction at all levels. However, the CSP will translate into positioning AASL better in reviewing its Partnership Policy where deeper analysis and pathways are provided.

3.3.6 Integrating Safeguarding into our Programming.

SHEA and Safeguarding incidents are rooted in power, particularly gendered and sexualized abuses of power. ActionAid views any form of sexual violence as a gross violation of human rights. We will not tolerate our staff or other representatives carry out any form of sexual harassment, exploitation, or abuse towards anyone we meet through our work. We recognise that to work with integrity we must 'walk the talk' and ensure that anyone who meets ActionAid is protected from any form of injustice, discrimination, or abuse. ActionAid is committed to preventing any form of sexual harassment, exploitation, and abuse (including child abuse and adult at-risk abuse) and responding robustly when these harms take place.

AASL mainstreams SHEA and Safeguarding into every aspect of its work and takes prompt and uncompromised action against perpetrators regardless of position and power. This applies to not only staff but our Board and General Assembly members, partners, service providers and other constituents. Using this strand of our approaches, we will ensure capacities are built, strengthen reporting mechanisms, referral pathways and embed it into the roles and responsibilities of every staff, board, and general assembly member.

3.3.7 Our Participatory Methodologies

Participatory methodologies are encapsulated into our programming from its appraisal, design, planning, monitoring, and evaluations. As a right-based organization working with the extremely poor and marginalized mostly dwelling in poverty and confronted with inequalities, marginalization, and discriminations, we keep in mind that they can understand their situation better through our programming and be able to lead various analyses with the use of local tools, techniques, and approaches. Together with these constituents, we conduct for example Participatory Vulnerability Analysis (PVA) to uncover the root causes of their conditions and the power they might have from within combined with power-with to overcome power over to reverse the status quo. Some community friendly tools we infuse in our programming conversations to harness local ideas include but not limited to Score carding, Problem and Solution Tree Analysis, Pairwise Ranking, Power Matrix, Transect Walk, River of Life, Low and High Hanging Fruits, Venn Diagram, and community mapping. This arouses the active participation and improved understanding of those we work with – making them empowered to form networks and coalitions to claim rights.



3.3. The Transition from CSP III to CSP IV and Alignments with ActionAid Global Strategic Priorities

3.4.1 Our transition into Country Strategy Paper IV

AASL work in the last five years of implementing the previous strategy recorded lot of successes as well as challenges and lessons in the process. Whilst the contextual issues may not be too different, in designing our programming for the next five years, we also considered the new or changing political, social, and economic conditions that emerged from our reviews and reflection processes. Our final evaluation presented the need to consolidate and deepen our work with communities on public service delivery, the empowerment of women and girls and building community structures and civil society to hold the state to account for the fulfilment of their rights.

AASL will focus on three priorities with more focused programming interventions around Inclusive Education, Inclusive and Participatory Governance for Sustainable Development, and Climate Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods. This is in response to the challenges and many lessons learnt, and emerging contextual issues in alignment with the national development plan, Sustainable Development Goals, and our collective global priorities.

These programme priorities will respond to the struggles and challenges of communities living in poverty, building on our theory of change and learnings from over three decades of working directly with communities to build their consciousness and strengthen their solidarity to demand public service delivery by holding duty bearers to account

3.4.2 Country Strategy Paper IV Alignment

This CSP is aligned with ActionAid Global Strategy and Strategy Implementation Framework, the Sierra Leone Development Agenda (the Big Five Changer) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The table below clearly shows these alignments and show our level of contribution to Sierra Leone, ActionAid Federation, and the Global Village.



Chief Minister of the Republic of Sierra Leone during the Launch of AASL's Fourth Country Strategy

CSP IV Priorities	Government Big Five Agenda	AAI Global Strategy	SDGs
Priority 1: Inclusive and empowering education to foster diverse opportunities.	Human Capital Development (including the Right to Education): Nurturing Skills for 21st Century Industry	Strategic Objective 1:	Goal 4: Quality Education
Priority 2: Inclusive and participatory governance for sustainable development	Revamping the Public Service Architecture: Delivery, Efficiency and Professionalism	Strategic Objective 6	Goal10: Reduce inequalities. Goal 5: Gender Equality
Priority 3: Climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods	FEED SALONE - An Initiative to Boost Agricultural Productivity to Ensure Food Security and Inclusive Economic Growth	Strategic Objective 2: Strategic Objective 3: Strategic Objective 4: Strategic Objective 5:	Goal 13: Climate Action

Chapter IV

4.1 Programme Priorities

The work of ActionAid Sierra Leone in the next five years is guided by three programme priorities and six focus areas. This is in response to the prevailing context to maintain relevance to the struggles of communities living in poverty. Over the next five years, AASL will work towards achieving the following overarching goal: **Empowered communities, having improved access to sustainable livelihoods, resources, and public services.**

The above goal will be achieved through our long-term integrated programme focused on **Rights, Redistribution and Resilience**. These three pillars are interconnected and mutually reinforcing in that one will only be achieved if gains are made in other areas. Rights cannot be fulfilled without redistribution of power and resources; and they will continue to be undermined without building the resilience of people living in poverty and exclusion and social movements. In the same vein, the three priority areas are interconnected in a way that inclusive and empowering education can only be achieved through effective and efficient governance systems. Climate and livelihoods remain a mainstay to achieving inclusive education and effective governance systems. Whilst we implement the actions of these priorities, we will ensure that they are linked to one another for an integrated result that contributes to achieving the overall goal of the organisation.

Priority 1: Inclusive and empowering education to foster diverse opportunities.



Teachers and Pupils in ActionAid sponsored school in Bombali District

Limited access and inclusion have remained sustained barriers to quality education in Sierra Leone. ActionAid Sierra Leone believes all children have a right to quality education. Despite the gains made in increasing enrolment in the last five years, retention, absenteeism, inadequate human, and material resources have served as major

challenges. Exclusion of children living with disability and other marginalized groups is rife, stemming from unavailability of the facilities that cater for their special needs, thus limiting accessibility. Safety in schools have also been challenged with issues of school related gender-based violence and unsafe communities. Low access to facilities that provide skills training have also impeded the growth of middle level manpower in Sierra Leone and limit the diversification of skills output of our human resources especially in rural communities. We will work with state institutions, school systems and communities to improve learning environments and outcomes for children. We will also support the empowerment of women and girls through skills training that promote their economic rights and self-reliance to break the cycle of poverty and violence.

The above analysis implies that although the right to education is enshrined in the national constitution and accompanying national Education Act, a significant percentage of right holders is likely unaware of its constitutional right or know how it can be legally enforced. In a similar vein, the right in education is often reduced to the right to schooling, with emphasis placed on getting children into classrooms, and little focus on what obtains when they get there. AASL's strategic focus over the CSP lifespan will be the continuation of its work on grounding the right to and in education at local level by empowering communities with knowledge and actions on how these rights could become a reality. Advocacy groups will be strengthened to communicate at local, national, and international levels, through written documentation, as well as using oral and visual media entailing advocacy messages for increased budgetary allocations, teacher recruitment and variable demands for goods and services in support of the right to education. Towards this direction, community groups would be supported to working in coalitions with other CSO actors, transmitting locally generated information into evidence-based policy using the Promoting Rights in School Approach.

Focus Area 1: Strengthen school systems and improve learning environments for quality educational outcomes.

Key Outcomes

1. School governance systems are functional and accountable.
2. Schools and communities provide safe and conducive learning environments.
3. Schools have adequate human and material resources to provide quality education.
4. Community advocacy groups are making evidence-based demands at local and national levels in support of education rights.

Actions:

- Use the Promoting Rights in School Framework to build Awareness and mobilize communities on their right to education and use the evidence to hold duty bearers to account for increased investment on education.
- Support community teachers to acquire teacher certificates through distance education to improve their skills and gain professional recognition.
- Provide teaching and learning materials to be available and accessible.
- Work with movements and networks to advocate for the recruitment and deployment of adequate number of trained and qualified teachers especially in remote schools and for sustainable financing of education Programmes.
- Build the capacity of school governance systems to improve their knowledge on their roles, teacher code of conduct, SRH, GBV, etc.
- Mobilize community structures to lead campaigns to guarantee the right to education for every child and link to national and international level actions on budget, debt, and public sector wage bill.
- Support school governance systems and community structures to participate in planning, implementation and monitoring of resources allocated to education.
- Strengthen community structures to advocate for school infrastructure.
- Improve learning environment through school infrastructure including WASH facilities, green environment to create an attractive and conducive learning environment.
- Support schools and communities to design and implement actions that promote safety for girls.

Focus Area 2: Skills training opportunities for women and girls.

Key Outcomes

1: Women and girls access effective skills training institutions or services.

2: Women and girls are using relevant skills that promote economic rights and self-reliance to break the cycle of poverty and violence.

Actions

- Advocate for the accessibility of skills training opportunities especially in remote communities to ensure inclusivity.
- Work with the government, donors, and other partners to set up programmes that provide access to skills training.
- Empower women and girls with skills training for self-reliance and economic empowerment.
- Build a movement of adolescent girls to advocate for increased investment in access to opportunities for skilled entrepreneurship.

Priority 2: Inclusive and participatory governance for sustainable development

The civic and political space for citizens' participation and demand for accountability is shrinking in the Sierra Leone context. This is evidenced by limited participation of women, young people and other marginalized groups in governance processes which is requisite for the delivery of and access to public services. ActionAid will capacitate citizens, especially marginalized groups, and their organizations to hold duty bearers (state, corporates, and NGOs) accountable. We will advocate for increased participation of women, young people and excluded groups in decision making and governance processes affecting them.



Revenue mobilization is a key instrument for achieving government's ambition for poverty reduction and increase in fiscal independence. However, domestic tax mobilization is still performing poorly due to bad governance and non-compliance¹⁷. We will influence the prioritization and provision of public services, financed through progressive taxation.

Focus Area 1: Strengthen and capacitate young people and women led CSOs for effective participation in governance processes.

Key Outcomes

1. Women and young people holding government to account.
2. Citizens and CSOs demand review and effective implementation of policies that promote inclusive participation.
3. Women and young people taking leadership in governance, promote national cohesion and civic participation.

¹⁷ Paper written and published on May 28, 2023, by Dr. Abu Kai Kamara and Dr. Sheku Kamara of the University of Sierra Leone,

Actions

- Build the capacity of young people and women led CSOs on leadership, accountability, civic education, political rights, and governance to empower them for greater voice and influence.
- Mobilize young people to take actions on peace building, civic participation, and national cohesion.
- Solidarize with networks and movements to demand for review and effective implementation of policies that promotes inclusive participation of women and young people.

Focus Area 2: Influence accountable public service delivery.

Key Outcomes

1. Local councils and authorities are more accountable and provide public services to citizens.
2. Women and girls including survivors of gender-based violence access to public services especially health and social protection.
3. CSOs and citizens influence adequate budget allocation to public services.

Actions

- Facilitate space for dialogue between communities and local councils to demand accountable public service delivery.
- Building local and national level evidence using participatory methodologies to make the case for increased and more accountable allocation of public resources to public services such as education, health, GBV services.
- Strengthen community structures and civil society organizations to demand increased budgetary allocation to public service provision and link them with national, sub regional and international networks.

- Facilitate reflection actions to build awareness around citizens' rights to public services.
- Building coordination and collaboration with movements, CSOs, NGOs and government institutions to ensure access to services and comprehensive support to women and survivors of SGBV.
- Strengthening community structures to identify and document women's rights violations and report using the referral and redress mechanisms.
- Work with community groups and build their capacity to relate with community and national level duty bearers to advocate and influence revenue mobilization and transparent utilization.



Sponsored Children during PRRP

Priority 3: Climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods



Women farmers in Bombali District

Food security and livelihoods are prominent among the sectors threatened by climate change in Sierra Leone. Flooding, mudslides, rise in sea level and changes in precipitation have adversely affected livelihoods, having multiple and ripple effects especially on people living in poverty and exclusion. AASL will work with

communities to deepen their understanding of climate change and demand for climate justice while promoting community based resilient livelihood programmes.

We will also harness communities' initiatives and actions against climate induced disasters and emergencies. In addition, we will advocate for fair distribution of productive resources and promote agroecology for climate resilient sustainable agriculture. At national level, we will join networks and movements to demand climate financing, support policy formulation and implementation of climate justice and monitor Government's accountability on international level commitments on climate. As a member of a growing national climate change consortium, together with other organizations, we will harness collective power to build capacity, take actions and solidarize against climate change.

Our global campaign "Fund our Future" is embedded in this priority area. We will commission research to propagate evidence of harmful industrial practices and use of fossil fuel for appropriate actions at national, regional, and international levels. We will also build capacities and resilience, embark on climate adaptation and mitigative actions but advocate against funders of fossil fuel and harmful industrial agriculture for renewable energy use and agroecological practices that will keep the environment safer.

Focus Area 1: Sustainable community based resilient livelihood programmes.

Key Outcomes

1. Women farmers access productive resources and diverse economic opportunities.
2. Improved climate friendly agronomic and post-harvest practices
3. Communities initiate green and self-innovative climate friendly alternative livelihood approaches

Actions

- Build the capacity of women's groups and support them to practice climate resilient sustainable farming and establish linkages to structures in the agriculture value chain.

- Promote women economic empowerment through income generating activities and other alternative livelihoods to improve their social and economic welfare.
- Support community initiatives on green and climate friendly alternative livelihood approaches to improve their coping mechanisms.
- Support women and community-led groups and link them to movements at national and international levels to advocate for their rights to access productive resources and other economic opportunities.
- Invest in agroecology.
- Support national civil society platform on climate resilience and sustainable agriculture and mobilize them to advocate for investment in agroecology and support to small holder farmers.

Focus Area 2: Community-led resilience actions against climate induced disasters and emergencies.

Key Outcomes

1. Community structures and their movements demonstrate the capacity to mitigate climate induced disasters and emergencies.
2. Communities serve as first-time responders during disasters preparedness, prevention, and response mechanisms.
3. Women and young people lead advocacy for climate financing for a green and just transition.

Actions

- Strengthen community groups to develop and implement disaster preparedness and response plans for timely and appropriate response.
- Mobilize young people and their movements to advocate for climate financing and a just, green, and feminist transition.
- Advocate for government to review or develop and implement relevant laws and policies and international commitments towards environmental protection.
- Support communities to practice adaptation and mitigation for improved resilience.
- Build capacity of women's groups and community structures on the use of participatory approaches to document the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods and use evidence to hold duty bearers to account.
- Build capacity and support local authorities to integrate climate change into local development planning and budgeting processes.



Global Platform Meeting in Bo District

Chapter V

4. Strategic Anchors



Staff during CSP Launch

To deliver on the CSP IV, the following organizational priorities will provide relevant support and guidance to its actualization. These anchors include effective monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Evaluation systems, fundraising and communication, effective and efficient financial management systems and Human Resource and Organizational Development including Board Governance and Audits.

ActionAid Sierra Leone has gone through a Country Model Review transition which positions it as a full presence country and Centre of Support. The implication is that ActionAid Sierra Leone must be prepared to provide support to other countries whenever the need arises.

Over the next five years of implementing this strategy, AASL will work towards an Agile and Financially Sustainable Affiliate Programme delivering quality and impactful programmes in communities in Sierra Leone. Details of the anchors are indicated in the following sections.



Members of Senior Leadership Team during presentation of Plans and Budgets

5.1 Strategic Anchor 1: Programme Effectiveness and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)

A MEAL plan will be developed in alignment to the global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to test our theory of change and show how our actions at country level contribute to global impact. We will build on the lessons of the previous strategy to track and measure the change made through our programme interventions, and our effectiveness in achieving the strategic anchors. We will use the principles of ActionAid's Accountability Learning and Planning Systems and Programme Quality Standards to ensure inclusive participation of people living in poverty and exclusion. Programme quality will be assured in all our actions to ensure measurable impact of all interventions.

We will invest in MEAL to generate knowledge and incorporate ways of planning and implementing programme and project processes and outcomes on a continuous basis. A digitalized data management system will be developed to track progress and achievements of programme priorities and strategic anchors and generate data that will influence planning and adaptation.

We will deepen accountability by establishing user friendly feedback and complaints handling mechanisms while managing stakeholder accountability expectations at all levels.

Key Outcomes:

1. Evidence-based reporting and communication of AASL's work
2. Deepened accountability and shared learning promoting programme quality

Actions

- Develop a comprehensive MEAL Plan using the 'Results-Based Monitoring Model' to capture the achievements and lessons learnt during this strategy period for evidenced-based policy influencing.
- Build staff, partners and beneficiaries' capacity on Results-Based Monitoring, Programme Quality and Digital Data Management to enhance quality reporting.
- Invest in innovative and appropriate technology/ tools to facilitate data management (collection, analysis, and storage) and knowledge management.
- Facilitate relevant participatory reviews and reflection processes and programme quality audits to generate learning.
- Promote innovation, document, and facilitate shared learning across units, Local Rights Programmes, and the federation as a whole through participation in international platforms to enhance organizational visibility and dissemination of best practices.
- We will identify our niche in tandem with issues emerging from the context and focus on interventions that are impactful, responding to the needs of communities whilst aligning with the common global priorities.

5.2 Strategic Anchor 2: Fundraising and Communication

The changes in the political and economic trends across Europe are dictating the pace of donor funding and these are having ripple effects on low-income countries like Sierra Leone. AASL is currently experiencing significant changes in resource mobilization due to donor fatigue coupled with the global economic downturn. This implies AASL needs to be more robust, creative, and innovative in resource mobilization to fund its programmes. During CSP III, AASL embarked on some transformative changes including the modernization of the child sponsorship programme and development of the Contract Management System for effective grant management.

There has been huge dependence on child sponsorship income with a realization in income growth. This notwithstanding, partnership income largely needs to be accelerated to overshadow regular giving income. For instance, in 2023, child sponsorship funding was 57% as against 43% for partnership funding; while similarly in 2018, child sponsorship funding was 61% compared to 39% for partnership funding. AASL is therefore striving to invest more to meet the required needs of our communities by exploring better fundraising opportunities.

ActionAid will strengthen its partnership fundraising to ensure it constitutes a minimum of 60% to 70% of our annual income from 2024 to 2028.

Key Outcomes

1. Increased annual income from about 2.5m GBP to 3m GBP per annum, through sponsorship and partnership funding.
2. Increased and sustained Child Sponsorship supporter links through innovative approaches in servicing the supporters.

Actions

- Conduct a comprehensive donor scoping study to review fundraising and communication strategies and update cost recovery policy.
- Build staff capacity to monitor the effective use of Contracts Management System (CMS).
- Enhance AASL's branding and visibility through IEC and effective use of print and electronic media to forge partnerships with peer organizations and government MDAs.
- Strengthen staff and partners' capacity in child sponsorship and partnership fundraising and communication for development to improve opportunities for diversified funding.
- Implement innovative approaches to sustain and increase our supporter base and donors through compliance to quality and timeliness of reporting and responding to supporter requirement.
- We will consolidate our child sponsorship footprint (both at LRP and national levels), to achieve change in costs, efficiency, and impact.
- Develop a financial sustainability plan with each LRP having a minimum of 2,000 CS links.

5.3 Strategic Anchor 3: Financial Management and Information Technology

In the CSP 3 lifespan, improved systems and structured policies shaped Financial Management and Information Technology Unit and improved the implementation of the Programmes. During this period, the Affiliate Programme transitioned from the use of SUN system version 4.4 to a more robust and advanced system, known as the Global Financial System (GFS). This is cloud based and can now be accessed by all finance staff at both regional and head offices. Unlike before, Regional Accountants can now produce Management Accounts and other donor reports from their individual locations or from any locations where internet is available. The AP also improved internet access by increasing bandwidths from 5 to 15 megabytes at the Head Office and from 1 to 2 megabytes at the Regional Offices. AASL also made work more effective by securing 365 Microsoft systems and making it simple to connect with the Global Financial System (GFS) and to save all working files on cloud. Staff does not need to move from their location to have meeting as this can now happen via Teams.

Key Outcomes

1. Strong internal controls for improved internal and external financial accountability and reporting.
2. Improved effectiveness of cost recovery processes
3. Assurance on financial prudence for internal and external stakeholders
4. Accurate and up-to-date financial records in place.
5. Improved Internet service to enable business management processes to achieve operational excellence.

Actions

- Build capacity of AASL and partner staff on financial management to improve financial reporting skills.
- Review financial management policy to align with CSP IV and new changes in the AAI Financial Management framework.
- Produce relevant, timely and quality reports to fulfil AASL internal and external financial reporting obligations.
- Develop digitalize financial management process to upgrade financial documentation and reporting.
- Continue to pursue indirect cost recovery to support overhead costs.
- Regularly support internal and external audits in a timely manner and implement all management actions according to agreed timelines to build confidence and integrity between AASL and other stakeholders.

5.4. Strategic Anchor 4: Human Resource, Organizational Development and Governance

Our Human Resource and Organisational Development priorities which include Strengthening Our People Power, Women's Leadership, Work culture, and Ethics and Governance have been successful. AASL has an effective Human Resources Management Information System, an electronic biometric sign-in system at the headquarters office and prioritizes staff capacity building. In the last strategy, we placed premium on building our own people power, hence a good number of staff have been supported in various professional and academic courses. Amidst the changes in our ways of working largely brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Country Model Review, AASL has been identified as a 'Centre of Support'. Our staff continue to support international-level processes as part of our dual-citizen commitment to the federation in the areas of HROD, Internal Audit, Finance, and Information Technology Coordination. In the next five years, we will prioritise the following:

5.4.1. Strengthen Women's Leadership:

The passing into law of the Gender Equality Women's Empowerment (GEWE) bill by the government of Sierra Leone requires a minimum of 30% women representation in all governance positions. Having a strong and developed female work force, AASL will continue to focus on developing women leaders and supporting their progression into leadership positions.

Key Outcome

1. Proactive, empowered, and productive women leaders in the organization

Actions

- Promote gender equality as a core value to address the structural causes of the abuse of power internally.
- Provide an empowering and enabling environment that supports women's advancement.
- Adopt participatory approaches that will support creative and innovative mechanisms to ensure work life balance for women.
- Build staff capacity on feminism and feminist leadership to empower staff with knowledge and skill to challenge patriarchy.

5.4.2 Safeguarding embedded into our work culture and ethics.

Safeguarding is a vital process that protects children and adults from harm, abuse, and neglect. The safety and well-being of our staff and community children is important as they come into contact with the services that we provide. In CSP III, AASL developed and implemented strong Safeguarding policies including Anti-bullying, and Whistle-Blowing Policy, Child Safeguarding Policy, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) Policy, Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse (SHEA) at Work Policy. Over the six years strategy period, AASL and partner staff and communities' capacity has been built on these safeguarding policies and mainstreamed in all our work.

Key Outcome

1. Safeguarding policies are in place, promoted and implemented to protect women, children, and adults at risk.

Actions

- Develop annual plan of awareness and capability interventions to guide the implementation of a preventive and protective organization-wide safeguarding culture.
- Support face-to-face training to enable the implementation of all relevant Safeguarding policies, standards, and procedures.
- Monitoring take-up development activities to respond on specific issues, needs and requirements at the respective levels.
- Integrate SHEA and Safeguarding in our programme work to emphasize its importance within AASL culture.

5.4.3 Staff efficiency, well-being, and flexible ways of work

AASL will build an organizational culture that supports staff to improve their capacity, well-being and enhance their potential with an opportunity for flexible and empowered ways of working.

Key Outcomes

1. Productive work force that contributes to achieving organisational goals.
2. Diverse human resource based on comparative better staff welfare and work flexibility.

Actions

- Create a flexible working policy to guide flexible ways of work.
- Build a culture of connection through check-ins to promote staff well-being.
- Create awareness of available mental health resources to enable the use of support options during tricky times.
- Conduct job assessment/evaluation to ensure an adequate staff capacity to support other countries in need.
- Review AASL current structure to ensure a more robust and agile to align with the CSP and be able to serve as 'Centre of support' without significantly affecting the effective functioning of AASL.
- Work with the GS CMR team to sign Service Sharing Agreement with relevant countries as required.

5.4.4 Strengthening Governance

As an Affiliate program, AASL has a Board in place that provides strategic oversight management in running the organization. Effective functioning of the Board and General Assembly is a prerequisite for the successful implementation of this strategy and deepening accountability to our multiple stakeholders. We will continue to strengthen the capacity of our Board to deliver on their roles in holding management to account in delivering on our commitments locally and to the ActionAid International Federation. We will enhance the use of technology to facilitate Board processes.

Key Outcomes

1. Compliant with relevant statutory and organizational policy requirements.
2. Efficient, diversified Board and General Assembly providing oversight to management for the effective implementation of the strategy.

Actions

- Constitute a Board with diverse members in terms of competence, gender, and representation of the poor and marginalized and young people.
- Build capacity of Board and General Assembly members to ensure continuity and succession.
- Support induction programmes for new Board and General Assembly members to create an understanding of their roles and responsibilities.
- Conduct periodic Board and General Assembly reviews to implement recommendations that will progressively improve their performance.
- Promote local Board participation in International Board Committees and AAI engagements for shared learning.
- Facilitate the engagement of board members in fundraising, programming, policy, and advocacy work to lend credence to AASL's work.



Board members during AGM

Annexes

Annex 1: Income and Expenditure Projections

Annex 2: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Plan

Annex 3: Risk Register

Annex 1: Income and Expenditure Projections

ActionAid Sierra Leone

Country Strategic Plan Projection

ActionAid Country Name Sierra Leone

E'm (state Currency)	2023 Forecast			2024 Plan			2025 Projection			2025 CSP Projection			2027 CSP Projection			2028 CSP Projection		
	R	U	Total	R	U	Total	R	U	Total	R	U	Total	R	U	Total	R	U	Total
Total income	1,628	-	1,628	1,469	-	1,469	2,207	-	2,207	2,296	-	2,296	2,380	-	2,380	2,330	-	2,330
Total expenditure	2,135	-	2,135	2,023	-	2,023	2,058	-	2,058	2,175	-	2,175	2,175	-	2,175	2,235	-	2,235
Net Transfers	-	(6)	(6)	-	(5)	(5)	-	(8)	(8)	-	(9)	(9)	-	(9)	(9)	-	(9)	(9)
Net result	(507)	(6)	(513)	(554)	(5)	(559)	149	(8)	141	121	(9)	112	205	(9)	196	95	(9)	86
Opening reserves (months)	14	-	14	12	-	12	8	-	8	9	-	9	9	-	9	10	-	10
Closing reserves (months)	11	-	11	8	-	8	9	-	9	9	-	9	10	-	10	10	-	10

Notes

R means restricted income

U means unrestricted income

Annex 2: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Plan

MONITORING EVALUATION ACCOUNTABILITY AND LEARNING PLAN

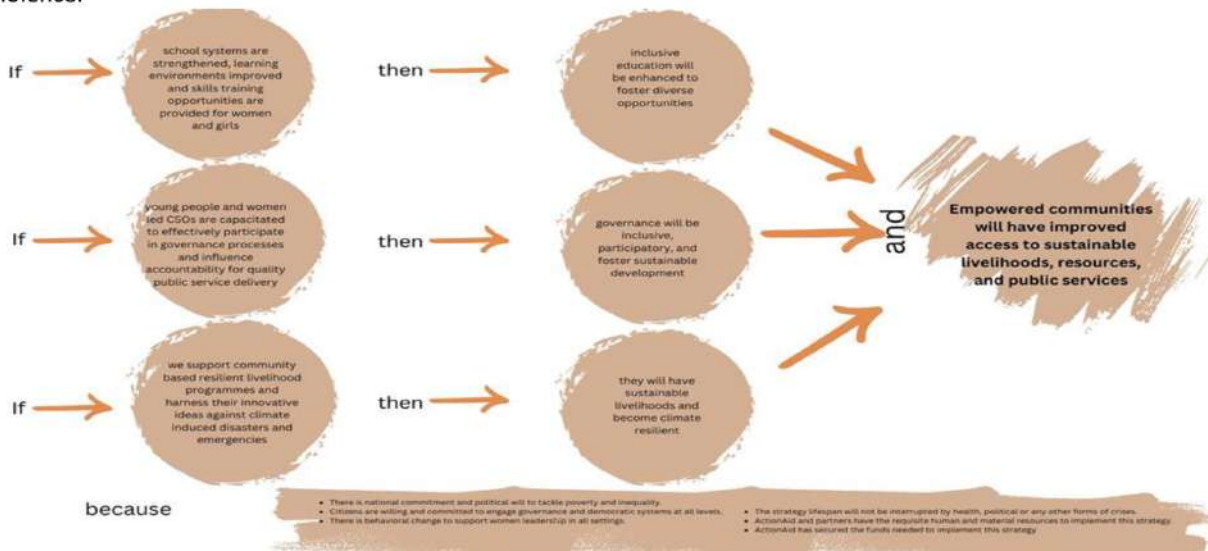
Introduction

This document details ActionAid Sierra Leone's Country Strategy Paper IV, Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Plan 2024 – 2028. It serves as the learning and quality improvement and assurance tool that will track progress and define what is to be monitored, how, when and by whom. It will help us collect data and generate evidence for informed decision making, be and demand accountability and for learning.

This MEAL Framework will be used in line with our broader programme approach analysis built on the theory of change. It is also a companion to our Country Strategy and will be considered as a living document giving us a basis for reviewing and evaluating our work. It will however be updated on regular intervals through the Strategy lifespan.

Theory of Change

ActionAid believes that change is possible, and it comes from the power in people. We believe that poverty and injustice can only be eradicated through the agency of individual and collective actions (especially women and young people) to shift unequal and unjust power relations (visible, hidden, and invisible). Therefore, we will support people living in poverty and exclusion to confront unequal and unjust powers that lead to denial of rights and challenge all forms of violence.



We are confident that we can contribute to achieving social justice and poverty eradication in Sierra Leone through people's power. Thus, **when** school systems are strengthened, learning environments improved and skills training opportunities are provided for women and girls, **then** inclusive education will be enhanced to foster diverse opportunities; **when** young people and women led CSOs are capacitated to effectively participate in governance processes and influence accountability for quality public service delivery, **then** governance will be inclusive, participatory, and foster sustainable development; **when** we support community based resilient livelihood programmes and harness their innovative ideas against climate induced disasters and emergencies, **then** they will have sustainable livelihoods and become climate resilient.

To enable this change, we will anchor on effective monitoring evaluation accountability and learning, robust fundraising, impact reporting and communication, improved financial management and information technology and a well capacitated human resource, strategically oversighted by an active Board.

We assume that:

- There is national commitment and political will to tackle poverty and inequality.
- Citizens are willing and committed to engage governance and democratic systems at all levels.
- There is behavioural change to support women leadership in all settings.
- The strategy lifespan will not be interrupted by health, political or any other forms of crises.
- ActionAid and partners have the requisite human and material resources to implement this strategy.
- ActionAid has secured the funds needed to implement this strategy.

However, AASL agrees that change is not linear and that the processes that lead to it are prone to backlashes but our deep rootedness in the communities where we work, the unwavering support from the ActionAid global federation and our courage of conviction to challenge unequal power relations will consolidate all efforts for social justice.

Our Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning Approach

Monitoring: In ActionAid the term used for 'monitoring' includes ongoing participatory review and reflection. ActionAid's monitoring system is designed not only to monitor our work (action/output) and the results of our work (objective/outcome) but also to test whether or not our theory of change is working out in practice (goal/impact). Our review and reflection should also monitor changes in the context to see whether our work is still relevant. Participatory review and reflection processes (PRRP) are the core component of ActionAid's approach to regular and ongoing monitoring of the progress and outcomes of our work. The term 'PRRP' refers to ongoing participatory monitoring mechanisms and to periodic moments of more in-depth review with key stakeholders on the progress of our work, where data collected through our monitoring processes are gathered, analyzed and consolidated for learning and accountability purposes.

In the lifespan of this strategy, we will monitor:

- Context – what has changed in the context that we need to take into account, if it can be traced back to our interventions and the effects contextual change might have on our work,
- Activities – are we doing what we said we would? Are our resources used efficiently and effectively? How can we improve?
- Objectives – reviewed against outcomes and indicators, assessing both positive and negative, expected and unexpected.
- Goal/impact – Are our objectives are leading to intended impact? Do our assumptions still hold and theory of change still valid? Do they need to be modified, and if so, how?
- Alignment and compliance to standards and policies.

All the above listed things will be monitored through monitoring routines guided by monitoring checklists and tools. Staff of ActionAid Sierra Leone will be responsible for this with guidance from the MEAL team led by the MEAL Manager. As often as necessary, monitoring will also be done jointly with our communities, partners, donors, government line ministries, department and agencies we work with and other levels of stakeholders.

Evaluation: Evaluation is a critical component of MEAL that involves assessing the success, impact and effectiveness of projects, programmes and policies¹. Evaluation for this CSP will encompass all reviews, assessments, scoping studies, programme quality audits and external evaluations. This will add value to the MEAL cycle by enabling external reviews of our work and proper recommendations for adaptation, modifications, informed decision making, future programming and learning. For this CSP, a baseline assessment, mid-term review and endline evaluation will be conducted by external consultants.

Accountability: ActionAid’s concept of accountability is one of mutual accountability driven by a primary accountability to poor and excluded people with whom we and our partners work. For ActionAid, accountability is integrally linked to our mission; it is about empowering people and transforming power relations, thus it is part of our strategy and theory of change. Our accountability approach will empower poor and excluded people to claim from us, and ultimately from duty bearers, to shape their own development processes. It will strengthen our governance by ensuring mutual accountability between our members and all our stakeholders. It will allow us to demonstrate impact and be accountable to donors and supporters, thus building more support and solidarity.

We will promote:

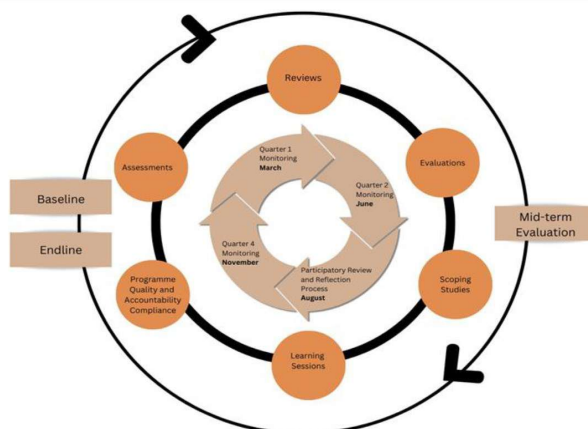
- Transparent communications through our Open Information Policy
- Alignment with ActionAid’s programme quality and other organizational standards
- Responsiveness, by strengthening and integrating our feedback and response mechanisms
- Inclusive participation of all levels of stakeholders

Learning: ActionAid regards learning and critical reflection as fundamental to our commitment to making change happen. Our learning approach aims to simplify reporting requirements and promote processes which emphasize critical engagement, mutual learning and accountability. It will optimize staff and partner time spent on critical reflection and learning, rather than on unnecessary bureaucracy and routine processes and adapts requirements where necessary to ensure processes add value. It will enable staff learn with and from poor and excluded people, our partners, allies, supporters and others so that better decisions about our actions are made and good practices and solutions can be shared and developed. It also requires that we remain flexible and adapt our strategies and plans in light of learning.

We will draw learnings from our reporting methodologies, participatory review and reflection processes, shared learning and knowledge management opportunities both internally within the Affiliate Programme and the Federation and externally especially among peer organizations. We foster learning through staff capacity building especially on the strategic focus areas of this CSP, organizational policies and organizational culture while creating and making use of platform to share learnings with others. We will build a virtual resource center for all our knowledge documents.

(excerpts from ActionAid Accountability Learning and Planning Systems²)

The MEAL Cycle



¹ <https://www.evalcommunity.com/career-center/meal/>

² ActionAid Accountability Learning and Planning systems 2011

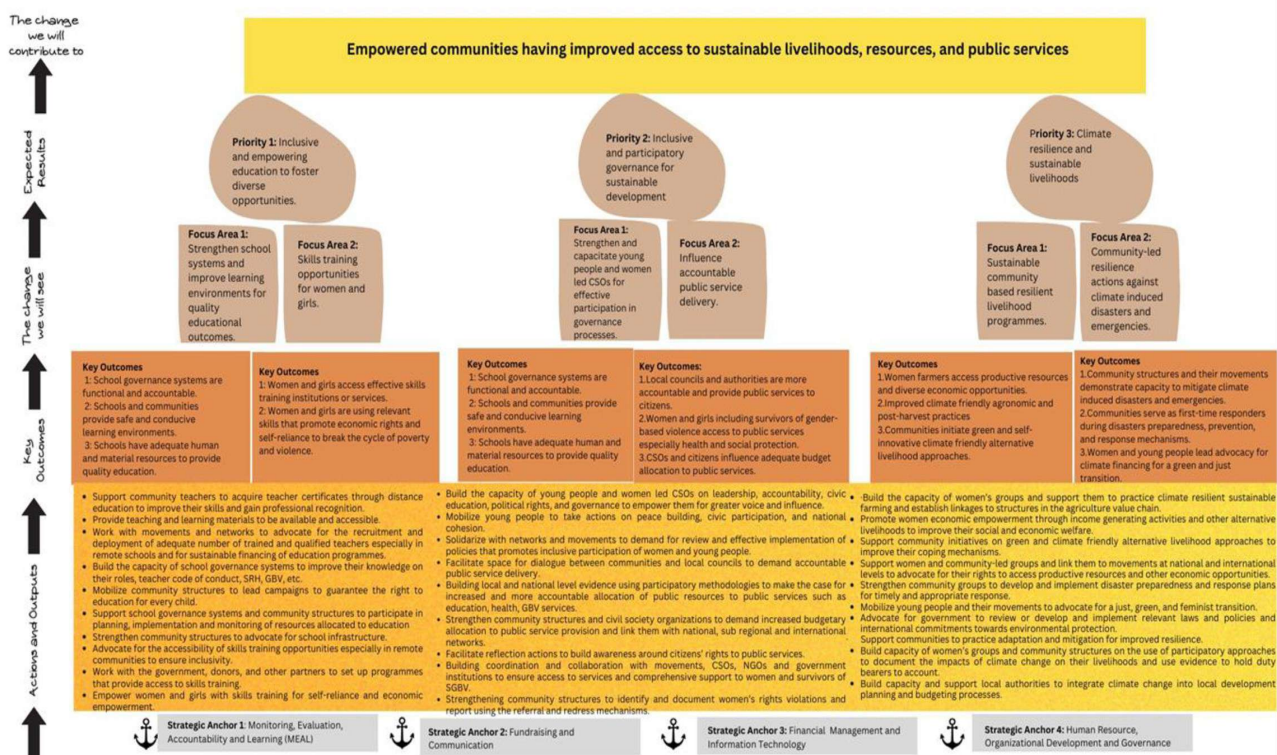
Strengthening the MEAL System

- We will modernize our monitoring and evaluation system in adopting integrated data management structures arising from the program indicators.
- Develop a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation plan using the 'Results-Based Monitoring Model' to capture the achievements and lessons learnt during this strategy period for greater policy influencing.
- Strengthen staff, partners and beneficiaries' capacity on Results Based Monitoring Model and our wholistic programme approach.
- Invest in innovative and appropriate technology/ tools to facilitate data management (collection, analysis and storage)
- Facilitate relevant participatory reviews and reflection processes to generate learning.
- Promote innovation and shared learning across Local Rights Programmes and the federation as a whole through participation in international platforms.
- Improve documentation and dissemination of information to enhance learning and scaling up of best practices.

Reporting

High quality, transparent reporting in line with donor and other internal and external stakeholder requirements is very important. The 2023 reviewed reporting templates will ensure our reports capture and explain both the successes and the challenges, generates evidence and catalogues good practices for learning.

Results Framework



Annex 3: Risk Register

CSP Priority Areas	Description of Risk	P	I	Mitigation	Risk Owner
Priority 1: Inclusive and empowering education to foster diverse opportunities.	Weakness in policy orientation and coordination may undermine a holistic and inclusive approach to the implementation of inclusive education.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Embark on consultations with key stakeholders to identify and address policy gaps. ii. Coordinate amongst key stakeholders to address issues to be included in policy that will help achieve inclusive education. iii. Promote awareness on key policies to the public. 	HoPP
	The new government priority of food security may lead to the de-prioritization of investment in education.	High	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Work with relevant stakeholders and advocate to give the required support needed in education. ii. Advocate for adequate budgetary allocation to education. iii. Complement government through the implementation of education related projects and programmes. 	HoPP
Priority 2: Inclusive and participatory governance for sustainable development	The proportional representation (PR) system might weaken elected MPs/Councilors' commitment and accountability to their constituents.	High	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Continuously work with constituents' political stakeholders on community development work. ii. Embark on advocacy work that will sensitize elected MPs/Councilors about their commitment to their constituents. 	HoPP
	Division within the CSO space may derail efforts to push for policy reforms of national interest.	High	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Coordinate and support CSOs to work on common goals relating to policy reforms of national interest. ii. Facilitate CSOs strengthening and provide leadership in ensuring a non-partisan CSOs participation in governance. 	HoPP/ED
	Shrinking political space may affect participation leading to non-active civil societies, movements, groups that are critical of government actions.	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Work closely with key stakeholders to provide the enabling environment for civil society movements and groups. ii. Support and capacitate CSOs on best practices to ensure a more workable and productive engagement of national interest with various political stakeholders. 	HoPP/ED

Priority 3: Climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods	The establishment of many Climate related structures may create overlaps and duplications of functions.	High	Medium	i. Advocate for structural reforms that can deliver with minimum cost on government.	HoPP
	The push for private sector investment in the Agricultural sector may fuel land grabs and environmental degradation thereby worsening climate change issues.	High	High	i. Promote continuous awareness on climate related actions and accountability. ii. Advocate for investment in renewable energy and agroecology. iii. Provide capacity through trainings on climate change and it related impact.	HoPP
	AASL and partners campaign on climate change accountability and disinvestment in fossil fuel and harmful industrial practices may pose unhealthy relationship with actors in the sector.	Medium	High	iv. Conduct evidence-based research to inform our advocacy and campaign work.	ED
Strategic Anchors					
Strategic Anchor 1: Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)	Our programme implementation model requiring us working with various local partners may lead to challenges in programme quality delivery (reporting, documentation, and maintenance of data etc.)	Medium	Medium	i. Conduct training for local partners on quality reporting, documentation, and maintenance of data. ii. Conduct regular monitoring for local partners to inform management's action.	MEAL/HoPP
	Activity implementation checks without incorporating result-based monitoring may not provide needed information on the impact of our work as per the MEAL Plan.	Medium	High	i. Provide training for staff and partners on result based monitoring and reporting. ii. Conduct appraisals for relevant reporting lines on progress around quality result based reporting.	MEAL/HoPP
Strategic Anchor 2: Fundraising and Communication	The multiple disasters and emergency occurrences in other countries may divert donor attention thereby affecting funding opportunities to Sierra Leone	High	High	i. Embark on fundraising opportunities at national level to finance our programmes. ii. Establish and strengthen consortium with like-minded NGOs and CSOs to collectively explore diverse funding opportunities from institutional donors. iii. Organise fundraising dinner for donors and partners to establish relationship for possible funding opportunities.	BPDS/ED

				iv. Increase visibility by producing and disseminating short video documentaries, organisational profile, impact stories and photos etc to attract funding.	
	Migration of our sponsored aware (children that are actively linked to supporters) as a result of social amenities and other opportunities reduces our caseload and may affect our CS funding necessary to finance the CSP	Medium	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Intensify follow-up mechanisms to recover migrated CS kids. ii. Advocate for the provision of gender responsive public services in deprived communities. 	HoPP/SPSM
Strategic Anchor 3: Financial Management and Information Technology	Inflation and exchange rate may affect the implementation of the CSP	High	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Monitor inflation and exchange rate regimes to inform management actions. ii. Review and update plans relative to changes in exchange rate and inflation movement. 	HoF
	Weak internal controls within Partners organisation may impact negatively on funds committed to them for key activities.	Medium	High	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Provide training for staff and partners on Internal Controls System and Financial Management. ii. Continue mentoring and coaching engagement with partners to deliver with quality. 	HoF/ED
Strategic Anchor 4: Human Resource, Organizational Development and Governance	The enactment and review of Labour laws/Government Policies may affect NGO operations thereby disrupting the smooth implementation of activities initially designed to fully achieve CSP goals.	Low	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Monitor government laws and policies to inform appropriate actions by management. ii. Review our internal policies in line with relevant government policies. 	HROD
	The development of a new CSP might present a new structure which may affect the current staffing structure within the organisation.	High	Low	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ensure a participatory planning process that involves everyone's input. 	HROD/ED



Girl Supported through the AEMAG project and MEAL manager during monitoring visit

CONTACT US
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ActionAid Sierra Leone

 97 C Wilkinson Road, off Thompson Bay Church yard junction
Private Mall Bag 1058 Freetown, Sierra Leone

 +232 73461 370



aasl@actionaid.org



[Sierra Leone .actionaid.org](https://www.facebook.com/SierraLeone.actionaid.org)



ActionAid Sierra Leone



[actionaid88](https://www.instagram.com/actionaid88)

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