

**Educational Policies and their Implications for Achievement of Millennium Development Goals in Sierra Leone.**Johnson Adlyn Omojowo<sup>1</sup> and Oladele O.Idowu<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Department of Teacher Education, Njala University, Sierra Leone.<sup>2</sup>Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, South Africa.[adlynjohnson@yahoo.com](mailto:adlynjohnson@yahoo.com), [oladimeji.oladele@nwu.ac.za](mailto:oladimeji.oladele@nwu.ac.za)

**Abstract:** This article examines the impact of educational policies since independence in Sierra Leone and its implications for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The policy scene before the establishment of the Goals is summarized and the article shows that as a result of the lack of initiative from the international scene, this period, 1960-1990 is characterized by sterility as there was only one act promulgated on education. Since 1990, the educational landscape has been very active. These policies are reflective of the sense of the future that pervades the educational system. Recent statistics in the basic education sector brings out the achievement of the policies especially at the primary level and in girls' education. The paper concludes that the emphasis on planning in the educational sector will help lead to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by the year 2015.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Sierra Leone was founded as a haven for freed slaves from Britain, the New World and Africa in May 1787. She soon became known as the Athens of West Africa. As Kaikai (1979) notes, all accolades in education received during this period were due to the educational efforts of the missionaries and not from the activities of the Colonial Government. According to Sumner (1960) as early as 1817, English visitors to the Colony found that the total attendance at both village and town schools were 1,364 children, 833 boys and 531 girls. The visitors were impressed not only at the standard of education but also at the large number of children being educated. Through the efforts of the Christian missions, she achieved a number of firsts in education in the region. The first secondary school for boys and girls in West Africa were opened in 1845 and 1849 respectively; Fourah Bay College was started in 1827 as a training ground for teachers and catechists. In 1876, it was affiliated to Durham University and the first degrees were granted in 1879. It became the first modern university in West Africa. However, the efforts of the missionaries could not be sustained. By the time of independence in April 27<sup>th</sup> 1960, there was only a relatively few number of Sierra Leoneans that had been educated.

**Post Independence Period 1960-To 1990**

Education is regarded as the crucial and indispensable vehicle for the realization of individual and national needs and aspirations, (Datta 1984)). As a result of the benefits of education not only to the society, but to the individual, every modern society needs an educational policy to guide the educational process. An educational policy has been defined as the statement of intentions of the government and the envisaged means of achieving those aspects of its national objectives that have to rely on the

use of education as a 'tool', Osokoya (1987). As education is not static, so a policy on education cannot be static; it must be changing with the goals, objectives and aspirations of the society, which it is meant to serve. The educational system inherited at independence was good to a certain extent. It had been designed for a colonial society. Aghenta (1993) states that the relevance of the Colonial Powers' education for independent Africa needs is questionable, because it neglected largely the country's cultural and social background. In Sierra Leone, like other former British West African colonies the efficiency of the formal educational system was called into question on several occasions because, of its lack of adequate access, and irrelevant curriculum. Bangura (1972) and Davies et al (1979) condemned the then education system that produced Africans unable to possess appropriate skills for the task of nation building. Despite calls for reform, this system of education continued to exist for over three decades.

**1964 Education Act**

The only shining light during this period was the first national act on education by the first post-colonial government. The 1964 Education Act was the first realistic national policy on education in Sierra Leone. It is the foundation of all subsequent acts. The policy conferred the responsibility for organization and control of education in the state in the Ministry of Education. The Act stated that the functions of the Ministry shall be the performance of all work necessary or incidental to the control of education by the Minister. The powers of the Minister included to: Establish, maintain or make grants-in-aid to schools, Provide for the regular and inspection and supervision of schools, Authorize the establishment or opening of any new school. This was the only policy that was enacted and

its primary function was to transfer ownership of education from the Colonial government to a national government.

#### **Imperatives Reflecting on the Policy Scene.**

To provide a basic education for all children is a basic human right. Ki-Zerbo (1989) state that education for all can either be a Utopian cop-out or it can be a new key to the future. Barrow (1975) states that the principle of equality has an important factor; it involves the assumptions that all people no matter their differences, whether socially or economically or otherwise are to be considered as of equal importance and that the claims of all have to be treated equally. Sierra Leone is a post conflict country. A rebel war started in 1990 by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone engulfed the whole country by the time it ended in 2000. It brought hardship, suffering and considerable deprivation in the lives of the population. The conflict disrupted the educational process for a large number of children following massive displacement from their localities. Some of these children dropped out of school and some never went to school. It is not surprising that, a UNICEF Report (2005) states that as a result of conflicts, the challenge the world faces in order to meet the MDG of universal primary education is greater in West/Central Africa than in any other region of the world.

Educating all children including girls is a human rights issue and the obligation of all governments. It is also a moral and social imperative. At the international level, most countries of the world are signatories to international protocols and agreements binding them to protect children especially the girl child. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights agree that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind. Article 28 on the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that parties should recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively on the basis of equal opportunity, all countries shall in particular make primary education compulsory and available free to all.

It is in from the late 20th century that education for all and the education of the girl child has taken centre stage. The intersection of two key movements based on human rights: the child rights movement that gathered steady momentum in the wake of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989, and the women's movement, which culminated in the Platform for Action at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, a platform specifically addressed to the needs and rights of girls. Commitments were made at the 1990 World Summit for Children 1991 to fulfill goals for children's well-being. This was because primary school age children were still being denied their right to education, the majority of them girls. Nearly three quarters of out-of-school children were to be found in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. It stated, "Educate every child. Gender disparities in

primary and secondary education must be eliminated," State of the World's Children (2003). They went on to recommend that the most urgent priority was to ensure access to, and improve the quality of education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. Sierra Leone is not only a signatory to the declarations but she is also a member of the Group of E.9 nations committed to the total eradication of illiteracy.

In May 2000, as part of the build-up towards the Special Session on Children, UNICEF, PLAN International and other leading child advocacy organizations launched the Global Movement for Children to support child rights and action on behalf of children. At its heart was the Say Yes for Children campaign, which includes 10 imperatives to make the world fit for children: Among these imperatives are: Leave no child out, Educate every child and Fight poverty: Invest in children.

Almost all the countries of the world are members of the United Nations and signatories to all these international conventions and treaties. A major imperative was education for all and gender equality and equity as basic human rights. In 2000, at the largest gathering of heads of states of the world, the United Nation Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) was agreed upon. The UN Millennium Development Goals have statements that universal primary education must be achieved and gender equality and women empowerment must be promoted. Recently, multi-lateral organizations invited the Ministers of Education and other high officials from West African countries to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, to reaffirm their commitment to education for all, including girls. All these ministers signed the Ouagadougou Declaration that recognizes the importance of girls' education for their countries' development, and commits governments to accelerate efforts to get as many girls as boys in school. The influence of the Conventions, Protocols and agreements on the Rights of the Child, including the girl-child during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been profound. This ground swell of opinion and activism for a common purpose has had a profound influence on the policy landscape of Sierra Leone. The Government of Sierra Leone in collaboration with its development partners, is implementing several policies and strategies aimed at accomplishing national and international goals.

#### **The Period 1990-2000: The Basic Education Commission, 1994**

Expanding education, especially basic formal education has been an objective of the education policies in developing countries over the past two decades (Kelly, 1987). In 1994, the military government in Decree No. 4 established the National Commission for Basic Education. This change was influenced and necessitated by the emphasis of the decade on expanding education, especially basic formal education and giving every child a better future. As the Jomtien Conference had emphasized,

the Commission was formed to enable the country to pay more attention to the availability of basic education for all citizens by the year 2000. Among the functions of the Commission were to: Devise programmes and strategies for the accelerating of adult literacy and non-formal education. Coordinate, supervise, monitor and evaluate all programmes and interventions in the country aimed at improving the literacy rate and providing adult education for early school leavers. Support the Ministry of Education in improving the quality of education in formal educational institutions.

#### **The New Education Policy for Sierra Leone, 1995**

It was this policy that established the 6-3-3-4 system of education as the structure of education for the country. The 6-3-3-4 system of education, according to Ukeje (1991) stands out as a document containing forward looking ideas and ideals. As noted by that author, on paper, there are many innovations, which if effected will permanently change the educational landscape. The Policy stated that the major objectives for education include: The development of a broad-based education; Increased access to basic education; Improving the quality and relevance of education; Expansion and upgrading of technical/vocational education; Providing equity in education; and Developing relevant attitudes, skills and values in children.

For the first time, in policy formulation, specific statements were made to promote the education of girls. This new Policy of Education highlights a number of measures designed specifically to halt the disadvantaged status of girls in formal basic education. Specific Policy statements referring to girls' education are: a) The gradual provision of free and compulsory education for all girls at basic education level as and when the national economy picks up, Legislation specifying a minimum marriage age for girls (i.e. 18 years) and penalties for men/boys who impregnate girls before they are 18 years, The promotion of counseling and family life education as means of avoiding early pregnancy, The -re-admission of "mother-girls" into schools and Allowing unmarried female students to continue their courses at tertiary level when pregnant. This Policy is now the bedrock of all educational planning in the country. It is a major input to the efforts being made to improve and strengthen the educational sector. Indeed whatever educational systems or practices adopted in any state depends on the philosophy and objectives of education in that country or nation contained in its educational policies, World Bank Report (1986).

#### **2000-To Date**

Since 2000, there have been many acts on education. The Polytechnic Act was promulgated in 2000. This Act established five Polytechnics throughout the country. They were to serve as teaching, learning and research institutions.

Their functions further included: Providing instruction in such branches of learning as it may think fit and make provision for research and for advancement and documentation of knowledge. Grant diplomas and certificates through the National Council of Technical, Vocational and other Academic Awards Maintain faculties in Education, Engineering and Technology among others. This Act is of immense importance to Sierra Leone. Teacher training and technical and vocational education have been merged to minimize costs as well as to emphasize the importance of both in the educational scene.

#### **The 2004 Education Act**

In 2004, the Education Act was passed by Parliament. In the preamble of the Act, it is stated that it is an act designed to reform the education system. Some of the reforms made are that: Every citizen of Sierra Leone shall have the right to basic education which shall accordingly be compulsory. A parent, including a guardian who neglects to send his child to school for basic education commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding Le500,000.00 and /or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year A Guidance Counsellor or teacher shall be attached to each school even at the primary level. every Chiefdom shall have at least one junior secondary school, each junior secondary school shall have its own administration, The establishment of specialist secondary schools which shall cater for subject areas such as science and mathematics, technology, the liberal arts or business studies. This Act, also known as the Basic education Act establishes basic education as the right of every right of every Sierra Leonean child and imposes punishment on parents and guardians who refuse to send their children to school. It also attempts to provide quality education by stipulating that secondary schools should have two administrations, the Junior Secondary Schools administration and the Senior Secondary School administrations.

The Government of Sierra Leone together with her international partners has succeeded in enforcing policies to enhance education for all. These include: free education for all children at the primary school level and the payment of the National Primary School Examination fees by the Government of Sierra Leone. Basic teaching and learning materials including basic core text books are also provided for most of the children. Schools have been rehabilitated or built in all the chiefdoms in the country. Table 1 brings out the status of education nationally at the end of the war. In 2000, Sierra Leone had the lowest literacy rate for the region. Moreover, girls' education was trailing woefully behind boys. As a result of international imperatives and a vibrant policy scene Sierra Leone seems poised to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of primary education for all children by the year, 2015. Findings from the Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2005 monitors and generates valid and reliable data and information that will be used to monitor or key indicators established by the

Millennium Development Goals and the goals of A World Fit for children that include international imperatives and commitments such as the World Fit for Children and the Millennium Development Goals.

Table 1: Literacy Rates per Province

| Province     | Both Sexes | Male  | Female |
|--------------|------------|-------|--------|
| Northern     | 14.3%      | 22.7% | 7.4 %  |
| Eastern      | 20%        | 30.7% | 10.4%  |
| Southern     | 28.4%      | 38.1% | 19.2%  |
| Western Area | 69%        | 80.2% | 58.6%  |

Source: Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) Report, 20000

Table 2 brings out the tremendous progress that has been made in the country five years after the war. Universal access to basic education and the completion of primary education by the world's children is one of the most important goals of the Millennium Development Goals. Overall, 69 percent of children of primary school age in Sierra Leone are attending primary school. The ratio of girls to boys attending primary and secondary education is virtually at a par. There is no difference in the attendance of girls and boys to primary school. Primary school attendance in Sierra Leone has increased dramatically over the past five years and has now surged ahead of the regional norm. Educational policy as it pertains to primary education appears to be achieving success. The gender parity index shows an encouraging situation at the primary level, with equivalent attendance rates for girls and boys. Gender parity for primary education in Sierra Leone appears to be ahead of the rest of the region. The relevance of educational policies is to plan to create an educational climate that would create growth in the educational system, Sierra Leone Education Review (1976).

Table2: National Primary School Attendance Statistics

| Key indicators   | Estimates |      | West<br>Africa<br>1996-2004 |
|--|-----------|------|-----------------------------|
|  | 2000      | 2005 |                             |
| Net primary school attendance rate (%)                         | 69        | 42   | 55                          |
| Gender parity index, ratio of girls: boys (primary; secondary) | 1.01      | 0.78 | 0.86; 0.8                   |

Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2005

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000, the country became a signatory to the Millennium Declaration. The realisation of the Millennium Development Goals signals opportunities for the improvement of all Sierra Leonean. As commendable as these efforts are, Sierra Leone is still a long way from achieving universal access to quality basic education for all

its children. Among all the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) Sierra Leone stands a better chance of achieving the goal of educating every child by 2015. There are still huge gaps to be met. The recent efforts of government in the in the planning and policy formulation in the education sector show a commitment to reverse the retarded national development and socio-economic decline of the nation since independence, Millennium Development Goals Report (2005). These policies mark a new trend in the history of education in Sierra Leone. Addressing the educational needs of the country at all levels of the educational system, from basic education to higher education through policy design and formulation is the first step in the achievement of the Millennium goals in education for Sierra Leone.

### Corresponding Author

Oladele O. I.

Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension,  
North-West University, Mafikeng Campus, South Africa.

E-mail: [oladimeji.oladele@nwu.ac.za](mailto:oladimeji.oladele@nwu.ac.za)

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