



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

National Youth Policy

Sierra Leone

Theme

**“EMPOWERED YOUTH LEADING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SIERRA LEONE”**

December, 2020



National Youth Policy of Sierra Leone

Theme:

EMPOWERED YOUTH LEADING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW SIERRA LEONE

**MINISTRY OF YOUTH AFFAIRS
December 2020**

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------|
| ALP | Accelerated Learning Programmes |
| AU | African Union |
| CBO | Community Based Organisations |
| COVID | Corona Virus Disease |
| CSO | Civil Society Organisations |
| CYC | Chieftdom Youth Councils |
| DSTI | Directorate of Science Technology and Innovation |
| DYC | District Youth Council |
| FGM | Female Genital Mutilation |
| HIV, | Human Immunodeficiency Virus |
| ICT | Information Communication and Technology |
| MDA | Ministries Departments and Agencies |
| MEL | Monitoring Evaluation and Learning |
| MTNDP | Medium Term National Development Plan |
| NAYCOM, | National Youth Commission |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| NIDS | National Innovation and Digitisation Strategy |
| NYEAP | National Youth Employment Action Plan |
| NYS | National Youth Service |
| SDF | Sports Development Fund |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SL | Sierra Leone |
| SLPP | Sierra Leone People's Party |
| STD | Sexually Transmitted Disease |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNICEF | United Nations Children's Fund |
| VCD | Value Chain Development |
| VION | Volunteers Involving Organisations Network |
| YEF | Youth Empowerment Fund |

Message from His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio – President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

I have always believed that our single biggest treasure in Sierra Leone is you- every young woman and man who constitute our youth population. This is not just a sentimental belief -it is rooted in strong personal experience and the overwhelming evidence of national and international data. This is why at the heart of everything I have done as President is a dedication to improving the human capital of our young population and preparing you to lead us as critical players in the imminent Fourth industrial revolution.

As most of you know, I enlisted to serve our country and defend it as a young man. I learned and imbibed the values of sacrifice, patriotism and discipline. These values guided me when I assumed leadership of this country as a youth. My personal experiences as a youth in leadership reinforce my belief that youth can be leaders of today and that with the right investment, they can be entrusted with the bright future of our country.

The evidence is also clear that if we invest in youth, we invest in peace and stability, prosperity and the future wellbeing of our country. This is even more true because Sierra Leone has one of the most youthful populations in the world. This means we have the potential to enjoy a formidable human resource combined with our enormous other natural resources to propel our country significantly forward.

This is essentially the thrust of my Human Capital development governing agenda. From the signature Free Quality School Education program to the Medium-Term National Plan to everything in between, my government is dedicated to unleashing the full potential of our young population.

This new National Youth Policy is therefore a welcome consolidation of our vision, policies, principles and concrete actions to achieve our ambitious agenda for youth empowerment in Sierra Leone. I assure every youth in Sierra Leone, that my government will make the full implementation of this policy a priority.

To the youth, you are partners in our development. This policy provides the best blueprint yet for you to help re-write the direction of our country, to be full, productive, healthy and engaged citizens. I invite you work with us, our development partners and the rest of our country to change the narrative and transform your lives. When we do that, we will transform our country together.

Finally, congratulations to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and all our partners for leading this inclusive and transformative process. Let's all work together to transform this into real concrete actions for our youth.

Long Live the Youth of Sierra Leone.

Foreword

When His Excellency the President Rtd. Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio assumed office in 2018, he committed to have Human Capital Development as a central premise of his governing agenda. From the signature Free Quality School Education initiative launched in 2018, to the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023), President Bio's government has prioritised investment in the young people of Sierra Leone as the central principle of the New Direction agenda.

The revised National Youth Policy (2020–2025) is rooted in the President's vision and commitment to harnessing the potential of Sierra Leone's youth population for national development. It situates youth as leaders and drivers of our country's development, articulates concrete and evidence informed policy provisions and provides for new structures and mechanisms or proposes reforms of existing ones in ways that will positively transform the sector and accelerate the intentional empowerment of the youth of our country.

I am proud that this policy does not only reflect our country's bold youth agenda but that its processes of development and content reflect the ambitious task we set out at the outset for the most inclusive, transparent and transformative youth policy in our history. Thousands of young people in every corner of the country and the diaspora actively and directly participated in the drafting and validation of the policy.

For their unflinching support throughout this process and to the youth sector over the years, I must thank our partners – United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Voluntary Services Overseas, Plan Sierra Leone, Restless Development, Oxfam, government of the People's Republic of China and our countless other local and international partners.

I must take this opportunity to register our deep gratitude to the consultant, Chornor Bah of Ceebah Policy Group- the Sierra Leonean expert who has led this process with professionalism, principle, and patriotic passion.

To the youth of Sierra Leone, this is your time. We have a bold new progressive policy document that provides a blueprint for our collective vision- an empowered youth leading the development of a New Sierra Leone. I implore you all to learn the provisions, share and discuss with others, support the full implementation of the policy, and hold all of us to account when there is the need to do so.

Together, we are poised to build a country where every youth will realise his/her fullest potentials and contribute to the transformation of our beloved Sierra Leone.

Mohamed Orman Bangura
Minister of Youth Affairs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the civil war ended in Sierra Leone in 2002, the country has implemented two national youth policies with the aim of enhancing the capacity and potential of the youth and addressing the challenges that they contend with. However, despite some modest gains made, it has become obvious that there are existing and emerging challenges that undermine the ability of young people to effectively contribute to national development. Thus, the 2020 National Youth Policy was developed with the aim of addressing these and has as its theme “empowered youth leading the national development of a new Sierra Leone”.

Sierra Leone is blessed with a youthful population, with 7 in 10 citizens being below the age of 35. As such, if they are empowered and provided with the socio-economic and political space, they will lead the process of transforming Sierra Leone into a middle income and more prosperous country.

The 2020 National Youth Policy is a progressive, pragmatic, rights based and gender responsive policy that outlines government’s commitments, principles and concrete actions to empower youth, with special emphasis on female youth, youth with disabilities and other marginalised groups, to be key players in their own wellbeing and the socio-economic and political development of their communities and the country as a whole.

This policy was literally written by the youth of Sierra Leone as over 20, 000 youth across the country directly participated in the in-person and digital consultations informing the development process of the strategy. The perspectives and critical reflections of the youth on their experiences, challenges and suggestions for change are summarised in this document.

The policy maintains the African Charter’s definition of youth as a person between the ages of 15-35 but calls for interventions and opportunities in the sector to pay special consideration for those below the age of 29.

The provisions in the policy are guided by 3 critical guiding principles: ***access, inclusivity and impact***. All interventions in the sector must not just reach youth, (access) but must reach an equitable number of the different categories of youth with a special focus on more traditionally excluded cohorts (inclusivity) and must be measured only by their tangible effect on the lives of youth as determined by youth themselves and other credible independent assessments (impact).

The priority provisions for the next five years (2020-2025) are categorised under the following:

- 1. Increase Access to Livelihood Opportunities through Education and Training Opportunities, Scale up Interest in Sporting Activities and Entrepreneurship with Emphasis in Agriculture and Fisheries.** A set of provision focused on human capital development of the youth including building skills, harnessing talents and cultivating creativity to enhance livelihoods. Particular attention is paid to two of the most economically productive sectors; agriculture and fisheries as priority for youth development over the period of the policy. It also emphasises Innovation, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the creative sectors for including music, film, Art, theatre, sports and general entertainment.
- 2. Review the Legal Framework and Address Continued Marginalisation and Infantilisation of Youth, Multiple Gendered Violence and Discrimination Against Female Youth, Harmful Migration, Substance Abuse and Other Youth Related Violence** – This set of provisions are centered on the wellbeing and safety of the different categories of youth with a special focus on female youth, youth with disabilities and other marginalised groups. The provisions focus on the safety of youth and non-violence, healthy lifestyle, including sexual and reproductive rights, and youth contribution to sustainable physical environment and ecosystem, including sanitation, forest protection and biodiversity.
- 3. Increase Youth Participation in Policy Discussions and Development with Intent to Build Trust and Confidence in the Socio-Economic and Political System and Restore Family and Community Values and Norms** – Youth aspire to be full and active citizens, participating in the social political and economic life of Sierra Leone. These set of provisions remove barriers, provides incentives, and takes concrete actions that facilitate youth leadership and active participation in the nation's political and socio-economic trajectory. It also provides for cultivating and strengthening patriotism and fostering mutually productive partnerships between the youth, government, civil society, communities and other stakeholders.

Critically, to assure sustained funding of the youth sector, the policy provides for the creation of a basket **Youth Empowerment Fund** which, will be a vehicle for innovative mobilisation and coordination of investments to implement the youth policy. Additionally, the policy calls for the government to develop a robust implementation plan with a clear monitoring and evaluation framework.

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

1. Introduction

Sierra Leone has a very youthful population with currently 30% of the population between the ages of 18 and 35, constituting approximately 49% of the country's labour force. They play a vital role in maintaining the country's socio-economic stability.¹ Despite this, for several decades, they have been victims of marginalization and infantilisation. Gerontocratic governance of the country has undermined the Sierra 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 youth to participate in the Sierra Leonean civil war (1991 to 2002).²

The socialization of youth with violence has continued to have significant implications for peace and security in post-civil war Sierra Leone. It has become apparent that the challenges that led to the involvement of youth in armed groups and the historical legacies of the conflict have remained largely unaddressed.³ This is due to the fact that 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

¹ See: Statistics Sierra Leone. 2015. Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census: Thematic Report on Children, Adolescents and Youth. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

² Truth and Reconciliation Commission Sierra Leone. 2004. Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report Volume II. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

³ Office of National Security. 2016. An Assessment of the Youth Situation and Emerging Crimes in Sierra Leone. Freetown. Sierra Leone.

to constructively engage young people and support them has led to them re-engineering the social space. The youth have turned to using music or other forms of art, as mediums of venting their grievance and frustrations. They use Ataya Bases 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 them.⁴ This failure by the state reflects even more negatively on female youth; persistently high rates of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, engagement in commercial and transactional sex. Failure to address safeguarding concerns has meant sexual and gender-based violence continues to be rampant.

In spite of 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 but a small fraction of the country's youth. Additionally, as described in the sections below, 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 has limited the opportunities and the effects of these interventions.

This policy is geared towards constructively supporting and working with young people in order to enhance their capacity to own and lead the process of its implementation. Taking a radical departure from previous approaches of dealing with youth related issues; it seeks to enhance the agency of youth and places them

⁴ 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.

at the heart of socio-economic and political development in Sierra Leone. A principal approach that this policy will adopt, will be the use of youth-focused research to ensure that activities undertaken are evidence-based, gender responsive and specifically address the needs and aspirations of young people. The focus on research will strengthen the link between policy, research and practice, thereby ensuring that academic and research institutions and think-tanks are fully integrated as key partners in the implementation of this policy.

Emerging global challenges and their transnational nature –such as Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID 19) epidemic, have led to an uptick in terror related and transnational organized crime activities. This provides further indication that an urgent shift is required in how young people are engaged and supported to overcome their daily challenges. This policy is designed to be a progressive document that will be owned and implemented by the Sierra Leonean youth. It is aligned to the New Direction manifesto of the ruling Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MT-NDP), the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national and international standards, principles and policies that are geared towards youth rights and empowerment.

The policy is divided into six sections: Section One introduces the policy. Providing the context within which this policy has been developed and will be implemented, drawing on the history of youth policy and their implementation in Sierra Leone. Section Two outlines the details on the methodological approach to consult young people during the development of the policy. Section Three conveys and analyses the challenges that young people continue to contend with. Section Four presents the policy direction including the vision, objectives and principles that will guide the implementation of the policy. Section Five provides the GoSL’s policy statements

and strategic actions. Section Six provides clear details on the governance arrangements and the implementation framework adopted by this policy.

1.1 Policy Context

At the end of the civil war in 2002, immediate steps were taken to have systems and policies geared towards preventing youth involvement in violent conflict and enhancing their contribution to national development. The GoSL quickly established a new Ministry of Youth and Sports, adopting its first National Youth Policy on 30 June 2003. This was complemented by the establishment of a National Youth Commission (NAYCOM), the development of a National Employment Policy and a National Youth Employment Action Plan (NYEAP) – all aimed at empowering youth and providing them with employment opportunities. In 2012, after a policy review, a new policy was developed for implementation between, 2013-2018. This document replaces the 2013-2018 policy following the five-year mandatory review which is done to ensure that youth engagement policy remains relevant to the evolving needs of young people and is rooted in the current policy and development context.

The policy outlines in this document seek to adjust the approach taken previously. Adopting a more strategic focus, it aims to effect tangible change as identified by the review over the next five years. The Policy is aligned with, and it is envisioned as a key component in actualizing the country's MT-NDP. The policy is especially guided by the MT-NDP's prioritization of human capital development, female and youth empowerment as well as addressing the needs of people with disabilities. Cluster Six of the MT-NDP -Youth Employment, Sports and Migration – informs the strategic focus of this Youth Policy. The Youth Policy is also aligned with the various other national and global sectoral policies. At a national level these include:

The Government of Sierra Leone’s new Free Quality School Education; The National Teenage Pregnancy Reduction Strategy and its successor National Strategy for the Reduction of Adolescent Pregnancy and Child Marriage; The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education’s Radical Inclusion Policy for schools aimed at creating an inclusive environment for all Sierra Leonean children, including pregnant and parent learners; and objectives for the creation of the District Youth Councils (DYCs) –in order to enable promote good governance youth participation in national development encouraging responsible citizenship and leadership amongst young people. At the international level, the policy is guided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, African Youth Charter, AU Agenda 2063, the Commonwealth Youth Charter, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the United Nations World Programme of Action for the Youth.

1. Methodology

The development of this policy adopted an inclusive and participatory approach through which over 20,000 youth from every district across the country were directly engaged. A nationwide digital and phone-based consultation using the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) youth platform, U-Report was conducted. The platform was developed to invite young people around the country to respond to specific questions developed for the review. Additionally, regional focus group discussions were held with young leaders and district youth council representatives across the country.

Youth groups and regional coalitions were invited to engage their membership and submit position papers on specific areas of the policy; many groups produced detailed position papers on a wide range of youth issues. The Ministry of Youth Affairs, in partnership with the Directorate of Science, Technology and Innovation

(DSTI) also developed its own App and an E-governance platform to ensure an even wider outreach of youth input. The App has been used to also collect the views and perspectives of young people across every district in the country and in the Diaspora. Additionally, individual interviews of thousands of young people across every district were conducted by an independent non-governmental organisation – the Volunteers Involving Organisations Network (VIONet) as part of the review process. The organisation produced a report that was a critical reference for this policy. Additionally, the framework for this policy has been informed by a review of laws, reports and academic literature on contemporary youth issues in Sierra Leone as well as analysing youth policies across the Africa and Caribbean regions.

At the outset, an inclusive Expert Advisory Group was formed in order to serve as a Reference Group and provide critical feedback throughout the process. The group included youth leaders in the fields of law, medicine, business, youth activism, agriculture, disability rights, innovation, children's rights, academia, as well as representatives from cliques/gangs. They provided oversight of the consultation process and made significant technical inputs into the outcome.

Key Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) stakeholders in the youth sector provided inputs and critical feedback throughout the process. The initial draft was reviewed by experts at the key government ministries who provided technical inputs and comments on alignment. The chair and members of the Parliamentary Youth Caucus have also been actively engaged throughout the youth consultations making substantial contributions to the final document.

These engagements have been instrumental in shaping this policy into an evidence-based policy, fully representing the views and aspirations of young people across the country.

Defining “Youth”

“Youth” is an imprecise concept and it is usually described as the transition "from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence".⁵ However, this definition in terms of age is context dependent.

The UN has traditionally defined youth as young persons' between 15 and 24 years of age. However, this is considered too narrow for most African states, given their social, cultural, political context, consequently the upper age limit has generally been raised with regard to most African states. The African Youth Charter, for instance, defines a youth as any person between the ages of 15 and 35.⁶

In previous policies and legislation in Sierra Leone, the definition of youth has been kept in line with the African Charter. For the purpose of this policy document, we define “youth” or “young person(s)” as anyone between the ages of 15 and 35. However, in line with the principle of inclusion governing this policy, this document advocates for greater priority to be given to younger youth below the age of 29 and for the future policy to seriously consider revising the youth age downward. This reflects the approach taken in other African countries and more adequately represents the reality of Sierra Leonean context. While the upper age limit of 24 create too narrow a spectrum an upper limit of 34 needs to be reconsidered. As the 2020 Demographic Health Surveys found that over 76% of men and women were already married by age 29. The 2018 Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey similarly suggests that only 3% of Sierra Leoneans aged 30-34 are actively looking

⁵ Valentine, Gill. 2003. Boundary Crossings: Transitions from Childhood to Adulthood. *Children's Geographies*, 1:1, 37-52.

⁶ See: https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf (Accessed on 12 July 2020).

for a job for the first time; less than 4% of women aged 30-34 have never given birth, compared to just under 8% aged 25-29.

This provides an indication that the transition to adulthood and independence - the defining characteristics of youth - has, for most people, taken place by the time they reach 30. While the policy sticks with the African Youth Charter definition of 15-35, it is important to point out that the 15-29 age bracket reflects when most people are moving from childhood to adulthood in Sierra Leone. Therefore opportunities, policy interventions and investments for “youth” should intentionally prioritize those in this critical period of transition.

This policy is also aligned with legal definitions such as the 2007 Child Rights Acts of Sierra Leone which defines a child as any person under the age of eighteen.

The Youth Categories

The Youth are categorised as:

- Rural and Urban
- Male and Female
- Adolescents and Adults
- Physically challenged and Able-Bodied
- Educated and Uneducated
- In-School and Out-of-School
- Organised and Unorganised
- Skilled and Unskilled

The above breakdown of the youth has varied characteristics, needs, and aspirations as well as diverse opportunities and constraints.

1. Strategic Issues and Challenges Related to Young People in Sierra Leone

As indicated in the background section, since the end of the civil war, significant investments have been made by both the GoSL and its development partners to address the challenges that young people face in the country. However, it became apparent during the youth consultations that many young Sierra Leoneans continue to grapple with a plethora of challenges; undermining their rights, preventing the development of their communal sense of identity, recognition and voice. These factors have over the years weakened the relationship between the youth and the state which, in the past contributed to the youth role in the violence of the civil war and more recently to other organized and sporadic acts of youth-related socio-political violence. The issues that young people identified as central challenges in their lives over the multiple consultation process and supported by existing literature are presented and examined below.

i. Lack of Access to Livelihood Opportunities

One of the major challenges young people in Sierra Leone are facing is the lack of access to livelihood opportunities. According to Restless Development, 60% of the youth in the country are unemployed and living in extreme poverty.⁷ These phenomena affect both educated and illiterate youth equally. Given the limited employment opportunities in the country and the fact that major industries such as agriculture and fisheries receive minimal investment, they are unable to absorb the large numbers of unemployed youth. As such, young people travel from rural to urban areas in search of opportunities, they are usually left anxious and frustrated, when they could not realise their dreams. The high rate of unemployment is closely

⁷ See: <https://wearerestless.org/2019/08/11/sierra-leone-is-facing-big-challenges-but-young-people-are-leading-the-way/> (Accessed on 12 July 2020).

tied to the fact that most of the country's youth do not have skills that make them employable, leaving them lacking vital life skills in seeking and retaining employment.⁸ Furthermore, the economy has not succeeded in diversifying opportunities for young people, through investing in opportunity mapping assessments and Value Chain Development (VCD) geared towards identifying opportunities and working with and supporting young people to access them. The country's youth, who gain skills through apprenticeship opportunities, lack means of standardisation of these skills. Second chances for those who drop out are extremely rare. Thus, youth are usually trapped in poverty and desperation, which usually has implications for peace and security in their communities.

ii. Limited Education and Training Opportunities

Inasmuch as the government continues to achieve tremendous gains with the Free Education Initiative for primary and secondary schools, there is still a high illiteracy rate among young people in the country. According to Molla Mekonnen (2016) "more than 50% of the country's youth are believed to be either illiterate and/or unskilled".⁹ One of the contributing factors is the limited number of education and training facilities across the country, particularly in remote and isolated communities. In some communities with children forced to travel for miles to access schooling, compounded with hunger and poverty, older children and youth are easily discouraged from attending school, instead choosing to engage in livelihood activities. Furthermore, even where schools exist near the community, the quality of education provided is poor, teachers are demotivated, and makeshift schools and educational facilities are often used.

⁸Mekonnen, Molla, A. 2016. Youth Unemployment Challenges and Opportunities: The Case of Sierra Leone. International Journal of Social Science Studies Vol. 4, No. 10: 16-28.

⁹ Ibid.

Furthermore, there has been minimal investment in strengthening the vocational and technical education provision, failing to adequately provide young Sierra Leoneans with the skills and knowledge they require to provide essential services in their communities. Coupled with this, there are extremely limited number of facilities across the country that offer Accelerated Learning Programmes (ALPs) for adult-education that would provide the youth with the literacy skills that would help them to gain employment and expand their enterprises.¹⁰

iii. Continued Marginalization and Infantilisation of Youth

Sierra Leonean youth complain about the continuous marginalization and infantilisation of their communities particularly by political elites. This they believe is contributing to the failure in enhancing the agency of the youth, hindering their representation at both the central government and local authority level. The gerontocratic and patriarchal approach to power, access and representation has limited the socio-economic and political opportunities available to young people. It is important to note that the female youth are particularly affected by this challenge, as the patriarchal systems, structures, traditions and cultures have continuously denied them their place and voice in society. Similar to this, there is the continued marginalization of youth with disability and the lack of enforcement of laws and policies that protect and promote their rights. As such, there is the need for a much more modern, progressive and gender responsive approach to governance that will open the socio-economic and political space for youth.

iv. Multiple Gendered Violence and Discrimination Against Female Youth

¹⁰ Based on interviews conducted.

Female youth face the additional challenge of gender-based violence and structural discrimination due to the patriarchal nature of society in Sierra Leone. Female youth are often the most vulnerable particularly when living in rural/remote areas, or in other precarious human settlements. According to the Girls Not Brides Partnership, “39% of girls in Sierra Leone are married before their 18th birthday and 13% are married before the age of 15”.¹¹ Childmarriage has significant implications for the growth and development of young girls and is one of the threats that older children have to contend with in the country. Other threats include high incidences of rape and sexual violence, sexual harassment and exploitation including sex for grades, and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) - a widespread practice across the country.

In formal youth structures, female youth are often invisible and underrepresented - a by-product of the culture of patriarchal abuse and discrimination. While female youth make up half of the youth population, they are regularly prevented from accessing basic services, decent employment and other opportunities. Addressing the critical and specific challenges of female youth is key to the country’s human capital development ambitions - ending poverty, improving access to health, education and sanitation, making Sierra Leone more inclusive and reducing violence in communities.

v. Youth Related Violence

Decades-long mistrust and lack of confidence has been caused by the state’s unwillingness and inability to constructively engage and support youth in addressing their challenges. This has led to youth re-engineering their social space. Ultimately, in search of identity and recognition, young people have started mobilizing in social structures such as gangs and cliques in which they socialized with violence as a

¹¹ See: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/sierra-leone/> (Accessed on 12 July 2020).

means of self-expression. These units gave them the voice, recognition, and identity that the state has failed to give them through constructive means.¹²

Similar to the activities of gangs and cliques, politicians have co-opted marginalised and abandoned youth, using them as thugs to intimidate political rivals and disrupt elections and the political process.¹³ The patron-client relationship has further succeeded in undermining the agency of the youth, with them being disadvantaged and limited to being thugs.¹⁴ Youth related violence is a major challenge to the Sierra Leonean society and has fuelled tensions in several districts over the last decade.

vi. Urbanization and Harmful International Migration:

Post-war Sierra Leone has experienced mass migration from rural to urban areas. This is as a result of the fact that youth in rural areas seek access to jobs and social services and amenities. Lacking the necessary skills and qualifications to find sustainable employment, coupled with the general lack of opportunities, several young people end up living in urban slums and usually join criminal networks, and resort to unsavory acts including violence and drug abuse.¹⁵

The desire to seek greener pastures is not limited to rural youth, as in the last decade, several Sierra Leonean youth have embarked on dangerous journeys through the Sahara, with the aim of accessing Europe. There are several reports of young Sierra Leoneans dying in the Sahara, with some arrested and jailed in countries they

¹² 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.

¹³ Institute for Peace and Security Studies. 2019. Sierra Leone Conflict Insight. Addis Ababa University, Peace and Security Report Vol. 1. Ethiopia.

¹⁴ Bangura, Ibrahim and Söderberg Kovacs, Mimmi. 2017. 'Competition, Uncertainty and Violence in Sierra Leone's Swing District' in Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs (ed.), *Elections Related Violence in Africa*, London: Zed Books.

¹⁵ Mekonnen, M. 2016. Youth Unemployment Challenges and Opportunities: The Case of Sierra Leone. *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 4(10): 16-28.

transit.¹⁶ Inasmuch as it has always been the perception among Sierra Leoneans that it is male youth that are more likely to migrate, it is important to point out that a Statistics Sierra Leone analysis of census data in the country indicates that gender was not a differentiating factor for migration as approximately equal proportions of male and females between ages 20-44 were migrants.¹⁷ This twin notion of rural-urban migration and irregular international migration was identified by many youth consulted, as a major youth related challenge that families and communities contend with in Sierra Leone. The effect is felt across almost every sector including a lack of human resource in agriculture, increase in crime rates, violence and drug abuse as well as sapping much needed talents from where they are needed in communities across Sierra Leone.

It is important to note that youth that are arrested in transit countries are usually maltreated and incarcerated for very long periods with no access to justice. In cases, when released they cannot return to Sierra Leone as a result of lack of funds to do so and thus continue to suffer in foreign lands. Those who are repatriated are usually in need of medical and reintegration assistance, which is usually difficult to access, as a result of the lack of reintegration support mechanisms and systems in Sierra Leone.

vii. Lack of Trust and Confidence in the Socio-Economic and Political System

Perceptions of bad governance and corruption among young people have over the years eroded their trust and confidence in the system. Young people believe that corruption and bad governance continue to undermine any strategic focus on them

¹⁶ See: <https://africasacountry.com/2017/04/temple-run-or-stay> (Accessed on 11 November 2020).

¹⁷ Statistics Sierra Leone. 2017. Sierra Leone 2015 Population and Housing Census Thematic Report on Migration and Urbanization

and deny them the opportunities they deserve.¹⁸ The lack of trust and confidence in the system, coupled with lack of livelihood opportunities in the immediate aftermath of the civil war led to young people mobilising in local coffee booths referred to as ‘Ataya Bases’ and also known as the ‘Youth Parliament’ to express both their frustrations and grievances but also their aspirations and desires. The Ataya Bases host a mix of uneducated and educated youth all of whom are unemployed and disillusioned.¹⁹ It is important to note that the lack of trust and confidence in the system has both immediate and long-term effects for the nation, as it affects the attitude and behaviour of the youth towards the state, which directly contributes to regular communal tensions that occasionally turn violent.

viii. Limited Involvement of Youth in Policy Discussions and Development

Currently there is very minimal involvement of young people in decision making and policy development. These sectors include for instance, education, tourism, agriculture, the environment, marine resources, and trade. The focus on youth engagement over the years has been limited to the Ministry of Youth and NAYCOM. As such, critical policies are developed that do not have the input of youth and do not promote their interests.²⁰ Subsequent governments have not succeeded in creating meaningful and accessible spaces for the full integration and effective participation of youth in decision making and policy development. It becomes much more difficult for the youth to hold policy makers accountable when they have limited, if any idea as to the development and the existence of policies that affect their lives.

¹⁸ Office of National Security. 2016. An Assessment of the Youth Situation and Emerging Crimes in Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

¹⁹ See: <https://www.globaltimes-sl.com/are-ataya-bases-useful-or-harmful-in-sierra-leone-part-1/> (Accessed on 12 July 2020).

²⁰ Based on interviews conducted.

ix. Substance Abuse

In the last five years, Sierra Leone has experienced a spike in the rates of substance abuse especially among young people. Use of drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, heroin and Kush, alongside painkillers and sedatives is now commonplace, with addicted youth perpetuating the cycle of abuse by influencing children to use the drugs. Furthermore, abuse of locally distilled gins and “pampers tea” by youths has increasingly become a concern as it is often accompanied by the consumption of homemade drugs.²¹ The drugs have direct physical and psychological implications for the abusers, their families and communities, as it increases the level of domestic and community violence. Additionally, it has direct mental health consequences, which have led to the prevalence in the number of young people suffering from mental illnesses such as bi-polar disorder, anxiety and depression.²² The positive correlation between substance abuse and mental health problems is consistent for both male and female abusers.

The use of drugs and alcohol cannot be divorced from the feelings of marginalization, unemployment or the lack of constructive engagement by the state. In order to deal with this challenge, it is necessary to improve both public education on substance abuse and establish proper support facilities dealing with substance abuse. Institutionalization of changes must be done relating to youth empowerment and motivation. The absence of such initiatives has only succeeded in exacerbating the challenge.

²¹ See: <https://www.politicosl.com/articles/youth-and-drugs-sierra-leone>(11 July 2020).

²² See: <http://www.ayvnewspaper.com/index.php/2020/01/10/million-sierra-leoneans-suffer-mental-illness/> (12 July 2020).

x. Erosion of Family and Community Values and Norms

The erosion of social norms and values in post-conflict Sierra Leone has particularly affected the social skills of the youth; especially their mode of interaction and approach to society. The positive values that have historically guided society over time were destroyed by the war, with young people being exposed to and familiarizing themselves with a culture of violence and abuse when expressing negative emotions or contending with other challenges.²³ Additionally the sense of community and community related values have also been compromised over time. Dissipating approaches to life have become the new normal, leading to the increase in substance abuse, prostitution, domestic violence, child abuse and unstable homes and families.²⁴

xi. Decline in Sporting Activities for Youth

In the past, sporting activities played a vital role in the mental and physical wellbeing of young people, also conveniently serving as a platform for peace and social cohesion. However, these positive engagements in sporting activities have increasingly declined in the past decade and half, with school sporting events usually erupting into violence. Lack of proper sport engagement has meant Sierra Leone has continually failed to compete at international levels for several years, which has further diminished the youth's interest in national sporting events. With the decline in sporting activities in the country, the focus has turned to international sport, especially football matches in European football leagues.²⁵ Sports could significantly contribute to peace and development if enhanced and it could also

²³ National Commission for Children. 2019. A Study on Children and Violence in Sierra Leone. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

²⁴ Based on interviews conducted.

²⁵ Based on interviews conducted.

immensely contribute to enhancing the physical and psychological wellbeing of young people in the country.

xii. Youth and Information and Communications Technology

A significant percentage of the country's youth cannot access or afford ICT related services, and many are computer illiterate. This includes most of the university and college students and graduates in the country. This challenge became more evident with the outbreak of COVID 19 and the attempt made countrywide to switch to virtual learning methods. A good number of lecturers and students continue to struggle with this hurdle. This points to the gaps that exist and the need for the government and its development partners to invest in improving access to ICT services and platforms for young people , in order to improve computer literacy, create e-commerce opportunities and other online economic activities, which would be critical to positively situate Sierra Leone as a driver of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

4.0 Policy Direction

This section presents the goal, vision, objectives, and the principles that guide the implementation of this policy.

4.1 Vision

A Sierra Leonean society where youth are realising their potential and contributing to the social, political and economic growth of the country through their skills, creativity, civic friendship and patriotism

4.2 Goal

To empower youth, with a special emphasis on female youth, youth with disabilities and other marginalized groups, to be key players in their own wellbeing and the social, political and economic development of their communities and the country as a whole.

4.3 Objectives of the Policy

To mainstream the Sierra Leonean youth in national development initiatives and programmes in ways that positively impact their lives at the personal, community and national levels.

The *specific objectives* of this policy are:

- To include youth and youth concerns in program design and implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- To identify, build on, and recognize existing skills, creativity and enhance achievements of youth;
- To ensure that all youth access and utilize opportunities and services provided by government, development partners, youth serving agencies and the private sector at the national, regional, district, chiefdom and community levels;
- To foster the imagination and increase meaningful participation of youth in decision making at the central, sectoral and local level; in order to support patriotic attitudes, sustainable activities and healthy lifestyles.

4.4 Guiding Principles and Values

This policy is grounded in the translations of the interests, rights and entitlements of young people into *access, inclusivity and impact*. It is not enough to talk about rights and entitlements; rather, the government should be seen transforming policy into practice and making a positive difference in the lives of young people. *Access, inclusivity and impact* are therefore the actionable principles that undergird every aspect of the policy. These action principles are summarised below.

Access – removing barriers; spreading knowledge about opportunities for the youth (utilizing youth aids, mentors, social workers, formal and informal social structures)

Inclusivity – a diverse and fair representation of youth being in governance processes and decision-making structures that impact their lives. These organisations include relevant MDAs, NGOs and Youth Serving Organisations. Additionally, significant ‘voice’ should be given to organisations formed for youth engagement, social clubs, music groups, film groups, and sport clubs. Special emphasis should be placed on the equitable inclusion of youth that have been historically marginalized- particularly female youth, youth with disability and poor rural youths. The principle of inclusivity should not be limited to just the inclusion of youth, but an equitable and fair reflection of the internal diversity of young people across each provision of the policy.

Impact – Youth programs must have a tangible impact on Sierra Leone’s next generation. The country has had a long history of youth programmes, which have either had negligible impact or have not been properly evaluated; this has resulted in cynicism about these programmes. Programmes must noticeably and positively change the lives of youth. Targeted interventions must be able to verify their impact. Monitoring and evaluation is a key to this. This policy will act as a baseline for

monitoring and evaluation. It will propose a number of youth program indicators, based on youth indices in the Demographic and Health Survey, reports by the Civil Society Organisations (CSO), international development partners and discussions with targeted youth groups relating to their socio-economic wellbeing.

Guiding Values of a Sierra Leonean Youth

In addition to the high-level guiding principles of this policy, there are other values that the Sierra Leonean youth must possess, these are:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Patriotism | Love for country should be inculcated as a core value in the youth. |
| Self-Reliance | As future leaders, the youth should be imbued with the spirit of self-reliance to harness their potentials, creativity and initiative. |
| Honesty and Integrity | Honesty and Integrity are imperative for the youth in their personal and national development. |
| Participation | The views of the youth and their participation in national development must be sought. The Government and other stakeholders must consciously and consistently involve young people in decision making. |
| Equity | The Government and other stakeholders shall at all times recognize the rights, responsibilities, and equality of opportunities for the youth. |
| Access | The Government and other stakeholders shall ensure equal opportunities for the youth, including marginalized groups and provide them adequate access to programmes and services regardless of gender, geographical location, and socio-cultural circumstances. |

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Leadership | The youth must be challenged with opportunities to actively lead in matters that affect them, their communities, and the nation. |
| Good Governance | The Government and other stakeholders will demonstrate principles of good governance such as accountability, transparency, and integrity. |
| Gender Mainstreaming | The Government and other stakeholders will actively promote gender mainstreaming in the implementation of all policies and programmes. |
| Respect | The youth must strive to attain their aspirations based on respect for freedom, justice, democratic rights, values, work ethic, our cultural heritage and uphold human rights. |
| Coordination and Collaboration | The Government and other stakeholders shall consciously and consistently pursue partnerships with the youth to promote self - awareness and social cohesion. |

POLICY PRIORITY AREAS

6.1 The Policy emphasizes the following priority areas:

6.1.1 Increase Access to Livelihood Opportunities through Education and Training Opportunities, Scale up Interest in Sporting Activities and Entrepreneurship with Emphasis in Agriculture and Fisheries.

This seeks to build skills, promotes talents and creativity in view to enhance livelihoods. Whilst the general aim is to promote skills, productivity and livelihoods in all fields, the emphasis will be on the following priority areas: Innovation, Information, Communication and Technology (ICT), the creative sectors for the purpose of this policy including music, film, Art, theatre, sports and general

entertainment. It pays particular attention to most economically productive sectors; focusing especially on agriculture, fisheries, entrepreneurship and mining.

6.1.1.2 Support recognition of, and building skills level of youth

The Sierra Leonean youth has been independently acquiring skills such as working as auto-mechanics, farmers, electricians, plumbers, beauticians, and drivers, amongst other professions. However, most of these skills are acquired informally, with no certification and are consequently hardly recognised. The result of this is that there are limited ways of judging the level of skill the youths possess; this leads to lack of confidence in their ability; leaving them with limited opportunities for improving their knowledge and skills in order to start their own businesses and take responsibility for their economic well being. Consequently, it is important to implement a certification programme/framework for training and accrediting skills levels including those acquired informally. The certification programme is geared towards formally recognising the skills that youth already have, by introducing skill set standards and creating registers of qualified youth. Additionally, the programme should aim to increase their cognitive, technical abilities, building their life skills, confidence and work ethic.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Map and create a register of informal training centres;
- Create a scheme to systematically identify youth who have undergone training in informal training centres, including garages, saloons, construction sites, farms, tailor shops and similar enterprises;

- Support standardisation of skills levels in these informal centres and provide appropriate certification. The Ministry of Education will play a leading role in assessing the centres and providing the support and certification required;
- Support skills development by means of informal training and TVET programmes;
- Support entrepreneurship and access to finance amongst the youth, particularly graduates of unaccredited training sites. This would enable them to start and grow their own businesses.
- Link youth with appropriate skills levels with clients and job opportunities both in the public and private sector;
- Establish conflict resolution mechanisms between youth in the informal jobs market and clients/customers.

Creating a framework for transitioning from school/university/training centre to work

Graduates of universities, polytechnics and formal education institutions face enormous challenges in seeking employment. It has become apparent that over the last decade the majority of educated young Sierra Leoneans lack the practical and essential skills required for transition from school to the jobs market. This includes preparing resumes, ICT skills, financial literacy, entrepreneurial skills and internship and job training opportunities. This has been largely due to the fact that unlike in other countries they receive minimal training and guidance in career development, before or after graduating. Thus, this policy will seek to equip young people with the skills relevant to youth transitioning from universities and technical/vocational centers to employment. By extension, this policy will provide alternative avenues to

boost youth capacity development through volunteering, internship, and externship opportunities.

Strategic Options

Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Support the improvement of training programmes in universities and technical and vocational centers aiming to give youth cognitive, technical and socio-emotional skills relevant to gaining employment;
- Support and expand the National Youth Service to include most university graduates and also graduates of technical vocational institutions. Expanding the scope of service deployment areas to include districts, local governments and chiefdoms and to specifically plug the gap in critical education, health and other social sectors;
- Build partnerships with the private sector to enhance placements/ youth employment;
- Build partnerships with development partners to support improving youth cognitive, technical, socio-emotional skills in order to better facilitate the school-to-workforce transition.
- Expand the Graduate Internship Programme to include more equitable representation youth across the country.

5.1.3 Creating a Framework for Youth Creativity, Imagination and Innovation

Innovation and ICT are key to modern national development. The youth are better positioned than any other demographic to capitalise on the opportunities presented

by the digital age, such as building online businesses, enhancing digital skills sets and creating innovative products among others. The National Innovation and Digitization Strategy (NIDS) lay out a comprehensive blueprint for this transformation.

There has also been a boom of youth talent involved in music and film and other creative mediums, including modeling, fashion designs and events management. Young people have organised themselves into music production groups, established film production groups and networks, organised talent and modeling events as well as other creative and artistic ventures. However, there is a dearth of structures for and investment in these creative endeavours. Which often resulting in unsustainable careers paths for those involved in them. Additionally, there is a need to build, renew and update the youth's digital skills in order to meet the demands of the employment market. By enhancing digital and innovation infrastructure and supporting youth entrepreneurship in creative industries could contribute to the cultural achievements and advancement of the country both nationally and internationally.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Support DSTI's engagement with the youth to enhance innovation in the digital and technological sector. In order to fully implement the National Innovation and Digitisation Strategy;
- Support youth participation and uptake of emerging digital technologies;
- Support the digitisation of the Sierra Leonean youth identity and protecting them from cyber-crimes and digital rights violations;

- Mainstream the youth in the use of digital solutions for challenged citizens, at the personal, community, sectoral and national levels;
- Utilise the talents and innovation of youth in using remote sensing and other technologies to grow the nation's wealth and manage its natural resources;
- Put youth at the forefront of digital transformation of the health, justice and other government sectors, including the fight against corruption;
- Support the digitisation of spaces where youth acquire skills, including universities, technical/vocational institutions, youth centers and other spaces where youth congregate;
- Support higher institutions of learning and companies creating spaces for Sierra Leonean students to access resources that contribute to the country's digital ecosystem;
- Support youth to be at the fore of conversations and actions on the country's innovation and digital transformation. Partnering with the public and private sector, this should occur across the country's socio-cultural terrain. It should include identifying and supporting youth digital champions;
- Support professionalisation of youth in the various aspects of filmmaking, from script writing, directing, acting and other relevant cinematographic skills and the creation of studios for youth in the film industry;
- Support youth entrepreneurship and the creation of professional standards in music, film, fashion and other creative industries;

- Support the establishment of a National Commission for the Arts, and incorporate young people into the decision-making and implementation structures of the Commission;
- Support the construction of ultra-modern entertainment complexes to showcase the talents of young artists across the country.

5.1.4 Sports for Skills, National Cohesion and Livelihoods

Sports has an integral role to play in the physical and psychological wellbeing of the youth, it also fosters peace and social cohesion. The failure of subsequent governments to invest in sport and promote the participation of Sierra Leonean youth in national and international spheres of competition has significantly undermined the use of sports as a platform for national unity. Alongside these, the ability of youth to recognise their skills and talents and use them as livelihood opportunities has decreased, causing psychological complications for some of those affected. There is the urgent need to transform the sporting sector into a vibrant vehicle for national unity, as well as a potential avenue for livelihood for the Sierra Leonean youth.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with the youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Conceptualise and promote sports as a platform for national unity, peace, social cohesion. Support the recommencement of sporting activities at multiple levels across the country;
- Support the participation of the country and its youth in international competition;

- Support the construction of youth centers comprising sporting and other youth-friendly facilities across the country;
- Promote the establishment of sports academy facilities for sports development and recreation around the country;
- Support the establishment of Sport Development Fund SDF to be financed by corporate establishments, international sporting organisations, and the government;
- Promote capacity-building programme for all sport disciplines;
- Support recognition and celebration of national sporting heroes and heroines through incentives such as; special national awards;
- Support opportunities for sporting heroes and heroines to transfer their knowledge and skills to the younger generation;
- Promote increased budgetary support to sporting activities, particularly football, athletics, cricket, volleyball, and basketball.

5.1.5 Building Youth Livelihoods through Agriculture and Fisheries

Two-thirds of Sierra Leonean livelihoods depend on agriculture.²⁶ However, in spite of the availability of 5.36 million hectares of arable land, abundant rain and varied ecosystems, the sector is not fulfilling its potential. This is in part due to ineffective farming practice, low levels of skill, low productivity. In light of this farms are increasingly being abandoned by the youth for other more seemingly lucrative pursuits, which has caused labour shortages. There are already several initiatives (examples include the United Kingdom funded, Invest Salone and World Bank's

²⁶ See: <http://www.fao.org/in-action/securing-land-tenure-rights-sierra-leone/en/> (Accessed on 11 July 2020).

Skills Development Funding Project and the government's Youth Farm scheme) to improve the level of skill in the sector, increase productivity, and enhance commercialisation. The successful implementation of these initiatives has the potential to make agriculture attractive again to young Sierra Leoneans. By improving the livelihoods of rural youth, migration to cities where youth inactivity often leads to increased destitution, violence and substance will decrease.

Fisheries present a potentially great opportunity for sustainable youth livelihoods.²⁷ Currently the subsistence/small-scale/non-commercial fishing sector employs many Sierra Leonean youth. Enhancing youth participation and skills acquisition in the sector presents some of the greatest potential for transforming the lives of youth living in coastal communities. Investments in Value Chain Development will go a long way in increasing the potential of youth in agriculture and fisheries.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with the youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Conduct studies geared towards mapping livelihood opportunities for young people across the country;
- Promote awareness amongst young people on agriculture and fisheries as viable livelihood option;
- Support the establishment of youth demonstration farms in every district of the country;

²⁷ See: <http://www.fao.org/fishery/facp/SLE/en> (Accessed on 11 July 2020).

- Support climate smart agro-based and aquaculture enterprise for youth; providing training on VCD and providing them with access to capital and required materials (including using new green technology). Additionally, stakeholders should seek to improve access to markets and other facilities that enhance youth independence and livelihoods in the sector.
- Support institutional farms to promote transition of incarcerated and delinquent youth in conflict with the law into skilled and more productive citizens;
- Profile and recognize youth champions in agriculture and fisheries to inspire other youth;
- Support the digitisation of agro-information about inputs, finance, product development, agro-technologies and markets;
- Protect and promote youth tenurial rights and investments in agriculture and fisheries;
- Support skills acquisition by the youth in modern agricultural and fishing practices through the establishment of viable and sustainable training centers on agriculture, agribusiness and fisheries across the country.

6.2 Review the Legal Framework and Address Continued Marginalization and Infantilization of Youth, Multiple Gendered Violence and Discrimination Against Female Youth, Harmful Migration, Substance Abuse and Other Youth Related Violence

This prioritises safe social and physical space for youth. It is about the safety of youth and non-violence, healthy lifestyle, including sexual and reproductive rights, and youth contribution to sustainable physical environment and ecosystem, including sanitation, forest protection and biodiversity.

5.2.1 Promoting and establishing Safe Communities with youth

With over 70% of the country's population being below the age of 35, communities within the country could be safer if the youth contribute to ensuring stability, peace and non-violence. As indicated above, there has been a worrying trend amongst some sections of the youth demographic in the last several years. This includes increasing engagement in gang violence, drug use, substance abuse and its attendant deviant behaviour, gender-based violence, particularly towards female youth. There have been several initiatives by the government, development partners, NGOs, CSOs and communities to create safe environments, protecting female youth against violence and curb substance abuse. This policy builds on these efforts, supporting the expansions of the initiatives to curb youth violence and substance abuse, and create safe communities for youth, with special attention to female youth, youth with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Conduct national studies to understand the factors responsible for the involvement of young people in violence;
- Develop initiatives, by partnering with and building upon on-going efforts to tackle substance abuse and curb youth violence. Special attention should be paid to violence against female youth;
- Support the full implementation of the Sexual Offences Act 2019; and promote youth inclusion as champions in the fight against rape culture in Sierra Leone.
- Support expansion of counseling services in schools, technical and vocational centers and universities;
- Support deployment and training of social workers, counselors and local volunteers in communities to work with youth including in formal and informal institutions;
- Create civic platforms for national and regional dialogue amongst the youth, as so to contribute to multi-stakeholder policy and decision making and hold political leaders accountable;
- Strengthen the capacity of youth in politics and provide them with specific training on leadership, governance and ethical practices;
- Partner with law-enforcement agencies, development partners, civil society, community leaders and social workers to meaningfully engage youth in gangs/cliques; facilitating their transformation to become peaceful and more productive citizens.

- Invest in youth spaces and structures across communities to rethink toxic masculinity and provide opportunities for imagination, and non-violent strategies for youth.

5.2.2 Protecting and Promoting Youth Reproductive Health and Rights

Female youth are made vulnerable by the prevalence of; child marriages, teenage pregnancy, domestic abuse, gender-based violence, and exploitative transactional sex. One-third of pregnancies in the country are among teenage girls, and 40% of maternal deaths come from the same demographic. Girls from poor families are more likely to get pregnant at an early age than those from wealthier households. Child marriage is a key driver of teenage pregnancy and its attendant vulnerabilities—including adverse pregnancy outcomes, high school dropout rates amongst female youth, poor health outcomes, and limited economic opportunities. The use of contraceptives and safe sex practices are low amongst the Sierra Leonean youth. Sex education is often limited and at times not guided by science. Female youth constitute 60% of youth who are impoverished.²⁸ This policy shall promote healthy development and wellbeing of youth, including reproductive health of adolescents and young women.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Support the implementation of the National Programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health for adolescents;

²⁸ Statistics Sierra Leone 2019. Sierra Leone Multidimensional Poverty Index 2019. Freetown: Statistics Sierra Leone.

- Support the expansion of the National Programme on Sexual and Reproductive Health to include post adolescent's female youth;
- Promote access to comprehensive sexual and sexuality education and information for youth on reproductive health;
- Support the creation of enabling environments for youth, especially female youth, to access and utilize health services through elimination of associated socio-cultural and legal barriers;
- Promote advocacy and action for the elimination of socio-cultural practices that are harmful to the health of young women;
- Support actions that lead to increased youth access to and uptake of family planning, including long term contraceptives;
- Promote interventions on preventing Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), and other diseases that are prevalent amongst youth, including HIV, Syphilis, and Hepatitis;
- Promote awareness towards the utilisation of the National Ambulance Scheme and pay special attention towards young women
- Support interventions for the management of unintended pregnancy by making available safe abortion and post abortion services that Sierra Leonean laws allow – especially for survivors of sexual violence and incest;
- Support programmes for the prevention and management of gender-based violence, including scaling up of initiatives such as Hands Off Our Girls and promoting youth partnership in the campaigns to tackle sexual violence across communities in Sierra Leone.

- Support the provision of digitalisation of health system as a means of increasing access to quality healthcare by the youth, with particular attention being paid to young women;
- Promote quality skills acquisition of youth as health workers, including as lab technicians, nurses, and medical doctors, and the absorption of trained youth health workers into the health service;
- Mainstream youth as central actors in the monitoring of the health sector; including the free health care drugs scheme among others;
- Support the mainstreaming of youth in implementation of the Sierra Leone Social Health Insurance Scheme.

5.2.3 Cultivate Youth Leadership in Environmental Protection

Sierra Leone is listed as one of the countries that will be most affected by climate change. In the last decade, the country has experienced several environmental disasters including flooding and in 2017, a devastating mudslide in the capital, Freetown.²⁹ There has also been a significant loss of forest cover in the country. This coupled with rising sea levels pose a threat to the islands and coastal communities in Sierra Leone. There has also been an increase in the number of fire incidents in major towns, especially in the capital city, Freetown. Protecting the environment is a matter of national interest, as well as a demonstration of the country's commitment to the SDGs and a Global Climate Agreements to which it is a state party. Youth as the custodians of the environment both in the present and the future, must play an active role in protecting the environment, and the countries sustainable development.

²⁹Redshaw, Peter., Campbell, Grace E., Boon, David., & Willis, Matthew. 2019. The 2017 Regent Landslide, Freetown Peninsula, Sierra Leone. *Quarterly Journal of Engineering Geology and Hydrogeology* 52: 435-444.

This policy seeks to situate youth as critical actors in the country's action to promote sustainable environmental practices and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Raise awareness; supporting education on climate change for youth groups and networks;
- Promote sustainability and environmental assessments for youth programmes;
- Promote the formation of Youth for the Environment clubs in formal institutions and in communities;
- Support, recognize and reward youth in environmentally friendly forestry activities, including tree planting and sustainable use of forest resources;
- Support outreach activities by the country's environmental protection agency to youth;
- Raise awareness and build youth capacities for disaster management including fire prevention and flood mitigation;
- Create partnerships between youth groups and environmental protection organisations.

6.3 Increase Youth Participation in Policy Discussions and Development with Intent to Build Trust and Confidence in the Socio-Economic and Political System and Restore Family and Community Values and Norms

This focuses on increasing youth participation in the nation's political and socio-economic trajectory. Strengthening patriotism and fostering partnerships between the youth, government, civil society, communities and other stakeholders.

5.3.1 Participation and Non-Discrimination

Sierra Leone for a long time has been challenged with weak governance structures, and gerontocratic socio-cultural practices that limit youth participation in the socio-economic and political activities at national, district, chiefdom and community levels. In politics, male youth are often contracted to deploy violence on opponents, and female youth perceived as cheerleaders. In social life, male youth are perceived as 'borbor' (lads) who lack agency or maturity and must do the bidding of others, and female youth are objectified as could be seen in the high incidences of child marriages, teenage pregnancy and gender-based violence. Generally, youth are marginalised in economic activities with many of them in low-skilled and less productive self-employment with barely enough returns to ensure decent livelihoods. Furthermore, YwDs also contend with discriminations that are related from certain cultural and other prejudices and practices.

There have been several initiatives to tackle youth related challenges including the creation of youth councils, the establishment of the National Commission for Youth, the Disability Commission, work for cash schemes, youth employment schemes and other programmes. The Sierra Leone MT-NDP recognises the challenges that youth continue to face and declares youth as current partners and leaders with the rights and obligation to fully participate in the country's socio-economic, political and cultural life. This policy will support the establishment and strengthening of structures, processes and mechanisms that promote meaningful participation and

inclusion of youth in all aspects of the country's development and that prevent discrimination against youth.

Strategic Options

Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Promote Youth Impact Assessments in design and implementation of major policies and initiatives;
- Significantly expand access to and support gender parity and inclusion of youth living with disability in the National Youth Service;
- Support gender parity and inclusion of youth living with disability in the Graduate internship programme;
- Support gender parity and inclusion of YwDs in skills development programmes;
- Raise awareness among leaders in the public and private sectors, political parties and communities on the benefits and necessity for youth mainstreaming;
- Promote youth inclusion in boards and other governing structures of Government agencies;
- Create incentives for and ensure youth inclusion in decision making positions in the private sector;
- Promote youth friendly public services and public service delivery;

- Strengthen representative and functional youth councils at the national, regional, district and zonal levels;
- Support gender parity and inclusion of youth living with disability in youth councils at the national, regional, district and zonal levels.

5.3.2. Creating a Framework for Partnerships

Enhancing youth development and securing the achievements of youth is a multi-sectoral endeavour involving multiple domains and stakeholders. However, given the number of institutions, including MDAs, youth organisations, academic institutions, the private sector, civil society groups and development agencies that are involved in activities relating to youth there have been challenges related to intersectoral coordination and collaboration. The lack of coordination and partnerships has often led to duplication of efforts or concentration of actions in a sector or region, leaving other regions or sectors underserved. Partnerships and coordination of action across sectors, regions, state, and non-state actors are key to ensuring optimal impact of youth programmes and activities. This policy shall support coordination, collaboration and partnerships across sectors, regions, institutions and actors involved in youth programmes as a means of ensuring optimal impact on the lives and livelihoods of youth

Strategic Options

The Government in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Build partnerships and coordinate activities with development partners to support youth initiatives;

- Build partnerships and coordinate actions with youth supporting NGOs, CSOs and CBOs;
- Support creation of partnerships between youth, MDAs, local government and chiefdom authorities;
- Build partnerships with youth informal networks, social clubs, film, music, and beauty pageant groups, bike riders and kekeh associations;
- Create guidelines for partnerships between youth, MDAs, local government, youth supporting organisations and youth at the national, regional, district, chiefdom and community levels;
- Create a framework that ensures that location, scope, type and nature of youth programmes are informed by independent scientific research. MOYA and its partners will invest in creating a database of credible youth-based research and knowledge that partners can use as a basis for program decisions. Government will require that youth programmes clearly articulate their evidence base for making critical decisions.
- Encourage the formation of coalitions and partnerships amongst youth organisations to maximise the impact of their activities;
- Support the establishment of an annual National Youth Assembly, for youth to discuss youth and other pertinent national issues and proffer recommendations to relevant authorities;

5.3.3 Patriotism, Volunteerism, National Cohesion and Civic Responsibility

As indicated in the sections above, since independence, there has been constant tension between young people and respective governments in Sierra Leone because

of their lack of trust and confidence in the system. The lack of trust and confidence has negatively affected the civic responsibilities and duties of young people, whose attitude and behaviour towards the state has not been as it should. This has been one of the reasons for the upsurge of violence and clashes between the police and youth across the country. The current context has undermined the agency of youth and their ability and willingness to actively participate in promoting democratic good governance in Sierra Leone. Additionally, any failure to address the current status quo will have implications for the peace, security and stability of the country. Thus, this policy will initiate and strengthen activities geared towards promoting active citizenship of youth, foster youth imagination, national cohesion and civic friendship across the country as indicated in the section below.

Strategic Options

The GoSL in collaboration with youth, development partners and other stakeholders shall:

- Intentionally engage youth on the country's laws, especially the national constitution;
- Support awareness raising and respect amongst youth about the country's national symbols (the meaning of the coat of arms and national flag), the national anthem and the national pledge;
- Support the re-introduction of civics education in the school curricula and at informal institutions;
- Promote social media platforms for civic engagement and national cohesion amongst youth;

- Support knowledge about statesperson and community leaders who have been role models for patriotism and national cohesion;
- Support knowledge about the cuisines, dress, tradition and customary laws of the various ethnic groups in the countries;
- Promote the learning of the country's national languages, including languages from regions other than home regions of the learners;
- Support global citizenship education programmes at the national and local levels;
- Support and create incentives for programmes that promote youth volunteerism in community activities;
- Support platforms for national youth events, including Brain of Sierra Leone competitions, national pageant shows, and national youth cultural shows;
- Support exchange programmes for youth in academic and skills training institutions to do field trips, attend courses and engage their counterparts from different regions.
- Sponsor a highly competitive National Summer Internship programme in certain state institutions different from the National Youth Service.

Governance Arrangements and Implementation Framework

The implementation of the policy will be guided by a clear and well-defined governance arrangement that will be instrumental in ensuring that the objectives and priorities of the GoSL are achieved. This section presents the governance arrangements and implementation framework, with the roles and responsibilities of each actor defined.

6.1 The Ministry Responsible for Youth Affairs

The Ministry of Youth Affairs is the lead institution responsible for implementing, advocating, coordinating, mobilising resources, and enhancing the positive impact on youth of the policies, processes and actions listed in the National Youth Policy. The Ministry sets the policy agenda on youth and is supported by the NAYCOM to ensure that the objectives of the policy are fully achieved. In implementing this policy, the Ministry shall:

- Promote the establishment of the appropriate institutional and other frameworks for partnerships and collaboration with all stakeholders to deliver the key policy actions contained in the Youth Policy;
- With support from NAYCOM, shall design and implementation plan in relation to key policy actions in the various clusters indicating programmes,

activities, groups targeted, agencies responsible, performance indicators, timelines, resource requirements, risks, outputs and outcomes;

- Support the establishment of an Inter-Ministerial high-level committee to support and drive the National Youth Policy;
- Establish a technical committee, with the NAYCOM as Secretariat and consisting of representatives from MDAs, Youth Serving Agencies, Youth Councils and Youth groups shall provide technical and coordination support for the design and implementation of programmes derived from the National Youth Policy;
- Support the creation of a Private Sector Youth Committee comprising representatives of the private sector to support the design and implementation of youth entrepreneurial, skills building, employment and innovation programmes;
- With technical assistance from NAYCOM, support meetings of the National and Regional Youth Councils to provide continuing proposals to meet emerging challenges, promote youth ownership of programmes and monitoring and evaluation of youth projects;
- Support the establishment of regional and district level Youth Advisory and Technical Committees to support the design and local ownership of youth programmes at the regional and district levels.

6.2. The National Youth Commission

The NAYCOM has a crucial role to play in providing the technical support required in ensuring the successful implementation of the policy. The experience and institutional memory of staff of NAYCOM, alongside with the partnerships and

collaborative relationship it has harnessed over the years, will be of intrinsic significance to the implementation of the policy. Specifically, the NAYCOM shall:

- Support the process of development and implementing a strategic plan for the implementation of the policy. The plan will have a well-designed implementation framework that will be guided by a Monitoring and Evaluation Plan;
- Mobilise youth across the country to participate in and own the process of implementing the policy;
- Design specific interventions geared towards rolling out the respective components of the policy;
- Ensure that a modern, democratic, youth centred, and gender responsive approach is adopted to the implementation of the policy;
- Support the Ministry in mobilising the required political will and financial resources required to fully implement the policy;
- Strengthen their relationship with development partners and regularly brief them on the implementation of the policy. This will also be geared towards promoting complementarities and mitigating duplication of efforts;
- Empower decentralised structures and ensure that they are fully integrated into the process of implementing the strategy;
- Establish platforms for cross-learning and exchanges among youth across the country.

6.3. District Youth Councils and Decentralised Youth Structures

A major component of the implementation of youth related activities in Sierra Leone are decentralised youth structures that have been in existence for over a decade and a half. They include DYCs, Chiefdom Youth Committees (CYCs) Youth Associations, Zonal Youth Committees and their associates. The Ministry responsible for youth and NAYCOM will mobilise resources to provide the decentralised structures with the technical and financial support they require to support the implementation of the policy efficiently and effectively. The specific roles that the decentralised youth structures would play are:

- Identify youth related opportunities, challenges and aspirations at the local level and engage NAYCOM on them;
- Mobilise an inclusive group of young people, especially female to participate in youth related activities at the local levels; Each DYC and CYC following the adoption of this policy will ensure that at least 50% of their executives and associated committees are made up of female youth.
- Work with the Ministry responsible for youth affairs and NAYCOM to identify initiatives that should be undertaken to empower young people in local communities;
- Provide technical support through capacity building for CSOs and CBOs working on youth related issues;
- Participate in data collection and collation on youth related issues at the local levels and ensure the active participation of youth in MEL exercises.

6.4. National Youth Service

Established in 2016 by an act of parliament, the National Youth Service (NYS) has the potential to become a major instrument for human development and for national unity and cohesion. The review and full implementation of the National Youth Service Scheme is identified as a critical goal of pillar 6 of the MTNDP. The experience and expertise of NYS as well as the expansion of its mandate to include a wider spectrum of youth in more diverse private and public sector opportunities is therefore critical for the success of the policy. The NYS functions will include:

- To train youth within 17-24 years of age to cohort in practical services to serve as entry level staff in the labour market
- To train and develop youth in the requisite skills and competencies with view to enhance the process of contemporary management of programme delivery.
- To develop training packages that provide youth with employability skills training needed to function in the world of work.
- To develop public and private sector partnerships in order to expand the reach of the National Youth Service.
- To promote, reward and create opportunities for youth volunteerism and community service.
- To build and maintain robust relationships with the local communities.

6.5. Other Stakeholders

The policy recognises the fact that there are several stakeholders that have vital roles to play in achieving the objectives of the policies. These actors include national and international development partners, CSOs, CBOs, academic institutions, Think-

Tanks and the media. Principally, NAYCOM will ensure that stakeholders align all their programmes and project plans to new priorities set in the new National Youth Policy. As such, the Commission with the support of the Ministry will strengthen its collaboration and coordination of youth related activities to promote complementarities and avoid duplication of efforts.

Both the Ministry and NAYCOM will encourage development partners to prioritise and invest in the empowerment of young people and strategically positioning them to effectively contribute to the growth and development of their communities and the country as a whole.

Central to the engagement with and mobilisation of stakeholders to support the implementation of the policy, will be engagements with the private sector. Private sector actors have a role to play in mentoring and coaching youth entrepreneurs; investing in the empowerment and other development activities that have to do with young people; and providing employment opportunities for youth.

6.6. Implementation Plan and Timeframe

To fully roll-out this strategy, a comprehensive implementation plan will be developed alongside its Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework and risk mitigating strategies. The implementation plan will be divided into short, medium and long-term priorities, with implementation models and indicators developed that are pragmatic and could foster the achievement of the goals and objectives that would be set in the implementation plan. The implementation plan will be constantly reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant and that the implementation process is efficient and effective. The plan will also be developed to be flexible and adaptable to changing times and circumstances, for instance, natural disasters and health epidemics as happened in the cases of Ebola and COVID 19.

The timeline for the implementation of the policy is five years, as such, it will seek to build on gains made by previous strategies, using a hands-on and priority-based approach to ensuring that the objectives of the policy are achieved within the set timeframe. As such, activities designed must be Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound, Explainable and Relative. The implementation process will be tailored to be inclusive, non-discriminatory, and participatory, with historically marginalized groups – female youth, youth with disabilities and youth in poor rural areas at the centre of it.

6.7. Financing the Policy

At the heart of the government's approach to good governance are young people – ensuring a critical mass is empowered with the socio-economic and political space to enhance their agency and their contribution to national development. As such, the GoSL is committed to providing the technical and financial resources required to implement the policy. The Government will also strengthen and harmonise inter-governmental efforts geared towards enhancing the process of implementing the policy. Additionally, the GoSL will encourage its development partners to have as one of their priorities, the financing of the policy. The GoSL will closely monitor the implementation process and the existing gaps to ensure that resources are provided in time.

The GoSL will promote complementarities of efforts to avoid duplication and wastage of limited resources. The efficient use of resources will be ensured to make sure that the benefits of interventions are fully accessed by young people.

6.7.1. The Youth Empowerment Fund

The government will establish a basket “Youth Empowerment Fund” that will be a vehicle for mobilising and coordinating investment in the implementation of the youth policy. The ministry responsible for youth affairs will set up the Fund and an inclusive governing structure that will include the Ministry responsible for Finance, the Ministry in charge of Development, other line ministries, NAYCOM, representatives of the donor community, representatives from youth groups and youth serving agencies.

This fund will be the central pool for all development investment in the youth sector in the country. Development partners will pool their resources and projects as part of the Empowerment Fund. This will also ensure coordinated investment aligned with the principles and policies of the youth policy.

To ensure consistent funding of the YEF, the government will put in a mechanism to ensure a designated proportion of tariffs/taxes paid for all the country’s minerals are paid into the fund. A minimum percentage of taxes from the gaming industry would also be earmarked for the YEF. Other private sector actors will be encouraged and incentivised to contribute to the Fund.

6.7. Youth-Led Monitoring and Impact Evaluation of the Policy

It was observed during consultations for the development of this policy, that the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) process during the implementation of the previous policy was ineffective and as such there were very minimal corrective measures taken that were based on data collected from MEL processes. To address this gap, a MEL framework will be developed alongside the implementation plan as

indicated above. The MEL framework will consist of four components which are presented below:

i) MEL Capacity Development for Key Actors: An assessment of the MEL capacity of the Ministry responsible for youth, NAYCOM and their decentralised structures shall be undertaken, with the findings used to develop specific capacity building activities for them. MEL experts should be hired with the aim of setting up systems and structures with a longer-term focus. With the right capacity, actors working on supporting the collection, collation, management and use of data would be in the position to provide essential data as and when required. The existing gap is leading to a failure in understanding the relevance of activities, their effectiveness, and the impact they are creating. Furthermore, there is a gap in relation to assessing the perception of youth in relation to activities designed and implemented for them.

ii) Youth-Led Monitoring Exercises: Regular monitoring activities will be undertaken by the Ministry responsible for youth, NAYCOM, their partners and community youth. The bulk of those that will be participating in and leading monitoring exercises will be youth. Rapid assessment tools would be designed to collect data from partners and beneficiaries during monitoring visits, with the aim of using data collected to mitigate or identify and address challenges and further strengthen activities undertaken.

Monitoring engagements would be well planned, with an intersectional approach used in including and engaging all categories of youth including youth with disability and those in remote and isolated communities.

iii) Mid-Term Evaluation: An evaluation exercise will be conducted 30 months after the inception of the implementation of the policy. The mid-term evaluation will be geared towards having a thorough assessment of the implementation of the policy

and the opportunities and challenges that the process presents. The evaluation will be undertaken by external experts with knowledge and experience on youth programming in Sierra Leone. Preferably, the evaluation team should consist of young Sierra Leoneans of both genders and they will work closely with the MEL Unit of both the Ministry responsible for youth affairs and NAYCOM. The evaluation report will be used to update the implementation framework of the policy.

iv) End-Term Evaluation: At the end of the five-year implementation of the policy, a nation-wide evaluation will be undertaken with the aim of having a clear picture of whether the objects set were achieved or not. Like the mid-term evaluation, the exercise will be undertaken by external experts with knowledge and experience on youth programming in Sierra Leone. The evaluation team will consist of both genders and will work closely with the MEL Unit of both the Ministry responsible for youth affairs and NAYCOM.

The end-term evaluation will help to provide strategic direction in the development of a new policy for the next five years. Its findings will be vital in setting the objectives and priorities that stakeholders should focus on.

7. Annexes