



Knowledge hub
-
Collection of best practices

Summary of the best practice

1. Title of the best practice (e.g. name of policy, programme, project, etc.) *

Supporting Newly Qualified Female Teachers- Learning Assistant/Student Teacher Model, Sierra Leone

2. Country or countries where the practice is implemented *

Sierra Leone

3. Please select the **most relevant** Action Track(s) the best practice applies to *

- Action Track 1. Inclusive, equitable, safe, and healthy schools
- Action Track 2. Learning and skills for life, work, and sustainable development
- Action Track 3. Teachers, teaching and the teaching profession
- Action Track 4. Digital learning and transformation
- Action Track 5. Financing of education

4. Implementation lead/partner organization(s) *

Plan International Sierra Leone

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

accessible route for vulnerable young women in rural communities to become qualified teachers

6. What makes it a best practice? *

Ethical soundness – human rights, equity and gender equality: The model specifically targets vulnerable young women who were unable to complete secondary education; mostly due to early/forced marriage and teenage pregnancy. After going through the programme, they receive the same certifications as others in the teacher training colleges. They are also coming from communities where there are very few female teachers. A recent gender equality report assessment highlighted some of the gender challenges/barriers that the young women face on their way to becoming Newly Qualified Student Teachers (NQST). We are adapting our model based on this, particularly around our child care strategy. Political commitment and leadership: The Teacher Service Commission (TSC - responsible for all teachers in Sierra Leone) is involved throughout the entire project cycle. They are an active member in the design, reviews, re-designing, etc. Because of this they know and follow the young women throughout the entire 4 years and therefore are confident in the recruitment of them, hence why there has been such a high recruitment of our female teachers. Partnerships and collaboration: In addition to the TSC above there are also Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). TTCs support student teachers in their training, preparing and supporting them through lectures and guidance to sit the National Council for Technical Vocational and other Academic Awards (NCTVA) exams and gain their teaching qualification. TTCs also participate in the project activities, through technical and coordination meetings, when the need arises. The TTCs collaborate with Plan International Sierra Leone and share reports of the student teachers' performance, challenges they face, and support required; TTC and Plan International hold monthly meetings. In addition, TTCs monitor student teachers teaching in their assigned schools as part of the NCTVA examination requirement. Youth and community involvement: The community development committees (CDCs) were very active in supporting the young women at the Learning Assistant (LA) phase. Newly Qualified Female Teachers (NQFTs) from the previous cohorts say that the CDCs have been visiting the schools and encouraging them to be patient even though they are not receiving salaries. They also said that the committees had requested head teachers to give them stipends to cover school meal subsidies. The committees have also been lobbying with school supervisors to convince them to support the NQFTs to be enlisted on their payroll. Relevance: The project addresses the challenge of lack of female teachers/role models in rural communities. As well as helping to address the root causes of gender equality, and thus, contributing to a gender transformative approach. Efficiency: Over 500 teachers are already on the payroll. There is a huge challenge in Sierra Leone around teachers actually being paid and, even when qualified, getting them onto the Government payroll. This model works because we work with the TSC to recruit female teachers and put them on the national payroll. Effectiveness: We completed an evaluation of the model in 2017 and in 2022. Sustainability: This model has been recognised by UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as a great model. One of our teachers also won a top teaching award nationally. We are also integrating the approach (if not the model) as much as possible in the new Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan to address the gender imbalance in teaching bodies and the lack of female role models. Replicability/ scalability: It has already been replicated in other districts and with other donors.

Description of the best practice

7. Introduction (350-400 words)

This section should ideally provide the context of, and justification for, the practice and address the following issues:

- i) Which population was affected?
- ii) What was the problem that needed to be addressed?
- iii) Which approach was taken and what objectives were achieved? *

In Sierra Leone education system inequalities persist and challenges are particularly severe for girls. Girls, particularly in rural areas, are less likely than boys to access, stay in school, learn, and transition to junior and senior secondary school and are more likely to drop out. One of the reasons behind this unequal access and retention, is that there is a serious lack of female teachers in the education system, resulting in an absence of important role models for children, especially girls, and low aspirations for girls in the community. The bulk of teachers in the education system are male and there is documented incidence of school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV).

The project directly inspired and contributed to the government of Sierra Leone's Education Sector Plan 2022-2026 and Free Quality School Education Programme, with regards to improving the competencies of teachers, especially female teachers, and supporting the recruitment pool for teachers in under-resourced areas.

The project was designed to break the negative cycle involving a shortage of female teachers, low quality of education and low aspirations for girls and young women in their communities by providing young women with an accessible route to becoming qualified teachers, whilst at the same time, including more women working in rural schools to inspire the next generation of girls and help them learn and achieve their full potential.

The project's approach to address the above challenges i) providing vulnerable young women (aged 19-28 years) in rural communities with an accessible route to becoming qualified teachers, and equipping them with practical teaching experience engaging with children in schools through the Learning Assistant phase, and ii) continuing to support the young women's successful entry into and completion of the Teacher Training College (TTC) following a blended model (distance and face to face learning) through the Student Teacher phase in order to be successfully accredited and employed as primary school teachers. Key achievement of the project is that nearly 500 young women in remote rural areas in Port Loko, Moyamba, Kenema, Kono and Kailahun were trained as teachers, adding to the small number of existing qualified female teachers. About 200 of these teachers are now on the government payroll. This approach supported women in rural communities with a structured pathway into the teaching profession, provided positive role models for girls. Also, the project had a strong positive impact on the lives of the Newly Qualified Female Teachers (NQFT's) and on their perceptions of how they can continue to influence and support the lives of marginalized children in their communities

8. Implementation (350-450 words)

Please describe the implementation modalities or processes, where possible in relation to:

- i) What are the main activities carried out?
- ii) When and where the activities were carried out (including the start date and whether it is ongoing)?
- iii) Who were the key implementation actors and collaborators? (civil society organizations, private sector, foundations, coalitions, networks etc.)?
- iv) What were the resources needed (budget and sources) for the implementation? *

Some of the main activities includes selection of the young women to be Learning Assistants in primary schools in collaboration with community members and leaders, and to study for three years at the TTC to qualify as teachers. The Learning Assistants were provided 6 months of literacy and numeracy training and materials and regular face to face tutorials with tutors to prepare them sit the Teacher Training College entrance exam. After passing this exam they became Student Teachers (STs). Whilst Student Teachers, a distance learning approach is taken that includes a combination of placement in primary schools and learning at the TTCs. As STs they are now enrolled in the teacher training colleges and provided with tuition fees which was paid directly to the college and they were provided with study materials and regular face-to-face mentoring by tutors. Tablets are distributed where their learning content had been digitized and young women had the opportunity to interact among themselves, learn through their tables, as well as with their tutors at the TTC. Additionally, Inclusive Education and Child Protection training was included in their training to complement the national teacher training curriculum.

They were also provided with stipends as they attended their periodic teacher training sessions. Peer-to-peer support opportunity was also provided through meetings with fellow Student Teachers.

Community awareness-raising for children, teachers and traditional leaders to promote girls' education.

Steering committee meetings were conducted for stakeholders including, the Sierra Leone Teaching Service Commission (TSC), the TTCs, the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), National Council for Technical and Vocational Awards (NCTVA) to follow up on the project implementation, monitor ST's in their schools, identify challenges and proffer solutions. The project was implemented from April 2017 to July 2021. However, with additional funding from another source, STs who could not complete their training courses at the end of the project owing to failure in two or more subject, were supported to complete their courses. This additional funding was from 2021-2022. The project was implemented by a consortium of Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) with technical support from the TSC, MBSSE, NCTVA and the Open University UK. Also, the project's education technical lead was part of the national education coordination group and other technical working groups.

Major funder of the project was DFID (now FCDO), Dubai Cares, and additional funding was from UK Internal Major Partnership Funds

9. Results – outputs and outcomes (250-350 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the questions below:

- i) How was the practice identified as transformative? (e.g., impact on policies, impact on management processes, impact on delivery arrangements or education monitoring, impact on teachers, learners and beneficiary communities etc.);
- ii) What were the concrete results achieved with regard to outputs and outcomes?
- iii) Has an assessment of the practice been carried out? If yes, what were the results? *

Outputs and outcomes included the enrolment of 200 women teachers on the government payroll. Willingness of the government, as well as capacity at both a centralized and local level, to engage with this project implementation. The project provided stipends to Student Teachers and the provision of stipends was a major contributing factor in retaining the teachers throughout their training. In addition to the stipends, the training gave student teachers, confidence to have dialogue and negotiation with Head Teachers on school-based and professional issues. It also provided positive role modelling for girls within the school context leading to change in attitudes within the whole community in relation to girls' education. The school-based placement approach has helped young women in rural communities in Sierra Leone to become qualified teachers, helping to address the shortage of female teachers in rural communities. Qualitative reports, from programme evaluations, stated that the presence of the STs is driving change within schools and communities leading to better learning experiences for children in their classes. Reports from STs' classroom observation and feedback sessions showed that they are aware that their gender makes a difference. They have a strong sense of their responsibilities as role models, and do not use corporal punishment as is often the case with other male teachers. Also, Headteachers in discussions said that children were 'more relaxed' with STs, that STs are more 'gentle and understanding' with children, and that children are 'more confident to speak in class' with STs and therefore children participate more. Girls and boys feel safer in schools where the number of female teachers is higher, especially for girls feeling more confident to reach female teachers to report abuse and ask questions about their Sexual Reproductive and Health Rights. In a 2019 assessment with STs, the report showed STs are reflective about the intrinsic value of study and meaningful work, their growing role in communities, their confidence to challenge traditional domestic arrangements, and their determination to succeed. That report also noted that four stood for local council elections in 2019 and one became a local councillor. Also, another ST became a community radio newsreader, outside of school hours.

10. Lessons learnt (300 words)

To the extent possible, please reply to the following questions:

- i) What were the key triggers for transformation?
- ii) What worked really well – what facilitated this?
- iii) What did not work – why did it not work? *

Some of the key triggers for change are the commitment, accessibility and continuous engagement of tutors and staff with the LA/ST in their communities. The community participation is another, where community stakeholders play a vital role in the selection process of the LA/ST and they form part of the key networks that the young women work with during their teaching and learning journey. In field observations and interviews, it was evident that there is community confidence in schools where there are STs; headteachers reported increased enrolments and attributed this to the presence of more women in the school. Importantly, also, existing community leaders and other high-status members of communities (e.g. headteachers and teachers) do not see the Learning Assistants as rivals, but as younger members of their communities advancing to maturity and participation. The involvement of established community members in the selection process has helped to ensure that they accept the young women and are committed to supporting them to do well.

An important attribute of the Learning Assistants as new leaders is that, through exposure, they are becoming more socially mobile. They already developed valuable links beyond their existing experience through their attendance at revision camp, college residential weeks, workshops and meetings. This kind of exposure extended further as they proceeded with their studies. Their learning from new environments and people increased their confidence and broadened their horizon and networks, resulting in them making significant positive contribution to their communities' future development.

The programme also resulted in the professional and personal development of key people who support the Learning Assistants. For example, by regularly visiting them in their schools, community stakeholders like Chiefs and Women's Leader have been prompted to reflect on their own roles and how they can support girls and young women in their communities to make the most of opportunities to improve their life prospects and those of their wider communities.

Some of the things which did not work so well were that many STs were teaching in extremely challenging conditions. Many schools had makeshift structures as buildings, hence the classrooms are not large enough to accommodate all the children. This resulted in overcrowded classes, especially for the lower classes where under-age children often come to school with older brothers and sisters because there are no available pre-schools in the communities. Most of the classes also do not have adequate seating so many children have to cluster together on benches, and many of the children do not have desks so they struggle to write with the books on their legs. There is a need to invest in hardware and infrastructure to complement teacher training.

11. Conclusions (250 words)

Please describe why may this intervention be considered a “best practice”. What recommendations can be made for those intending to adopt the documented “best practice” or how can it help people working on the same issue(s)? *

This intervention can be described as a best practice because the model improved some of the systemic barriers to education especially in rural communities which included decreasing the student-teacher ratio, improving attendance and retention, and creating more child-friendly classrooms through the presence of female teachers who encouraged participation and who are beginning to practice learner-centered approaches. Also, the model has profound personal and community impact. Personal impact where cohorts of women in education and training have experienced personal transformation as paraprofessional learners, with resulting changes to family relationships, how communities perceive women and how women operate in communities. In regard to community impact, the presence of Learning Assistants and Student Teachers resulted in some indicators of system change. Their presence is positively altering the culture of primary schools and classrooms where they are deployed as corporal punishment is not used by the teachers, higher attendance of boys and girls, and community confidence, with children feeling safer, more relaxed and willing to participate in class. These successful indicators of system change provide some evidence and confidence that the Learning Assistant/Student Teacher programme is a sustainable model. It has improved both the learning environment and improved the retention and transition rates of students as part of the change process in Sierra Leone for inclusive quality education for all and for replication in other contexts.

One recommendation for those intending to adopt the documented practice is that commitment of men for change is very important for those who support Learning Assistants/Student Teachers. Also, the continuous engagement and collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the TSC and other relevant stakeholders will aid the effective implementation of the project, especially in regard to enlistment on the young women on the government payroll.

12. Further reading

Please provide a list and URLs of key reference documents for additional information on the “best practice” for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the beneficiary group/s. *

<http://oro.open.ac.uk/49603/1/Sierra%20Leone%20LA%20Research%20Report%20170517%20FINAL.PDF>

<https://edtechhub.org/2021/03/26/sierra-leone-series-plan-international-and-the-importance-of-community-support-for-distance-teacher-professional-development-programmes/>

<https://girlseducationchallenge.org/blogs/blog-article/supporting-young-women-to-become-teachers-and-role-models-in-sierra-leone/>

<https://girlseducationchallenge.org/media/bdjdqqlp/gate-gect-endline-evaluation.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bX0glcBCcyA>