



**SEND
SIERRA LEONE**

Working to promote good governance and
equality of men and women in Sierra Leone



EVALUATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN

2019 - 2023





SEND
SIERRA LEONE
Working to promote good governance and
equality of men and women in Sierra Leone



EVALUATION OF SEND SIERRA LEONE'S STRATEGIC PLAN

2019–2023

FEBRUARY 2024

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	1
Executive Summary	3
Context	3
Subject and Focus of the Evaluation	3
Key Evaluation Findings	3
Recommendations	4
1. Introduction	6
1.1. Background and purpose of the evaluation	6
1.2. Scope of the evaluation	6
1.3. Evaluation approach	7
2. Sierra Leone Economic Overview	7
3. Overview of Strategic Directions Under Review	9
4. Review of Strategic Direction 1	10
4.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction	10
4.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects	10
4.2.1. Lessons from the LANN+ project	11
4.2.2. Lessons from other projects	12
4.2.3. COVID-19 related interventions	13
5. Review of Strategic Direction 2	14
5.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction	14
5.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects	14
5.2.1. Lessons from the Kenema Education Project	14
5.2.2. Lessons from the TERRA TECH Project	15
5.2.3. Lessons from other projects	16
6. Review of Strategic Direction 3	16
6.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction	17
6.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects	17
6.2.1. Lessons from the Shebro Island WASH Project	18
6.2.2. Lessons from the Right to Water and Sanitation Project	18
6.2.3. Lessons from the P100 Project	19
6.2.4. Lessons from the P150 Project	19
6.2.5. Lessons from the LANN+ project	19
6.2.6. Lessons from the P138 Project	20
6.2.7. Lessons from the SALT Project	20
7. Review of Strategic Direction 4	20
7.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction	21
7.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects	21

7.2.1.	Lessons from the “More than a Woman” Project	22
7.2.2.	Lessons from other projects	23
8.	Review of Strategic Direction 5	24
8.1.	Coherence and clarity of strategic direction.....	24
8.2.	Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects	24
9.	Alignment with Sierra Leone National Development Plan	26
10.	Complementarity of Work by Other Development Agencies	27
11.	Insights/Lessons from Stakeholders	28
11.1.	SEND Sierra Leone Board	28
11.2.	SEND Sierra Leone Staff	28
11.3.	Donors	29
11.4.	Ministries and Government Stakeholders	30
11.5.	Community Members and Groups	30
12.	Evaluation of Procedures, Processes and Practices	31
12.1.	Training Manuals	31
12.2.	Departmental processes and vision	32
12.3.	Donors and funding bodies	32
13.	Conclusion and Recommendations	33
	References	34
	Appendix 1 – Theory of Change	36
	Appendix 2 – List of Key Consultations	37
	Appendix 3 – List of Consulted Resources	37

Executive Summary

Context

In 2018, SEND Sierra Leone developed a strategic framework covering 2019 to 2023. This strategic framework is strongly aligned with the Sierra Leone National Development Plan and various goals associated with the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The strategic framework focused on five strategic directions, four of which are closely aligned with the SDGs. The strategic directions include:

- **Strategic Direction 1:** Promoting livelihood security in rural communities, contributing to SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), and SDG 10 (decent work and economic growth).
- **Strategic Direction 2:** Strengthen access to quality education for girls and marginalized groups in rural communities, supporting SDG 4 (quality education) and SDG 5 (gender equality).
- **Strategic Direction 3:** Improving health facilities and services in difficult-to-reach and rural communities, fulfilling SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation).
- **Strategic Direction 4:** Promoting women's political empowerment to realize SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 10 (reduced inequality), and SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions).
- **Strategic Direction 5:** Establishing a regional program in collaboration with other affiliates of SEND West Africa.

As SEND Sierra Leone develops its new Strategic Plan 2024–2029, an evaluation was commissioned to assess performance, support learning and inform any revisions to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023.

Subject and Focus of the Evaluation

The strategic focus of the evaluation was to provide an independent assessment of SEND Sierra Leone's performance to inform the design of the next strategic plan, to facilitate accountability to stakeholders and to improve current programming. The evaluation covered SEND Sierra Leone's activities under the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. The independent evaluation team conducted a comprehensive desk review of documentation and quantitative data sets, which were complemented with extensive data collected from stakeholders. The evaluation took place from December 2023 to February 2024.

The evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 involved analyses across two phases. Phase I involved the evaluation of internal documents and a thorough examination of all programs and projects executed within the framework of the prior strategic plan. Phase II involved the analysis of primary data collected from various stakeholders associated with the implementation of the previous strategic plan.

Key Evaluation Findings

The evaluation found that the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 is relevant and aligned with national plans and several aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The evaluation found the strategic framework and its implementation to be highly relevant in responding to development challenges in Sierra Leone. SEND Sierra Leone's activities over the period under review were also significantly aligned and consistent with the work of several other development agencies operating in Sierra Leone, including UNICEF, UNDP and FAO.

The interventions, projects and programs reviewed were quite diverse, covering different development goals. Although the overall quality of the documentation that influenced the evaluation was high, it was difficult to draw causal inferences from the findings emerging from the project evaluations. Thus, in some cases, it was not fully possible to attribute observed changes to interventions. Notwithstanding this, there were some strong examples of effective programs.

Findings from the evaluation demonstrated strong alignment of SEND Sierra Leone's interventions

and the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 with local development objectives. There is also evidence of strong multi-stakeholder approach that allowed for participatory planning and significant involvement by local stakeholders. Importantly, the evidence also demonstrated that SEND Sierra Leone has been effective and successful in achieving objectives linked with all of the strategic directions excepted for Strategic Direction 5.

Recommendations

Four major recommendations emerged from the evaluation. First, because it was difficult to draw causal inferences from the findings emerging from the project evaluations, it is recommended that, where possible, randomised control trials (RCTs) be adopted to evaluate project interventions. RCTs are recommended to answer questions on whether SEND Sierra Leone is indeed causing improvements in the development goals, given that they enable the estimation of the causal effects of interventions.

Second, while the evidence from the evaluation demonstrated significant progress in achieving Strategic Directions 1 to 4, consensus from stakeholders and findings from the review suggest that various gaps still exist. Thus, these strategic directions are recommended to be revisited as part of the next strategic framework but with a more streamlined set of activities. SEND Sierra Leone has made considerable progress and is recommended to build on this success to lay a strong foundation for the next strategic plan.

Third, it is recommended that SEND Sierra Leone be more involved in climate change interventions. These interventions were not prominently featured in the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. However, stakeholders have identified the need for climate-change-related interventions, which suggests including a strategic direction focused on climate change in the next strategic plan.

A final recommendation that has emerged from this evaluation is that SEND Sierra Leone should engage only international experts or consultants with established reputations who have demonstrated a high level of excellence in project evaluation. Given that SEND Sierra Leone is a leading organization receiving support from many international organizations, it is essential that the quality of evaluation reports is consistent with international standards. This is crucial in ensuring that donors have confidence in the quality of work being done by SEND Sierra Leone.



1. Introduction

1.1. Background and purpose of the evaluation

As SEND Sierra Leone develops its new Strategic Plan 2024–2029, it draws on various bodies of information, including that drawn from research into the organization’s work over the strategic plan period now ending (2019–2023). This report presents the results of the 2019–2023 Strategic Plan evaluation, which will help inform the development of the next strategic plan, support program management, and respond to accountability commitments. The Strategic Plan 2019–2023, “Empowering Citizens to Make Sierra Leone Work for Equity”, emphasised SEND Sierra Leone’s commitment to social equity and economic equality in Sierra Leone.

The evaluation was carried out as part of SEND Sierra Leone’s commitment to supporting greater accountability to stakeholders and development partners and the provision of an evidence-informed policy that ensures the next strategic plan is underpinned by high-quality evidence.

The evaluation assesses the strategic directions set out in the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 and the extent to which the activities, programs, projects, and general interventions introduced helped to improve SEND Sierra Leone’s support for the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly for promoting social equity and economic equality in Sierra Leone.

1.2. Scope of the evaluation

The evaluation covers the period from 2019 to 2023 and encompasses the overarching vision and objectives of the Strategic Plan during this period—accordingly, the review analyses SEND Sierra Leone’s contributions through various activities to improve development outcomes.

The evaluation of the strategic plan examined:

- The outcomes that SEND Sierra Leone achieved were a result of its activities in general, with a specific focus on programs and projects implemented over the period under review.
- How SEND Sierra Leone and their partners worked together to achieve shared goals.
- The effectiveness of approaches adopted by SEND Sierra Leone to achieve development outcomes and organizational goals.
- how SEND Sierra Leone’s work fits within the Sierra Leone National Development Plan (2019–2023)
- how SEND Sierra Leone’s work complements the work undertaken by other international development organizations in Sierra Leone.

The overarching questions that guided the evaluation and the subsequent development of the new Strategic Plan 2024–2029 are:

- How effective was SEND Sierra Leone in achieving outcomes relating to each development goal?
- Which approaches contributed the most to SEND Sierra Leone’s efforts to achieve outcomes?

In addition to these overarching questions, the evaluation focused on how SEND Sierra Leone’s activities, programs and projects contributed towards achieving a set of Strategic Directions as part of the Strategic Plan. These Strategic Directions, discussed in detail in subsequent sections, sought to contribute to various SDGs.

1.3. Evaluation approach

The evaluation was theory-driven and drew on the theory of change presented in Appendix 1, which was developed considering the focus of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. The evaluation of the strategic plan involved analyses across two phases. Phase I involved the review of internal documents and thoroughly examining all programs and projects executed within the framework of the prior strategic plan. This included scrutinising project proposals, implementation reports, monitoring data, end-of-project evaluations, and internal review meeting reports. Methods used included document review, evaluation of interventions and reports on implemented projects and review of SEND Sierra Leone’s self-reported data. Phase II involved the analysis of primary data collected from various stakeholders associated with implementing the previous strategic plan. A multi-stakeholder approach was adopted to gather views and perspectives through surveys and semi-structured interviews. The stakeholders included SEND Sierra Leone board members and staff, donors and project funders, and government and community stakeholders.

The interventions, projects, and programs reviewed were quite diverse, covering different development goals. This diversity presented some advantages but also some disadvantages. Although the overall quality of the documentation that influenced the evaluation was high, it isn’t easy to draw causal inferences from the findings emerging from the project evaluations. Thus, in some cases, attributing observed changes to interventions was not fully possible. Notwithstanding this, there were some strong examples of effective programs.

The evaluation’s outcome presented relevant insights that contributed to an independent document outlining the best approaches and capabilities for SEND Sierra Leone to contribute to the new Strategic Plan 2024–2029.

To conduct the evaluation, SEND Sierra Leone hired two external consultants to undertake an independent review. SEND Sierra Leone provided the consultants with all documents and reports for Phase I. Following the insights drawn from Phase I, the consultants prepared interview and survey instruments that aided in collecting information from SEND Sierra Leone staff, affiliates, donors and partners, among others.

2. Sierra Leone Economic Overview

Despite progress made on several fronts, poverty remains widespread in Sierra Leone, with statistics from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) suggesting that 59.2 percent of the population in Sierra Leone were multi-dimensionally poor in 2021 while an additional 21.3 percent were classified as vulnerable to multidimensionally poor (see Table 1 for other social economic indicators). Poverty rates are higher in rural than in urban areas, with 80.5 per cent of poor people living in rural areas and the remaining 19.5 per cent in urban areas. Notably, rural women and young people are among the poorest and most vulnerable in the country. Nearly half of the working-age population engages in subsistence agriculture. Although there has been a reduction in food insecurity, many still struggle with insufficient access to food, especially in rural areas where extreme poverty is most prevalent.

Sierra Leone’s economic growth in recent times has been heavily reliant on the mining sector, particularly iron ore extraction. The country possesses substantial mineral, agricultural, and fishery resources, but is still recovering from a civil war that destroyed most institutions. Currently, Sierra Leone’s primary exports include iron ore. Historically, the government had depended on external aid to bolster its budget. However, it had been gradually moving towards greater financial independence until 2014, when the Ebola outbreak and plummeting global commodity prices led to a substantial decline in economic activity across all sectors. Although the World Health Organization declared an end to the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone in 2015, the persistently low commodity prices in 2015–2016 resulted in the country experiencing its most significant fiscal deficit since 2001. The turnaround came in 2017 when increased iron ore exports and the cessation of the Ebola epidemic facilitated the country’s return to economic growth.

However, Sierra Leone’s economic progress continues to face significant challenges due to simultaneous global and local crises. Global supply disruptions, currency devaluation, and unfavourable trade conditions are key issues. The COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptions are no exception. Concurrent domestic and external shocks have disrupted Sierra Leone’s post-pandemic recovery. Inflation and exchange rate depreciation reached record levels, depressing economic activity and triggering a severe cost-of-living crisis. The surge in living expenses, alongside sluggish growth and deteriorating macroeconomic foundations, poses a threat to escalating poverty levels, especially with insufficient safety nets in place.

The country’s economic trajectory hinges on international and local factors. Continued economic growth will depend on rising commodity prices and increased efforts to diversify sources of growth. Although non-mining activities promise economic growth, they remain constrained by inadequate infrastructure. Any spikes in inflation, triggered by fluctuations in energy and food costs, coupled with less supportive monetary policies in advanced economies, could adversely impact global economic conditions and dampen domestic growth prospects.

Sustained support from multiple stakeholders is critical and underscores the need for the work of development organizations such as SEND Sierra Leone. Development agencies’ work is pivotal to implementing economic reforms and interventions that promote development.

Table 1: Sierra Leone Social Economic Indicators

Indicator	Value	Year
GDP per capita, PPP (current international \$) (1)	\$1,931	2022
Total population (1)	8,605,718	2022
Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) (1)	27.21%	2022
Unemployment Rate (1)	3.635%	2022
Human Development Index (2)	0.477	2021
Percentage of population in urban areas (1)	43.8	2022
Gini coefficient (2)	35.7	2021
Gender inequality index (2)	0.633	2021
Population in multi-dimensional poverty (2)	59.2	2021
Maternal mortality ratio (2)	1,120 per 100,000 live births	2021
Share of seats held by women in parliament (2)	12.3%	2021
Infant mortality rate (1)	78.3 per 1,000 live births	2021
Life Expectancy at Birth (1)	60 years	2021

Sources: (1) Global Edge; (2) 2021/2022 Human Development Report

3. Overview of Strategic Directions Under Review

Over 2019–2023, SEND Sierra Leone’s activities were guided by five Strategic Directions, which will be reviewed as part of this evaluation. The focus here is to determine if activities, programs and projects that were implemented contributed towards attaining goals linked with the strategic directions. The five Strategic Directions under review, which also have direct links with selected SDGs, are:

- **Strategic Direction 1:** Promote livelihood security in rural communities contributing to SDG 1: No poverty, SDG 2: Zero hunger and SDG 10: Decent work and Economic growth
- **Strategic Direction 2:** Strengthen access to quality education for girls and marginalized groups in rural communities, supporting SDG 4: Quality education and SDG 5: Gender equality.
- **Strategic Direction 3:** Improve health facilities and services in difficult-to-reach rural communities in fulfilment of SDG 3: Good health and well-being and SDG6: Clean water and sanitation Outcome Indicators Approaches
- **Strategic Direction 4:** Promote Women’s Political Empowerment to realize SDG 5: gender equality, SDG 10: Reduced inequality and SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
- **Strategic Direction 5:** Establish a regional programme with the two affiliates of SEND West Africa

In addition to contributing to the SDGs, the Strategic Directions also sought to address issues about:

- low economic and political empowerment of women
- weak accountability and transparency in political governance
- livelihood, food and nutrition insecurities in rural communities
- low capacity of the national health system to deliver quality services
- limited support for the sexual and reproductive health rights of women and girls
- weak capacity of the educational system to deliver high-quality services
- limited access to modern water and sanitation services
- high level of economic inequality and social inequities
- weak civil society sector
- low economic development

The Strategic Directions aimed at change across four operational districts: Kailahun, Kono, Kenema, and Freetown. Subsequent projects also covered Port Loko, Western Area Rural, Bonthe, Bo, Falaba, Pujehun, and Moyamba.

4. Review of Strategic Direction 1

This section of the report evaluates SEND Sierra Leone's efforts in achieving the objectives relating to Strategic Direction 1. It examines whether the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 offered a clear, coherent vision, purpose, and sense of mission that guided the organization to better support the attainment of Strategic Direction 1.

Strategic Direction 1 focused on promoting livelihood security in rural communities and in doing so, SEND Sierra Leone sought to contribute to SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger) and SDG 10 (Decent work and economic growth). The expected outcome of this strategic direction is “Improved livelihood security of target groups and beneficiaries”. To measure the success of this strategic direction, the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 emphasized income levels of targeted groups and beneficiaries, the level of hunger gap at the household level, and nutrition-related health issues. To achieve the outcome of interest related to this strategic direction, the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 proposes several activities, including:

- strengthening existing and establishing new credit unions
- microfinance provision, training and support to women group members
- business management skills training
- nutrition education training
- establishing new and update the skills nutrition multipliers
- training on cultivation of sweet potatoes
- village saving and loan scheme

4.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction

An excellent strategic direction typically involves several key elements collectively guiding an organization towards its goals and objectives. Outcomes related to good strategic directions must be measurable with relevant indicators that can be assessed. The focal outcome and the associated indicators for Strategic Direction 1 are coherent, clear and quantifiable. However, it is still being determined how each proposed activity related to this strategic direction will help achieve the expected outcomes. For instance, the pathways through which activities relating to “SRHR for women in solidarity groups” are expected to influence the outcome of improved livelihood is unclear. However, this intervention has some relevance for Strategic Direction 3.

4.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects

From 2019 to 2023, SEND Sierra Leone implemented various programs and projects. The most relevant project to the achievement of Strategic Direction 1 is “Linking Agriculture Natural Resources Management and Nutrition (LANN+) in Sierra Leone”.

Strategic Direction 1 focused on promoting livelihood security in rural communities. Livelihood security refers to the assurance that individuals and communities have sustainable access to basic necessities, resources, and capabilities necessary for a decent standard of living (Bohle, 2009; Frankenberger & McCaston, 1998). It is about ensuring that people can meet their basic needs today while maintaining the ability to sustain those needs in the future (Lindenberg, 2002; Pelletier et al., 2016). Livelihood security emphasizes not just immediate relief from poverty or deprivation but also on enabling individuals and communities to create sustainable means of supporting themselves over the long term.

4.2.1. Lessons from the LANN+ project

While livelihood security seems to have a broad scope, the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 sought to specifically contribute to SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger) and SDG 10 (Decent work and economic growth). “Linking Agriculture Natural Resources Management and Nutrition (LANN+) in Sierra Leone” has direct relevance because it sought to contribute to SDG 2. The objective of this project was: “Improving household food and nutrition security among vulnerable households in Kenema District”. Despite the focus on Kenema District in the title of the project, the geographic areas actually covered by the project included the Kenema District (Gaura, Tunkia and Nomo Chiefdoms) and the Pujehun District (Barri Chiefdom). The project ran from November 2017 to December 2020, and thus, while the project commenced before the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023, there was some overlap.

The endline project evaluation report “Linking Agriculture Natural Resources Management and Nutrition (LANN+) in Sierra Leone” outlined several findings consistent with success in achieving some outcomes relating to Strategic Direction 1. The endline project evaluation highlighted the following:

- The project was relevant in contributing to the purpose of the LANN+ project to improve Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) of vulnerable rural communities.
- The achievement of the project’s purpose was measured by two outcomes: “Agricultural production is diversified and increased to create a more diverse diet”; and “Enhanced income opportunities and improved health status is achieved through the use of safe drinking water, improved sanitation, and hygiene practices”. Among households, 72 percent reported an increase in the quantity of the crops they were marketing due to increased yield from their main cropping enterprises; 7 main crops (rice, cassava, maize, yams, pepper, and beans) in Sierra Leone were grown by more than half of households.
- Despite the slight late start, the project was able to realize virtually all products and deliverables set out in the project document, although sometimes with slight delays due to national elections, restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and/or modification in the implementation approach.
- The project measures resulted in an improvement in the socio-economic status of the households that received support from the LANN+ project.
- The participatory approach of the project will instil the feeling of involvement and ownership of outputs and outcomes, thus ensuring sustainability and continued benefits.

Drawing on the findings from the endline project evaluation report, important dimensions of Strategic Direction 1 have been achieved. First, the success of the project in improving the food and nutrition security of vulnerable rural communities as indicated in the endline report suggests that important strides have been made towards achieving SDG 2 on zero hunger. The increase in, and diversification of, agricultural production as highlighted in the endline report also demonstrates that progress has been made towards SDG 10 on the promotion of decent work, which has relevance for economic growth and, importantly, SDG 1 (No poverty). Viewed together, the outcomes of the LANN+ project lend support to the achievement of Strategic Direction 1 on promoting livelihood security in rural communities.

As noted previously, Strategic Direction 1 also placed emphasis on three key indicators including: income levels of targeted groups and beneficiaries, level of hunger gap at the household level, and nutrition-related health issues. Although the evaluation of the LANN+ project and the associated endline report did not directly assess success against these indicators, some important inferences can be made. First, the LANN+ project outcome related to increase in agricultural production and diversification, and enhanced income opportunities means that income levels of targeted groups and beneficiaries are likely to have increased. With increased income levels, one can expect a narrowing in hunger gaps, as demonstrated in the development literature (Gentilini & Webb, 2008; von Braun et al., 2021). Second, the LANN+ project outcome related to improved health status through the use of safe drinking water, improved sanitation and hygiene practices has direct relevance to the indicator related to nutrition-related health issues.

The extent to which Strategic Direction 1 was achieved depends on the reliability of the evidence from

which the analysis is drawn (i.e., the evaluation of the LANN+ project). This calls for an assessment of the endline project evaluation report of the LANN+ project, including the methods adopted for the evaluation. A thorough assessment of the methods used in the LANN+ project suggest that although conclusions drawn as part of the project evaluation report may be valid, the methods adopted do not allow for causal inferences. This means that, arguably, some of the observed outcomes may not be fully attributed to the LANN+ project intervention. Specifically, there could be several factors that could have influenced these outcomes and the adopted methods do not allow for an isolation of the effects of the LANN+ project intervention. The gold standard for project evaluation in the development literature is a Randomised Control Trial (RCT), which would allow an evaluation team to carefully investigate the causal impact of a project or intervention on key development outcomes (Bédécarrats et al., 2019; de Souza Leão & Eyal, 2019; Webber & Prouse, 2018). An RCT would involve selecting communities and beneficiaries (households) at random to benefit from an intervention. Those chosen at random would comprise a treatment group. Communities/households not chosen would comprise a control group. Development outcomes would need to be assessed for households in both the control and treatment groups prior to the intervention and development interventions taking place. Development outcomes would need to be re-assessed for both groups after a specified period of time. Given the random nature of the intervention, any difference in the changes in development outcomes across the two groups could be said to be caused by, or attributed to, the intervention.

It is also worth noting that because the implementation of the LANN+ project commenced in November 2017, which is prior to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023, arguably, success linked with the LANN+ project may not fully be considered success under the strategic plan. The overlap in years allows for some of the success to be claimed. It would, however, have been useful to identify specific projects implemented in responses to the Strategic Direction 1 of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023.

4.2.2. Lessons from other projects

Livelihood security also involves empowerment, fostering capabilities, and creating opportunities that allow people to improve their lives and those of their families (Abiche, 2012). Thus, strategies aimed at livelihood security can involve interventions in areas such as agriculture, education, healthcare, social welfare, infrastructure, and economic development to ensure holistic and sustainable improvements in people's lives. Although, several of the implemented projects over the period 2019–2023 did not have a direct objective related to the achievement of Strategic Direction 1, several connections can be made if livelihood security is broadly defined. Accordingly, several of the implemented projects can be expected to have positive spillover effects, which, via indirect mechanisms, could contribute towards the attainment of Strategic Direction 1.

For instance, the project “Improvement of Educational Infrastructure and Quality Educational Services in Kenema District” had direct relevance to Strategic Direction 2, which emphasized quality education. However, as demonstrated in the development literature, interventions aimed at promoting quality education could have significant benefits for livelihood security in the long term (see, e.g., Ikendi et al., 2023; Preston, 2012; Wallace, 2007). With regards to contribution to SDGs 1, 2 and 10, a well-established literature has demonstrated that education is associated with a decline in poverty (Hofmarcher, 2021; Liu et al., 2021), reduction in malnutrition and hunger (Mutisya et al., 2016), and an increase in labour market opportunities and economic growth (Benos & Zotou, 2014; Ionescu & Cuza, 2012; Obiols-Homs & Sánchez-Marcos, 2018).

While these indirect links can be established from the success of the education project, no direct link can be established. Importantly, because the focus of the “Improvement of Educational Infrastructure and Quality Educational Services in Kenema District” project was not on Strategic Direction 1, the evaluation reports associated with this project did not examine direct links to livelihood security. Accordingly, there is no evidence of the success of this project in influencing positive outcomes related to Strategic Direction 1. Additionally, the impact of education on livelihood security may not be instantaneous and thus the effects of the education intervention on livelihood security may not be immediately obvious if assessed.

The project “Promotion of Nutrition Sensitive Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Self-Supply Project in the Shebro Island in Bonthe District” also has some relevance for the achievement of goals related to

Strategic Development 1. Specifically, as part of the project, household food insecurity was examined as an outcome, which has relevance for SDG 2, as well as the indicators related to hunger gap and nutrition-related health issues.

4.2.3. COVID-19 related interventions

COVID-19 had profound impacts on livelihoods, exacerbating existing socio-economic challenges and vulnerabilities, which had significant implications for Strategic Direction 1. In collaboration with the UNDP, SEND Sierra Leone implemented various interventions to address challenges associated with COVID-19 and curb potential negative effects on livelihoods. Notably, SEND Sierra Leone implemented various interventions aimed at strengthening capacity on COVID-19 prevention as well as financial and business management practices to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on economic activities and livelihoods. Interventions included the provision of financial assistance to support livelihood activities as well as entrepreneurship and business education to enhance business activities and mitigate the harmful effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The "Africa Borderland COVID-19 Quick Impact" project sought to enhance social safety nets for women traders and women in agriculture. Evidence drawn from the report related to the project suggests that, through the training of Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) groups, many beneficiaries have been able to access loans to undertake different economic activities. The project also provided tools for women in farming and agriculture to enhance productivity. The outcomes of the project contribute towards the achievement of Strategic Direction 1. 5. Review of Strategic Direction 2



5. Review of Strategic Direction 2

This section of the report evaluates Strategic Direction 2, which focused on strengthening access to quality education for girls and marginalized groups in rural communities in support of SDG 4 related to quality education and SDG 5 related to gender equality. The Strategic Plan 2019–2023 highlights the expected outcome linked with Strategic Direction 2 as “Increased enrolment and retention of girls in primary and JSS schools”. To measure success for this strategic direction, the focal indicators in the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 were: the percentage of girls completing primary and junior secondary school, and the number of orphan and vulnerable children in changing lives schemes. To achieve the outcome of interest related to this strategic direction, Strategic Plan 2019–2023 proposes the following activities:

- free education policy advocacy
- establish, train and support gender-based violence (GBV) accountability forum including girls club and monitors in schools
- establish, train and support Changing Lives Center
- train and support women councillors to champion GBV eradication activities in schools
- use community score cards to monitor girls’ performance and implementation of free education program

5.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction

Similar to Strategic Direction 1, the focal outcome and the associated indicators for Strategic Direction 2 are coherent, clear and measurable. However, there is a general lack of clarity around how each of the proposed activities will help achieve the expected outcomes. Specifically, as discussed in the case of Strategic Direction 1, while the link between the activities and the outcome related to the strategic direction seems intuitive, the pathways through which change can be expected are not clear from the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Nonetheless, the strategic plan offered a clear, coherent vision, purpose and sense of mission for Strategic Direction 2.

5.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects

Over the period under review, SEND Sierra Leone implemented the “Improvement of Educational Infrastructure and Quality of Educational Services in Kenema District” project, also known as the “Kenema Education Project”, which is the most relevant project to the achievement of Strategic Direction 2. Strategic Direction 2 focused on strengthening access to quality education for girls and marginalized groups in rural communities, which were the key foci of the Kenema Education Project. The “Integrated Project for Education, and Empowerment of Women and Civil Society Groups in Sierra Leone” project also had strong elements linked with the promotion of quality education and is therefore also discussed in this session.

5.2.1. Lessons from the Kenema Education Project

The Kenema Education Project was a 24-month project implemented from September 2020 to October 2022 by SEND Sierra Leone, aimed at improving the quality of education in the Kenema District by bolstering educational systems through infrastructure and capacity building. The project also sought to contribute to the realization of SDG 4 (Quality education) and SDG 5 (Gender equality), which are key goals related to Strategic Direction 2. The project implemented various activities including the provision of capacity-building training, the integration of gender responsiveness in science, mathematics and technology education (STEM), the construction of a senior secondary school for girls, and the establishment of a Computer Training Center. Through the Kenema Education Project, the construction of the school was expected to benefit 300 pupils, while 1,680 teachers were expected to benefit from

information technology (IT) training.

Through the implementation of the Kenema Education Project and associated activities, the project's expected results were as follows:

- capacity building of the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) to improve the quality of schools and teachers.
- improved education infrastructure and strengthened effective education service delivery in Kenema District.
- better organized teachers who know how to communicate their concerns to the relevant authorities.
- increased numbers of trained and qualified teachers to enable high-quality education for their students.

The findings from the endline evaluation of the Kenema Education Project suggest that the project was largely successful in achieving its intended objectives. The project was found to be impactful in building the knowledge of teachers and education service providers, and thus fostering the provision of quality education. Overall, based on the findings from the evaluation report, there is evidence to support the achievement of goals relating to Strategic Direction 2. First, the establishment of school infrastructure, including a well-equipped model science school for girls, increased school enrolment among girls, which is the focus of Strategic Direction 2. A key focal indicator is the percentage of girls completing primary and junior secondary school, which the report has indicated was achieved. However, outcomes relating to this indicator are more likely to be long term, and thus, may not be immediately obvious. The increase in enrolment is a good indication that completion rates are likely to increase as well.

The second focal indicator to measure success for Strategic Direction 2 is an increase in the number of orphan and vulnerable children in changing lives schemes. However, it is unclear whether this goal was achieved given that the evaluation of the Kenema Education Project did not focus on assessing this outcome. Notwithstanding this, the SEND scholarship for orphans in partnership with the Dona Foundation has been instrumental in achieving outcomes relating to this focal indicator with five ongoing scholarships and several alumni who previously benefited from the scheme.

The success of the Kenema Education Project means that important strides have been made towards achieving SDGs 4 and 5. Various aspects of the Kenema Education Project demonstrated commitment to equality in education. The construction of the Nyapui Senior Secondary School for Girls in the district, which increased enrolment for girls, is an important step towards narrowing the gender gap in school enrolment and contributing to gender equality.

Overall, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Kenema Education Project successfully contributed to meeting the goals associated with Strategic Direction 2. However, this success cannot be generalized across all components of the strategic direction given the lack of evidence to draw relevant conclusion.

5.2.2. Lessons from the TERRA TECH Project

The “Integrated Project for Education and Empowerment of Women and Civil Society Groups in Sierra Leone” project (i.e., TERRA TECH Project), which was implemented from September 2020 to October 2022 in the Kenema and Kailahun districts, had the core objective of contributing towards achieving the SDGs 1 (No poverty), 4 (Quality education), 5 (Gender equality) and 8 (Decent work and economic growth). Specifically, SEND Sierra Leone and its stakeholders sought to address issues relating to the lack of reading and text comprehension among school pupils especially girls, low capacity of School Management Committees (SMCs) to carry out their functions and gender inequality in local communities.

Overall, while the mid-term and endline project evaluation reports stated that the project objectives sought to directly contribute to multiple SDGs, it is not immediately clear from the reports how specific contributions were achieved. However, given the specific project objectives outlined above, it is clear

that the success of the TERRA TECH project has significant implications for Strategic Direction 2, which has the objective of strengthening access to quality education for girls and marginalized groups in rural communities. Obviously, there might be implications for other strategic directions, and thus the TERRA TECH project has been discussed under Sections 7 and 9 in relation to other strategic directions.

The TERRA TECH project provided a series of training and literacy sessions, which the endline project evaluation report indicates was successful with the following outcomes:

- 80% of all teachers trained as part of the TERRA TECH project state that after taking part in the training, they are more aware of educational problems and possible approaches to solving these problems and the quality of their lessons has improved
- significant improvement in literacy rate (i.e., 30% increase) among target group (2,925 people)
- teacher associations, SMCs, and head girls/head boys communicate more about educational issues
- head girls/boys articulate their interest in the SMCs and stand for their rights
- at least 80% of the participating community leaders demonstrate their knowledge about the possibility to influence the development of the educational sector and intend to use their influence

All of the above outcomes demonstrate strong alignment with the tenets of quality education and therefore suggest that the TERRA TECH project contributed to Strategic Direction 2, which has the objective of strengthening access to quality education. Accordingly, there is direct relevance and immediate contribution to SDG 4 on quality education. The emphasis of the TERRA TECH project on gender means that there is also immediate relevance for SDG 5 focused on gender equality. For instance, findings from the endline project evaluation report suggest that Local Government Authorities now report greater involvement of women in decision-making in the Kenema and Kailahun regions, which has improved young girls' educational conditions. However, immediate contributions to the other SDGs noted in the endline evaluation report (i.e., SDGS 1 on Poverty and 8 on Decent work and economic growth) are not obvious. The role of education in poverty reduction and the promotion of decent work and economic growth is well-established. However, the effects may not be immediate and thus, the full benefits of the TERRA TECH project may be realized in the longer term.

5.2.3. Lessons from other projects

While the main focus of the “More than a Woman: Strengthening Women’s Participation in Politics and Governance” project was not related to Strategic Direction 2, some inferences about the project’s relevance can be made for the gender equality dimension of Strategic Direction 2. The project implemented training and outreach activities aimed at increase women’s participation in politics and governance. The success of this project as demonstrated by the endline evaluation report means that project outcomes have contributed to gender equality by narrowing the gender gap in the participation of politics and governance as further discussed in Section 7. 6.Review of Strategic Direction 3

6. Review of Strategic Direction 3

The report now turns to the evaluation of Strategic Direction 3, which focuses on improving health facilities and services in difficult to reach rural communities in fulfillment of SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation). The Strategic Plan 2019–2023 highlights the expected outcome linked with Strategic Direction 3 as “Strengthened health infrastructure, preventive health education and accountability for the Free Health Care Program (FHCP)”. To measure success for this strategic direction, the focal indicators in the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 were:

- number of health facilities strengthened

- number and types of issues covered in health education talks
- number of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) exercises conducted on FHCP
- number of Good Governance Indicators (GGI) awards
- number of household sanitation facilities built

To achieve the outcome related to Strategic Direction 3, the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 proposes the following activities:

- FHCP advocacy
- construction of peripheral health units (PHUs), wells and sanitation facilities and provision of energy facilities
- supply of basic inputs: beds, chairs, benches, mattresses, coolers, etc.
- development and dissemination of health educational materials, including through the use of drama groups, DVD and posters
- outreach skills development training for health workers
- health sector SDG sensitization for health workers and SEND staff
- SDG Annual Awards for PHUs
- training on prevention of zoonotic diseases: Ebola, Lassa fever and Cholera
- sanitation education for community members and schools
- building of household latrines
- support of local multipliers
- simulation exercises to prevent infectious diseases
- awareness raising activities for health actors and community groups
- establishment of early warning systems
- sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for women in solidarity groups

6.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction

Strategic Direction 3 seeks to improve health facilities and services in areas that are difficult to reach. This objective is supported by a clearly defined outcome of strengthening health infrastructure and preventive health education. Accountability for the FHCP is also indicated as an outcome. These overarching outcomes are, however, underpinned by a set of indicators, some of which lack clarity around measurement. For instance, it is unclear how the “strength” of a facility can be measured; thus, the indicator suggesting “number of facilities strengthened” as a way of measuring success is difficult to evaluate.

- From a different perspective, while the achievability of a strategic plan or associated strategic direction is not solely determined by the number of activities associated with it, a leaner set of activities could be more manageable and achievable if they were well-prioritized, properly resourced, and directly tied to the strategic objectives. Strategic Direction 3 features several activities. Similar to the previous strategic directions, there seems to be lack of clarity around the role of each activity in contributing to the strategic direction. The pathways through which change can be expected from engagement in each activity are not clear from the Strategic Plan 2019–2023.

6.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects

SEND Sierra Leone implemented several projects that have direct relevance for Strategic Direction 3.

The most relevant project, however, which has the likelihood of having the greatest impact is “Promotion of Nutrition Sensitive WASH Self-Supply Project in the Shebro Island in Bonthe District”. Strategic Direction 3 has multiple elements, some of which are the focus of this project. Details and relevance of all projects are discussed below:

6.2.1 Lessons from the Shebro Island WASH Project

The Shebro Island WASH project run from December 2018 to December 2021 as a partnership between SEND Sierra Leone and Welthungerhilfe (WHH), funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ), with three core objectives:

- establishing structures for sustainable community participation and contributions to the development and maintenance of the WASH sector/institutions
- sustainable community managed domestic water supply as well as hygiene and sanitary facilities
- increased knowledge and improve hygiene and sanitation practices for sustainable behavioural change in target communities.

The Shebro Island WASH project was intended to be a 33-month project. Despite delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the project met its objectives, as detailed in the endline evaluation report. In Bonthe District, where the project was implemented, food insecurity has been a major issue compared to the national average. Demand for the WASH project was also clearly established as demonstrated by baseline data. In the Bonthe District, prior to the implementation of the project, there were major water, sanitation and hygiene challenges evidenced by low levels of use of basic sanitation services, access to safe/quality drinking water and inadequate use of safe hygiene practices by children and their families. The 2019 baseline data indicate that about 60% of the Bonthe Island population were using water for household consumption from unprotected sources, such as streams or ponds, and open defecation was widespread.

In addition to the benefits of the project to the community as outlined in the endline project evaluation report, the implementation of the project itself demonstrates that some of the objectives of the Strategic Direction 3 have been met. For instance, the establishment of structures for the development and management of WASH facilities means that the core objective of Strategic Direction 3, to improve health facilities and services, has been met. This contributes to the fulfillment of SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation). Aspects of the project focused on increasing knowledge around hygiene and sanitation practices are also consistent with the objective of Strategic Direction 3 focused on preventive health education.

It is not immediately clear how the project contributed to the achievement of each of the four indicators outlined as part of Strategic Direction 3. However, this could be due to the lack of clarity around the measurability of these indicators, as previously discussed. For instance, it is not clear how the success of the WASH project helped measure success or understand the “number and types of issue covered in health education talks”. There is also no evidence to assess the indicator “Number of Good Governance Indicators (GGI) awards”. Thus, the WASH project is unable to demonstrate success in some of the indicators outlined as part of the strategic direction. Additionally, there is no evidence to suggest that the objectives around accountability for the FHCP were achieved.

Notwithstanding these issues, the success of the WASH project and the identified benefits to the community suggest that contributions towards SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) cannot be ignored. Specifically, evidence from the endline evaluation report suggest that there was a general decline in the prevalence of diarrhoeal diseases, which is an important progress towards SDG 3.

6.2.2. Lessons from the Right to Water and Sanitation Project

The third phase of the “Right to Water and Sanitation: Community Development in Kenema District, Sierra Leone” project (i.e., Right to Water and Sanitation Project) ran from 2018 to December 2020 as a partnership between SEND Sierra Leone, Engineers Without Border (EWB) Denmark and EWB Sierra

Leone. This project built on earlier project phases. Phase 1, which ran from 2011–2013, emphasised local awareness of safe water supplies and hygiene, and the construction of hand-dug wells with a hand pump and rainwater collection and latrines in three villages. Phase 2, which ran from 2013–2016 focused on a human rights-based approach to the development of civil society and community-based organizations, while concurrently strengthening capacity and knowledge of district officials to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities around the provision of water and sanitation infrastructure. Phase 3, which is the focus of this evaluation, built on Phases 1 and 2 and supported improved livelihood in 26 rural communities by strengthening structures and institutions at the district level and securing participation of civil society in decision-making processes relating to the WASH sector.

Findings from the endline project evaluation report suggests that the project was successful on various fronts. For instance, the report confirmed the functionality of several waterpoints and success in promoting positive hygiene across households and communities. Achieving these outcomes lends support to success in contributing towards the core objective of Strategic Direction 3, which is to improve health facilities and services. This also provides evidence in support of contributions towards the fulfillment of SDG 3 on good health and well-being and SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation.

6.2.3. Lessons from the P100 Project

In collaboration with Engineers Without Borders Denmark (EWB-DK), SEND Sierra Leone implemented the “Democratic and Participatory Sector Governing Institutions – Civil Society Engagement in Water Sector Management in Kenema District (P100)” project, which has direct relevance for Strategic Direction 3. The project, which was implemented between January 2020 and March 2021, conducted a series of community-driven, adaptive and sustainable activities to improve hygiene and sanitation in 27 communities in the Kenema district. Viewing women’s empowerment as an important asset in promoting WASH, the project also implemented gender and water management training for women to ensure women are empowered to take the lead in the management of water.

Overall, evidence from the evaluation report suggests that the P100 project was successful, thus contributing significantly to Strategic Direction 3.

6.2.4. Lessons from the P150 Project

SEND Sierra Leone in collaboration with World Hope International (WHI) with funding from Engineers Without Borders Denmark (EWB-DK) implemented the Citizen Driven Climate Sensitive Wash Management Project (P150). The objective of the P150 project was to improve livelihood in Kenema district through cross-sector engagement in climate-sensitive WASH governance aimed at benefiting 610,000 people. The project sought to help communities adapt to climate change and serve as an example to other communities in the Kenema district and Sierra Leone as a whole. The specific project objectives were:

- To provide access to climate-robust WASH structure in 50 rural communities in Kenema district.
- Implement community-driven climate-sensitive WASH actions toward climate-robust access to water and sanitation.
- To ensure Kenema district serves as an example of citizen-driven rural climate adaptation in the WASH sector to influence national climate adaptation strategies.

The mid-term evaluation report for the project suggests that overall, the project has been successful with evidence of capacity building among community members on a series of climate-resilient and smart WASH practices. Achieving these outcomes demonstrates success in contributing towards the core objective of Strategic Direction 3.

6.2.5. Lessons from the LANN+ project

The “Linking Agriculture Natural Resources Management and WASH (LANN+)” project has direct relevance to Strategic Direction 3. In addition to ensuring agricultural production is diversified to enhance income opportunities and livelihoods, the LANN+ project also had a major objective of

implementing various WASH initiatives. Specifically, the project sought to improve health through the use of safe drinking water, improved sanitation and hygiene practices. The LANN+ project targeted four chiefdoms, three of which are in the Eastern Province (Kenema district – Gaura, Nomo and Tunkia chiefdoms) and one in the Southern Province (Pujehun district – Barri Chiefdom), with a total number of 61 project communities.

Evidence from the project report suggests that the LANN+ project was generally successful. Specifically, inferences from the evaluation report demonstrate that the LANN+ project enabled women and men to improve access to high-quality foodstuffs, achieved through sustainable climate-smart farming practices and improved management of natural resources. Importantly, related to Strategic Direction 3, the LANN+ project contributed to increasing awareness on WASH, thus leading to improved hygiene practices. The construction of WASH facilities also improved access to safe drinking water and sanitation opportunities, which contributed to the achievement of Strategic Direction 3.

6.2.6. Lessons from the P138 Project

The “Enhanced Community Health Resilience -Baoma, Kenema District” project (P138) contributed towards the achievement of Strategic Direction 3, which seeks to improve health facilities and services in areas that are difficult to reach. The P138 project, which was implemented between October 2021 and October 2022, had the primary objective of improving the health and livelihood of the 700 people of Baoma and its six catchment communities in Nomo chiefdom. The project also sought to improve the health care system in Baoma through the establishment of health infrastructure, capacity building, awareness raising and resilience.

The project evaluation report suggests success on several fronts, which demonstrates significant progress towards the achievement of Strategic Direction 3. Notably, evidence from the evaluation report suggests that the project led to the construction of a solar powered maternal and child health post to provide 24-hour health services, which is consistent with one of the key focal indicators of Strategic Direction 3. Additionally, six capacity-building training sessions were conducted for community health workers to enable them to promote improved health-seeking behaviour and the appropriate management of health facilities. Several training sessions were also conducted on health, hygiene and sanitation.

6.2.7. Lessons from the SALT Project

The “Community Empowerment to Participate in Service Delivery using the Stimulate, Appreciate, Learn and Transfer (SALT) Approach” project implemented by SEND Sierra Leone in partnership with the District Health Management Team (DHMT) in Kailahun with financial and technical support from the Germany Government through the GIZ. The SALT approach is designed to increase community ownership, accountability and impact in development intervention by enabling communities to recommend solutions to their own challenges and take actions to resolve them. The SALT project has a key objective of improved health, hygiene and sanitation in Sierra Leone, by encouraging, promoting and enhancing the health sector in Kailahun District. The project provided support to rural communities to enable active mobilization and participation in health and hygiene promotion activities. Evidence from the project evaluation report suggests significant progress was made towards Strategic Direction 3.

7. Review of Strategic Direction 4

This section of the report evaluates Strategic Direction 4, which focused on promoting women’s political empowerment with the aim of contributing to SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 10 on reduced inequality, and SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. The Strategic Plan 2019–2023 highlights the main expected outcome linked with Strategic Direction 4 as “increased women’s participation into elected and appointed positions by District Councils”. To measure success for this strategic direction, four measurable indicators are considered:

- percentage of women nominated during the next elections
- number of women elected during the next general election
- number of women appointed into senior positions in the 2018 councils
- number of and types of gender equity promotional issues addressed by the council

To achieve the outcome of promoting women’s political empowerment, Strategic Plan 2019–2023 proposes several activities including:

- strengthening district women’s network secretariats
- training of women leaders
- supporting gender audit exercises
- supporting implementation of gender action plan
- supporting women’s candidates in 2024 elections
- preparation and dissemination of women’s manifesto for 2024
- capacity building of women councilors
- facilitating PM&E and community score card activities
- promoting the interaction between citizens and the state
- rights and entitlements education and awareness
- power and gender analysis
- Gende Model Family (GMF) training
- women economic empowerment through Village Savings & Loans Association (VSLA) and microfinance
- working with women’s parliamentary caucus
- working with traditional and religious leaders
- engagement of men on gender and women empowerment

7.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction

Strategic Direction 4 is driven by the key objective of promoting women’s political empowerment with relevance for SDG 5, SDG 10 and SDG 16. The objective relating to this strategic direction is coherent and consistent with a long-standing goal of empowering women and promoting gender equality (Kabeer, 2005; Mosedale, 2014). Thus, overall, this strategic direction is relevant, contemporary and coherent. However, the key issues, which are consistent with the other strategic directions, pertain to the lack of a well-established link between proposed activities and the achievement of goals outlined as part of the strategic direction. Importantly, the Strategic Plan under review focused on 2019–2023, and thus, it is unclear how the number of women appointed into senior positions in 2018, which predates the strategic plan, would be a benchmark to assess success.

7.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects

Over the period under review, SEND Sierra Leone implemented key projects that are relevant to the achievement of objectives related to Strategic Direction 4. The most relevant project to Strategic Direction 2 was the “More than a Woman: Strengthening Women’s Participation in Politics and Governance” project. This project and its relevance to Strategic Direction 4 are discussed in detail below.

7.2.1. Lessons from the “More than a Woman” Project

The “More than a Woman: Strengthening Women’s Participation in Politics and Governance” project (i.e., More than a Woman Project) had the core objective of empowering women in the Eastern Region of Sierra Leone to increase their participation in politics and governance. The Project was fully funded by the Government of Ireland and covered the geographic locations of Eastern Province (Kailahun, Kenema and Kono districts) of Sierra Leone. The project was implemented between April 2019 and April 2020, with the specific objectives of the project outlined in the project endline evaluation report as follows:

- Strengthened women’s collective voice, knowledge, capacity on gender, and accountability in governance and politics at district and regional levels
- Ensuring women are economically empowered through resources mobilization and utilization
- Increased national level advocacy and networking on women’s participation in decision- making, governance and politics
- Enhanced capacity of SEND for effective and result-oriented program delivery.
- To measure progress and success, the following indicators were identified as part of the endline evaluation report:
 - percentage of women expressing interest to contest for or retain their political positions
 - number of and type of capacity building trainings organized for women.
 - percentage of women benefiting from economic empowerment activities who express their aspirations to participate in politics.
 - number of and type of collective actions taken by the women’s network and their allies
 - number of political party representatives, women advocacy groups, female parliamentarians and local leaders participating in power analyses at national and local levels
 - evidence of improvement in SEND’s organizational and delivery capacity due to capacity building support; Evidence of existing capacity building and monitoring plan
 - number of capacity building actions implemented by SEND.

The project activities and objectives are closely aligned with the mandate of SEND Seirra Leone and Strategic Direction 4. As indicated in the evaluation report, the project was successful, with several satisfactory outcomes that lend support to the success of Strategic Direction 4. It is worth noting that while several of the expected outcomes or results from the project can be assessed following a one-year implementation period, the translation of such outcomes to what is expected under Strategic Direction 4 may not be immediate.

Further, although the evaluation report for the project provided several useful insights, some key areas were lacking. Notably, it would have been useful to clearly assess each of the indicators of interest under the project and indicate if each objective was met or not. For instance, an important indicator to measure success was a review of the number of political party representatives, women advocacy groups, female parliamentarians and local leaders participating in power analyses at national and local levels. However, it is unclear from the endline evaluation report if success was established against this indicator. This also applies to other indicators where there was no clear indication of success. Notwithstanding this, the just ended election demonstrated remarkable increase in female representation in politics as shown in Table 2 people.

Table 2: Women’s Representation in Governance

Position	# of women in 2018	% of total in 2018	# of women in 2023	% of total in 2023
Ministers	5	17%	10	30%
Deputies	6	21%	11	33%
Member of Parliament	18	12%	42	31%
Councilors	90	18%	160	32.5%

7.2.2. Lessons from other projects

In addition to the More than a Woman Project, SEND Sierra Leone generally has a strong gender dimension attached to most of their implemented projects. Accordingly, there are several other projects that contribute to the goals related to Strategic Direction 4. Although these projects may not directly contribute to the goal of promoting women’s political empowerment, they have strong relevant in terms of contribution towards the related goal of achieving SDG 5 on gender equality linked with Strategic Direction 4. For instance, the TERRA TECH Project that had a focus on education had key components of gender, which, as previously discussed in Section 5, contribute to SDG 5 on gender equality. Other relevant projects are discussed below.

7.2.2.1. The Kenema Education Project

The Kenema Education Project also holds relevance with outcomes contributing towards the gender equality dimension of Strategic Direction 4. Specifically, the project’s focus on promoting quality education among girls including the construction of the Nyapui Senior Secondary School for Girls, which increased enrolment for girls, is an important step towards narrowing the gender gap in school enrolment and, therefore, contributed towards gender equality.

7.2.2.2. The Solar Harness Entrepreneurs (SHE) Project

The Solar Harness Entrepreneurs (SHE) project, which was a collaboration between CARE and Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet, also has strong gender dimensions. The overall goal of the SHE project is to develop and expand profitable and sustainable renewable energy-enabled businesses for women through financing, capacity building, and enhanced market access. Businesses range from agro-enterprises focusing on key value chains – rice, palm oil, cassava, cocoa/coffee, fish – and other women-owned businesses. The project was implemented across multiple districts including the Bo, Bonthe, Moyamba, Pujehun and Kenema districts. Inferences from the project evaluation report demonstrate that between August 2022 and December 2023, the SHE project was successful with significant contributions towards gender equality. The project successfully built capacity of women entrepreneurs to engage in energy enabled businesses, which promoted economic inclusion and empowerment. The project also had implications for promoting sustainability.

7.2.2.3. Promoting Employment Opportunities Project

In collaboration with the UNDP, SEND Sierra Leone implemented the “Promoting Employment Opportunities for Women and Youth in Kono District” project. Evidence from the project evaluation report demonstrates that the project successfully achieved several outcomes including the formation and strengthening of three youth cooperatives to boost their living conditions, and the provision of financial literacy training. This project contributes to gender equality in various ways and therefore has significant implications for Strategic Direction 4. Notably, the establishment of several women-led businesses and over 70% of women beneficiaries across most interventions support the project’s contribution to gender equality and empowerment.

8. Review of Strategic Direction 5

The section evaluates Strategic Direction 5. The Strategic Plan 2019–2023 outlines the focus of Strategic Direction 5 as establishing a regional programme with the two affiliates of SEND West Africa. The expected outcome linked with this strategic direction is stated as “Increased capabilities of National Programme in Good Governance and Livelihood Security Promotion”. To measure success for this strategic direction, two measurable indicators are considered:

- number of good governance promotion projects
- number of livelihood projects

To achieve the stated outcome, Strategic Plan 2019–2023 proposes five activities including:

- regional training workshop
- joint fundraising
- exchange visits
- regional dashboard
- regional electronic newsletter

8.1. Coherence and clarity of strategic direction

Strategic Direction 5 seeks to establish a regional programme with the two affiliates of SEND West Africa – SEND Ghana and SEND Liberia. This objective is expected to yield an outcome that increases SEND Sierra Leone’s capabilities in good governance and livelihood security promotion. However, from the Strategic Plan 2019–2023, it is unclear how the establishment of a regional programme would help achieve this outcome. The approaches and activities proposed under this strategic direction were, however, very clear and concise.

8.2. Evaluation of relevant activities, programs and projects

Over the period under review, Strategic Direction 5 received the least attention. The only program with direct relevance to Strategic Direction 5 was the Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) project. The CMDRR project was a collaboration between SEND Sierra Leone and SEND Liberia, which ran from October to December 2022 with funds from BMZ and in partnership with Terra Tech Germany. The project sought to strengthen communities and their resilience when dealing with climate-related disasters. While the primary focus of the CMDRR project was different, the emerging collaboration between SEND Sierra Leone and SEND Liberia is consistent with the objectives of Strategic Direction 5. However, none of the focal activities, such as the implementation of regional training workshops and joint fundraising, have been achieved.



9. Alignment with Sierra Leone National Development Plan

As a major development agency in Sierra Leone, it is important to evaluate how SEND Sierra Leone's activities contribute to the national development agenda. Accordingly, this section of the report evaluates the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 against the Sierra Leone National Development Plan, which details the national development agenda. Specifically, the implementation of the Government of Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019–2023 coincides with Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Therefore, it is important to understand how SEND Sierra Leone contributed to this development plan.

The National Development Plan 2019–2023 focuses on the overarching agenda of human capital development as a way to improve the welfare of Sierra Leone's citizens. The development plan outlines four key national goals to be achieved over the period of the plan:

- **Goal 1:** A diversified, resilient green economy
- **Goal 2:** A nation with educated, empowered, and healthy citizens capable of realizing their fullest potential
- **Goal 3:** A society that is peaceful, cohesive, secure, and just
- **Goal 4:** A competitive economy with a well-developed infrastructure

These four main goals are further divided into seven policy implementation clusters, which are mapped to relevant SDGs:

- human capital development
- diversifying the economy and promoting growth
- infrastructure and economic competitiveness
- governance and accountability for results
- empowering women, children, and persons with disabilities
- youth employment, sports, and migration
- addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience

Although SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 and associated activities have not contributed to each of these policy clusters, they have – in various ways – contributed significantly to the National Development Plan. As previously noted, the policy clusters are directly mapped to relevant SDGs, several of which SEND Sierra Leone contributed to cover the period of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Taking a programme-by-programme perspective, each of the interventions associated with the strategic plan has contributed to specific dimensions of the National Development Plan. This is also the case for each of the strategic directions except for Strategic Direction 5, which was about developing stronger regional relationships.

For instance, education and women's empowerment were relevant components of the National Development Plan featuring in multiple policy clusters. In the National Development Plan, as noted earlier, the Government of Sierra Leone has human capital development as its first policy cluster, which was strongly supported by free basic and senior secondary education. SEND Sierra Leone has supported this government priority as part of its Strategic Direction 2, which sought to strengthen access to quality education for girls and marginalized groups in rural communities. This was implemented through multiple projects including the Kenema Education Project and the TERRA TECH project, both of which provided relevant assistance to rural community schools with key focus on girls.

These projects also had strong gender elements that contributed to women's empowerment and therefore contributed to the national development agenda which featured female empowerment under the fifth policy cluster. Strategic Direction 4, which focused on promoting women's political empowerment, also demonstrates dedicated contribution to the fifth policy cluster of the national development agenda. Here, in addition to the More than a Woman Project, SEND Sierra Leone also made contributions towards female empowerment via the TERRA TECH Project and the Kenema Education Project, which focused on promoting quality education among girls including the construction of the Nyapui Senior Secondary School for Girls.

Significant contributions were also made towards the national priority relating to WASH. The National Development Plan highlights environmental sanitation and hygiene as a priority area with the strategic objective of providing acceptable, affordable, and sustainable sanitation services for urban and rural households and institutions. Strategic Direction 3 of SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 focuses on improving health facilities and services in difficult-to-reach rural communities, with emphasis on sanitation and hygiene. Here, the Shebro Island WASH project and the Right to Water and Sanitation Project demonstrated alignment with the National Development Plan and contributed to the promotion of environmental sanitation and hygiene.

As part of policy clusters 1 and 2, the National Development Plan emphasizes poverty reduction and shared prosperity, which is consistent with Strategic Direction 1 of SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 that sought to contribute to SDG 1 (No poverty), SDG 2 (Zero hunger) and SDG 10 (Decent work and economic growth) by promoting livelihood security in rural communities. Multiple projects including the LANN+ project have direct relevance.

Overall, SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 and associated activities were relevant to and aligned with national policies, the National Development Plan and the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Although COVID-19 posed some challenges, the ability of SEND Sierra Leone to adapt to changing circumstances over the period under review has been noteworthy. Further, the alignment of SEND Sierra Leone's interventions and Strategic Plan 2019–2023 with local development objectives has been achieved through a multi-stakeholder approach that has allowed for participatory planning and significant involvement by local stakeholders.

10. Complementarity of Work by Other Development Agencies

SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 and activities are significantly aligned and consistent with the work of several other development agencies operating in Sierra Leone, including UNICEF, UNDP and FAO.

Over the period under review, UNICEF Sierra Leone implemented multiple projects consistent with SEND Sierra Leone activities. As outlined by UNICEF, the organization in Sierra Leone "works to uphold the rights and well-being of all children in Sierra Leone, across health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection, education, social inclusion, emergencies, disabilities and adolescent development". Several of these areas complement the work of SEND Sierra Leone. The construction of several early childhood development centres by UNICEF is consistent with the focus on quality education and human capital development, to which SEND Sierra Leone has contributed through various projects, including the TERRA TECH Project and the Kenema Education Project. The Shebro Island WASH project and the Right to Water and Sanitation Project complement several activities implemented by UNICEF Sierra Leone in the WASH sector, including the WASH National Outcome Routine Mapping (WASHNORM) and the WASH Information Management System (WASHIMS) Platform. Thus, there is a significant overlap between the work being done by SEND Sierra Leone and UNICEF, although the scale, location and focus of implementation vary across organizations.

Similarly, there is some complementarity between the work of UNDP Sierra Leone and SEND Sierra Leone, although the overlap is not as significant as observed in the case of UNICEF. For instance, over the period under review, UNDP Sierra Leone implemented various projects related to climate change,

energy efficiency and conflict mitigation, which do not overlap with the work being done SEND Sierra Leone. This is also the case for World Bank projects in Sierra Leone, some of which have focused on energy efficiency and clean energy generation.

FAO tends to focus on hunger. Thus, while other development organizations, such as UNICEF and UNDP, implement a range of projects spanning different development objectives, FAO's core mandate focuses on raising levels of nutrition and improving sustainable agricultural productivity. Accordingly, the nutrition related objectives as part of Strategic Direction 1 of SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2019–2023 complemented the work of the FAO in Sierra Leone. In regard to implemented activities, the LANN+ project has direct relevance to the work of the FAO and complements their efforts to end hunger and improve nutrition.

Overall, SEND Sierra Leone's efforts over the period under review complement activities by several development agencies in Sierra Leone with significant overlap in some cases. This demonstrates a general commitment by the development community to promote economic well-being among the people of Sierra Leone.

11. Insights/Lessons from Stakeholders

This section of the report presents insights from primary data collected from various stakeholders who either benefited from or were associated with the implementation of the previous strategic plan. Perspectives from each stakeholder group are discussed below.

11.1. SEND Sierra Leone Board

Six members of the SEND Sierra Leone Board provided perspectives. Four out of these six board members indicated that SEND Sierra Leone has worked diligently towards the fulfilment of its strategic plan with a rating of five, while the remaining two board members gave a rating of four. Overall, this suggests that board members generally believe SEND Sierra Leone has been effective in achieving the goals relating to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Additionally, all board members who responded to the survey confirmed that all activities SEND Sierra Leone implemented in relation to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 aligned with the organization's vision and mission.

All board members generally agreed that financial, human and technological resources were allocated appropriately and in alignment with strategic priorities. However, the need for more financial, logistic and human resources, as well as more donor support, was highlighted.

Board members identified some risks and challenges that hindered the successful execution of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic was highlighted as a major challenge. Exchange rate risks, which, in some cases, tend to devalue donor funds was also highlighted, as was the high cost of living, which negatively impacts on the salary structure of staff. Additionally, risk associated with political violence causing insecurity and delays in project implementation was identified as a major challenge.

Regarding areas that board members believe should be the focus of the next strategic plan, emphasis was placed climate change, education, youth economic empowerment and sexual reproductive health of girls.

11.2. SEND Sierra Leone Staff

Ninety-four SEND Sierra Leone staff were surveyed in relation to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. When asked to rate performance in implementing Strategic Direction 1, the majority of staff rated SEND Sierra Leone's performance quite highly. Respondents were asked to provide a rating on a five-point scale, where one was the lowest and five was the highest. Collectively 89% of staff members gave a rating of 4 (42%) or 5 (47%). This suggests that the majority of staff believe the implementation of Strategic Direction 1 was largely successful. Regarding Strategic Direction 2, 84% of staff members gave a rating of 4 (28%) or 5 (56%), which also suggests some degree of consensus among staff in their belief that

SEND Sierra Leone successfully achieved goals relating to Strategic Direction 2. Overall, respondents who did not highly rank SEND Sierra Leone's performance across Strategic Directions 1 to 2 suggested that because activities are donor driven, not every thematic area related to the strategic directions had full funding support.

Over half (52%) of staff gave a rating of 4 to express their views on how well Strategic Direction 3 was implemented, while 27% gave a rating of 5. Thus, a total of 79% of respondents collectively rated performance as 4 or 5. Here, some perspectives from staff who ranked performance poorly suggested that SEND Sierra Leone needs to increase its efforts in inspection and monitoring of established health facilities. Others suggested the need for a more objective criteria in selecting communities defined as "hard to reach" when implementing projects.

Regarding Strategic Direction 4, 93% of staff members gave a rating of 4 (12%) or 5 (81%), suggesting significant that SEND Sierra Leone's performance here is widely acknowledged by staff. However, the opposite is observed for Strategic Direction 5, where 60% of respondents gave a rating of 1 to 3, with only 40% of respondents endorsing performance relating to this strategic direction. This sentiment is consistent with earlier findings that suggest a general lack of evidence in achieving the objectives of Strategic Direction 5. Several respondents suggested that SEND Sierra Leone has not proactively worked on establishing regional collaborations, and called for better coordination that would promote joint programs with the possibility of greater impact.

When asked about which of the five strategic directions of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 required more work and should be revisited, most respondents suggested Strategic Direction 5, as well as 4 and 1. Here, staff emphasised the need for a working regional partnership that allowed for the transfer of staff across the West African region as well as joint programs with regional relevance.

Regarding effectiveness of resource allocation, while staff indicated that resources were generally allocated well, there were also some perspectives on the need for potentially adjusting or reallocating some resources. Notably, staff suggested the need to allocate some resources towards emergency humanitarian interventions as well as increased funding for education and health projects. Concerns were also raised about the need to properly incorporate relevant escalation figures in budgets that account for inflation and Sierra Leone's increased cost of living. Further, staff highlighted the need for additional investments in human resourcing to ease the stress and burden on existing staff as SEND Sierra Leone's activities continue to expand. There were also suggestions to allocate funds towards a more sustainable SEND Sierra Leone, beyond donor funding. In particular, there were calls for investments into activities that would promote self-reliance. The need for investments into climate change-related interventions were also highlighted.

Several factors that constrained or acted as risks to the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 were highlighted. Notably, the reliance on donor funding was highlighted as significant by staff. Limited funding and lack of adequately qualified staff were also highlighted. COVID-19, inflation and political disruption were also noted as major risk factors that constrained the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023.

Regarding areas that staff believed should be the focus of the next strategic plan, emphasis was placed on climate change, with several staff also suggesting the need to revisit the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 with a more narrowed focus given that more work was still required. A focus on disability empowerment was also highlighted.

11.3. Donors

Ten donors provided perspectives on the performance of SEND Sierra Leone in relation to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Of the 10 donors, 4 gave the highest rating of 5 indicating that the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 aligned with the donors' overarching goals and funding priorities. Another 4 donors gave a rating of 4, while the remaining 2 gave a rating of 2 and 3. Additional perspectives in line with these ratings suggest that some donors considered interventions relating to climate action as important, but this did not feature prominently in the Strategic Plan 2019–2023.

All donors agreed that all measurable outcomes that were expected from their donations or contributions were met, although a few donors had concerns about timeliness given delays in the submissions of some reports as well as responding to emails. An important issue raised pertained to the quality of evaluation reports, which did not meet up with international standards. This is consistent with what has been observed by the independent consultants of the Strategic Plan. Specifically, most of the evaluation reports presented as part of the strategic plan review had major editing and syntax issues. One donor emphasized that while outcomes relating to improved resilience and sustained food and nutrition in communities of practice were achieved, external factors emerging from climate change continue to undermine progress and thus it is critical that dimensions relating to climate change be better integrated into all programs.

Except for one donor, all donors expressed strong satisfaction with the SEND Sierra Leone's financial management, progress monitoring and reporting systems. The concerns raised here pertained to some instances of significant budget overruns and inadequate budget planning. Additionally, suggestions were made around the need for improving project and activity monitoring. Given that this concern was only reported by one donor, this suggests that generally practices are consistent with donor expectations. This is further supported by donor reports suggesting that project implementation is typically consistent with expected standards and showed value for money.

Regarding the overall perspectives on the Strategic Plan 2019–2023, several donors suggested SEND Sierra Leone needs to take a more focused and narrow approach. In this regard, one donor indicated that: "I think SEND may become too stretched as they are expanding into ever more areas. I worry at times they might lose their technical niche with some of the amazing work they do if they expand into too many areas". In addition to the suggestion that the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 could have been more streamlined with focus and a narrow set of goals, several donors emphasized the need for programs relating to climate actions and building climate resilience. Another highlighted the need for SEND Sierra Leone to improve on innovation in technology with a specific example given for the need to digitize the VSLA model.

Regarding areas that donors believe should be the focus of the next strategic plan, emphasis was placed on women's empowerment, gender equality, climate change, education, agriculture (food and nutrition, value chains), waste management, and natural resources management. Women's empowerment, gender equality and climate change featured significantly across multiple donors.

11.4. Ministries and Government Stakeholders

Seventeen representatives of government ministries and departments were surveyed about their perspectives on SEND Sierra Leone's activities related to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. Most (93.33%) respondents agreed that SEND Sierra Leone's activities have been helpful with a rating of four or five (on a one to five scale where five is the highest). Thus, the majority of government stakeholders believed that SEND Sierra Leone's activities have been helpful. Survey respondents indicated that SEND Sierra Leone made significant impact across various areas including women empowerment, livelihood improvement, rural health and education development, entrepreneurship, leadership training and development, capacity building and agriculture.

Government stakeholders also identified key areas they believed SEND Sierra Leone should focus on for the next strategic plan. Emphasis was placed on women empowerment, empowerment of female teachers, the expansion of credit unions and VSLA services in SEND operational areas, the introduction of counselling sessions to provide mental health support and guidance, climate change-related interventions, and increased efforts to eradicate female genital mutilation and all forms of violence against girls.

11.5. Community Members and Groups

Forty-three community members and stakeholder groups provided perspectives on SEND Sierra Leone's activities related to the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. For this group, the first focal question was to ascertain the extent to which community members thought SEND Sierra Leone's activities had been helpful in their local area over the period 2019–2023. Respondents specifically answered the question:

“On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest, how helpful has SEND Sierra Leone’s activities been in your local area?” Of the 43 respondents, 52% chose 5, 28% chose 4, 8% chose 3, and 4% chose 2 and 8% chose 1. Thus, 80% of respondents strongly believed that SEND Sierra Leone’s activities had been helpful in their local area.

In the Bonthe district, community members suggested that SEND Seirra Leone’s activities have been helpful in improving WASH and promoting VSLA services. In other communities, community members indicated SEND’s success in influencing agricultural outcomes, political rights and women empowerment. However, community members also highlighted areas that they believed should be prioritized or required additional investment. Emphasis was placed on the need for SEND Sierra Leone to empower community groups and organizations to implement some of the activities relating to their strategic plan. Other areas identified include the need for climate change-related interventions, interventions related to drug abuse, business management training, as well as further investments in education (including adult literacy), nutrition, clean water, and health. Additional programs and investments into livelihood improvement and agriculture as well as technical and vocational education were also focal points.

12. Evaluation of Procedures, Processes and Practices

Over the period under review, SEND Sierra Leone managed multiple resources, processes and activities, including the implementation of several interventions and training sessions. This section of the report evaluates the organizations systems, processes, procedures and practices, among others.

12.1. Training manuals

As part of several interventions implemented by SEND Seirra Leone, the organization has spearheaded the development of several training manuals including manuals for training women with political aspirations, WASH systems and gender model family, among others.

All of the training manuals developed and used by SEND Sierra Leone are well-crafted and are of very high quality. A review and evaluation of each of the manuals demonstrate that each manual is suitable for its intended purpose, and thus enhances the probability of each intervention being effective, relevant and successful. The content of each manual is relevant and aligns with the objective of the interventions they are intended for. For each of the manuals, the evaluation demonstrated that when compared to the objectives of the interventions they were meant to cover, the content was necessary and contained information required for the targeted training. The contents of the manual were also clear, concise and accessible to the target audience. The instructional design enhanced readability and thus for a range of audience the manuals could be easily understood. The format of the manuals, including the visual aids, are consistent with best practices that enhance comprehension and engagement.

The effectiveness of the training manuals is evident in their ease of adaptability to different learning styles, levels of expertise and cultural contexts. The manuals also leave room for flexibility in their application to cater to the diverse needs and backgrounds of the trainees. Importantly, the review of the manuals demonstrate that each manual is designed to engage trainees and encourage active participation. The manuals, therefore, encourage active involvement and foster participatory learning environments.

An element that is, however, missing from some of the training manuals is the provision for feedback. Good training manuals should typically include provisions for feedback. However, this was not a feature of most of the training manuals evaluated. On the other hand, the manuals did offer tools or guidelines for trainers to assess participants’ progress, which is an important feedback mechanism that benefits trainees.

12.2. Departmental processes and vision

The desktop review demonstrates that each department and team of SEND Sierra Leone have a vision that significantly aligns with that of SEND's strategic plan and broader objectives, although these have not been made explicit in most of the documents reviewed. There were some instances where departmental vision lacked coherence, but in general there was consistency with the organizational vision. Each department's vision resonates with the overarching vision of SEND Sierra Leone. Departmental vision and proposed activities demonstrate complementarity and contribute towards fulfilling the larger objectives outlined in the SEND Sierra Leone's strategic plan.

Beyond the human resource (HR) and finance documents, which highlight, with a high degree of detail, relevant processes, there was a general lack of detail around processes engaged in by individual units and departments. It is also noteworthy that while the HR and finance process documents demonstrate high level of consistency with best practices, the evaluation is not able to comment on whether these practices are actually being adhered to. This is beyond the scope of the current evaluation, and would most likely require a detailed audit into practices beyond what is presented in the reviewed documents. Nonetheless, working with the assumption that the processes indicated in the reviewed documents are adhered to, inferences can be drawn that processes and practices are consistent with best practices and the strategic objectives of SEND Sierra Leone.

The evaluation is unable to provide assessments around resource allocation across departments or units, and the level of collaboration that occurs across departments. Further, the review does not assess the performance of each department given that these are beyond the scope of the evaluation.

12.3. Donors and funding bodies

SEND Sierra Leone appears to be working with an extensive range of donors and funding bodies. However, it appears that there are several other untapped partners that could help with funding and project implementation, which, per the evaluation, SEND Sierra Leone has not fully explored. An independent document highlights and reviews current funding sources and presents a forward-looking resource mobilization strategy.



13. Conclusion and Recommendations

An evaluation of the country strategic plan (2019–2023) for SEND Sierra Leone was conducted with the aim of providing evidence and lessons that could inform the development of the next Strategic Plan 2024–2029. The evaluation assessed the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 implementation to gauge the level of success and determine if any strategic shift in focus might be required. The evaluation examined SEND Sierra Leone’s strategic positioning, effectiveness in contributing to strategic outcomes, and the efficiency with which the strategic plan was implemented.

An independent, external expert evaluation team conducted the evaluation using a theory-based and mixed-methods approach, drawing on information from a wide range of sources, including monitoring data, document review and primary data collected from multiple stakeholders. A summary of the findings and recommendations from the evaluation are discussed below.

Overall, SEND Sierra Leone mostly adopted best practices across many dimensions in pursuing the objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. The evidence also demonstrates that SEND Sierra Leone has been effective and successful in achieving objectives linked with all of the strategic directions except for Strategic Direction 5.

The gains achieved under the previous strategic plan serve as essential building blocks for the formulation and implementation of the next strategic plan. These gains represent valuable lessons learned, successful interventions, strengthened partnerships, and enhanced organizational capacities. Leveraging these accomplishments enables SEND Sierra Leone to capitalize on existing momentum, optimize resources, and streamline efforts towards achieving its objectives more efficiently. By drawing upon the experiences and achievements of the past, SEND Sierra Leone can refine its strategies, address identified challenges, and pursue innovative approaches to further advance its mission and contribute to sustainable development outcomes in the communities it serves. In light of this, there are a few areas that could benefit from improvement as the organization moves forward towards the next phase. These are outlined as four key recommendations.

Recommendation 1: A key area that could be improved has to do with evaluation design methods. Over the period under review, all evaluations of programs and projects undertaken by SEND Sierra Leone adopted non-experimental evaluation design methods. Although these methods are commonly used and generally accepted in assessing projects, they have several limitations. The most critical limitation is their inability, in most cases, to help draw causal inferences, which is important for policy. Thus, an important recommendation emerging from the evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 is the need to adopt experimental methods, if possible, to evaluate future programs.

It is important to emphasise that the most reliable way to determine the effectiveness of interventions is through an RCT. An RCT is a scientific research study design that is widely accepted as the gold standard in scientific research. In an RCT, participants or subjects are randomly assigned to one of two groups: a treatment group that receives a specific intervention and a control group that does not receive the intervention (or often receives a placebo). The random assignment of participants helps minimise bias and ensures that the groups are comparable at the beginning of the study. Participants are observed both before and after an intervention and are compared to a similar group of individuals who do not receive the intervention. RCTs are recommended to answer questions on whether SEND Sierra Leone is indeed causing improvements in the development goals given that they enable the estimation of causal effects of interventions.

Recommendation 2: Evidence from the review of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023, including information collected from relevant stakeholders, demonstrates that while significant progress have been made in achieving Strategic Directions 1 to 4, there are still several areas where significant progress could be made. Although stakeholders appreciate the work that SEND Sierra Leone has done in relation to the various strategies directions, they also recommend that work related to these strategic directions continue. Thus, it is recommended that Strategic Directions 1 to 4, which are consistent

with the National Development Plan, remain as part of SEND Sierra Leone's Strategic Plan 2024–2029. However, a review of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023 suggests that the activities and focal points need to be streamlined. Thus, it is also recommended that the approaches to and activities for these strategic directions are streamlined to ensure proper monitoring. It is also recommended that the strategic plan emphasizes pathways through which each activity will help achieve the expected outcomes.

Recommendation 3: The third recommendation that has emerged from this evaluation is the need for SEND Sierra Leone to have greater involvement in interventions relating to climate change. Interventions relating to climate change did not feature prominently as part of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023. However, stakeholders have identified the need for climate change-related interventions, which suggests that the inclusion of a strategic direction focused on climate change in the next strategic plan would be consistent with stakeholder needs and expectations. The inclusion of a strategic direction focused on climate change will also be consistent with Goal 13 of the SDGs, which calls for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. Importantly, the goal of addressing climate change is intrinsically linked to all 16 of the other goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Recommendation 4: A final recommendation that has emerged from this evaluation is the need for SEND Sierra Leone to engage only international experts or consultants with established reputation, who have demonstrated high level of excellence in the evaluation of projects. Given that SEND Sierra Leone is a leading organization receiving support from many international organizations, it is important that the quality of evaluation reports is consistent with international standards. This is crucial in ensuring that donors have confidence in the quality of work being done by SEND Sierra Leone. As part of the evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2019–2023, a review of all project evaluation reports indicated that there were several shortcomings including major issues with the overall presentation and syntax of some of the reports. This is an important concern shared by some donors, which highlights the need for SEND Sierra Leone to take a proactive approach to ensure that the quality of evaluation reports is of the highest standards. This is critical, and would ensure that donors, funders and partners continue to trust in the work being done SEND Sierra Leone.

References

- Abiche, T. T. (2012). *Community empowerment and sustainable livelihoods: Transforming social capital into entrepreneurship in rural Southern Ethiopia*. (PhD). University of South Africa Pretoria.
- Bédécarrats, F., Guérin, I., & Roubaud, F. (2019). All that glitters is not gold. The political economy of randomized evaluations in development. *Development and Change*, 50(3), 735-762.
- Benos, N., & Zotou, S. (2014). Education and Economic Growth: A Meta-Regression Analysis. *World Development*, 64(0), 669-689.
- Bohle, H.-G. (2009). Sustainable livelihood security. Evolution and application. In *Facing Global Environmental Change: Environmental, Human, Energy, Food, Health and Water Security Concepts* (pp. 521-528): Springer.
- de Souza Leão, L., & Eyal, G. (2019). The rise of randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in international development in historical perspective. *Theory and Society*, 48, 383-418.
- Frankenberger, T. R., & McCaston, M. K. (1998). The household livelihood security concept. *Food Nutrition and Agriculture*, 30-35.
- Gentilini, U., & Webb, P. (2008). How are we doing on poverty and hunger reduction? A new measure of country performance. *Food Policy*, 33(6), 521-532.
- Hofmarcher, T. (2021). The effect of education on poverty: A European perspective. *Economics of Education Review*, 83, 102124.
- Ikendi, S., Owusu, F., Masinde, D., Oberhauser, A., & Bain, C. (2023). Does participation in livelihood

education programs impact household food security? A comparative study in rural Uganda. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*, 13(1), 1–31-31–31.

Ionescu, A. M., & Cuza, A. (2012). How does education affect labour market outcomes. *Review of Applied Socio-Economic Research*, 4(2), 130-144.

Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender and Development*, 13(1), 13-24.

Lindenberg, M. (2002). Measuring Household Livelihood Security at the Family and Community Level in the Developing World. *World Development*, 30(2), 301-318.

Liu, F., Li, L., Zhang, Y., Ngo, Q.-T., & Iqbal, W. (2021). Role of education in poverty reduction: macroeconomic and social determinants form developing economies. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 28, 63163-63177.

Mosedale, S. (2014). Women's empowerment as a development goal: taking a feminist standpoint. *Journal of International Development*, 26(8), 1115-1125.

Mutisya, M., Ngware, M. W., Kabiru, C. W., & Kandala, N.-b. (2016). The effect of education on household food security in two informal urban settlements in Kenya: a longitudinal analysis. *Food Security*, 8, 743-756.

Obiols-Homs, F., & Sánchez-Marcos, V. (2018). Education outcomes and the labor market. *Labour Economics*, 54, 14-28.

Pelletier, B., Hickey, G. M., Bothi, K. L., & Mude, A. (2016). Linking rural livelihood resilience and food security: an international challenge. *Food Security*, 8, 469-476.

Preston, R. (2012). Dependency Perspectives on The Impact of Education on Family Livelihood Strategies in Rural Areas of Andean America. In K. Watson (Ed.), *Dependence and Interdependence in Education* (pp. 119-140): Routledge.

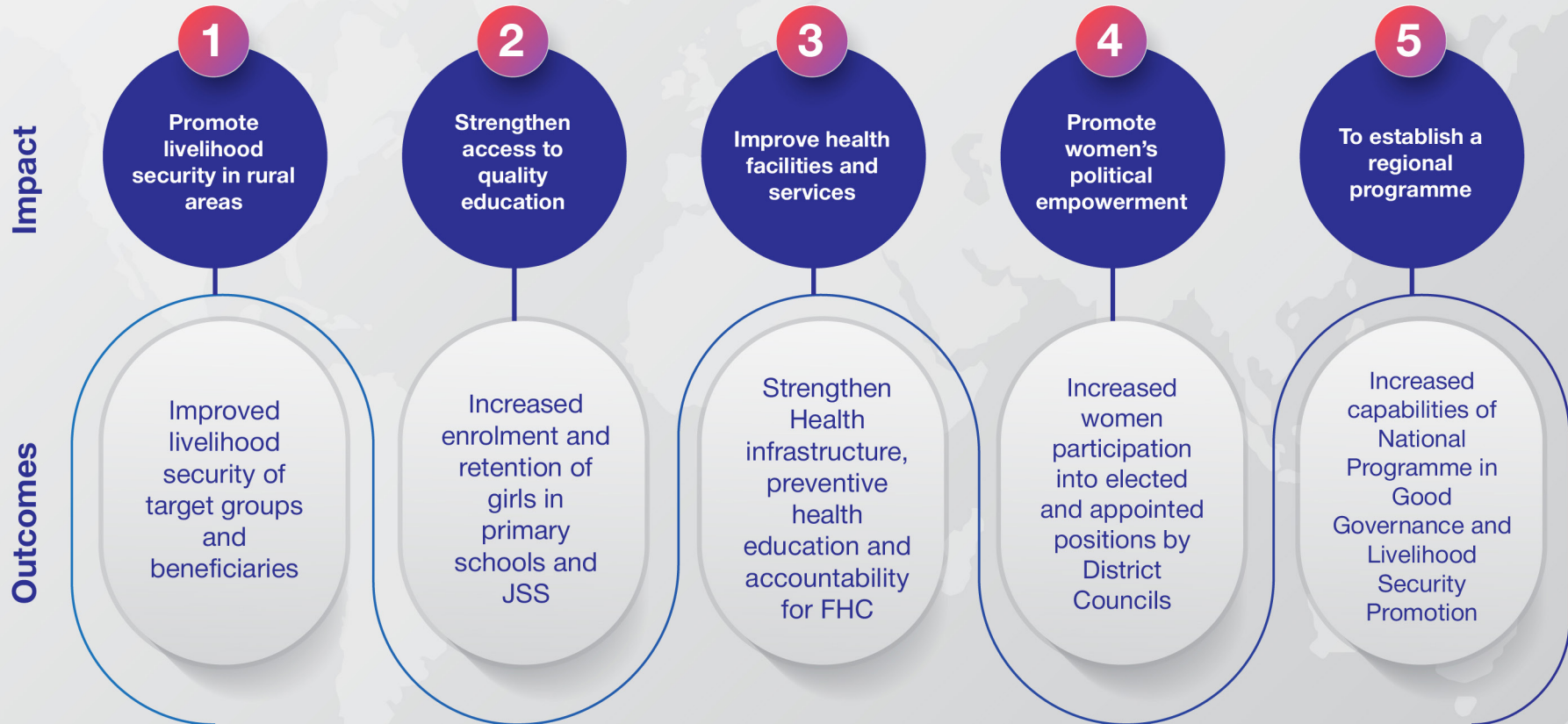
von Braun, J., Chichaibelu, B. B., Torero Cullen, M., Laborde, D., & Smaller, C. (2021). Ending hunger by 2030—policy actions and costs. Bonn: Center for Development Research (ZEF).

Wallace, I. (2007). A framework for revitalisation of rural education and training systems in sub-Saharan Africa: Strengthening the human resource base for food security and sustainable livelihoods. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 27(5), 581-590.

Webber, S., & Prouse, C. (2018). The new gold standard: The rise of randomized control trials and experimental development. *Economic Geography*, 94(2), 166-187.

Appendix 1 – Theory of Change

Empowering Citizens to make Sierra Leone work for Equity



Enablers

- ▶ Accelerated delivery of high quality projects
- ▶ Organizational efficiency and effectiveness for programme delivery
- ▶ Appropriate access to right support
- ▶ Dependable, consistent and reliable teams and staff to deliver on strategic direction

Appendix 2 – List of Key Consultations

SEND Sierra Leone Board
SEND Sierra Leone Senior Management and Heads of Department
SEND Sierra Leone Staff
SEND Sierra Leone Donors
Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies
Local/Traditional Leaders
Political Parties
Civil Society Organizations
Community Group Leaders

Appendix 3 – List of Consulted Resources

SEND Sierra Leone Strategic Plan 2019–2023
SEND Sierra Leone “Democratic and Participator Sector Governing Institutions – Civil Society Engagement in Water Sector Management, Kenema District, Sierra Leone” end of project evaluation report
SEND Sierra Leone “Promoting nutrition-sensitive WASH self-sufficiency on Bonthe Island” end of project evaluation report
SEND Sierra Leone “More than a Woman: Strengthening Women’s Participation in Politics and Governance” end of project evaluation report
SEND Sierra Leone “Improvement of Educational Infrastructure and Quality Educational Services in Kenema District” end of project evaluation report
SEND Sierra Leone “Linking Agriculture Natural Resources Management and Nutrition (LANN+) in Sierra Leone” end of project evaluation report
SEND Sierra Leone “Integrated Project for Education, and Empowerment of Women and Civil Society Groups in Sierra Leone” end of project evaluation report
Sierra Leone Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019–2023)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) “Human Development Reports – Sierra Leone”



SEND SIERRA LEONE

Working to promote good governance and
equality of men and women in Sierra Leone



www.sendsierraleone.com



sendsierraleone