

**Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education**

# **Early Childhood Development Policy**

**Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE)**

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **FOREWORD**

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is critical for optimizing human capital and national development. Pre-primary education was not formally part of the government education sector service delivery plans until the advent of the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy of the Government of Sierra Leone in 2018. His Excellency President Julius Maada Bio's New Direction government made access to education free for parents and learners from pre-primary through senior secondary in Sierra Leone.

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child- this is truer today than ever before in Sierra Leone. This ECD Policy invites families, communities, cities and the nation to commit to our children's learning, protection, growth and development (physical, cognitive and psychosocial). While learning never ends through the life of an individual, it begins at birth and research and evidence has shown that ECD is most important.

Across Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Civil Society Organizations, and Parents, everyone has clear roles and responsibilities to effectively implement this policy and empower all Sierra Leonean children to develop their human potential to the fullest. This is a document that's been developed through collaboration and we hope that same collaboration will drive us as a nation towards the intended goals and impact.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1. Background

Early childhood development (ECD) is essential for all children to achieve their full potential as individuals, and progressive citizens. The social and economic cost of not taking actions to promote ECD is too high to afford for a country. ECD is widely recognized as being foundational for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2016-2030). This is the first time that ECD has been included on the global development agenda.

In Sierra Leone, there are several important sectoral policies that pertain to the development of young children in the first years of life, including the Education Sector Plan (ESP) (2014-18), the child Rights Act, and the Agenda for Prosperity. These policies have been playing and will continue playing a critical role in promoting young children's survival, growth, protection and development in the different sectors. However, few policies take a holistic approach to promoting ECD, and the sectoral services are oftentimes not coordinated, and hence result in gaps in service delivery, in terms of accessibility and quality. The vulnerable groups, such as children living in poverty, orphaned children, and children with disabilities, are particularly disadvantaged.

A laudable thinking of the Government of Sierra Leone since 2008 has been the promotion of Early Childhood Development (ECD) through a holistic approach towards human resource development and poverty reduction for effective and sustainable social and economic development. In order to address the policy gaps pertaining to young children, a major endeavour was undertaken to develop this national integrated ECD Policy to address the young children's needs for multi-sectoral services that are essential for their holistic development.

The national integrated ECD Policy is expected to provide an overarching framework with shared vision, mission, goals, and objectives for ECD. The relevant line ministries and other partners should coordinate their planning and delivery of services and interventions through the most appropriate platforms for young children aged 0-8 years, , so that all Sierra Leonean children would have the best start in life to achieve their full potential.

### 1.3 Definition of Early Childhood Development

ECD is the continuous process through which young children 0-8 years old grow and acquire skills and abilities in the domains of motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional development. ECD is about

young children's holistic development. The skill development in the different domains is integrated and depends on each other, and sets the foundation for success in school, as well as career and income, health, and well-being in adulthood.

ECD occurs as a result of the interactions between the child and the environment, which include interactions with caregivers and other children and adults, at home, in the community, at pre-school/nursery, and in other settings. The "nurturing care" in the environment is crucially important for ECD. Nurturing care consists of good nutrition, health, clean water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), protection from accidents, violence, and neglect..

#### **1.4 Rationale**

The justification of the policy is to provide a framework for all stakeholders, including: all relevant line ministries in regions, communities, families, private sector providers, Non-Governmental Organisations, (NGOs) and development partners for coordination in planning and implementing ECD services and interventions.

Another justification for this policy is reflected in The Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2007 that points out the responsibility of the State to provide good guidance, care, assistance and maintenance for the child and assurance of the child's survival and development. The CRA advocates that a disabled child has a right to special care, education and training, wherever possible, to develop his maximum potential so as to be self-reliant.

Promoting ECD and scaling up ECD services are smart investment for a country to promote effective and sustainable, social and economic development. The global consensus is that ECD is one of the most cost effective ways to break the inter-generational poverty cycle. According to the 2016 Lancet report on the "Advancing Early Childhood Development: from Science to Scale", Laws and policies can improve childhood development by increasing access to and quality of health and other services, as well as money and time for parents to provide nurturing care for their young children.

Human development research over the past decade has provided solid evidence that multi-sectoral interventions improve ECD. Sectoral services combined with the key elements of nurturing care can boost the developmental outcomes of children, and the target of the services should be the child and his/her family, not just the child. In order to ensure that the necessary ECD services reach the child and family in an integrated manner, it is critical for the different sectors to align their services within a shared framework, to guide planning and delivery of the sectoral services. Providing such a framework is the main purpose of this ECD Policy.

#### **1.5 Situation analysis**

## **Health**

Within the Sierra Leone context, gaps in Early Childhood Development (ECD) such as the high level of under-five mortality rate (UFMR), the current position in the Human Development Index (HDI), stunting of children as a result of poor nutritional facilities warrant access to equitable quality ECD programmes, breastfeeding, and school feeding programmes.

It was estimated that Sierra Leone has more than 1,700,000 children aged 0-8 years. Over the past decade, steady progress has been made in promoting young children's well-being in Sierra Leone. The Child Rights Act (CRA), passed in 2007, highlighted children's undeniable right to life and survival, and development. The CRA posits that any health worker, teacher, or social development worker, and all other governmental and non-governmental service providers shall discharge their duties to children and communities with diligence, fairness, without being swayed by personal interest and without discrimination, respecting people's dignity and worth and taking into account the short and long term interests of the children.

## **Nutrition**

The 2014 Sierra Leone National Nutrition Survey (SLNS) 4, which offers the most recent data on nutritional status of children under five, indicates that 28.8 percent are stunted according to the 2006 World Health Organization (WHO) standards, while 12.9 percent are underweight and 4.7 percent, wasted.

While progress towards reducing stunting and underweight is evident, more needs to be done to achieve the 20% threshold set by WHO and WHA global targets by 2025 to improve maternal, infant and young children nutrition. Micronutrient status remains a major nutritional challenge as shown by data from the Sierra Leone Micronutrient Survey (SLMS, 2015), which was conducted for the first time in the country. Micronutrient deficiency disorders of iron, anaemia, Vitamin A, iodine and folate deficiencies continue to pose public health concerns.

## **WASH**

Most children (0 - 8 years) live in poor households and communities, impacted by food insecurity, limited WASH facilities, poor health and child protection/social welfare services. The absence of school clinics especially in the rural areas is a major concern. WASH facilities: A large number of schools lack toilets and clean water. Children in these schools are often not provided with hygiene lessons. This situation needs to be improved as safe water and sanitation are essential to protect children's health and ability to learn at school. The availability of clean water, adequate sanitation and hygiene education is directly related not only to physical, mental and social health, but ultimately to

economic and political development. According to WHO 2017 report, One out of three people using safely managed drinking water services (1.9 billion) lived in rural areas.

### **Early Stimulation**

Furthermore, most children living in rural environments experience poor early stimulation and few early learning opportunities. There is a steady increase in street children and orphans the limited available ECD services are fragmented rather than integrated, and they are only available to affluent families living in urban areas. The results of the ECD survey (2003) carried out in the PRSP education sector review showed that there were only 153 preschool institutions in urban and semi-urban areas combined. Nearly two-thirds of these preschools are in the Western Area while more than 40 percent of them are not on permanent sites.

It is against this backdrop that the child Rights Act, the Agenda for Prosperity, the Education Sector Plan(2014-2018), the Free Health Care Services for children from 0-5 years and their mothers were fully endorsed and implemented by the government. This approach would encourage early learning and early stimulation especially for young children living in rural areas where there is limited access to clean drinking water, proper toilets and hand washing facilities.

### **Early Learning**

The paucity of preschools countrywide is a factor that has prompted the establishment of an ECD programme. Some children (0 – 8 years) especially in rural areas do not attend school. These children are usually found in the streets or serving as food vendors as early as 5 years old. The Sierra Leone national school census December 2012 report revealed that there were 778 pre-primary schools in all the districts countrywide. With the recent construction of preschools in some of the regions in Sierra Leone, much is left to be desired. If we are to have a preschool in each of the primary schools, then the government must endeavour to construct 5962 preschools in addition the number of available preschools according to this census report. This may not be possible in the near future therefore, preschool age children will be at risk in the districts without ECD facilities.

### **Child Protection**

There is a shortfall in the availability of services for orphans and vulnerable children. There are also concerns in the implementation of policies to protect rights of children with special needs, and to promote their participation and access to ECD services. These areas are addressed in the policy. According to the SABER 2013 report recommendations were made to activate a financial transfer mechanisms or income supports to reach the most vulnerable families to ensure the welfare of children.

## **2. Vision, Mission, Goal, and Objectives of the Integrated ECD Policy**

### **2.1 Vision**

All children in Sierra Leone 0-8 years old, including the vulnerable groups such as poor children, orphaned children and children with disabilities, achieve their developmental potential within an environment characterized by nurturing care.

### **2.2 Mission**

To ensure equitable access to quality ECD services and interventions for young children 0-8 years old and their families, provided by the line ministries and other partners in a coordinated manner.

### **2.3 Goal**

To provide an overarching framework with shared vision, mission, goal, and objectives for ECD, for the relevant line ministries and other partners to coordinate their planning, financing and delivery of ECD services and interventions through the most appropriate platforms for young children 0-8 years old and their families, including the vulnerable groups, to promote the holistic development of Sierra Leonean children, so they can achieve their full potential.

This overarching goal is in line with several of the country's national strategies including: the Agenda for Prosperity and the Agenda for Change, endorsed by His Excellency, the President, Ernest Bai Koroma, PhD.

### **Primary Targets**

These include all children who are Orphans and Other Vulnerable Children and Children with Disabilities from 0 to eight years. Within this age range, there are four major categories: children at birth, from birth to 3, 3 to 6, and 6 to 8. Although these children all have the same holistic needs, which consist of nutrition, love, care, health, nurture, protection, early stimulation and training, the emphasis providing for these needs varies depending on the age category. In addition, special attention must be focused on the needs and rights of orphans and children with disabilities. Under this category, this policy also targets Parents, Teachers and other caregivers who provide care for children including grandparents, relatives and others in the home setting.

### **Secondary Target Groups**

These refer specifically to service providers which include; government Ministries, churches, Civil Society Organizations and communities, among others. The roles and responsibilities of these target groups are highlighted in the latter part of this document

## **2.5 Objectives**

1. To provide coordination guidelines for line ministries and other partners in providing equitable and quality ECD services for young children and their families
2. To set up ECD coordination mechanisms at the national and sub-national levels to facilitate communication, coordination and collaboration in planning, financing and delivery of ECD services for young children and families
3. To build and strengthen partnerships and collaboration for synergy (including referral) among ECD services for young children and families provided through different platforms in different sectors
4. To mobilize adequate and growing resources for improving accessibility to quality ECD services for young children and families, including capacity building.

## **POLICY STATEMENTS**

- Every child shall have good parenting care, including exclusive breastfeeding for at least the first six months of the child's life
- Every child shall have the appropriate vaccinations from birth to 5 years.
- Every child shall have the opportunity to early socialization and learning and age- appropriate play materials
- Every care-giver in nursery schools shall have the requisite training in ECD
- Every child shall attend pre-school either in a formal setting or non-formal community-based setting
- A pre-school shall be attached to every primary school.
- Every teacher in a pre-school shall be a trained ECD teacher
- In every community -based pre-school, parents shall be a part of the management of the school
- Parents should provide the appropriate nutrition for all children 0-8 years
- Parents and teachers shall ensure that children in their care are protected from all forms of abuse.
- There shall be regular health checks for children 0 -8 years by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation.
- Local Councils shall superintend all pre-schools in their localities and provide educational materials that will enhance the learning process.
- Rural communities shall provide land for the construction of community-based ECD centres and pre-schools
- Free health-care should be provided for all children 0-8 years
- Social workers shall pay regular monitoring visits to nursery and pre-schools.

## **3. Roles and Responsibilities for the Implementation of Policy**

### **3.1 Stakeholders, Roles and Responsibilities**



This ECD policy will be adopted and implemented in collaboration with the stakeholders, whose roles and responsibilities are outlined below because of the evolving research and key principles of Early Childhood Development. This list of stakeholders is not exhaustive and can be updated during the review period stated in this policy.

Critical steps in the strategy include setting up national and subnational ECD administration and coordinating bodies; clarifying key partners' roles and responsibilities; devising mechanisms for decision making and information flow; and devising ECD emergency preparedness and response plans and mechanisms. A major initiative in this area is regrouping the National ECD Steering Committee to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration among related ministries; this involves the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE), Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS), Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA), Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED), and others. These ministries should ensure that proper coordination is established among them to avoid duplication. This could be further buttressed by having strong advocacy from the line ministries and local governments to earmark adequate funding for ECD in their financial planning and to substantially review and increase the earmarked funding for ECD on a yearly basis. It is also important for these ministries to promote an appreciation of children's rights, of the value of ECD for individual children, family, and nation, and of the elements and qualities that define good ECD by conducting awareness campaigns and social mobilization at both the national and sub national levels.

Moreover, the government should ensure that all children under age eight are registered at birth and receive regular health care and timely immunization, adequate nutrition and nurturing, and infant stimulation, as well as Early Childhood Development, through community-based parent education, support and collaboration in the provision of WASH facilities, and an upgrading of child protection services. Each line ministry and key development partners such as UNICEF, WB, and WHO will identify an ECD focal person with a deputy ECD focal person to participate in the National ECD Steering Committee, which will serve as the national level coordination body for improving and implementing ECD related policies.

All line ministries and key development partners are encouraged to make ECD mainstreamed in to their policy and programme work, to ensure that their policies and programmes are friendly towards the young children and their families, with a focus on the vulnerable groups.

### **3.2 The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE):**

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) will:

- Appoint a National Focal Person to coordinate the National ECD Programme, including policy improvement and implementation
- Strengthen the Pre-primary Education Unit with necessary staff and resources
- Advocate for adequate public financing (10% of education sector budget) for scaling up formal and non-formal pre-primary education (early learning) services
- Implement ECD Minimum Standards and ECD Curriculum;
- Lead public advocacy and communication to raise awareness about the importance of ECD and good child rearing practices among the general public, especially the caregivers
- Demonstrate and identify effective and sustainable pre-primary education (early learning) service models
- Coordinate with the TSC in planning and conducting training on providing quality pre-primary education (early learning) for pre-school/nursery teachers, administrators, School Management Committees and other relevant personnel, through regular in-service courses
- Develop developmentally appropriate, cost effective and contextually relevant materials and resources for ECD (early learning)
- Support pre-schools/nurseries/ECD centres with appropriate and adequate learning materials and resources;
- Promote inclusive pre-primary education by exploring ways to include vulnerable children such as children with disabilities in early learning settings
- Undertake early detection and assessment of disabilities in children and provide appropriate interventions through referrals;

### **Teaching Service Commission**

The Teaching Service Commission will:

- serve as an advisory body to the Minister on all matters pertaining to ECD educators;
- Ensure that all ECD educators are registered and licensed
- advocate for teacher professional development in Early Childhood Education
- advise the Minister on the pre-service training of Early Childhood educators
- develop and review standards and codes of professional ethics

### **3.3 Ministry of Health and Sanitation:**

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation (MOHS) will:

- Collaborate with MEST in designing and implementing a comprehensive health and age-appropriate education programme;
- Provide safe motherhood initiatives;

- Monitor and promote growth and provide immunisation services;
- Integrate the management of neonatal and childhood illness and sickle cell anaemia;
- Intensify programmes on infant and young-child feeding;
- Develop the health and nutrition (including breastfeeding, nutritious food complements) content of the ECD curriculum;
- Monitor and provide dewarming facilities for children in ECD settings
- Establish school clinics in each preschool
- Advocate for an allocation to ECD in the health sector budget, and
- Promote environmental sanitation, including safe drinking water sources
- Collaborate with key stakeholders in the early detection of disabilities in children and provide appropriate interventions;
- Design age-appropriate food menu that is healthy and diverse, suitable for children's growth and development

### **3.4 Ministry of Finance and Economic Development**

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Development (MOFED) will ensure that ECD activity costs in relevant ministries are accommodated in the national budget.

### **3.5 Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) will:**

- Develop advocacy guidelines on ECD;
- Develop minimum standards for ECD operations in children's institutions and foster homes;
- Mobilize resources for research, advocacy, monitoring and coordination;
- Submit a comprehensive sectorial annual report on ECD programmes to the National Coordinating Office.

### **3.6 Ministry of Justice:**

The Ministry of Justice will:

- Facilitate the interpretation of the Child Rights Act and other legal instruments as they affect ECD;
- Prosecute those who violate children's rights.

### **3.7 Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment**

The Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment will

- Ensure the adequate provision of land for all ECD programmes and activities;
- Ensure that the environments are conducive for ECD activities;

Collaborate with other line Ministries to develop basic minimum standards for the establishments of preschools

### **3.8 Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development**

- provide the technical direction in which the Local Councils (LCs) can be engaged in promoting the goals in the ECD policy
- Promote and coordinate community involvement in health issues;
- protect children 0-8 years by working with other sectors;
- Ensure access to safe drinking water, peri-urban water supply, environmental health care,
- Ensure integration of ECD programs in Plans and Budgets of all local governments
- Monitor the implementation of the IECD Policy at local government level
- Ensure availability of land for establishment of ECD centres and recreation facilities for children at local government level.

### **3.9 Concerned Families, Parents and Guardians**

The contributions of families, parents and guardians are crucial in the following areas:

- Feeding children at school and home:
- Sanitation, hygiene and medical care;
- Shelter;
- Clothing;
- Parental love and care;
- Protection and security;
- Supporting learning through play at home.

### **3.10 Private proprietors and ECD partners will be encouraged to:**

Provide equality in ECD services and follow guidelines set up by the national, regional and district-level early childhood development committees.

## **4. Implementation Strategies**

1. Promoting cross-sectorial communication, coordination and collaboration in ECD programming
2. Mobilizing human and financial resources, especially public financing, for effective implementation and scaling up of ECD services and interventions
3. Capitalizing on and strengthening the existing service providing platforms/systems for implementing and scaling up ECD services and interventions
4. Advocacy and communication to cultivate political commitment, build partnership and promote ownership for ECD policy improvement and effective and sustainable implementation

5. Supporting caregivers and communities to improve their ECD knowledge and child -rearing practices.
6. Improving research and monitoring data for promoting integrated ECD
7. Advocating for and acquisition and ECD services.

## **5. Costing**

### **5.1 Government and Non-Government Coverage**

ECD costs in Sierra Leone will be covered by public financing and contributions from other stakeholders. These costs will stem from the work needed to do the necessary research, policy formulation/review, advocacy, capacity building, empowerment of parents, and implementation of projects, coordination and evaluation. Fully funded ECD programming will need fiscal support at many levels with government enforcing of funding mechanisms equitably.

### **5.2 National Level Costs**

At national level the main costs stem from the following:

- Support to relevant MDAs to perform their ECD functions:
- Support to ECD training institutions to enable them to train ECD educators/caregivers
- Development of sector capacity in their new roles, and
- Development of training modules for comprehensive ECD programmes

### **5.3 Local and Community Level Costs**

At local or community level, costs will stem from the following:

- Infrastructure provision and maintenance
- Sponsoring of educator training
- Provision of locally produced materials and equipment
- Provision of food for children
- Training of community ECD committee members, and
- Transportation and salaries for educators

### **5.4 Financing**

The financing of ECD programmes will be spread in various forms among the key participants and stakeholders, namely: the government, participating families, local communities, the private sector, NGOs and other organizations, both local and international. The government will ensure accessibility and quality so that children in need of special attention, including those from low income families can

fully benefit from ECD services. To this end, the government will seek international cooperation and sponsorship, where necessary, toward the provision of basic ECD services.

## **5.5 Financial Roles of Key Players**

### **1. Government:**

Recognizing that ECD forms an integral part of national development priorities, the government will direct the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development in its budgetary guidelines to direct relevant sector Ministries, to allocate a certain percentage of their regular budget for supporting ECD programmes. In addition, the government will:

- Waive taxes on equipment and materials purchased for ECD programmes;
- Provide incentives to private sector establishments that contribute above a certain minimum level, minimally defined levels of funding or in-kind support to ECD programmes.

### **2. Communities, Families and Parents**

Communities, families, and parents will provide support to ECD programmes through:

- Contribution of labour, cash, or local building materials
- Provision of food for children and
- Contribution toward the payment of stipend/subsidy of caregivers and other costs that may be necessary

### **3. Development Partners, NGOs, and Philanthropists**

Development partners, NGOs, and philanthropists will:

- Continue to provide technical as well as financial assistance (technical assistance could be in the form of research, dissemination of research findings and best practices from other countries, networking, developing appropriate curriculum, capacity building, or professional training);
- Support programmes to train teachers and
- Support the initial start-up costs of programmes, including the provision of infrastructure.

## **6. Policy Research Planning, Partnership and Coordination**

### **6.1 Research**

The research plan going forward, should be geared toward bringing into focus the successes and failures of ECD programmes in the following areas: health, nutrition, breastfeeding, safe motherhood, immunisation, parental education, HIV/AIDS level of parental involvement in ECD programmes,

compliance with Minimum Standards required in all ECD centres and compliance with the approved curriculum.

## **6.2 Partnership and Coordination**

Since the policy is inter-sectoral, it should have a unit at MEST and should operate within its own budget line. Line ministries should have ECD units with focal persons and should be under the supervision of the Deputy Directors of the Director of Inspectorate at MEST.

## **7. Policy Approval, Periodic Monitoring and Review for Sustainability**

### **7.1 Policy Approval**

The National ECD Policy will become a nationally owned after it has been presented to cabinet by the Minister of Education, Science and Technology for discussion..

### **7.2 Periodic Monitoring and Policy Review**

Since measurable results from educational activities usually accumulate over time, evaluation should take place after two to three years of implementation. The evaluation findings regarding results will determine the nature of any revisions to the national policy, which is expected to be revised after five years of implementation.

### **7.3 Sustainability of ECD Programmes**

ECD programmes will be sustained if the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, line ministries, national and international NGOs all ensure that all funds allocated for the management of ECD programmes in the country are properly monitored without prejudice and that any individual found culpable in the management of its resources are prosecuted.

All monitoring and evaluation of ECD programmes will be carried out within the stipulated times and reported to the appropriate authorities accordingly.

## **8.0 Administration of ECD Programmes**

### **8.1 ECD Steering Committee**

ECD Steering Committees at the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology will perform the following functions:

- Ensures that the ECD Policy, Minimum Standards and the Curriculum are fully adhered to by the implementing partners
- Teaching and learning materials supplied to the pilot/preschools are accordingly used.

- Provide in-service training for unqualified caregivers all over the country
- Ensures that there is proper coordination of all ECD programmes in the country
- Development partners submit annual reports of their respective operational activities to the Focal Person, MEST for onward submission to the Minister of Education, Science and Technology.

## **8.2 National ECD Focal Person**

National ECD Focal Person will be Appointed to:

- Lead national ECD strategic planning and implementation, supervision/monitoring and information management;
- Provide advice to the Minister of Education on national ECD priorities and strategic plans, and regularly update the minister about progress;
- Supervise the development and revision of the National ECD Policy, National ECD Minimum Standards and the National ECD Curriculum, as well as other National ECD policy documents;
- Supervise technical groups that are commissioned to develop and revise the ECD policy documents and provide inputs.
- Oversee the implementation of the National ECD Policy;
- Coordinate the National ECD Network to share updates in promoting ECD services, plan ECD projects/activities, facilitates synergy among stakeholders, secure essential resources, coordinate implementation of projects/activities to ensure coherence, and share experiences and lessons learned;
- Act as a liaison officer between the National ECD steering Committee and the regions in the management of ECD activities;
- Coordinate implementation of the National ECD Policy;
- Work in coordination with the National ECD Steering Committee to interpret the national ECD Policy along with the National ECD Curriculum and Minimum Standards, in each respective region, including all districts communities and local levels where ECD programmes exist;
- Ensure that the established centres comply with the approved ECD Policy, Curriculum and Minimum Standards;
- Promote and participate in knowledge-sharing among District Focal Persons to promote collaboration and best practices;
- Provide an annual report to the Ministry of Education and its line ministries on activities undertaken with recommendations for the continuing sustainability of ECD programmes nationally;
- Closely work with the National ECD Steering Committee in the identification and prioritization of challenges facing ECD by finding solutions to address those that directly impact the holistic development of children;
- Setup good monitoring and evaluation structures that will feed into the planning structures;



- Promote and sustain quality pertaining to the relevant line ministries for the optimisation of ECD service delivery.

### **8.3 Other Recommendations:**

- All teacher training institutions should offer ECD programmes that articulate and prepare early childhood workforce to implement the curriculum and achieve the Core Competencies.
- In-service training courses should be organised for educators already teaching in pre-schools. Both caregivers and educators should be included in training, as appropriate.
- Training of caregivers on the importance of advising on local nutritious food for optimal child growth and development should occur.
- All ECD facilities should be made available and equitable and nationwide.
- Parental involvement on ECD should be manifested in all ECD programmes.
- Qualified ECD professionals should be employed in all ECD programmes at all levels.
- All funds provided for the management of ECD programmes should be properly monitored with fair and equitable distribution.
- There should be fourteen (14) Deputy Directors representing each district in the country.
- Reporting officials should be provided with cell phones to assure that reporting to MEST and District Situation Rooms is done.
- Government through the relevant line Ministries should develop and implement budgets to fully support ECD services recommended herein, with holistic and integrated support in health care, nutrition and early learning at national, district and community levels.
- Stakeholders should embark on sensitisation programmes relating to best practices across all relevant topics in quality early programmes, that include, but are not limited to how children learn best through guided play; early literacy and mathematics, in playful and meaningful ways and on health topics like proper toileting, hand washing, food ingredients and nutrition, strictly banning corporal punishment, with consequences for hitting children.

### **9.0 Conclusion**

This policy spells out the shared vision, mission, and goals of Early Childhood Development as the foundation of Sierra Leone's Human Resource Development for the future, and provided an overarching framework for cross-sectoral coordination in planning, financing, and implementing ECD services for young children and their families. It also clarifies the implementation strategies and roles and responsibilities of the various Ministries and other partners in promoting ECD for the young children in Sierra Leone, so they would have the best start to achieve their full potential.

By adopting and deploying this policy with the necessary national legislation to make it work, the government would carry out its constitutional duty to protect and promote the fundamental human

rights and freedoms for children under eight, aligned with the global Sustainable Development Goals. Investing in young children by bringing this policy to full implementation, will build a strong foundation for the future of Sierra Leone.