Chapter 14

GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN POST-CONFLICT SIERRA LEONE

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14.1 Introduction

Sierra Leone has a long history of Western-style education dating back to the late 1790s with the arrival of freed slaves from Britain and Nova Scotia. The Methodist 'negros' established classes in 1792 to teach their children. Later, the demand for education was stirred among the natives when it was realized that whenever there was work to be done those who were literate were given lighter work and the illiterates did the manual work (Sumner 1963). As the demand for education increased, the number of schools was also increased. Yet over 200 years afterwards Sierra Leone has not been able to reduce the illiteracy rate to below half the population.

There is a correlation between education and employment. The level and type of education acquired determines the type of job opportunities available to individuals. Since over half of the country's population is illiterate, they can only be involved in jobs not requiring formal training for which literacy and other technical skills are typically important. This paper argues that girls' and women's low level of education is responsible for their low representation in formal sector employment in general and their clustering at the margins of such institutions. It discusses the government's policies and intervention strategies to raise the educational status of the country and of girls and women, and the outcomes of these interventions. Furthermore, the paper argues that several other factors need to be addressed to buttress government efforts in order to realize positive and concrete outcomes.

This chapter is divided into nine sections. Section 14.1 examines the status of education in Sierra Leone before the 1991–2001 rebel war and includes

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the status of girls' and women's education at that time. The new education system is introduced in this section, followed by problems with and content of girls' education. Section 14.2 deals with the Sierra Leone government's responses to international declarations on the expansion and improvement of education. First, we present the response to Education for All (EFA 1990), focusing on the policies and strategies the government put in place to achieve this and discussing their outcomes. These are followed by the effects of the war on girls' and women's education. In Section 14.3 we submit government policies to expand educational provisions after the war, within the framework of EFA. In Section 14.4 we examine the government's efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs 2000) focusing on MDG 2 and 3. In Section 14.5 we set out a brief summary of the EFA National Action Plan. Our deliberations in Section 14.6 focus on technical and vocational education, including a discussion of the opportunities for skills training available in the country. The arguments in Section 14.7 throw light on the two major employment sectors in Sierra Leone, analysing the nature of each and scrutinizing opportunities presented by each sector for employing girls and women. Section 14.8 proposes ways forward for education and skills training, Section 14.9 contains conclusions together with recommendations for policy formulation. Most often, in this chapter 'employment' is used synonymously with 'formal employment'.

14.1.1 Prewar National Educational Status

Sierra Leone's educational system was inherited from British colonial rule and was very academic. Three decades after independence educationalists in the country observed that, although it produced a relatively high level of education, the graduates were unequipped for work. The academic nature of the system, which emphasized cognitive skills at the expense of psychomotor skills, put girls at a disadvantage in school – since girls were expected to study only 'feminine' subjects like needlework, home management and cookery.

Primary school enrolment in the late 1980s was close to 400,000 but this figure declined to 315,000 in 1989–90 and 1990–91, when the war broke out in Sierra Leone (World Bank 2007).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports conducted another survey in 1992 and found that enrolment rates for primary schools was 35% and 11% for secondary schools even though figures from Donors to African Education showed 48% for primary schools and 16.3% for secondary schools.

The 2005 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP 2005) extract on education confirmed that in the 1990s (the war years), gross enrolment ratio (GER) declined, but its figures were higher than the previous two: 51% in primary schools and 17% in secondary schools. Civil wars always take their toll on the education system as was evident in Mozambique, Sudan, Liberia, Rwanda and other war-torn countries.

14.1.2 Prewar Educational Status of Girls and Women in Sierra Leone

Women make up 51.3% of Sierra Leone's population according to Statistics Sierra Leone's Census Report (SSL 2004). Despite their numerical strength they have not benefited on an equal level with their male counterparts from the provisions of social amenities like education and health. The majority of Sierra Leonean women are illiterate, poor and are denied certain basic rights; for example, the right to education (Pessima *et al.* 2010).

Prior to the war, many rural and deprived families considered girls' education to be a waste of resources. From their perspective, the girl would end up in the private domain engrossed in her gender roles of cooking, cleaning the home, preparing food for the family, caring for the sick and elderly, while the boy ventures out into paid employment to earn an income to care for the family. Parents, therefore, did not mind sacrificing all their resources to educate their sons; this is referring to parents who perceived education as a means to better paid jobs.

Culture and tradition have served as barriers to female education in Sierra Leone. Girls are disadvantaged right at the start when parents take a decision on which of their children should go to school. Girls' labour in the home and their contribution to family income often militate against them. Girls' contribution to family labour is common practice in many developing countries. In Liberia, girls face similar setbacks. Families bound to tradition do not favour Western-type education for their girls. They want them to remain at home to work or attend traditional home schools. Other reasons from Liberia have been fear of sexual violence that continued after the war, and fear of rape because of lack of separate bathrooms (USAID/Liberia 2010). The same is true of Madagascar where household chores, parents' views about girls' education, concern for girls' safety and lack of gender-sensitive school environment keep girls away from school (UNICEF/Madagascar 2005).

In countries where educational provision is poor, girls are more likely to be at a disadvantage. For example, when Mozambique gained independence in 1975 it had a population of 10 million. At that time 93% had not attended any formal school and the problem remained after the war (UNESCO 2000). In such circumstances enrolment rate of girls would be mostly very low. Many studies (for example, Alghali *et al.* 2005 (in Sierra Leone); Santibanes 2010 (in Honduras and Nicaragua)) have shown that poverty militates against girls' participation in education. Even in Ghana, which has a much improved economy compared to her neighbours, there were severe gender and regional disparities in primary enrolment, particularly in rural and deprived urban communities in the early years of 2000 (Peprah 2008). The Sierra Leone Education for All National Action Plan further noted that poverty prevents parents and guardians from paying fees for their children (EFA: NAP 2004). Subsequently, poor educational provision, coupled with poverty, contributed to girls' low participation in education in the prewar years.

14.1.3 The New Education System

Two years after the outbreak of the war, in 1993, the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), the military junta in the early 1990s, implemented the 6–3–3–4 system of education. This new structure was based on the recommendations of a publication titled 'Report of the task force on external examination for secondary schools in Sierra Leone'. The task force was set up in 1988 and the report submitted in 1989. The new structure of education came into being four years later (New Education Policy 1995). This system provides nine years of basic education for all who enter it. It involves six years of primary education and three years of junior secondary school education. Next there are three years of senior secondary schooling before pupils can proceed to tertiary education. Progression into the next three years of secondary schooling is however not compulsory. Pupils can enter into vocational/technical institutions on completion of the basic education cycle. Completion of the rest of the educational process depends, among other things, on the financial status of the child's parent.

14.1.4 Problems with Girls' Education

Girls' enrolment in school is one problem; retention is another. The prime concern of parents in traditional homes is preparing girls for marriage. This preparation takes pre-eminence over every other interest in the life of the girl, for example, over formal education. Due to this, domestic duties engulf much of a girl's post-school day. Some girls help their mothers to sell in the market after school. This results in little or no time to study at home. By the end of the day the girl is tired and unable to study. This leads to poor performance in school and loss of confidence in continuing with academic work. In traditional homes in Sierra Leone, boys are not allowed to do domestic work; therefore they have much time at hand to study after each school day.

The report of a consultative meeting of African Education Ministers held in Mauritius in 1994 on 'School drop-out and adolescent pregnancy' revealed that girls' domestic workload is heavy and affects their concentration and performance in school, often leading to withdrawal from school. In this way, completion of a cycle of schooling becomes threatened. The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) 2005 GAP Project found that only one-third of girls enrolled in school in Madagascar remain until the fifth grade (adapted in UNICEF/Madagascar, 2005 report). Similarly, in Sierra Leone, retention of girls in the school system is a major problem in their education process.

Also generating retention issues are the problems of unwanted pregnancies, initiation ceremonies and early marriage. It is not unusual for girls to be withdrawn from school for the purposes of initiation and marriage (World Bank 2004). After the initiation ceremony the girl is considered to be an adult. This very often leads to sexual promiscuity, unwanted pregnancy and dropping out of school. At other times they would simply be given away in marriage after the

initiation rites. Furthermore, girls are withdrawn from school to help generate income to pay school fees for their brothers. Consequently, girls' enrolment and completion of a full educational cycle becomes problematic due to economic constraints, the barriers of customs and tradition, and parents trading off the value of girls' education against their marriageability (World Bank 2004).

According to the study (World Bank 2004), culture affects girls' education in two ways: as a source of ideas about the educational process, and also as a source of ideas and practices about the rights and responsibilities of women. These can have a negative or positive impact on increasing girls' participation in education. Families are convinced that boys' economic security lies in their ability to secure a good job, while girls' security lies in their marriageability (World Bank 2004).

From the outset of Western education in Sierra Leone, education was thought of as a thing for men only. Such thinking laid the foundation for the current gender disparities in education. The 1985 National Population Census analysis showed that 95.1% of women in Sierra Leone aged five and above were illiterate. Making an analysis of the 1984 GCE 'O' level results, the National Action Plan for Development found that out of 641 pupils who took the examination, girls made up only 25% of the total number. It also observed a high drop-out rate among girls (TRC 2004, vol. 3B).

14.1.5 The Content of Girls' Education

The education of women in third-world countries is very significant to development. Their access to education must not only be for the purpose of raising their socio-economic status, but should also be viewed in relation to the intersection of education and development.

The content of girls' education has been influenced by early socialization. As boys and girls grow up, early socialization creates a distinct dichotomy between male and female which both genders inculcate and nurture as reality.

The colonizers, with their Victorian perception of women, envisioned women's responsibilities as being limited to nurturing and conserving society, while the men engaged in economic and political activities (Synders and Tadesse 1995). This is quite clear from the discrimination in the timetable. In the afternoon girls did needlework and boys did subjects like advanced mathematics and geography (Sumner 1963). The boys would need these to get jobs to earn income for the home. The girls needed to read and write to complement the status of their husbands. Furthermore, they needed to refine their feminine skills and learn new ones to make them better wives and mothers.

At the second International Women's Conference held in Copenhagen in 1980, education was integrated into the conference document, 'Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000'. These strategies were accepted by the Nairobi Conference in 1985. Also, at the fourth International Women's Conference (Beijing 1995), additional strategies were set out for implementing equality between men and women in the Platform for Action, a document which

was to be used to promote women's issues even beyond the year 2000 (Skelding 1996). In this document 12 critical issues for the advancement of women were highlighted, and education and training of women were identified as issues of concern for women's empowerment in their societies. Skelding (1996, p. 5), composing an easy-to-read version of the Education and Training of Women component of the Platform for Action, stated that

> non-discriminatory education benefits boys and girls and contributes to a more equal relationship between men and women. If more women are to become agents of change they need: equality of access and educational qualifications.

Concerning the content of girls' education, she noted that 'textbooks do not relate to women's experience; girls are often denied basic training in mathematics, science and technology' (p. 6). The issue of textbooks manipulating girls' choice of career has been much debated, especially in feminist literature (Medel-Anonuevo 1997).

Amara (1997), making a presentation on 'Teachers' classroom behaviour: a critical factor for gender disparity in science and education in Sierra Leone', observed that 18% of pupils entering for the School Certificate/General Certificate Education Examination major in science subjects. When compared by gender 79% were males and 21% females (Amara 1997, in Mahdi 2009). This was four years after the introduction of the new education system of 6–3–3–4. This educational structure was introduced with diversified national curriculum which placed no restriction on female pupils. Before this time, in her 1993 presentation on 'Factors that influence gender disparity in science education' at a workshop on gender disparity in mathematics, science and technology, she indicated that more boys selected careers like medicine, engineering and agriculture, while more girls desired to be secretaries, nurses, air hostesses (Amara 1993, in Mahdi 2009). The subjects that pupils study in school determine their future career. It can be seen from the above that boys had prestigious and well-paid jobs because they did subjects that were requirements for such jobs. The career choices of girls – secretary, nurse or air hostess – are not among the most lucrative jobs in Sierra Leone.

14.2 Education for All, 1990

At the Education for All (EFA) Conference held in Jomtein, Thailand, in 1990, basic education was lauded as necessary for tackling the high illiteracy rates round the globe. The UNESCO world illiteracy figure was 774 million people. Sierra Leone pledged to work towards this goal and, together with other participating countries, set out to achieve the following.

- Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children (goal 1).

- Ensuring that by 2015 children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those from ethnic minorities have access to complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality (goal 2).
- Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skill programmes (goal 3).
- Achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015 especially for women and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all (goal 4).
- Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to achievement in basic education of good quality (goal 5);
- Improving all aspects of education and ensuring excellence for all, so that recognized and measurable outcomes are achieved, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (goal 6) (EFA: NAP 2004, pp. 20–21).

In order to achieve the above in Sierra Leone, the following measures were taken. Non-formal primary education was introduced in areas without any formal school to achieve goal 2; functional adult literacy provision was increased to provide life skills for young people to achieve goal 3; many adult literacy centres were established by various non-governmental organizations like the Sierra Leone Adult Education Association (SLADEA) and the People's Educational Association, Sierra Leone (PEA–SL), to promote literacy and to fulfill goal 4; scholarships and other incentives were given by government to increase children's participation in schooling, especially for girls, in line with goal 5; supply of educational materials and teacher training were undertaken to ensure good-quality education as stated in goal 6.

14.2.1 Non-formal Primary Education

Non-formal primary education (NFPE) is a component of basic education and is in line with EFA goal 2, which is concerned with children in difficult circumstances. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the People's Educational Association, Sierra Leone (PEA–SL) launched the Non-formal Primary Education Project (NFPE) in Sierra Leone in 1992 for out-of-school children. This project was designed to reach a large number of out-of-school children in the country, especially girls and other disadvantaged children in communities without schools. Girls aged 6 to 14 years were special targets for this 3-year programme. Those who performed well later joined the formal school system in class 4 in other areas of the country (EFA: NAP 2004). Skills training was added to the course so that those who could not further their learning would have acquired a skill they could use to generate income in their

communities. Many girls have been able to move from this programme into the formal system. However, the implementers have not been able to keep data on the number that have joined the formal system (PEA–SL 2006).

14.2.2 The National Commission for Basic Education, 1994

The National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), the military junta mentioned earlier, established the National Commission for Basic Education in 1994 to fulfill the EFA goal of reducing the high illiteracy rate in the country. The commission was to coordinate adult and non-formal education in the country. It was recognized that the high illiteracy rate in the country could not be significantly reduced without massive intervention by the government, assisted by donor agencies. The work to address adult and non-formal education was a large and multifaceted undertaking and so the government focused on literacy and the education of women and girls, particularly those living in rural areas. The framework for this was laid in the country plan for basic education developed by the National Commission for Basic Education, 1994 (New Education Policy 1995). The aims and objectives of the policy on adult and non-formal education were:

- to establish a 13-man Adult Education Committee to work within the framework established by the Basic Education Commission;
- to develop a national plan of action for adult and non-formal education built around the country plan for basic education;
- to devise programmes and strategies for the acceleration of adult literacy;
- to obtain and provide supporting resources (personnel and materials) for these programmes from the government and interested donor agencies, to enable the Department of Education, through the Basic Education Commission, to coordinate, supervise, monitor and evaluate all programmes and interventions in the country aimed at improving the literacy rate and providing adult education for early school leavers (New Education Policy 1995, pp. 25–26).

To achieve these aims and objectives, the Ministry of Education, the Basic Education Commission, and the Adult Education Committee did the following:

- implemented a language policy to facilitate the use of English and indigenous languages in literacy and non-formal education classes;
- provided relevant curricula for all levels of literacy and non-formal education classes;
- devised and established links between the formal education system (especially the basic education component) and the non-formal/adult education systems;

- controlled, coordinated, monitored and evaluated all programmes of literacy, adult and non-formal education in the country;
- created a Non-formal Primary Education section within the Primary Division of the Ministry of Education;
- encouraged the enrolment and retention of female pupils by making primary education free;
- made possible the readmission of 'girl-mothers' into the formal system of education (New Education Policy 1995, pp. 26–27).

A new education policy was developed to accommodate changes in the education system. Government thereafter put in place measures to implement the above.

14.2.3 The National Education Action Plan, 1994

The National Education Action Plan (NEAP) was developed to support the new system of education. It addressed all sections of the education system. It concentrated on several issues in educational development which included:

- the coordination of provision for basic schooling (nine years) and for the non-formal education of adults;
- a phased increase in the enrolment of the population of school age and their retention;
- a large and sustained programme of economically productive skills acquisition in association with the upgrading of technical/vocational education – formal and non-formal;
- the increased production, localization and availability of teaching/learning materials for all levels, but especially in support of the Basic Education Reform;
- the strengthening of procedures and support services for the regular assessment of pupil progress, including both continuous assessment and external examination;
- the rehabilitation/construction of educational facilities of all types, including the provision of equipment and furniture;
- the development of adequate guidance and counselling services in schools and colleges;
- a significant improvement in the quantity and quality of training for educational sector personnel of all types, but especially in respect of teachers;
- a major reform of the structure and operation of the Department of Education;

- the establishment of an integral project implementation unit to facilitate cooperation and coordination among different development projects;
- increasing female participation and performance in education;
- strengthening special provision for the education of the disabled, disadvantaged and gifted;
- strengthening of the University of Sierra Leone (New Education Policy 1995, pp. 4–5).

14.2.4 The New Education Policy, 1995

The New Education Policy, developed five years after the Jomtein Conference, was in response to the EFA call. Paragraph B.5 of the policy states that the government will make deliberate efforts to keep women and girls in school at every level of education (p. x). Furthermore, the government emphasized its aim to improve the quality of basic education, reduce the illiteracy rate, especially female illiteracy, and substantially increase the enrolment ratio in basic schooling countrywide. The need to address the gender imbalance in the education system was also underscored by the policy. This would be done through the development of incentives, cost recovery methods, scholarships, community involvement and work study programmes. In addition, the policy of non-discrimination would ensure gender equity in education.

By 2001, the government had introduced free primary education, which resulted in increased enrolment of pupils in primary schools and at junior secondary school level. Primary enrolment increased from 51% in the early 1990s to 90.4% in 2001 (SL–PRSP 2005). Generally, making primary education free increases enrolment in schools, as was the case in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania (Sperling 2006).

Advocacy for free primary education became a policy concern after the EFA conference in 1990.[1] The Global Campaign Action Plan for universal primary education and gender equality by 2015 includes the strategy of abolishing fees and charges for primary education, and making education free and compulsory for at least six years. It also advocates for the establishment of a time-bound plan for the progressive expansion of free and compulsory education to at least nine years. This will be equivalent to nine years of basic education which had already been adopted by Sierra Leone's New Education Policy (1995), and which became operational with the introduction of the 6–3–3–4 system of education. Nevertheless, the three years following primary education is free only for girls.

Additionally, government and non-governmental agencies like the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) embarked on sensitizing parents to the importance of young girls' education and encouraging them to send

[1] The Global Campaign Action Plan for universal primary education and gender equality by 2015. Available at www.campaignforeducation.org.

their female children to school. This sensitization was carried out through the electronic media and formal and informal gatherings.

14.2.5 The National Education Master Plan, 1996

The National Education Master Plan (NEMP) was developed to cover the period 1997–2006. It provided support for women's and girls' education, and technical vocational education. The NEMP goal 3 advocates the elimination of gender disparity in access to and participation in education, through the operation of free junior secondary education for girls by 2006 (Alghali *et al.* 2005, p. 5). This was to ensure girls' increased participation in education beyond the primary level to complete the basic education cycle. This would increase their chances of being employed and enhance their economic condition, as goal 6 of the NEMP aimed at using education as a tool for poverty alleviation (Alghali *et al.* 2005). By 2006 all girls at the junior secondary school level were benefiting from free tuition, free books and uniform to enable them to complete the basic education cycle. Yet girls continued to lag behind their male counterparts in education. By the 2006–7 academic year, at primary level in all four regions of the country, enrolment was 46.2% for girls and 53.8% for boys; at the junior secondary school (JSS) level enrolment was 62% for boys and 38% for girls; at senior secondary school (SSS) level it was 62.4% for boys and 35.8% for girls (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Annual Statistics, 2006–7). For the 2008–9 academic year, primary enrolment was 59% for boys and 49% for girls; JSS enrolment was 57% for boys and 43% for girls; and at the SSS level enrolment was 58% for boys and 42% for girls (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports Annual Statistics 2009). The figures reveal that the provision of free tuition, textbooks and uniforms will not keep girls in school. Parents need further motivation.

14.2.6 Effects of the War on Girls' Education

Girls' enrolment increased with the introduction of free primary education from 40% in 2000 (SSL 2000) to 42.6% in the 2006–7 academic year (MEYS 2007). The gradual expansion of the war through the entire country stifled the government's effort in improving and expanding educational opportunities in Sierra Leone. Many girls and women were abducted. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report states that 'violations committed against women included killings, rape, sexual violence, sexual slavery, slave labour, abductions, assaults, amputation, forced pregnancy, detention, and torture' (TRC 2004, vol. 2, p. 100). In addition to these violations was mass displacement of the population as they searched for safer havens.

Internal displacement and abduction by the rebels greatly affected girls' education. Both actions led to the abrupt cessation of many girls' participation in educational activities. Although those who were internally displaced had temporary shelter schools, education was not an immediate priority in their

lives. Furthermore, the camp schools were not as effective as the children's original schools; this too had a negative effect on the outcome of learning. Girls who were abducted were the most disadvantaged. They were completely removed from their learning environment and many became wives and mothers prematurely (Commonwealth Secretariat 2002).

By the end of the war many of these girls could not go back to school. Others came back sexually battered. Still another proportion could not return to school due to the character transformation that took place in their lives during their stay with the fighting forces, and hence became prostitutes.

14.3 Government Strategies to Expand Education after the War

By the end of the war, government embarked on special programmes to prevent further deterioration in the education system, in recognition of the fact that education is significant in the development of the country. It undertook policy reforms aimed at improving the educational system. Two of these programmes were as follows.

- The Rapid Response Education Programme (RREP) was a new initiative purposely geared towards facilitating the re-entry to the formal school system of school-aged children between 10 and 13 years who had lost formal schooling as a result of the rebel war. The programme lasted for five months, and enabled children who went through it to re-enter the formal school system.

- Complementary Rapid Education for Primary School (CREPS) was aimed at introducing the re-entry of over-aged children into primary school. The six-year primary school syllabus was condensed to three years, so that children in the CREPS programme were expected to complete the programme in three years (Commonwealth Secretariat 2002, p. 162).

These moves caused further increases in primary school enrolment from 260,000 in 2004 to 355,300 in 2005 and an increase in the number of pupils passing the National Primary School Examination from 43,400 in 2004 to 55,800 in 2005. The number of girls passing the examination this same period increased dramatically from 5,176 in 2004 to 20,062 in 2005 (GOSL and UNDP 2008).

In addition to the above, various non-formal primary education programmes were put in place aimed at children in communities without schools, and those who, because of age, could not return to school. Such programmes were community-based and focused mainly on literacy, numeracy and vocational skills training (Commonwealth Secretariat 2002). These programmes were particularly targeting girls. The UNICEF/PEA–SL programme mentioned earlier continued after the war. Other partners providing non-formal primary education were Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), CAUSE Canada, Christian Children's Fund (CCF) and ActionAid.

14.4 The Millennium Development Goals, 2000

In the decade before the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 1990–2000, Sierra Leone experienced a decline in economic and human development (GOSL and UNDP 2008). The rebel war ended a year after the declaration of the MDGs and Sierra Leone was faced with the enormous task of reconstruction and rehabilitation of the destruction caused by the war. The war wrought great damage on the educational system. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports estimates that 80% of educational infrastructure was destroyed and teaching and learning materials were vandalized (Commonwealth Secretariat 2002). Apart from the destruction of school infrastructure, wars prevent school-aged children from going to school, for example, in Somalia, when the civil war broke out in 1991, school buildings were demolished and educational materials looted. By 2005, only 13% boys and 7% girls were enrolled in primary school (UNICEF/Somalia 2005). Likewise, in Liberia, the conflict caused serious damage to the education system; 80% of educational infrastructure was destroyed, schools and training institutions were closed. A generation of students was deprived of education (USAID/Liberia 2010).

In rehabilitating the entire education system, the government of Sierra Leone constructed 200 primary schools, 30 junior secondary schools and 30 technical and vocational institutions between 2002 and 2006. By 2008, government increased spending on education to 20% of its annual budget (GOSL and UNDP 2008) in its effort to meet the MDGs. MDG 3, 'Promote gender equality and empower women' aimed at eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015. This was in accordance with EFA goal 5, 'Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to achievement in basic education of good quality'. As indicated earlier, the government had already put measures in place to ensure girls' increased access, retention and completion of basic education. The government of Sierra Leone and United Nations Development Programme (GOSL and UNDP 2008) report on 'Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Sierra Leone' recorded an increase in girls' enrolment of 39% between 1990 and 2004. In addition, women's literacy increased from 16.7% to 23% in the same period (male literacy was 46.9% in this period). In spite of this improvement, government and its development partners are still working on increasing girls' presence in the education system and promoting women's literacy nationwide.

In rural communities, the government and its development partners are implementing the school feeding programme to encourage parents to enrol and retain their children in school. The support to parents, through the school feeding programme, free primary education and free core textbooks, has been found to be motivating in rural areas in Sierra Leone. This is similar to Brazil's Bolsa Escola (school grant programme) where poor families are provided with income subsidies on the condition that they maintain their children's regular

attendance at school (Palazzo 2005). This strategy of support to poor families has been yielding positive results as is evident in a programme in Kenya where the provision of school meals raised attendance by 30% (Sperling 2006).

The task of achieving MDGs 2 and 3 is challenging. In spite of the government's effort to increase girls' enrolment through free primary education and support for junior secondary school education, the number of girls decreases as they move up the education hierarchies. For example, in the 2008–9 academic year, girls' total enrolment at senior secondary school level was 42%, while that of boys was 58% (MEYS 2009). This problem is not peculiar to Sierra Leone. In Bangladesh significant progress was made in bringing about gender parity in the 1990s. Between 2001–3 girls had outnumbered boys by 9.11% in secondary schools, but at tertiary level it was 53 women to 100 men because women were discouraged from pursuing higher education (Rowshan 2008). This indicates a strong view that women's participation in education should have a cut-off line. It also suggests that free education is not adequate to achieve the desired goals for girls' education: traditional beliefs about girls' education must change.

The MDG Report on Sierra Leone (2010) showed a high drop-out rate for both boys and girls. It stated that the proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reached the last grade of primary school in 2005 was 11%, whereas the MDG target is 100% (Multi-Cluster Indicator Survey 3, 2005 in SLPRSP 2010). At the same time the Core Welfare Indicator Questionnaire showed that the Sierra Leone government had made primary education accessible to only 75% of school-aged children. This report reveals that the Sierra Leone government still needs to cater for the remaining 25% school-aged children to achieve EFA goal 2 (ensuring that by 2015 all children – including girls, children in difficult circumstances and those from ethnic minorities – have access to complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality) and MDG 2 (achieve universal primary education). Though universal primary education is slowly being approached, quality and drop-out rates are of major concern.

14.5 Education for All: National Action Plan, 2004

In developing the National Action Plan (NAP) to achieve Education for All (EFA), all four regions of the country made contributions to its compilation. A similar strategy was adopted in Mozambique. After the EFA conference, seminars and conferences were held to disseminate the conclusions of the conference (EFA). Plans were designed for the reform of the Mozambican education system during these meetings. Many other activities followed complemented by surveys carried out by various technical commissions composed of the Ministry of Education staff and university lecturers who analysed problems faced by the education system, particularly in basic education. The outcome of these exercises formed the basis of their Basic Education Master Plan in 1993 (UNESCO 2002).

The EFA National Action Plan contained the priorities set out for achieving basic education in Sierra Leone by 2015. It emphasized the issues of access, equity and quality within the Sierra Leone education system. The major national EFA policy issues are contained in this document. One of the priority objectives of the plan was to eliminate gender disparities in education. Programmes identified to achieve this were:

- sensitization and gender awareness campaign;
- advocacy by stakeholders to encourage the education of girls;
- enactment of legislation on compulsory education discouraging early and forced marriage;
- construction of more schools and literacy centres nationwide;
- training support for females who study mathematics, science and technology;
- education on gender parity issues in mathematics, science and technology (EFA: NAP 2004, pp. 48–52).

The plan recognized that free and compulsory education was a must for achieving EFA. It acknowledged that investing in female education was a cost-effective way of improving the standard of living in the country. It revealed that the government's strategy of a micro-credit scheme (a loan repayment scheme) through the National Commission for Social Action was a policy to invest in the poor population of the country.

It reiterated a major EFA goal which states that all children in Sierra Leone must have access to free, compulsory and quality education by 2015 (goal 2). It emphasized the provision of access to lifelong skills for all young people and adults, and that training must be skewed towards employment. Girls' access to education was emphasized throughout the document. Subsequently, two objectives for achieving EFA goal 5 were the following.

- Accelerate the process of reducing gender disparity in education.
- Increase enrolment, retention and completion rates of women and girls in formal and non-formal education programmes by the year 2010. Provision was also made for war-affected girls to be placed in schools and awarded scholarships (EFA: NAP 2004, p. 21).

Education was recognized in the EFA: NAP as being important in the fight against poverty and for empowering women. Consequently, providing access to education for girls and ensuring retention up to basic education level became key to reducing gender disparity in education. The 2002 Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports report on the status of education showed that 120 out of 3,000 schools were operating double-shift to accommodate more children at junior secondary school level (EFA: NAP 2004). Furthermore, non-formal education was recognized as being a complementary programme to the overall

educational system, leading to the development of life skills. A harmonized curriculum was developed and lodged in the Non-formal Education Directorate of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports.

14.6 Technical and Vocational Education

The 6–3–3–4 system of education and the 1995 New Education Policy gave prominence to technical and vocational education in the education system in Sierra Leone. This was in fulfillment of EFA goal 3, 'ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes'. Before the introduction of the new system of education, only a few schools offered technical/vocational and commercial subjects. In the new system some general schools do offer TVET at JSS and SSS levels. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports' policy demands that pre-vocational courses are taught at junior secondary school level, for example, introductory technology, and business studies. At senior secondary school level, the curriculum has a list of technical/vocational education subjects, but the lack of equipment and qualified teachers have stymied many schools from offering these courses (World Bank 2007). In spite of this shortcoming, the government is aware of the significance of training in technical and vocational skills, established the National Council for Technical, Vocational and Other Academic Awards (NCTVA) by an act of parliament in 2001. The Council was to set examinations and ensure quality for all technical and vocational training in the country (Alghali *et al.* 2005).

By 2004, a technical vocational education and training survey showed that there were more than 200 TVET institutions in the country with a total enrolment of 30,000 students in the 2003–4 academic year of which 60% were females (World Bank 2007). However, gender stereotyping by subject was observed in that 90% of students in the technology options were males (World Bank 2007). The Western Area, Bonthe (in the south) and Kenema (in the east) do offer TVET programmes at the Higher National Diploma level (HND). Unfortunately, some districts do not have technology-related programmes beyond that offered by Community Education Centres (CECs) (Samba 2009).

With the proliferation of technical and vocational institutions in the country it became necessary for these provisions to be categorized and assigned levels. Entry requirements were laid down, duration of courses were stated and types of certificates offered were indicated.

Courses offered in TVE institutions are grouped as follows.

1. Agriculture trades
2. Construction
3. Mechanical trades
4. Clothing and textiles
5. Electrical/electronic trades
6. Cosmetology trades
7. Commercial trades
8. Arts and crafts work
9. Hospitality trades
10. Marine trades
11. Information technology
12. Air conditioning and refrigeration
13. Boat building
14. Food processing and preservation

An examination of the above list shows that more male-orientated subjects are provided. Naturally, some trades will attract more females as they are compatible with their gender roles. For example, clothing and textiles, cosmetology, trades, food processing and preservation. Although female students are found in commercial trades, on the whole TVE courses are more inclined to equipping male students. Women are beginning to venture into the electrical and mechanical trades but their number is relatively insignificant. Generally, entry requirements into technical/vocational education institutions are as follows.

Category 'B' community education centres with duration of between 6–18 months. The entry requirement is age of labour. On completion, occupations they could fit into are as follows.

1. Bricklaying
2. Hairdressing
3. Boat building
4. Carpentry
5. Weaving
6. Basketry
7. Masonry
8. Blacksmith
9. Carving
10. Soap making
11. Agriculture worker
12. Tailoring
13. Gardening
14. Sales person in food trade
15. Embroidery
16. Tinsmith
17. Goldsmith

Category 'A' community education centres with course duration of 6–18 months. The entry requirement is completion of primary school education/NPSE. The student will qualify to become any of the following in the list below (Samba 2009).

1. Motor vehicle mechanic
2. Electrical fitter
3. Joiner
4. Painter and vanisher
5. Fitter
6. Baker
7. Tool maker
8. Radio and TV technician
9. Gara tie dyer
10. Welder and fabricationist
11. Electronics technician
12. Mechanic
13. Cook
14. Doctor's receptionist
15. Florist
16. Draftsman
17. Surveyor
18. Bookkeeper
19. Cabinet and upholstery maker
20. Plumber
21. Cosmetologist
22. Sheet metal worker
23. Mechanical drawing personnel
24. Air conditioner and refrigerator technician
25. Bank clerk
26. Pharmacist assistant
27. Hotel specialist
28. Secretary

Category: technical and vocational institutes. These are the standard technical and vocational institutions. The duration of courses is two to three years. Entry requirements are completion of SSS/WASSCE, GCE 'O' level, and OND.

On completion of the courses the recognized occupations they will enter into are (Samba 2009, p. 5) as follows.

1. Building construction
2. Construction draftsman
3. Technical draftsman
4. Electricals
5. Telecommunication technology
6. Electronics technician
7. Customs and excise duty
8. Clothing and textile
9. Automobile mechanics
10. Hotel specialist
11. Machinery
12. Catering and hotel management
13. Assistant business and tax consultancy
14. Home economics
15. Agriculture
16. Computer technology
17. Advanced air-conditioning and refrigeration

Technical and vocational education and training institutions provide five training fields for learners, namely: craft, industry and commerce, profession, agriculture and domestic science.

By 2008 there were 370 registered technical and vocational institutions in the country (Samba 2009). However, there are some unregistered institutions that could be added to this number. The government assists 154 such institutions. At government-assisted institutions the gender enrolment figures were 36% male and 64% female (Samba 2009). It is worth noting that women were concentrated in training components that reinforced their gender roles.

Many TVET institutions, especially those privately owned, are plagued by numerous problems: poor accommodation, inadequate and obsolete equipment and other training materials, and improperly trained teachers. On the whole TVET is largely provided by individuals. Their fees are high and this keeps many potential students out (World Bank 2007).

14.6.1 Training Opportunities for Girls and Women in Formal and Non-formal Training Institutions

The 6–3–3–4 system was to develop the human resources needed to meet the developmental challenges of the country. To reduce wastage, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) were located between the junior secondary school and the senior secondary school to accommodate those completing junior secondary school (New Education Policy 1995). The junior secondary schools were to provide 'opportunities for the continued acquisition of basic skills and knowledge'; introduce 'subjects encouraging the development of nationally desired and saleable skills' (p. 11); and assist in the 'acquisition of abilities appropriate and necessary for entry into modes of employment or self-employment not requiring prior training in specialist skills' (New Education Policy 1995, pp. 11–12).

Training opportunities exist in the country for different types of skills and at various levels of training, as indicated in Table 14.1. The extent to which these

TABLE 14.1. Nature of TVE institutions in Sierra Leone.

Category	Level	Entry requirement	Duration of courses	Certificates gained
Community education centre (CEC) 'B'	Non-formal	Age of labour	6–18 months	National Vocational Certificate
Community education centre (CEC) 'A'	Formal	Completion of primary/NPSE	6–18 Months	Trade test 'B'
Junior secondary technical/vocational (JSTV)	Junior secondary school	National Primary School Examination	3 years	Trade test 'A'
Technical vocational centre (TVC)	Junior secondary school	Completion of JSS/BECE/trade cert. 'A'	1–2 years	Diploma/OND
Senior secondary technical/vocational (SSTV)	Senior secondary school	BECE	3 years	
Technical vocational institute (TVI)	Senior secondary	Completion of SSS/WASSSCE/GCE 'O' level/OND	2–3 years	Diploma/OND/ HND
Professional institutes	Post-secondary	WASSSCE/OND/HND	3–4 years	Diploma/HND/ degree
Polytechnic	Tertiary	WASSSCE/OND/HND	3–4 years	Diploma/OND/ HND/degree

Sources: Samba 2009. *Note*: BECE stands for Basic Education Certificate Examination. 'HND' stands for Higher National Diploma. 'OND' stands for Ordinary National Diploma. JSS stands for junior secondary school. 'SSS' stands for senior secondary school.

are available to women and girls is a case in point. Training opportunities are offered by formal and non-formal institutions. Formal training is provided by government and NGOs while non-formal training is provided by community-based organizations and individuals.

Government policies, based on ILO Convention 100 (1957) on equal remunerations for men and women for work of equal value, reiterate the essence of providing facilities for counselling in vocational training and employment for women, encouraging them to take advantage of these facilities, and allowing them equal access to these occupations.

Formal skills training centres include community education centre 'A' category (CEC 'A'); junior secondary school technical vocational education (JSTVE); technical and vocational centres (TVCs); senior secondary technical vocational education (SSTVE); technical vocational institutes (TVI); professional institutes and polytechnics. But these require prior educational attainment for enrolment, ranging from completion of primary education to the possession of the West Africa Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSSCE), GCE 'O' level, Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and Higher National Diploma (HND). Many women can therefore not access TVET due to their literacy status and lack of formal qualifications. The total percentage of national literacy is 35.1%. Literacy by gender is 46.9% for males and 24.4% for females (Statistics Sierra Leone 2004). Consequently, though there are various categories of technical and vocational training institutions and centres for skill acquisition, entry requirements pose a limitation on women and girls.

The next limitation posed by formal training institutions is the courses offered. By their socio-cultural orientation, girls' choices are limited. In community education centre category 'A' 28 occupations are catered for and girls and women have 10 options, which are: bakery, gara tie-dye, cook, hotel specialist, florist, bookkeeping, cosmetology, pharmacist's assistant, doctor's receptionist and secretarial studies. The technical and vocational centres provide 6 options for females out of a total of 17 occupations, namely, customs and excise duty, clothing and textiles, hotel specialist, catering and hotel management, home economics, and agriculture. Often girls and women lack adequate information on vocational training, science and technology. Many girls and women are not aware of some of the courses offered at these centres, for example, florist, doctor's receptionist, customs and excise duty. The absence of role models is also a demotivating factor in opting for subjects that could lead to certain vocational or technical skills acquisition.

In addition, the cost of training in formal institutions discriminates against women and girls who are generally poor and may have dropped out of school, or did not go to school, for lack of funds to pay fees. Janjua and Naveed (2009), in their study, 'Skill acquisition and the significance of informal training system in Pakistan: some policy implications', raised concerns over the high cost of formal training in Pakistan marginalizing almost two-thirds of the labour force. This suggests that even where entry is not limited by educational requirements, cost will prevent many women from enrolling in these centres.

Alternatively, non-formal skills training could be acquired from community education centre category 'B'or on the job in apprenticeship, where either a very minimal amount is demanded or where payment is in kind; that is, the apprentice assists the master craftsman in domestic duties. The course duration in formal training ranges from six months to three or four years. Conversely, training acquired through apprenticeship could last longer. Sometimes learners enter into apprenticeship at a very young age, for example, 8, 9 and 10, and would remain until they become adolescents and are ready to operate their own workshops or trades.

14.7 Employment and Income Opportunities for Girls and Women in Sierra Leone

The last population census revealed that about 85.62% of the population aged 15–64 years made up the labour force. However, not all of this population was employed, 96.45% were employed and 3.55% were unemployed at the time of the census (UNFPA and EU 2006). Male participation in employment was 52.6% and female participation was 47.4%. They were engaged in various occupations in the economy, as shown in Table 14.2.

From an institutional and organizational perspective, African economies are usually divided into two broad groups of sectors, namely, the formal and informal sectors (Juma *et al.* 1993). In this regard, these are the two sets of employers and employees in Sierra Leone. The formal sector, being well organized with explicit rules and having rigid bureaucratic procedures, seriously constrains prospective entrants. When a vacancy exists it is advertised and conditions for applying are stated. Next, an interview is conducted for shortlisted candidates. In some instances, when too many people qualify, an examination is conducted for shortlisted candidates, after which an interview is conducted. Literacy is therefore a prerequisite for entry into formal sector employment. In addition, particular skills are sometimes required for filling some vacancies. Women, therefore, with their high illiteracy rate and lack of essential skills, are often at a disadvantage in applying for jobs in the formal sector. Besides, the formal sector, being limited in size at present, could only employ a relatively small percentage of the working population (SL–MDG 2010). The Sierra Leone Integrated Household Survey (SLIHS) report of 2005 revealed that 93% of urban resident women and 94% of rural women who were economically active were not in paid labour (SLIHS 2005 in GoSL and UNDP 2008). However, the GOSL and UNDP (2008) figures show that there has been an increase in female participation in the labour force in Sierra Leone, from 51.3% to 53% between 1990 and 2004. Female participation in the labour force is generally low in many African countries: 40% in Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda. The figure is higher in places like Burkina Faso, Burundi, Gambia, Ghana and Sierra Leone (World Bank and AFD 2010). The alternative employer is the informal sector which does not restrict entrants.

TABLE 14.2. Distribution of the labour force by industry and gender.

Industry	Male and female		Males		Females	
	Total labour force	Distribution of labour force (%)	Total labour force	Distribution of labour force (%)	Total labour force	Distribution of labour force (%)
Crop farming	1,177,873	64.01	568,165	60.42	609,708	67.77
Livestock	7,241	0.39	3,940	0.42	3,301	0.37
Poultry	1,796	0.10	866	0.09	930	0.10
Hunting	1,241	0.07	777	0.08	464	0.05
Forestry	6,180	0.34	4,060	0.43	2,120	0.24
Fishing	48,821	2.65	31,834	3.39	16,987	1.89
Mining	67,644	3.68	58,481	6.22	9,163	1.02
Manufacturing	9,203	0.50	7,236	0.77	1,967	0.22
Electricity/gas/water	8,255	0.45	7,059	0.75	1,196	0.13
Construction	38,307	2.08	27,829	2.96	10,478	1.16
Trade/repairs	263,459	14.32	100,398	10.68	163,061	18.12
Hotels/restaurants	4,890	0.27	2,604	0.28	2,286	0.25
Trans/com/storage	15,654	0.85	14,402	1.53	1,252	0.14
Financial intermediate	6,873	0.37	3,973	0.42	2,900	0.32
Estate/renting/business	10,602	0.58	5,428	0.58	5,174	0.58
Public admin/def/SS	25,804	1.40	21,038	2.24	4,766	0.53
Education	33,550	1.82	22,708	2.41	10,842	1.21
Health/social/WK	19,594	1.06	9,739	1.04	9,855	1.10
Other community/social work	81,157	4.41	43,378	4.61	37,779	4.20
Private HH employee	8,062	0.44	3,895	0.41	4,167	0.46
External org/bodies	3,796	0.21	2,486	0.26	1,310	0.15
Sierra Leone	1,840,002	100.00	940,296	100.00	899,706	100.00

Source: UNFPA and EU 2006.

14.7.1 Formal Sector Employment in Sierra Leone

In Sierra Leone, formal sector employment is provided by government, non-governmental organizations and private firms, all of which require formal entry procedures and are hierarchically structured. For example, in the government civil service, all positions are graded from 1–14. They are also categorized into five classes, namely, the administrative class, the professional and technical class, the executive class, the clerical class and the manipulative class. The senior positions begin from grade 7, while grade 14 is the highest position. The paramount consideration in the appointment of members of the civil service of Sierra Leone is the highest standard of qualification, efficiency, competence and integrity. The appropriate grade for a position is determined by the responsibility of the work, risk involved in the job, consequences or effects of error or work failure, independence of action and initiative expected in accomplishment of work, supervision over others and special qualifications required for successful performance of work. For appointment into senior positions, the following factors are considered: knowledge required for performance of complex duties at senior level, complexity of work, scope and effect of decisions and actions, and independence of action (Bangura 2004). Consequently, in public administration, defence and state security, women form only 0.53% of the total workforce (UNFPA and EU 2006). The emphasis in the formal sector is on procedures and qualifications. The factors responsible for women's clustering in the lower hierarchies of this sector have been discussed above. The majority of women working in the Sierra Leone civil service fall below grade 7.

14.7.2 Informal Sector Employment in Sierra Leone

In this sector, a wide range of economic activities are undertaken. Because of the ease of entry many people (men and women) flood the sector, being an employer of 'last resort' (Khalek 2005). In his essay on 'Viable financial services for development', Khalek (2005) identified three categories of workers in this sector: those who are struggling to survive, the self-employed, and micro-enterprise. The survivors, he stated, are very poor; they simply generate income to live on a daily basis. The self-employed produce goods for sale, purchase goods for resale or offer services for money. Micro-enterprise is very small business and often operates from a fixed location with regular hours. He observed that those working in this sector create their own employment either individually or in small-scale family businesses (Khalek 2005).

The informal sector now characterizes the labour market in Africa and it accounts for 72% of non-agricultural employment in sub-Saharan Africa (Verick 2006). Women make up the majority of informal sector workers in Sierra Leone (UNFPA and EU 2006) due to their exclusion from the formal sector. The ease of entry and the ability to combine income-earning with domestic responsibilities make the sector attractive to girls and women. In

2001 it was estimated that the informal sector accounted for at least two-thirds of the labour force and over 70% of the urban labour force in Sierra Leone (Commonwealth Secretariat 2002). For many women in Sierra Leone participation in the informal sector is a survival strategy, especially after the war which left many of them as heads of households. The informal sector has been creating new jobs, and providing linkages among small-scale manufacturers, promoting labour intensive production processes and integrating local markets (Khalek 2005). It has also 'built associations and mobilized traditional savings and credit schemes to offer sources of capital for women' (Kargbo 2009, p. 12).

Many women in the informal sector are involved in trading. Verick (2006) observed that the informal sector in Africa is dominated by trade related activities and that manufacturing and servicing account for only a small percentage of the sector.

Women have opportunities for employment in the formal sector provided they possess the educational levels and skills required. They also have an open-ended opportunity in the informal sector for employment and income generation.

14.8 Ways Forward

For education to become a tool for poverty alleviation, the level attained and the type and content received determine the employment sector that will absorb the graduates. Preparation for future employment must begin in schools and continue in tertiary institutions, to better equip prospective job seekers. For women to contribute to national development they must be equipped with both cognitive and psychomotor skills.

14.8.1 Education

The government's efforts at increasing girls' participation in education will not yield its desired goal if measures are not put in place to ensure retention, completion and achievement through quality delivery. In post-conflict Rwanda, to promote education, a child-friendly atmosphere with an appropriate learning environment was created. This had a positive effect on girls' education. Teachers, too, were committed to seeing pupils succeed. In child-friendly schools, when classrooms were not sufficient, makeshift classes were held outdoors. This resulted in great progress in enrolling girls in primary school (UNICEF, Rwanda 2007). This suggests that a proper school environment must be buttressed by teacher commitment.

When the school environment is conducive to learning, children's performance may improve. This may in turn lead to more girls remaining to complete a cycle of schooling. In spite of the government's effort to rehabilitate schools damaged during the war and to construct more schools under the Sababu

Education Project,[2] many schools in Sierra Leone are still overcrowded and in some the teacher–pupil ratio far exceeds the official figure of 1:40 (New Education Policy 1995). This is a problem for the teachers as it reduces their efficiency and creates a disadvantageous condition for girls, who are generally less confident, and who may be suffering from harassment from boys that a teacher could not notice. This is likely to lead to girls' inability to cope with schoolwork and could result in poor performance which has been identified as one reason for girls dropping out. Schools must be equipped with better facilities. For example, pipe-borne water, toilet facilities, spacious classrooms, electricity and playing fields could all serve as motivation to the pupils.

Although efforts are underway to train unqualified and untrained teachers through distance education, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, should make it compulsory for all untrained and unqualified teachers to enrol for training to improve teacher quality. Gender issues should be included in teacher training courses to make teachers gender aware. This may have a positive effect on their classroom behaviour, especially towards girls. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports should provide logistics to enhance proper and effective monitoring of schools. Regular in-service training programmes for teachers could contribute to improving teacher quality. The training of teachers should be accompanied by improved conditions of service; this will motivate them to be more dedicated to their work, hence making them more committed to seeing the pupils pass their examinations. Their salaries must be raised in consonance with current living conditions and relevant allowances paid on time. Teacher satisfaction is part of a school-friendly atmosphere. Girls may stand to gain greatly from such a school-friendly atmosphere and this may contribute to reducing drop-out rate among them. Moreover, modern methods of teaching and learning should be introduced in schools in Sierra Leone. Children should be introduced to information technology at an early stage in their learning process. All of the above will contribute to keeping girls interested in the learning processes.

The parents, guardians and the community as a whole should cooperate with school authorities to ensure that pupils achieve in school. Accountability and transparency should be emphasized within the school management system; materials supplied to schools must be used for the benefit of the children. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports should follow up on the distributed materials in the respective schools.

The hidden cost of school attendance should be minimized. It has been observed that when school fees are abolished, other charges become the unofficial 'fee'. This was observed in Kenya, Zambia, Malawi and Sierra Leone (World Bank 2007, 2008). This hidden cost becomes a burden on parents, and poor families cannot cope with it. Sierra Leone has a high incidence of poverty (54% in the urban areas and 80% in rural areas (World Bank 2007)) and

[2] Sababu – the rehabilitation of Basic Education Project was later renamed the Sababu Education Project. Sababu means 'opportunity' (Alghali *et al.* 2005).

poverty has been identified as one of the reasons for girls' lower participation in education (World Bank 2004; GOSL and UNDP 2008).

With free primary education and the supply of learning materials in place, government should formulate policies to ensure that parents send their girls to school, sanction those who refuse to do so, and ensure that the sanctions are implemented. This is because education generally opens up opportunities for employment.

Families and communities should be supported somehow as an incentive to retain their girls in school, since some of the reasons given for girls' exclusion or dropping out of school include their contribution to family labour and income generation. Sperling (2011) noted that even modest incentives to parents make a huge difference as scholarships and conditional cash transfer have shown an increase in school attendance for both boys and girls in Bangladesh, Mexico and Brazil. In Sierra Leone, literacy classes could be established in communities and microcredit loan schemes incorporated into each, to be received only by families whose girls are in school. This could increase the adult literacy rate in the country and raise girls' school completion rate. Brazil's 'Bolsa Escole' retained black and indigenous pupils in school. The programme also empowered women as the income benefit was given to mothers who were responsible for monitoring their children's school attendance and performance (Palazzo 2005). In Madagascar, the 'girl to girl' strategy was adopted when it was observed that only one-third of girls enrolled in primary school reached grade 5. The strategy was introduced in 2001. It required teachers to identify girls who were likely to drop out of school and paired them with girls in the fourth and fifth grades. They began to do things in common, walking to school together, playing during break time and doing their homework together. The older girl built the confidence of the younger in the classroom (UNICEF/Madagascar 2005). Mexico's 'Opportunidades' also compensated parents for keeping their children in school. This increased girls' enrolment and retention in the school system. All of the above show that a little more effort could increase girls' school attendance and retention.

Best practices could be adopted or adapted according to the socio-cultural milieu of the receiving country. The microcredit loan scheme which Sierra Leoneans are familiar with and look up to could be used as motivation for parents to enrol and keep their girls in school. Facilitators in community literacy classes should enlighten their learners about the essence of girls' education. In addition, the microcredit loan schemes in the literacy classes could serve other purposes: first as motivation to remain on the literacy programme, and next to create an opportunity for them to generate income to meet the extra charges levied by the schools.

This should be followed by community sensitization regarding the importance of girls' education, and encouraging parents and guardians to enrol their girls in school. The school feeding programme which is currently being implemented in selected communities should be expanded to all rural areas and to schools in deprived communities in urban areas.

Government policy on readmission of girl mothers should be enforced. Some heads of schools still refuse to admit girl-mothers on the moral basis that they would be a negative influence on other girls. Some parents too are reluctant to support such girls on the grounds that it is a waste of limited resources. They prefer the girl to stay at home and nurture her child. Some girl-mothers stay too long at home and eventually lose the confidence to return to school. Depending on the level from which they drop out many revert to illiteracy after a few years, thereby reducing their chances of being gainfully employed, especially in formal institutions.

Ensuring women's and girls' education requires either additional efforts or new initiatives: a gender desk could be created in the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports specifically to implement or follow up on the strategies contained in the National Education Action Plan that promotes girls' education. These strategies are:

- gradual provision of free and compulsory education for girls at Basic Education Level (this has been achieved, but is to be monitored);
- legislating the minimum marriage age for girls to 18 years (they would have completed secondary schooling by then) and penalties for men/boys who impregnate girls before 18 years;
- promoting counselling and family life education to avoid early pregnancy;
- readmission of girl-mothers into school;
- allowing unmarried female students to continue their courses at tertiary level when pregnant (already in place);
- increasing participation of girls in mathematics, science and technology;
- recognizing non-formal education for girls and its linkage with the formal system;
- providing childcare facilities near learning centres for women learners in adult education programmes and girls in non-formal education programmes;
- allowing unmarried female teachers to enjoy maternity leave when they become pregnant.

Girls' education at basic education level has not become compulsory and girl-mothers are facing discrimination in admission in some schools. A well-established gender desk with the requisite logistics could effectively ensure the smooth implementation of all nine strategies.

14.8.2 Skills Training

A country's development potential is seriously limited by the capacity of its manpower, particularly its middle-level manpower. The World Bank and Agency Française de Developpement (2010) conducted a survey in 18 African countries on gender dynamics that impact work-related indicators such as employment, unemployment, sector of activities and pay gap. The report stated that two sets of people were found to dominate the few jobs available in the labour market in these countries: those with better human capital, that is, education, and those with more power in the home, usually men. These findings reiterate the importance of education as one major factor influencing employment opportunity and throws light on the unequal power relations in the home in African societies.

In addition to education, women need to be trained in appropriate and relevant skills to enable them to either compete with their male counterparts for the limited jobs in the formal sector, or enhance their setting up of micro-enterprises in the informal sector. Training is necessary to fill the middle-level manpower needs of a country. One major problem that girls who drop out of school and women in the wider society face is the lack of the requisite technical and vocational skills (Mahdi 2009). To build their capacities, they need information on training opportunities available in the country where they could learn new skills or develop their basic skills in preparation for either better-paying jobs or improved performance in the informal sector. The training would enable them to produce better-value goods and services and contribute to economic growth in the country. To boost their performance in the agricultural sector, women need to learn new skills as opposed to only the traditional skills. The passing of the Gender Act 'Devolution of Estate' in 2007 entitled women to own property but landownership remains a problem, especially for women in rural areas. This points to the fact that women cannot own agricultural plots that they could invest in. The land problem needs to be reconsidered. Agricultural extension workers should target women farmers even in their backyard gardens. Because of the sensitivity of cultural dictates in some communities, more female agricultural extension workers should be trained. These women could better interact with their colleagues in the performance of their agricultural activities.

Women's employment opportunities must be diversified. In Cambodia, though three-quarters of their employment is in agriculture, the opening up of the garment industry led to rapid employment growth, especially for women. In another post-conflict scenario in El Salvador, recovery of the service sector was a major factor in improving employment opportunities for women. Almost 75% of El Salvadoran women work in the service sector (M'cleod and Davalos 2008). Following these examples, Sierra Leonean women could be trained to work in industry. They could be taught simple operation of machines in addition to doing manual work, in the available industries in the country. To buttress this, much premium should be placed on technical and vocational education

for women. At technical and vocational training centres women should be counselled to take advantage of the variety of skills offered and not just cluster into what are considered to be feminine skills.

The World Bank report on gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan underscored the significance of technical and vocational training in increasing women's employment opportunities. The report stated that vocational training enables women to acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills to meet basic needs, open doors to job opportunities and raise women's standard of living. In Afghanistan, where strict adherence to culture is emphasized, women are allowed to work in the repair of computers, mobile phones, and other electronics (Solotaroff and Hashili 2007). In Sierra Leone these are not popular areas for women as they are considered to fall within the male domain. At the myriad of community education centres throughout the country, women should be counselled to train in non-traditional skills. In addition, female role models in non-traditional jobs should be recruited at these training centres. To attract more women, training must be less expensive. Furthermore, if women are training for self-employment, training should include business planning techniques (Solotaroff and Hashili 2007) and appropriate social skills to enable them to perform better on the job. As the New Education Policy (1995) laid premium on technical and vocational education, the infrastructure of government technical and vocational education institutions should be upgraded and expanded to accommodate more learners. Government and development partners could equip them with modern technologies and other relevant training materials. Government should increase the number of private institutions they are currently supporting to help improve quality of delivery in private institutions. In training institutions and centres, internship should be a must. This will ensure quality on completion of the training programme.

The government and/or development partners should establish financial lending facilities at community level that cater for women's businesses. The loan conditions should adopt local initiatives such as having someone in the community to stand as guarantor for the borrower. This is an acceptable practice in rural communities. Such loans could enable women to set up their own enterprises if they fail to get employment elsewhere. The lending institutions should have field officers to monitor the performance of the women in their businesses and to offer advice where necessary. The institutions should also encourage women who receive loans from them to save a minimal amount of their profits with them. This could be one way to reduce the rate of defaulting.

At the formal level, the EFA: NAP programme 5 (training support for females who study mathematics, science and technology) must be adhered to. Further, studies in these subjects could be obtained from both private and government-owned tertiary institutions including vocational and technical institutions. As the formal labour market in Sierra Leone is limited in scope (UNFPA and EU 2006; SL–MDGs 2010), women should be trained to be self-employed. The 2004 Housing and Population Census revealed that 1,388,161 persons were in self-employment, and of these 702,554 were males and 680,607 were females

(UNFPA and EU 2006). The formal employment sector could be expanded by creating more jobs and/or encouraging foreign investors to establish various enterprises in the country.

14.9 Conclusion

We have looked at the educational and employment status of girls and women in a post-conflict context. We have described the government's efforts in policy reforms to increase girls' participation in education. We also examined training opportunities available in the country. Examining the employment sector, we observed that girls and women outnumbered men in the informal sector.

The paper has revealed that poverty, parental perception of girls' education, gender division of labour and emphasis on girls' marriageability all pose serious hurdles to girls' education, and subsequently their formal employment. It also revealed that lack of the requisite skills is a hindrance to women's and girls' employment. In the light of these issues, we propose the following for consideration in policy formation.

14.9.1 Education

Concerning education, the paper has addressed several issues that need to be considered in order to increase women's and girls' education and employment. These are presented below for consideration in policy formulation:

- more sensitization is needed for parents who refuse to enrol their girls in school;
- the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports should mount a strong monitoring mechanism to minimize high and hidden costs of school attendance, ensure the distribution of school materials and adequate accountability and transparency in school management;
- improve on teacher training and include occasional in-service training to ensure quality of educational delivery;
- employ more teachers to reduce the high pupil–teacher ratio;
- gender issues should be included in teacher training courses;
- teachers' conditions of service should be revised in line with current living conditions;
- schools should be equipped with better facilities like adequate accommodation, pipe-borne water, sufficient furniture, separate toilets for boys and girls, electricity and computers;

- greater involvement of parents and community in school management throughout the country;
- giving parents incentives either directly or indirectly in cash or in kind to encourage girls' education.

14.9.2 Employment

On the employment side, the paper has addressed several issues that lead to suggestions for policy that can be briefly stated:

- encourage girls to study subjects that will earn them better-paying jobs, which will necessitate the provision of guidance counsellors in all secondary schools in Sierra Leone;
- entrepreneurial skill development in both formal and non-formal institutions;
- reduce the cost of training in technical/vocational education institutions;
- establish microfinancing at community level;
- train more female agricultural extension workers to reach female farmers with new farming techniques.

Appendix A: Acronyms

BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
EFA	Education for All
EFA: NAP	Education for All: National Action Plan
ERNWACA	Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa
EU	European Union
FAWE	Forum of African Women Educationalists
GOSL	Government of Sierra Leone
GRADOC	Gender Research and Documentation Centre
JSS	Junior secondary school
MICS3, 2005	Multi-cluster indicator survey 3, 2005
PEA–SL	People's Educational Association Sierra Leone
SL–PRSP	Sierra Leone Poverty Reduction Strategies Paper
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
SSS	Senior secondary school
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNGEI	United Nations Gender Education Initiative
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPE	Universal primary education
USL	University of Sierra Leone
WASSSCE	West Africa Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination

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