



Photographs: © UNICEF - Sierra Leone

# A Case Study of the Sierra Leone Delivery Unit

## DeliverEd Initiative Policy Note

Kate Anderson, Abril Ibarra and Neelofar Javaid

December 2022



## **DeliverEd: Building knowledge on how to use delivery approaches to advance education reforms**

The DeliverEd Initiative was launched in 2019 to strengthen the evidence base for how governments can achieve their policy priorities through delivery units and other delivery approaches. Globally, more than 80 countries have used such approaches to achieve better outcomes for policy reform and implementation. Forty-seven percent of those include an education focus, either as a single focus sector or as part of a multisector approach. But there was little empirical evidence, especially from developing countries, on the effectiveness of delivery approaches in delivering education outcomes or on the design choices, contextual features, and enabling factors that contribute to their performance.

DeliverEd has helped to fill this evidence gap and create a better understanding of the practices leaders can adopt to improve their policy delivery and reform efforts. It has conducted research within and across countries on the effectiveness of delivery approaches in improving reform implementation, with the key findings included in this final report. It has facilitated knowledge and experience sharing among countries—for example, through the Africa Policy Forum—to equip policymakers with a deeper understanding of delivery challenges and solutions to make informed decisions. It continues to increase awareness and the uptake of research to improve schooling and learning in low-income countries.

The Education Commission leads DeliverEd with Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government and funding from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO). Other partners include the University of Toronto, the Institute for Educational Planning and Administration (under the Auspices of UNESCO), University of Cape Coast, Ghana, Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS) in Pakistan, World Bank, and Georgetown University in the U.S. For more information about DeliverEd, and to view the country studies and other related research and policy engagement materials, please visit [www.educationcommission.org/delivered-initiative](http://www.educationcommission.org/delivered-initiative).

We are very grateful to the Blavatnik School of Government and all our research partners for their in-depth research, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. This DeliverEd Final report is the Education Commission's interpretation of the research. For the detailed research papers themselves, please see the next page.

## DeliverEd Research Products

Anderson, K., Ibarra, A., & Javaid, N. (December 2022). [The Education Commission. A Case Study of the Sierra Leone Delivery Unit](#). DeliverEd Initiative Policy Note.

Bell, S., Asim, M., Mundy, K., Pius Nuzdor, H., Boakye-Yiadom, M., & Mensah Adosi, C. (May 2023). How do regions, districts and schools respond to the introduction of a delivery approach: Evidence from Ghana. DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Bell, S., Leaver, C., Mansoor, Z., Mundy, K., Qarout, D., & Williams, M. (March 2023). [The Role of Delivery Approaches in Education Systems Reform: Evidence from a Multi-Country Study](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Boakye-Yiadom, M., Leaver C., Mansoor, Z., & Iocco, MP. (March 2023). [Management and performance in mid-level bureaucracies: Evidence from Ghanaian education districts](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Gulzar, S., Ladino, JF., Mehmood, MZ., & Rogger, D. (March 2023). [Command and Can't Control: An Evaluation of Centralized Accountability in the Public Sector](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Malik, R. & Bari, F. (May 2023). [Improving Service Delivery via Top-Down Data-Driven Accountability: Reform Enactment of the Education Road Map in Pakistan](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Mansoor, Z., Qarout, D., Anderson, K., Carano, C., Yecaló-Teclé, L., Dvorakova, V., & Williams, M. (July 2021). [A Global Mapping of Delivery Approaches](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Qarout, D. (November 2022). [The Accountability Paradox: Delivery Units in Jordan's Education Sector 2010–2019](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

Williams, M., Leaver, C., Mundy, K., Mansoor, Z., Qarout, D., Asim, M., Bell, S., & Bilous, A. (April 2021). [Delivery Approaches to Improving Policy Implementation: A Conceptual Framework](#). DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper.

## DeliverEd Policy Products

Anderson, K., & Bergmann, J. (2022). The Education Commission. [Design Choices for Delivery Approaches in Education](#), DeliverEd Initiative Policy Brief.

Anderson, K., & Carano, C. (2021). The Education Commission. [The Challenge of Delivering for Learning](#) DeliverEd Initiative Policy Brief.

Villaseñor, P. The Education Commission. (2021) [Delivery Approaches in Crisis or Conflict Situations](#), DeliverEd Initiative Policy Brief.

## Project overview

This note on policy delivery in Sierra Leone is one of a series of research products that are being produced as part of the DeliverEd Initiative, funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). DeliverEd was launched in 2019 and aims to strengthen the evidence base for how governments can achieve their policy priorities through the use of delivery approaches. DeliverEd is undertaking in-country research in Ghana, Pakistan, Jordan, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone. This Sierra Leone policy note is based on a qualitative analysis of a small number of semi-structured interviews with government officials and partner organizations working with the delivery unit established by David Sengeh, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education at the MBSSE. This note aims to complement the findings from the other DeliverEd in-country studies, contributing to conclusions to support policymakers around the world in how to use delivery approaches to improve policy implementation. variability within the system (short-term fluctuations in the schools), rather than more structural issues that could better explain school performance.

## Objectives and research questions

As previously stated, the aim of this Sierra Leone policy note is to help fill the evidence gap about delivery approaches by creating a better understanding of the practices of the Sierra Leone delivery unit at the MBSSE. The note provides insights on what the delivery unit at the MBSSE in Sierra Leone has helped to achieve and how, but it is not an evaluation of the delivery unit or its team.

The key research questions for this Sierra Leone policy note are:

1. How does the Sierra Leone delivery unit map onto the core functions of a delivery approach?
2. How does a “homegrown” and locally led delivery unit start and evolve overtime?
3. What are the main challenges experienced and solutions provided by a small and locally led delivery unit?

---

### Acknowledgments

We gratefully acknowledge funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and would like to thank the Government of Sierra Leone, and the Blavatnik School of Government University of Oxford for their collaboration and advice. We would especially like to thank Amy Bellinger, Director Programs Education Commission for her excellent guidance. All errors are our own. The views expressed in this chapter are those of the authors alone.

<sup>1</sup> DeliverEd defines a delivery approach as an institutionalized unit or structured process within a government bureaucracy that aims to rapidly improve bureaucratic functioning and policy delivery by combining a set of managerial functions in a novel way to shift attention from inputs and processes alone to also include outputs and outcomes.

## Methodology

DeliverEd conducted semi-structured virtual interviews with a small number of government officials, policymakers, and partner organizations in Sierra Leone in late 2021 and early 2022. A total of 15 people were interviewed, including David Sengeh, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education. Other officials interviewed from the MBSSE included key advisors to the minister, as well as leaders of sub-agencies within the MBSSE. Implementing and supporting partners were also interviewed, and these interviewees included staff at the UK-based Education Partnerships



Group (EPG) nonprofit, the UK-based Fab Inc. advisory firm, the EdTech Hub global research partnership, the World Bank, and the Tony Blair Institute. Employees within the delivery unit were also interviewed. These findings draw mainly on the interviews that were conducted but also include a review and analysis of policy documents, research papers, and other relevant documentation.

The core functions of delivery approaches (Williams et.al. 2021), as described in Figure 1, provide the framework for the analysis. This policy note describes what the Sierra Leone delivery unit at the MBSSE has undertaken regarding each of the core functions. This note also highlights successes, challenges, lessons learned, and

policy recommendations that may be useful for the education sector in Sierra Leone and also for other countries and sectors that might design, initiate, and implement a delivery approach. The timing of the adoption of the delivery unit in Sierra Leone coincided with the emergence of the COVID-19 crisis; therefore, this study may also shed light on the challenges faced when setting up delivery approaches in times of crisis.

## **Sierra Leone education sector context**

The MBSSE's work affects approximately 2 million students and 80,000 teachers. Access to education has improved in Sierra Leone in recent years, and enrollment has increased dramatically. In 2019, approximately 700,000 more children enrolled in basic education, compared to the previous year, "an increase equivalent to almost 10% of the entire population of Sierra Leone" (Government of Sierra Leone MBSSE, 2021d). However, challenges remain in maintaining access to education and improving learning outcomes. According to a 2020 UNICEF education sector analysis, 1 child in 10 does not attend school; 2 in 10 do not complete primary education and are therefore less likely to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills. At the junior- and secondary-school level, access and completion rates are also low (84 and 72 percent, respectively), indicating that 3 in 10 students do not complete basic education. According to stakeholders, approximately two-thirds of the workforce in education is not on the government payroll, and basic facilities, such as electricity, are missing in schools, making implementation of education reform programs difficult. Two major health emergencies over the past eight years (Ebola in 2014 and COVID-19, emerging in 2020) led to school closures, impacting girls' education in particular, with more girls than boys not returning to school after those crises.

## **Background and evolution of the MBSSE delivery unit in Sierra Leone**

The delivery unit in Sierra Leone was established within the MBSSE in May 2020 with US\$250,000 in funding from the Government of China. The aim of the delivery unit has been to support President Julius Maada Bio's vision for education transformation and his commitment to equip young Sierra Leoneans with innovative skills to make them globally competitive and able to contribute to Sierra Leone's growth (Daramy, 2018). President Maada Bio's government has made education one of its highest priorities and channeled significant resources into the sector through the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) program established in 2018 (De la Fuente et al., 2019). The delivery unit was set up to improve the implementation of the FQSE program, which aimed to provide per-student block grants to public schools instead of charging school fees.

The delivery unit was established by David Sengeh, Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, as a small new unit at the national level, and it was not integrated into the existing bureaucracy. The minister indicated he wanted a team to implement his vision, address key issues in the system to deliver on key interventions, and improve bureaucratic functioning. The rationale was that a team of technical experts could drive delivery, as there were capacity constraints within the existing ministry and bureaucracy. The delivery unit was set up to:

- 1. Enable delivery of the FQSE program through systems building:** Work with the minister's office, his senior leadership team, and other partners within and outside the MBSSE. Together, these partners would agree on time-bound delivery targets; collect/collate regular data on progress against these targets from the schools/districts up to the national government level; and develop a transparent system so all functions within the ministry could be accountable for the progress made in delivering on the FQSE.
- 2. Provide targeted support:** Work remove bottlenecks to delivering on the identified priorities and support the MBSSE staff in troubleshooting.
- 3. Build capacity:** Support in building the capacity of the MBSSE staff, with a key focus on performance, in creating a roadmap for delivery and clear lines of accountability.

**Quote:** “We came in as enablers to serve the ministry to bridge the gap and create synergy between policymakers and implementers.” Grace Kargobai, Head of Delivery Team MBSSE, Team Lead and Executive Assistant to the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education

The Sierra Leone delivery unit differs from many delivery approaches in sub-Saharan Africa, as the setup and operation of the unit were entirely initiated and guided by the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education, David Sengeh, with targeted input from his advisors. The delivery unit that was set up did not rely on the expertise of foreign delivery consultants. For this reason, we consider this to be a locally-led delivery approach, rather than an externally-led approach.

Although the establishment of the delivery unit coincided with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery unit was not set up explicitly to respond to the

---

<sup>2</sup> The program also limited how much public schools could charge for other items. The government provides education materials directly to schools, including textbooks and supplies for students and teachers, and the government also covers the fees for students who take exams administered by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC). In rural areas, the school feeding program is greatly expanded, with larger amounts of funding provided per student.

pandemic's challenges. The plans for the delivery unit were in motion well before COVID-19 emerged. The delivery unit was, however, part of the emergency task force team set up by the MBSSE to address the COVID-19 challenges, and it was also part of the Operations, Planning and Policy Pillar, co-led by the MBSSE and the FCDO, mandating that the delivery unit support activities across the board. Schools were closed during the pandemic, but the delivery unit continued to function, although it shifted priorities over time, as described in the target setting and prioritization section, to respond to some of the challenges posed by the pandemic.

The funding from the Government of China ended in June 2022, and the delivery unit is now funded by a variety of sources. Staff are seconded to the delivery unit from the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), EdTech Hub, Fab Inc, and Tony Blair Institute. Some positions are funded by the World Bank Free Education project, UNFPA, and UNICEF.

### **Design and role of the delivery unit**

The delivery unit in Sierra Leone adopted a top-down approach, coming from the president's larger reform agenda and being set up by the MBSSE minister. This approach placed Sierra Leoneans in the driver's seat of the reform agenda, with minimal international expertise involved. The minister appointed a small delivery unit comprising four full-time female Sierra Leoneans who had attended graduate studies abroad. A team leader and three analysts were hired for a 12-month contract period to work closely with the minister on day-to-day activities to carry out the reform agenda. According to the majority of the interviews, the team members were "highly-educated and passionate individuals who took on multiple projects." The development partners who were interviewed found the delivery unit team to be capable, accessible, responsive, and able to establish good working relationships with external partners. The delivery unit had eight full-time staff members as of November 2022.

### **Description of staff positions at the delivery unit**

The head of the delivery unit (team lead) was the first person to be hired, in May 2020, soon after the delivery unit was set up. This person remains the team lead as of this writing. She is also the executive assistant to the minister. The team lead liaises with the MBSSE leadership to set and identify delivery goals, priorities, and activities. She draws up work plans and reviews the key plans and programs of the MBSSE. She provides advice on developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks in collaboration with the MBSSE leadership for all of the ministry's priorities and



cross-cutting initiatives. The team lead is responsible for reporting on the delivery status to the minister and other senior staff of the MBSSE. She provides advice on resource allocation and reallocation, where needed, to drive outcomes. The team lead manages the delivery team, including the performance evaluation of the staff to ensure the timely and effective deliveries of assigned activities.

The delivery unit also has three analysts: a policy analyst, a data analyst, and a strategic communications analyst. The policy analyst, hired in October 2020, is responsible for the development, review, and implementation of policies, programs, and legislation in line with the MBSSE's objectives. The policy analyst collaborates with the directorates of Policy & Planning, Inspectorate, Educational Programs and Services, Non-formal & Adult Education, and Research & Curriculum Development in the MBSSE and with strategic partners to assess and improve the effectiveness of the policies and provide recommendations to the MBSSE (Government of Sierra Leone MBSSE, 2020b). The data analyst, hired in August 2020, is responsible for the digitization of data. The data analyst also supports the Policy and Planning Unit in the MBSSE to present data in a user-friendly and comprehensible manner. This analyst works closely with the relevant partners to ensure that the data management and collection system is functioning, both within the ministry and with the schools. The data analyst supports and works with the MBSSE directorates (Government of Sierra Leone MBSSE, 2020a). The strategic communications analyst, hired in August 2020, is responsible for ensuring that the work done is communicated and shared with stakeholders; the analyst also creates communications material for the MBSSE. The role includes working with the communication unit within the MBSSE to support the development and implementation of the communications strategy (both internal and external), promote public and media outreach on the policies and programs of the MBSSE, evaluate communications plans, and provide recommendations on current and emerging communication issues (Government of Sierra Leone MBSSE, 2021b). The delivery unit team also receives technical support from EdTech Hub, Fab Inc., the Education Partnerships Group (EPG), and the Tony Blair Institute. The delivery unit also has an internship program with Harvard University and Yale University, which has allowed two cohorts of students to provide support to the delivery unit. EdTech Hub works with the delivery unit to support the implementation of the One Tablet Per School (OTPS) program, including through the provision of funding and seconding of an expert to the delivery unit to support the program design, delivery approach, and coordination with other stakeholders, including the World Bank and the Teaching Service Commission, or TSC (FCDO 2021). FabInc. Has also worked with the delivery unit on the implementation of the School Infrastructure and

Catchment Area Planning Policy (MBSSE, 2021c) and the transformation of data systems (including the 2015–2020 education database). The Education Partnerships Group (EPG), has helped review the MBSSE policy and delivery systems, including the role of the delivery unit (FCDO 2021). In particular, EPG has helped establish the policy process for the MBSSE, including templates and standards, draft policies, and retrofitting some of the policies to the templates. The Tony Blair Institute (TBI) has had one person on secondment at the delivery unit since July 2021 who supports the mapping of the partnerships of the MBSSE, including the programs of 90 nongovernmental organizations. The Directorate of Science Technology and Innovation (DSTI), which sits in the office of the President, has seconded a data scientist to the delivery unit from the outset.

### **Description of the main roles of the delivery unit**

Since the delivery unit's inception in May 2020, one of its main roles has been to support the development, reviewing, updating, and revamping of key policies, based on evidence, to achieve the FQSE objectives and gain approval by the Cabinet. The key policies on which the delivery unit has worked so far are:

**1. The National Radical Inclusion Policy** (Government of Sierra Leone MBSSE, 2021c). This policy focuses on the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, including pregnant girls, parent learners, students with disabilities, and students in low-income and hard-to-reach areas. The policy development started before the COVID-19 pandemic and was quickly approved by the Cabinet in April 2021, as the pandemic hit. The need for the policy was widely recognized, as it helped in identifying the most marginalized groups and those affected by COVID-19. The delivery unit developed a roadmap for the inclusion of marginalized children, edited the policy document, researched relevant data on how many pregnant girls went back to school, prepared the communication material for the MBSSE to share with the relevant stakeholders to aid policy implementation, and managed the dissemination plan.

**2. The School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Policy.** This policy is designed to ensure the provision of education through the construction and rehabilitation of pre-primary, primary, and secondary schools for girls and boys, based on need, to reduce disparities in access to schools. The policy was developed by the Education Commission's Education Workforce Initiative and Fab Inc., which obtained input from the delivery unit. The delivery unit coordinated the development and retrofitting of the policy, worked with the Operations, Planning and Policy Pillar to conduct a gap analysis, ensured that the policy reflected the MBSSE's guiding principles, and

prepared and submitted documents for Cabinet approval.

**3. The Integrated Early Childhood Development policy.** This policy was formulated with UNICEF's support and launched in June 2021 to recognize pre-primary education as a priority and fund it through the FQSE program. The delivery unit coordinated the development of the policy, worked with the Operations, Planning and Policy Pillar to conduct a gap analysis and retrofit the policy, ensured that the policy reflected the MBSSE's guiding principles, prepared and submitted documents for Cabinet approval, and developed the pre-primary education implementation plan. The delivery unit also provided inputs and coordinated work with other partners related to the Comprehensive Sexuality Education initiative, the National School Feeding Policy, and the Taskforce on Sexual Reproductive Health. The delivery unit also drafted the Cabinet paper for an anti-corporal punishment initiative.

The delivery unit also completed four research projects to support concrete aspects of the above-mentioned policy design. These projects included:

- **The Values-Anchored Framework for Civic Education** (Xu et al., 2020). This project in Sierra Leone formed the basis for a civic education curriculum that is now taught in the schools.
- **A stakeholder analysis.** Producing this analysis involved documenting and structuring the MBSSE's partnerships with different organizations and donors to improve coordination among them.
- **The Transforming Education Service Delivery Through Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice policy e-book** (Government of Sierra Leone MBSSE, 2021a). This e-book has served to link policies to evidence and implementation strategies strongly reflecting the MBSSE's commitment to evidence-informed decision-making and service delivery.
- **The National Council and Insights research project.** This project mapped partner engagements, COVID interventions, and alignment with the government's efforts.

In addition to the above, the delivery unit also supported the following MBSSE priorities to improve the collection and use of data and technology:

**1. Digitizing the exam results and school placement system to reduce costs and time and improve accessibility:** The delivery unit, in collaboration with EdTech Hub, developed the automated exam results-checking system via phone text messaging. Prior to the introduction of this tool, students and parents had to buy scratch-off cards with concealed code numbers to be able to access the examination

results online. These cards cost parents each time they wanted to check the results and this method of checking results was also not accessible to all, since internet connectivity is limited. The implementation of the new system allowed parents in remote areas to access test results more easily through text messaging, which saved parents approximately US\$ 5-6 per student and billions overall. The delivery unit also collaborated with EdTech Hub partners to develop an algorithm that places students into secondary schools according to their final exam score and preferred schools. Prior to the development of this algorithm, the placement of students into junior and senior secondary schools was a time-consuming manual process that was subject to human interference.

**2. Designing and piloting the One Tablet Per School (OTPS) program:** The delivery unit designed a real-time data management system to collect and verify teacher data (e.g., registration, attendance) and pupil data (e.g., enrollment and attendance) through tablets at the school level. The delivery unit secured funding from the World Bank and provided oversight for the implementation of the piloting of the central data-gathering device with headteachers and teachers in 60 schools followed by a further scaling-up effort. The use of tablets to collect and share data in real-time aims to create quick feedback loops and identify main challenges to set targets and promote evidence-based decision-making. Classroom-level data, such as teacher and pupil attendance and enrollment, are monitored in real time, using the Tangerine software designed by the delivery unit under the OTPS program.

**3. Optimizing the Annual School Census (ASC) data:** The delivery unit worked with the Planning and Policy directorate to help optimize the timely use of the 2020 ASC data. In particular, the delivery unit supported the Planning and Policy directorate in the analysis and layout of the data, helping to reduce delays in the publication of the results. In addition, the delivery unit reviewed the data dictionary for the 2021 ASC to provide a single source of reference for the ASC terms and easy access for the ASC enumerators.

**4. Supporting communications during COVID-19:** During COVID-19, the MBSSE received additional funding from the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), in addition to World Bank funding, and support from an NGO consortium to work as the main actor for the pandemic response in the education sector. While the delivery unit was not charged with leading the COVID-19 education response, it did play a critical communications role during the pandemic. The communication analyst at the delivery unit supported school reopening and oversight of distance learning, and in particular, she supported the communication aspects of the radio programs. Most of the policies that the delivery unit supported were also linked with the COVID-19 response.

While key policies have been developed and revamped, implementation is still a work in progress. As a first step, however, the delivery unit found that there was a gap in the key policies that needed to be addressed before delivery. Some interviewees reported, however, that policy implementation is a goal of the next phase of the delivery unit's work.

### **Delivery unit setup, team onboarding, and organizational culture**

**Initial setup of the delivery unit:** Members of the delivery unit team noted that they initially struggled to understand their roles and what exactly they were expected to deliver. Similarly, several external stakeholders were unsure of the role of the delivery unit because the team was separate from the ministry's other reporting structures and answerable directly to the minister. In addition, the delivery unit did not have the proper office space and equipment, which, according to some interviewees, would have helped the team in its initial stages.

**Initial resistance to the introduction of the delivery unit as a parallel structure:** In the early stages, members of the delivery unit reported facing some resistance from the existing ministerial staff who were at times apprehensive of the unit's role and the unit staff's close working relationships with the MBSSE minister. Some stakeholders also reported that at times there were some tensions between the delivery unit team and the MBSSE staff, as the delivery unit team demographics, profiles, salaries, and composition differed from those of the civil service staff. Managing power relationships between the MBSSE formal structure and the delivery unit may therefore have been challenging from the outset.

Improving the functioning of the bureaucracy also appeared challenging; the existing bureaucratic structure at the MBSSE is quite strong. Interviewees said that they believed that adopting delivery approaches principles within the delivery unit would be simple, but adapting them to the MBSSE organizational culture and context created some tensions between the MBSSE bureaucracy and the delivery unit team. Due to this environment, some stakeholders reported that it took time to develop trust between the delivery unit and the rest of the MBSSE staff. According to some interviewees, the institutional dynamics may have also led to delivery unit staff turnover. However, as the minister suggested, when the delivery unit started showing some results, tensions between the unit and the formal structure started to ease.

## Analysis of the core functions of delivery approaches

The analysis of the Sierra Leone delivery unit within the MBSSE is based on the DeliverEd conceptual framework (Williams et al., 2021) and the DeliverEd global

**Figure 1. Core Functions of a Delivery Approach**

1.	Prioritization and target setting	Establish key priorities and objectives, create measurable indicators to measure progress, and/or ensure performance benchmarks are achieved within a specific time period.
2.	Measurement and monitoring	Establish and use mechanisms to collect and report information about the performance of divisions, districts, teams, schools, and/or individuals.
3.	Leveraging political sponsorship	The leader uses his/her high-level political backing to enable better policy delivery. The audience for these signals can be the bureaucracy itself or external stakeholders.
4.	Accountability and incentives	There are implicit or explicit rewards and/or sanctions linked to whether or not the delivery targets are met.
5.	Problem solving and organizational learning	Dialogue, coordination, and problem solving across individuals, divisions, or organizations to improve performance through the sharing of information and ideas.

mapping review (Mansoor et al., 2021). The framework theory of change is that delivery approaches aim to introduce a new set of management practices through different delivery approach functions or reconfigure these existing practices across the delivery chain (Figure 1). The Sierra Leone delivery unit at the MBSSE was analyzed against the following core functions, with findings summarized below:

### 1. Prioritization and target setting

The overall priorities are set by the 2022–2026 Education Sector Plan or ESP (Government of Sierra Leone, 2020) and the FQSE program. The delivery unit supports the MBSSE in delivering on the FQSE program and goals and implementing a selection of these goals. According to the stakeholders interviewed, the delivery unit priorities are to improve: (i) policies and policy implementation based on evidence; (ii) data collection, analysis, and use; (iii) coordination and alignment among MBSSE stakeholders, including partners, NGOs, and others; and (iv) communication to end users.

According to the interviewees, a whiteboard in the minister’s office lists projects that the minister prioritizes and wants to fast-track. The delivery unit members are asked to pick the ones they want to implement. Stakeholders have reported that the delivery unit has worked on at least 30 priorities. Given the high number of priorities, the delivery unit reported at times having challenges with further prioritizing the work. Some stakeholders stated that prioritization usually happened in an ad hoc manner, with the delivery unit responding more to immediate challenges and bottlenecks and less to structured objectives and medium-and long-term goals. With a smaller staff and a heavy workload, it appeared challenging for the unit to focus and deliver on key priorities.

## **1. Target setting**

The delivery unit has not yet introduced concrete key performance indicators (KPIs) for meeting targets, and it is not clear whether specific timelines have been set to achieve measurable indicators. Some delivery unit staff have stated that “there is no specific timeline” to achieve targets, while others have reported that “the activities undertaken by the delivery unit have to be done within a prescribed period of time.” Some suggest that “every quarter there is a ‘focus line’ (target, to be achieved in a specific period of time), for example developing a radical inclusion policy, or the replacement of the national exams scratch card by an SMS system.” Given the conflicting responses regarding target setting, it appears that some targets were set at the delivery unit with timelines, but this was done in an ad hoc manner. It also appears that the delivery unit has not yet focused on setting clear objectives and indicators to measure progress and benchmarks to be achieved in a specific period of time by the MBSSE directorates.

## **2. Measurement and monitoring**

One of the delivery unit’s main roles is to improve data collection systems, analysis, and the use of data for evidence-based decision-making at the MBSSE. The delivery unit supports the MBSSE Policy and Planning Unit in identifying data sources, developing systems for digital data collection at the school level, ensuring timely and accurate data collection, providing recommendations on data improvements, and producing instruction handbooks and manuals for data use and dissemination. The delivery unit has been instrumental in improving the data collection systems and the quality and accessibility of data (for instance through the OTPS program or involvement on the ASC). This, in turn, has contributed to the identification of challenges and promotion of evidence-based decision-making.

While the delivery unit has worked with the MBSSE on developing the systems and key aspects of data collection and digitization, an essential first step, the data does not seem to be systematically used to measure and monitor the progress of the MBSSE’s key priorities and targets. It seems that there are no formal structures for monitoring or measuring the performance of the delivery unit or the achievement of the MBSSE’s priorities. According to some interviewees, building formal internal structures for monitoring performance will be introduced going forward.

## **3. Leveraging political sponsorship**

The delivery unit has a high level of political sponsorship from the MBSSE minister, and the unit is aligned with the government’s education mandate to deliver key

education interventions. The minister established, led, and took complete ownership of the delivery unit, to the extent that it was called “his team.” He used his political capital to remove bottlenecks to its setup and to establish the delivery unit, including seeking funding from the Government of China and later securing funding from other sources for sustainability. Under the strong leadership of the minister, key policies, such as the Radical Inclusion Policy, were approved by the Cabinet in a short period of time. The strong leadership and support of the minister helped ease the resistance from the formal staff within the MBSSE with regard to the delivery unit. Minister David Sengeh has stated, “How did you get that buy-in? You show people exactly what they have done ... the impact of their work and role. Show that ... the delivery team [does not] replace them but rather continues to support them.”

#### **4. Accountability and incentives**

One of the main functions of a delivery unit is to introduce performance indicators and an accountability mechanism for the whole ministry to ensure that different actors are held accountable for the delivery of the ministry’s priorities. Interviewees noted that there are minimal accountability mechanisms in the delivery unit, and it is unclear whether there are rewards or sanctions linked to meeting the delivery goals. The delivery unit has very ambitious and general goals, and there are few consequences if the unit is unable to achieve the goals. The low level of accountability may be explained by the fact that missing the objectives cannot be attributed to the delivery unit entirely, as there are other actors engaged in the policy formulation and implementation. Interviewees noted that there were no high-stakes consequences attached to not being able to deliver, for example, on the OTPS program. In addition, stakeholders noted multiple systemic challenges in the education system that hamper the effectiveness of the delivery unit’s work. The MBSSE has reported that since the MBSSE directorates have been closely involved in projects, follow-up action has been taken and meetings have been held if processes are not followed and benchmarks are not met, with issues escalated to senior management. Nevertheless, it seems that very few accountability mechanisms have been initiated by the delivery unit.

In terms of providing incentives, the interviewees shared that the delivery unit serves as an enabler that is readily available to step in and increase the human resource capacity of the MBSSE in specific priority projects or as assigned to the team by senior MBSSE management and the minister. Multiple respondents reported that there was a shortage of staff at the MBSSE to conceive and implement various initiatives. Capacity constraints have posed a challenge to the homegrown delivery



unit. One incentive for the MBSSE staff, as reported by some interviewees, was that the delivery unit served as a support mechanism for them. For example, the delivery unit carried out routine capacity-building activities and supported the MBSSE by preparing meetings and presentations and following up after meetings such as those with the Education Development Partners and Local Education Group; this follow-up was highly appreciated by the MBSSE staff.

## **5. Problem solving and organizational learning**

Stakeholders reported that there was an informal process for problem solving and organizational learning within the delivery unit. A dialogue would be held among the delivery unit, MBSSE, and development partners when barriers or roadblocks arose. Interviewees shared that each team member at the delivery unit had a problem-solving attitude and mindset, but there was often a lack of coordination and a lack of a collective problem-solving attitude across the MBSSE departments; they also did not follow a formal structure, with scheduled meetings. The MBSSE reported that all of the initiatives of the delivery unit were fully led by ministry staff, and they worked collaboratively to ensure effective service delivery. Some respondents, however, mentioned that collaboration was an issue in the beginning, as there was resistance from certain parties, particularly within the bureaucracy, and the delivery unit was seen as a threat by other MBSSE departments. Problem-solving strategies were, therefore, hard to implement. With time and strong support from the minister, the relationships between the delivery unit and the MBSSE improved, as people saw the efficacy of the unit, and it became easier to work as a team to solve problems. One of the participants shared that “the basic issue of people not cooperating was more of a lack of understanding of what a delivery unit is, rather than not supporting the unit or resisting it.”

As for organizational learning, collaboration between the delivery unit and development partners, including the World Bank and FCDO, was achieved at earlier stages. The delivery unit has been key to mapping and coordinating partners and to aligning their efforts with the government’s agenda. The delivery unit has also been able to communicate effectively and share its accomplishments with stakeholders within and outside of the MBSSE. For example, stakeholders reported that the delivery unit at the MBSSE is seen as a success by other units within and outside the education sector. The Teaching Service Commission is shifting its staff to form a small delivery unit by following the MBSSE example. The Ministry of Health is also potentially replicating the MBSSE delivery unit model and experience. Events and communications ensure that the media and public are aware of the MBSSE’s

accomplishments and priorities.

## Lessons learned and Policy Considerations

The following lessons learned are drawn from the Sierra Leone case study, and the policy considerations may be useful for low-income and lower-middle-income countries seeking to adopt delivery approaches to improve service delivery:

**1. Political leadership is key to a successful delivery approach.** The Sierra Leone delivery unit has the political commitment and ownership of the highest levels of government, in particular, the president and MBSSE minister. Such political commitment is the first key element for a successful delivery approach, as it lends legitimacy to the delivery unit and ensures that the delivery team is treated as a serious player in the system. Strong political support creates a favorable environment for a delivery unit to function and deliver results.

**2. Adequate onboarding and induction of the team.** Delivery units are usually new structures that face resistance from the bureaucracy, even in the case of the Sierra Leone delivery unit which has been set up locally. Clearly defined roles and responsibilities, and the provision of an office space can facilitate the smooth onboarding of delivery unit teams. Clarifying the purpose and funding of a delivery unit to the relevant ministries, bureaucracy, and other stakeholders can also help manage the political economy of such initiatives. Setting expectations with staff within the government structure, from the outset, can help promote better working relationships and more cohesion. Building trust, however, takes time. The MBSSE delivery unit has demonstrated that the staff in the delivery unit are there to support rather than replace the civil service by developing an open communication, sharing results, and showing the value of the work of the delivery unit over time.

**3. Utilization of data is key to informing policy, planning, and monitoring.** The Sierra Leone delivery unit has been instrumental in improving the data collection systems and the quality and accessibility of the data, which in turn has helped to identify challenges and promote evidence-based decision-making. There is, however, little evidence to indicate that such data is systematically used to track results against specific indicators. Data should be analyzed and shared in an easily digestible way for bureaucrats and managers to understand their performance and help track results on key performance indicators (KPIs) to bring accountability into the system.

**4. Clear prioritization, target setting, and timelines.** The MBSSE minister had

identified key priorities for education reform with the 2022–2026 Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan as a guiding document, providing a clear idea of the aspirations and goals of what the system should deliver. Some targets have been set by the delivery unit, but not in a systematic way with specific timelines. Identifying and selecting a few key priorities, may help to maintain focus on the most critical reform elements. Goals, targets, and timelines need to be widely communicated and agreed upon with the responsible implementing agencies within the MBSSE, to result in improved implementation and ownership across the system. The delivery unit can also help in introducing KPIs (for the delivery unit and other MBSSE units) to achieve specific, measurable, and achievable objectives, and to assess progress. The delivery unit can also help to reassess and reset targets when progress is slow or when results are not being achieved.

**5. Clear accountability and formal problem-solving mechanisms.** While there are ad hoc accountability and problem-solving arrangements in place, establishing and embedding routines within the system for holding MBSSE agencies to account may be useful to track the achievement of results. Regular check-in meetings with the minister to monitor progress may provide structured opportunities to review performance, track results, and help make decisions. Support structures, however, should be in place in case there are capacity issues which may affect the delivery of results. A more formal and effective problem-solving mechanism in the system may provide a platform for stakeholders to be engaged in the process and offer solutions when bottlenecks hamper delivery or when progress is off track. Initiatives such as secondment of MBSSE staff to the delivery unit resulted in increased trust and collaboration among the two structures, leading to greater problem solving, and similar initiatives may be undertaken with the other departments so that problem solving becomes part of the organizational culture.

**6. Better coordination, communication, and stronger linkages with the subnational levels.** A clear plan on how to coordinate implementation across the various MBSSE directorates, and linkages between the national and regional/district levels may be desirable to ensure that implementation reaches schools. This is a challenge for many delivery units, which are stronger at the national level but less so at the subnational levels. Subnational strategies and linkages can help the government overcome bureaucratic and political tensions and align subnational agendas with national and international commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A clear communication plan on how to engage and coordinate the MBSSE units' efforts (similar to the one that was put in place to

coordinate with different donors) may help to create ownership for the reform process at the subnational level and achieve the overall objectives.

**7. Sustainability is a critical component of reforms.** Sustainability of a delivery unit should be a key priority, and it can be related to the funding as well as to the continuity of reforms and changes introduced. A major reason for delivery units losing momentum is either a change in political leadership or a lack of funds to sustain operations, especially if they are donor-driven. Funding uncertainty made it challenging for the Sierra Leone delivery unit team to focus on the work. For continuity of reforms, it is essential that delivery units are embedded within government structures and have a dedicated budget within the ministry to cover operational expenses; these units may be institutionalized legally, if required. A sustainability plan developed at the outset can help mitigate this risk, particularly in case of a change in government with a shift in priorities. However, the aim of the delivery units should be to change the system's culture and widen the circle of delivery efforts to include senior leaders, middle managers, and other staff, so that if delivery units disappear, the changes they introduce are embedded in the system.

## Conclusion

The Sierra Leone delivery unit is a homegrown initiative, established in 2020 and set up to deliver on the president and MBSSE minister's vision for human capital and education reform in Sierra Leone. The Delivery Unit has played a critical role in identifying key gaps in policy development and implementation plans and has contributed to improving data collection and digitalization to make data more relevant, reliable and accessible. This in turn has helped the MBSSE in promoting inclusion in the system, building safe and sustainable infrastructure, improving data collection and digitization, and expanding early childhood education. With the commitment and capable leadership of the MBSSE minister, the delivery unit has the potential to further evolve to make the MBSSE a more effective organization. The implementation of the key policies, which is a critical next step, will help to drive delivery across the sector to achieve the goals set forth and help realize government priorities and international commitments in education. The different components of the delivery approach, as envisaged under the DeliverEd conceptual framework, could be useful when combined and properly balance to create a delivery-oriented culture for driving reform and may be helpful in shaping the way forward for the Sierra Leone delivery unit.

## References

- Cambridge Education. (2021). Cambridge Education at CIES 2021 [Session List]. <https://www.camb-ed.com/intdev/article/577/cambridge-education-at-cies-2021>
- Comparative and International Education Society. (2020). Education beyond the human: Toward symposiums. <https://cies2020.org/wp-content/uploads/CIES-2020-Program-Book-final.pdf>
- Daramy, A. (2018, May 10). President Bio Speech at the State Opening of Parliament. Global Times.
- Education Partnerships Group. (2020, April). Systems-level analysis of education service delivery in Sierra Leone. [https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DIGITAL\\_EPG\\_Sierra-Leone\\_Systems-Mapping\\_report.pdf](https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/DIGITAL_EPG_Sierra-Leone_Systems-Mapping_report.pdf)
- Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. (2021). Note on the MBSSE delivery team [Briefing Note].
- Ghana Ministry of Education. (2018). Education Strategic Plan 2018–2030 Appendix A, and the Delivery Framework Concept Note 2018.
- Gold, J. (2017). Tracking delivery: Global trends and warning signs in delivery units. The Institute for Government. <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Global%20Delivery%20report.pdf>
- Government of Sierra Leone. (2020, August 26). Sierra Leone Education Sector Plan: Transforming Learning for All Government of Sierra Leone 2022 – 2026. <https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/media/1306/file/Sierra%20Leone%20Education%20Sector%20Plan%202022%20-%202026.pdf>
- Government of Sierra Leone Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE). (2020a, May). Terms of reference: Data analyst. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TOR-Data-Analyst100.pdf>
- — —. (2020b, May). Terms of reference: Policy analyst. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TOR-Policy-Analyst100.pdf>
- — —. (2020c, August 26). The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) establishes an all-Female Delivery Team (DT) to Support Implementation of the Free Quality School Education [Press Release].
- — —. (2021a, February). Transforming education service delivery through evidence-informed policy and practice. [https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MBSSE\\_Policy-E-book-V.1.pdf](https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/MBSSE_Policy-E-book-V.1.pdf)
- — —. (2021b, March). Terms of reference: Strategic communications analyst. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/TOR-for-Strategic-COMMS.-Analyst.pdf>
- — —. (2021c, March). National policy on radical inclusion in schools. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Radical-Inclusion-Policy.pdf>
- — —. (2021d, June). School Infrastructure and Catchment Area Planning Policy. [https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/School-Infrastructure-and-Catchment-Area-Policy\\_June2021.pdf](https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/School-Infrastructure-and-Catchment-Area-Policy_June2021.pdf)
- Mansoor, Z., Qarout, D., Anderson, K., Carano, C., Yecaló-Teclé, L., Dvorakova, V., & Williams, M. J. (2021, July). “A Global Mapping of Delivery Approaches.” DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper. Education Commission and Blavatnik School of Government. [https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/A-Global-Mapping-of-Delivery-Approaches\\_DeliverEd\\_July2021.pdf](https://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/A-Global-Mapping-of-Delivery-Approaches_DeliverEd_July2021.pdf)
- Mullan, J., & Taddese, A. (2020). EdTech in Sierra Leone: A Rapid Scan. EdTech Hub Country Scan. DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.3903213
- Muthama, M., Travers, M., Spencer, P., Mutua, W., Getachew, E., & Said, J. (2021). Empowering transformational decentralisation in Africa through delivery. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. <https://institute.global/advisory/empowering-transformational-decentralisation-africa-through-delivery>
- Simson, R. (2013). The Africa Governance Initiative in Sierra Leone (Case Study). Overseas Development Institute.
- United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). (2020). Education Sector Analysis of the Republic of Sierra Leone, Assessing the enabling environment for gender equality, Republic of Sierra Leone. IIEP-UNESCO.
- Williams, M. J., Clare, L., Mansoor, Z., Qarout, D., & Bilous, A. (2021, April). “Delivery Approaches to Improving Policy Implementation: A Conceptual Framework.” DeliverEd Initiative Working Paper. Education Commission and Blavatnik School of Government. <http://educationcommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Delivery-Approaches-to-Improving-Policy-Implementation.pdf>

World Bank. (2020). Free education project: Program appraisal document.  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/957041593741800590/pdf/Sierra-Leone-Free-Education-Project.pdf>

World Bank, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, FCDO, UNESCO, UNICEF, and USAID. (2022). Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration: Using the RAPID Framework to Address COVID-19 Learning Losses and Build Forward Better.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/publication/the-rapid-framework-and-a-guide-for-learning-recovery-and-acceleration>

Xu, R., Salahuddin, F., & Aghayere, O. (2020, August). Developing a values-anchored framework for civic education in Sierra Leone. <https://mbsse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SL-Report-FINAL-08-23.pdf>

## List of Acronyms

The overall priorities are set by the 2022–2026 Education Sector Plan or ESP

ASC	Annual School Census
DSTI	Directorate Of Science Technology And Innovation
EPG	Education Partnerships Group
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FCDO	UK's Foreign, Commonwealth And Development Office
FQSE	Free Quality School Education (Program)
GPE	Global Partnership For Education
gui2de	Georgetown University Initiative On Innovation, Development And Evaluation
IEPA	Institute For Educational Planning And Administration (University Of Cape Coast, Ghana)
IIEP	International Institute For Educational Planning (Unesco)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MBSSE	Ministry Of Basic And Senior Secondary Education
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OTPS	One Tablet Per School (Program)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
TBI	Tony Blair Institute
TSC	Teaching Service Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund (Formerly The United Nations Fund For Population Activities)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund (Formerly The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)
USAID	United States Agency For International Development
WAEC	West African Examinations Council