



## Youth and Child Advocacy Network -YACAN

In collaboration with Oxfam Sierra Leone and other Civil Society Organizations

### POSITION PAPER

29<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2019

*YACAN Calls on the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to ensure Special Needs (children, youths and young women) enjoy equal opportunities in the Free Quality Education Programme in Sierra Leone*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

On Wednesday, 09<sup>th</sup> October, 2019, Youth And Child Advocacy Network (YACAN) held a one day consultative stakeholder meeting with representatives from institutions that are working with children, youth and young women with Special Needs to identify the challenges, opportunities and threats that they face that create limitations for their inclusion in the Free Quality Education (FQE) programme provided by the Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education. The meeting concluded with the development of a position paper for prompt action by the Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education.

#### **BACKGROUND / EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This position paper presents the views of Children, youth and young women with special needs and calls on the Government of Sierra Leone through the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to take appropriate action to address the views and implement the recommendations relating to an inclusive policy, rights based practices and curricular concerns for Children youth and young women with special needs.

The representing institutions supporting Persons with Special Needs (PSN) in the Western Area and by extension representing the views of all PSN in Sierra Leone applaud the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) for taking the ambitious step to provide Free Quality Education programme across the country.

Recognising that education is a powerful instrument of social change, and often initiates upward movement in the social structure, thereby helping to bridge the gap between the different sectors of society;

Noting that the educational standard in the country has undergone major changes over the years, resulting in several unfulfilled efforts by successive governments to achieve better provision and practices in favour of PSN and further recalling that over the years, the educational system in the country has suffered and undergone major challenges and changes that have resulted to the need for scrutiny;

Noting in particular that best practice demands that PSN must be supported if the nature and extent of their physical, sensory and intellectual defects compels this necessary and that such necessity is guided by the recognition that an inclusive system of education is built on the framework of equity, equality and non-discrimination and in this vein reminding the GoSL that human rights frameworks across the world guarantees their protection;

We the representatives of PSN in Sierra Leone at a stakeholder consultative meeting organised by YACAN on Wednesday, 09<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 wish to make the following views and concerns known to the GoSL through the MBSSE for immediate action;

- 1. *Free Quality Education (FQE) Programme:*** We are concern that programme /policy formulation and implementations have in many cases discriminated against Persons with Special Needs (PSN) especially those arising from physical, sensory and intellectual disabilities. We note therefore that a strict adherence to the new changing approaches to disability from the charity model to that of the human rights model that enables PSN to enjoy the same educational opportunities as able-bodied persons will be a giant step in the right direction.
- 2. *Respect for fundamental human rights and international treaties:*** In international human rights law, equality is founded upon the two complementary principles of non-discrimination and reasonable differentiation. The principle of differentiation is of particular importance to PSN, some of who may require specialised services or support in order to be placed on a basis of equality with others. We however do recognise that differences of treatment between individuals are not discriminatory if they are based on reasonable and objective justification.  
The human rights model obliges states to position disability as an important dimension of human culture and practices, and therefore affirms that all human beings are born with certain inalienable rights, as justified by the fundamental principles of *Inalienability, Universality and Indivisibility* of rights. By merely recognizing these principles in our democracy, our society can help to break down the existing ideological barrier that restrict and limits the inclusion, participation and enjoyment of fundamental rights in society. It will also drive perception change and shift the focus in the way society must plan for an environmentally friendly system of education that will be accessible and pedagogically strategic. We note that the trend in lack of inclusive policy provisions is reflected in the current FQE programme, making way for PSN to be discriminated against.
- 3. *Developing and implementing an inclusive FQE Policy:*** We understand that at the moment, there is no inclusive policy on government's FQE programme. We are however aware that some International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) e.g. Sight Savers International has a set policy agenda framework for inclusive education on a national basis which refers to all persons – with or without disabilities to learn together with appropriate network of support services. We believe that a closer look

at such policy framework will support government in the implementation of a national inclusive policy agenda on FQE. This will usher in an inclusive curriculum for all persons without discrimination but recognises the need of schools to be organised with the individual differences of students in mind and is flexible enough to enable all students to achieve their goals.

4. **Modification of School curriculum:** Implementation of an inclusive curriculum would further require a number of changes in present day teaching practices, curriculum content, evaluation procedures and available resources at the school level. The primary goal of a successful FQE programme would remain elusive if the concept of inclusion is not linked to broader discussions on pedagogy and effective participation of all children in the learning experiences provided in the classrooms. The implementation of such policy should therefore involve the modification of curriculum and the use of modern human and appropriate technological support.
5. **Role of other Stakeholders:** We consider the intrinsic role of stakeholders such as communities, parents and special institutions that supports PSN. In consideration of this, government's action is imperative in developing appropriate guidelines for the planning, design and implementing of a workable and effective inclusive policy and programmes for FQE for children youth and young women with special needs. Communities, families and institutions having persons with special needs require greater support to adequately provide the required needs rather than heavily dependent on voluntary initiatives and services.

In view of the above, PSNs calls on the GoSL to note the following challenges that is continuing to limit our chances to benefit from the FQE programme;

#### **CHALLENGES**

- I. **Peculiar Needs:** PSNs have peculiar needs such as brail printing material, talking computers (soft ware) Non Visual Desktop Access (NVDA), well equipped personnel like sign interpreters to teach PSN, lack of inclusive curriculum for all aspect of education, lack of policy on physical rehabilitation with particular reference to Handicapped International's policy guideline in collaboration with MOHS (2010-2012) on physical rehabilitation and medicines. Hygiene support such as sanitary pads for female students is also not available for PSN.
- II. **Learning Materials:** Books available are not part of the subjects that are thought. Inappropriate learning materials for the blind such as type writers have gone out of fashion; lack of computers and trained personnel to train the children is limited. Tape recorders too have gone out of fashion and up-to-date assisting devices such as digital materials are neither available nor are they provided by government. ICT trained teachers for visually impaired are also lacking.
- III. **Learning Environment:** Regional Blind Schools have deprived learning environment with inadequate food, clothing, mobility and appalling boarding homes.

- IV. **Inadequate Institutional Support:** Inadequate institutional support is further compounded by late receipt of subvention that is practically inadequate. Suffice to note that the UN Research (2018) reveals that over 33 million children with disabilities are out of school.
- V. **Community, School and Poor Parenting:** Parent are not sending their children with disabilities to schools and many schools do not admit children with disabilities. There is limitation in subjects to offer at schools for the visually and hearing impaired. There is also a growing cultural perception for disabled persons e.g epilepsy, leprosy etc and no teachers assigned to such special needs. Children supporting PSN are by implication disabled and not been catered for.
- VI. **Inconsistent Monitoring:** There is a general gap and inadequate monitoring at all levels for PSN including; Government, West African Examinations Council, Parents, Communities, Schools/Heads of schools and NGOs and a lack of assessment of school environment for children with special needs.
- VII. **No Concession for PSN at Public Examinations:** PSN are not accorded concession time at public exams. Marking of scripts are not consistent with the challenges that PSN face. This accounts for the increase in drop-outs, e.g, many hearing impaired do not go above J.S.S 3.
- VIII. **Access to transportation and building facilities:** Transportation systems pose serious physical and emotional stress to PSN. All 50 school buses supplied by government are not disable-friendly and sadly, not a single bus was designated to PSN. There are also no Ramps in public buildings.
- IX. **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET):** TVET is not considered for disabled persons. Government has not invested in TVET for middle man power development with respect to the participation of PSN.
- X. **Political Parties Non-adherence:** ‘We Ring the Bell Campaign’ a campaign lead by the Sierra Leone Union of disability (SLUDI) not given much attention by government and other political parties.

#### **OPPORTUNITIES AND ADDED VALUES**

In light of the above, we recognise the existing opportunities which if positively harnessed will potentially add value to government’s efforts. These includes, among others;

1. Disability Act 2011
2. Inclusive Education Policy with Sight Savers International, Handicap International etc
3. Adequate space at Blind School, Cheshire Home
4. Donor Interest to rehabilitate schools e.g EU
5. Existence of Unions, Commission eg . SLUDI, NCPD
6. Existing structures within the MBSSE e.g Special Needs Desk
7. Existing private vocational training centre by Persons With Disabilities (PWD)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the afore-mentioned concerns, challenges and opportunities, we therefore wish to make the following recommendations for urgent action by the Government of Sierra Leone;

1. **Development of an Inclusive FQE Policy:** We urge the GoSL to develop in consultation with stakeholders an inclusive policy on FQE for PSN. We further call on Government and donor partners to invest in learning and teaching equipment/materials for PSN. Such materials/software should include among others, text books, hearing aid, wheel chairs, clocks, computers, NVDA, digital and recorders.
2. **Improvement of the Learning environment for PSN:** We call on government to conduct a speedy assessment of all regional facilities for special needs children and share outcomes with donors to influence donors/govt assistance and support for a friendly environment for PSN. We further call on Government to invest in the training of trainers or personnel's of PSN. We also call on the National Commission for Persons with Disabilities (NCPD) and Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to support existing efforts/ campaign in favour of FQE for PSN.
3. **Improved Transportation and Subvention:** We urged Government to review the allocation of school buses to incorporate designated buses to institutions of PSN and further increase subvention to include at least 10% to cover issues of hygiene for girls in institutions/ facilities of PSN.
4. **Effective Monitoring:** We call on Government and partners to institute effective monitoring mechanisms at various levels and share report widely. We further call on Government to ensure that WAEC Institutes provision for a conducive environment with special concession for examination periods and script marking for PSN.
5. **TVET for PSN:** We urged Government to support the strengthening of TVET for middle man power development for PSN.
6. **Promote fundamental Human Rights:** We remind Government of her obligations to promote and protect fundamental human rights and compliance for PSN.

### Conclusion:

On behalf of YACAN, the CSO platform members and all institutions that participated in the process we present this position paper to the Minister of Basic and Senior Secondary Education to demand as citizens and CSO for a better and inclusive education for all in Sierra Leone .

Name: Hassan Fuad Kanu

Position: Executive Director -YACAN