

**GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE**

**MINISTRY OF PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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**Revised Discussion Note on the Successor to Sierra Leone’s Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023**

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# **A. General background**

1. Sierra Leone is concluding the implementation of its fourth post-war national development plan in 2023. As the previous plan 2013-2018, the current Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) was set for a five-year implementation period starting in 2019. Key challenges encountered in the preceding plan included *multiple external shocks* and *weak governance across the public sector*. In 2018, the New Direction Agenda of President Julius Maada Bio ushered a renewed vigour and determination in the public sector towards producing a new development plan that will be implemented on the back of a resilient economy and sound national delivery mechanism. The new plan was launched in February 2019 with an utmost political determination to backstop, expedite and sustain optimal public service delivery.
2. The MTNDP 2019-2023 placed *human capital development* at the highest pinnacle of the government’s agenda. It prioritised education, healthcare and nutrition, utmost; while determined to increase domestic revenue mobilisation, improve national and sectoral governance, and build and maintain peace and national cohesion for delivery of sustainable development results.
3. The government remained focused on pursuing Sierra Leone’s *vision* of becoming a middle income country by 2035/40: a time when we had hoped to ensure a stable, export-led economy, based on sound macroeconomic fundamentals, with inflation not more than 5 percent; government revenues standing at least 30 percent of GDP; over 80 percent of the national population living above income poverty line, with no more than 5 percent of Sierra Leoneans out of decent jobs; when over 90 percent of the population will be able to read and write, and all have access to affordable housing; healthcare and delivery system will be housed within not more than 10 kilometre radius of every village; and having life expectancy of at least 70 years, with every mother having access to a modern hospital in which she can give birth without fear.
4. This vision was articulated to be pursued through successive implementation of five-year national development plans. The *2023* *national goals* of the current plan, MTNDP 2019-2023, are: a) to have a diversified, resilient green economy; b) a nation with educated, empowered, and healthy citizens capable of realising their fullest potential; c) a society that is peaceful, cohesive, secure, and just; and d) a competitive economy with a well-developed infrastructure.
5. The government ensured that the current plan was strongly aligned to the United Nations 2030 Agenda/Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the African Union Agenda 2063, whose implementation was perceived to have direct relation to achieving Sierra Leone’s development aspirations.
6. In light of the above, the ***objective*** of this *concept note* is to kick-start initial discussions on the formulation of the successor to the MTNDP 2019-2023, which ends this year. The specific objective is to begin the identification of a broad strategic direction to inform the successor plan. The note presents a set of already identified emerging strategic policy areas to be part of the discussions towards informing the next national development plan, reflecting on what has been achieved in the current plan so far, including challenges and lessons learned.

# **B. Broad contexts and constraints to the current plan**

1. At the launch of the MTNDP in February 2019, Sierra Leone was on a promising trajectory for sustained GDP growth and revenue generation to finance public development programmes. Growth had increased to 5.3 percent in 2019, from 3.5 percent in 2018; and was projected to positively hover around 4.3 percent in 2020.
2. Unfortunately, ***nine*** months following the launch of the MTNDP, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the globe. By mid-2020 at the peak of the pandemic, the world economy became increasingly unstable; it was projected to lose US$8.5 trillion in output for the ensuing two years, with 34 million people estimated to go into extreme poverty as a result of the novel virus.
3. As the world had hoped to significantly continue to recover its GDP from the pandemic starting from 2021 into 2022 and so on, the Ukraine-Russia War erupted in the first quarter of 2022, leading to heightened geopolitical tensions. This dashed the recovery hopes from COVID: the projected global growth of 4.0 percent in 2022 and 3.2 percent in 2023 was consequently expected to be lost with the unfortunate war and its ramifications, especially for fragile regions and states like Sierra Leone. This added to the lingering effects of COVID-19, climate change and biodiversity loss, among others.
4. Sierra Leone being highly linked to the global economy—highly dependent on the outside world for its production and consumption needs—its GDP dropped from 5.3 percent in 2019 to -2.0 percent in 2020 largely on account of the pandemic.
5. Private investment was extremely diminished during these trying times. The activities in this sector were crowded out as government increased its expenditure towards the fight against COVID; and subsequently towards stemming the macroeconomic and household effects derived from the fallouts of the war in Ukraine. Development Partners had to repurpose funding from supporting capital investment in the country to assisting with the fight against COVID.
6. While the country managed to recover its output to 2.9 percent in 2021, following COVID-related national mitigation strategies, such as the Quick Action Economic Response Programme and the Health Preparedness and Response Programme of the government, the compounded effects emerging from the Ukraine-Russia fallouts reversed growth projection for 2022 from 5.9 to 2.8 percent in tune with global trends.
7. The socioeconomic and investment uncertainties for the country from these global factors continue to linger in 2023; which could be expected to go even into 2024, if not beyond. The following continued risks posed by these factors have been noted in the *Statement of Economic and Financial Policies of GoSL for 2023 Fiscal Year*:
8. the likelihood of the global economy plunging into recession and the potential impact on the prices of Sierra Leone’s key exports;
9. sustained increases in food and fuel prices and the pass-through effects on domestic prices, trade balance and Government’s fiscal position;
10. continued decreases in international financial assistance;
11. the continuation of the crisis in Ukraine and its accompanying uncertainties in the global economy; and
12. a re-emergence of COVID-19 and other public health emergencies.[[1]](#footnote-1)
13. This constituted the background context and broad constraints within which the MTNDP 2019-2023 has been implemented. Indeed, the revenue situation of GoSL was egregiously dampened during these multiple crises, as private sector operations were in dire straits with this circumstance. And, certainly, the situation is expected to remain bleak, as those global uncertainties continue to grow.
14. Despite these constraints, remarkable results were achieved by GoSL in the implementation of the National Development Plan, which we will summarise in the next paragraphs. Results were achieved through the strict pursuit of defining actions in the last 4 years, involving the delivery of highly prioritised needs, with a special focus on human capital development; accompanied by increased sectoral and development partner coordination, heightened public financial management, increased deployment of ICT and digital solutions, and sustained fight against corruption. Some of the key results recorded are highlighted in the following section *(see the Mid-Term Review Report on the implementation of the MTNDP for details on the progress made so far; obtainable from the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, Freetown*).

# **C. Summary of performance in the implementation of the current plan**

1. ***Policy Cluster One on Human Capital Development (the most prioritised cluster):*** The government pursued a flagship *free quality school education programme* that engendered significant increases in education expenditure as a percentage of recurrent public spending from 18.9 percent in 2018 to 22 per cent in 2021 and 2022. This provided food for over 400,000 children in over 1,000 piloted government/government-assisted schools, as well as tuition fee grants, teaching and learning materials in close to 8,000 of these schools, covering pre-primary, primary, junior and senior secondary levels. Consequently, school enrolment significantly increased by about 800,000 pupils since the launch of the Free Quality School Education Programme in September 2018. Gender parity was achieved and maintained at the primary, as well as junior secondary school level.
2. In *health*, the national budgetary allocation to the sector almost doubled in 2021 at 11 percent from 6 percent in 2018. This led to recruitment of over 4,000 healthcare workers and distribution of over 216 ambulances across the 16 districts of Sierra Leone during the 2019-2021. By the end of 2019, maternal deaths per 100,000 live births had dropped from 1,165 in 2013 to 717 in 2019; under-five deaths per 1,000 live births dropped from 156 in 2013 to 122 in 2019, and infant deaths per 1,000 live births reduced from 92 in 2013 to 75 in 2019.
3. ***Cluster Two on Economic Diversification for Promoting Economic Growth:*** In *agriculture,*at least 600 assorted tractors, 200 power tillers, and other farm inputs such as fertilisers, agrochemicals, improved seedlings and combined harvesters were procured and distributed across the country during 2018-2021; accompanied by the cultivation of over 2,500 hectares. The *fisheries* sector provided huge revenue to the state from export and other levies, an effort largely drawn from improved monitoring and surveillance of the country's waters with a state-of-the-art Vessel Monitoring System, which helped reduce illicit marine operations; while, in *tourism*, the international tourist arrivals increased from 24,000 in 2015 to 28,000 in 2020 despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
4. For the *energy sector,* under ***Cluster Three on Infrastructure and Economic Competitiveness***, access to electricity increased from 16 percent in 2018 to 26 per cent in 2021; household access nearly doubled from 13.5 percent in 2018 to 24 per cent in 2021. The population access to reliable electricity is expected to drastically increase with Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea (CLSG) power project. In *transport*, construction and rehabilitation of 130 km trunk roads was embarked on, including rehabilitation of several bridges and more than 400 km of feeder roads; and road accidents were reduced by 14 percent from 3,200 in 2018 to 2,763 in 2021, while national aviation security rating increased from 64 percent in 2018 to 71.6 percent in 2021. In the *water sector*, about 75 percent of the population of major secondary cities (of Bo, Kenema and Makeni) now have access to safe drinking water, surpassing the 2018 national average of 60 percent. With regard to *information and communication*, the population covered with mobile services increased from 57 percent in 2018 to 80 percent in 2021; the national area covered by mobile voice services increased from 70 percent in 2018 to 89 percent in 2021; while the population using internet nearly doubled from 11.8 percent in 2018 to 21 percent in 2021.
5. ***Cluster Four on Governance and Accountability for Results****:* Under this cluster, the level of peace and political stability among political parties was improved from 30 percent in 2018 to 40 percent during 2019- 2021, while public confidence in accountable governance increased with the national perception rate for corruption declining from 70 percent in 2018 to 40 percent in 2020. Efforts to promote *inclusive and accountable justice institutions* saw more than 595,000 people, mostly underprivileged, receiving free legal services since 2015; more than 395,000 since 2019 alone; while the rural areas now have more magistrates and judges deployed to increase access to justice for the poor. *Prudent management of public finances* was scaled up with the full functioning of the Fiscal Risks Management and Oversight Office in the Ministry of Finance coordinating rationalisation of contingency liabilities of state-owned enterprises and institutions; coupled with a range of other strategies, including introduction of e-procurement and operation of online expenditure management system in general. With regard to *deepening decentralisation and local governance*, the District Development Coordination Committees were re-established for effective monitoring, supervision, and reporting on development progress at community level, while rolling out a People's Planning Process model commonly called Wan Fambul Framework initiative to support village and chiefdom level development planning and plan implementation led by the people, with more than 20 chiefdom plans now in place in pilot chiefdoms for integration with district and national development plans.
6. ***Cluster Five on Empowering Women, Children and Persons with Disabilities***: Among the range of results achieved in this cluster included: establishment of a one-stop centres for *sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)* in 6 districts, resulting in at least 2,515 survivors of SGBV cases provided with effective response services; reduction of *child* *marriage* and *teenage pregnancy* in communities through enforcement of the Hands-Off Our Girls Initiative; upgrading the *Child Protection Information Management System (PRIMERO) software*, leading to registration of more than 750 child protection cases in 2021; and provision of COVID-19-related support to at least 10,000 persons with disability (PWD), including food and protective equipment, while advancing the development of a Free Education Initiative for all PWDs.
7. ***Under Cluster Six on Youth Employment, Sports and Migration***, a total of 1,400 direct jobs were created for the *youth* through the government's Youth in Fisheries Project that saw the construction of 70 new fishing boats with requisite accessories distributed to youths in seven coastal districts; over 500 youth leaders were trained in entrepreneurship; a total of 1,200 university graduates were recruited, trained, and deployed across the country through the National Youth Service Scheme, about 804 (67 percent) of whom have gained permanent employment. For *sports*, the government rekindled support for the national football team leading to Sierra Leone qualifying for the 2021 Africa Cup of Nations Tournament after 25 years; while efforts with respect to addressing *migration* issues are demonstrated by the government receiving and reintegrating 328 stranded Sierra Leonean migrants in more than 10 countries in 2021.
8. Achievements ***under the Cluster Seven on Addressing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience*** included: establishment of the *Ministry of Environment* in 2019 to increase political investment in environmental management and sustainability, alongside the establishment of the *National Disaster Management Agency* as a standalone institution from the Office of National Security to scale up national preparedness and response to natural disasters. Over the period 2019-2021, more than 2,000 hectares of forest were restored; at least 100 hectares of woodlots established; and more than 300,000 trees planted in all agricultural districts, alongside 3,000 others in three flood prone communities within the western area. These initiatives led to the recruitment of 500 forest guards and the creation of over 20,000 temporary and permanent jobs in general.
9. With regard to mobilisation of resources, partnerships and general support for the MTNDP under the ***Means of Implementation Policy Cluster***, all government institutions at central and local levels, and development partners, NGOs, civil society organisations, the private sector, and the academia were involved in delivering results. An estimated 104 public investment projects were funded through the government budget in 2019, 86 in 2020, and 70 in 2021 (up to June). A total of 392 projects were funded by Donor Agencies in 2019, 429 in 2020 and 311 in 2021. As a strategy to stay the course of implementing the MTNDP with the participation of key stakeholders at the peak of COVID-19, government scaled-up cooperation with development partners through the state’s traditional Development Partners’ Committee (DEPAC) framework and related others. Among other strategic coordination platforms utilised was the Joint Steering Committee on the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework; ensuring that alignment of partner programmes with the MTNDP was strengthened, while promoting sectoral coordination. As noted under Cluster 4, the District Development Coordination Committees were resuscitated to strengthen regular reporting and delivery of results at local/community level.

# **D. Challenges to implementation**

1. Sierra Leone’s income poverty remained high in excess of 50 percent during implementation, as population growth rate continued to be positive.
2. The COVID-19 pandemic was a leading barrier to achieving planned results. The virus broke out ***nine*** months after the launch of the MTNDP. It badly affected private sector activities and revenue generation to finance development. The Ukraine-Russia war heightened the country’s economic and revenue vulnerability and fluctuation, being highly dependent on international markets and foreign assistance.
3. The protracted fiscal squeeze suffered by the state could not permit planned investment in critical infrastructure, such as energy, water, roads, and ICT towards boosting private sector operations.
4. The technical capacity to effectively prepare and deliver bankable projects at sector and local level was still seriously inadequate—absorptive capacity for the available scarce resources from both government and development partners, especially in sectors like agriculture, remained weak; huge allocated resources remained unspent in this situation.
5. Domestic resource mobilisation was generally challenged. For instance, the implementation of the Electronic Cash Register System introduced by the National Revenue Authority met stiff resistance from the business community.
6. The digital divide between regions and districts in the country remained a major challenge to effectively engaging all relevant locations in the plan implementation; inequality in mobile network coverage across communities has been a challenge, which contributed to the financial exclusion of many local economic actors.
7. There has been considerable room for improvement in coordinating development actors within the public sector and non-state sphere; in promoting public financial management and alignment/tracking of donor funding to sectoral priorities, and frontline monitoring of development projects.
8. Data systems and reporting in the public sector generally remained weak, while many indicators were programmed in the Results Framework of the MTNDP without data (baselines and targets); close to half of the 686 indicators in the framework were without data, largely because of limited resources to undertake the necessary baseline assessment during implementation.

# **E. Lessons learned**

1. Diversifying sources of financing national plans with more emphasis on domestic resource mobilisation is critical for the sustainable implementation of public projects; critical for providing shock absorbers during crises, such as drawn from climate change, COVID-19 and Ukraine-Russia War.
2. Entrenched digital solutions are inevitable in building resilient socioeconomic systems. Virtual spaces are critical to the insulation of operations during crises, coupled with their general default importance for sustainable development.
3. Sustained development cooperation, strengthened regional/sub-regional trade and sectoral/general stakeholder coordination are critical dimensions to sustainable financing.
4. Decentralised systems with a highly people-centred approach are fundamental prerequisites for effective public service delivery.
5. Building risk management into plan implementation frameworks is fundamental to ensuring the continued implementation of plans during shocks.
6. Using computer aided online system for conducting large statistical operations like national housing and population census yields great efficiency as demonstrated during the 2021 Mid-Term Census of Sierra Leone.
7. A strong political will is the most crucial requirement for effective delivery of services.

# **F. Emerging strategic areas for consideration in the successor to the MTNDP 2019-2023**

***Those drawn from periodic review and general development debates***

1. A range of strategic areas for consideration in the next MTNDP were highlighted in the periodic reviews of implementation of the current plan and general debates/discussions on contemporary issues affecting global, regional and national developments. The following are among the critical emerging areas for consideration:
   1. Advancing Human Capital Development Programme of GoSL, with a continued focus on education, healthcare and nutrition; the need for prioritisation of investment in sustainable AgriFood System is coming out strongly.
   2. Increasing resource mobilisation through strengthening implementation of Sierra Leone’s Integrated National Financing Framework.
   3. Capacity will be built for the formulation and implementation of bankable projects linked to broad and strategic project areas that the new Plan will identify to pursue sectoral strategic objectives and key targets—a strong case expected to be made for securing an adequate Project Preparation Facility.
   4. Economic diversification, private sector development & increased implementation of African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Trade interventions will be emphasised, ensuring a sharp focus on implementation of the revised industrialisation policy, and new policy on Special Economic Zones.
   5. Promoting gender consideration in socioeconomic operations, ensuring the fullest implementation of the recently passed Gender and Women Empowerment Act.
   6. Also, the next Plan will raise the premium on Climate Action and Finance in light of the increased concerns derived from climate change.
   7. Urban habitat and development will stand out with a special focus on promoting secondary cities.
   8. Increasing investment in science, technology and innovation and digital solutions in the public service delivery.
   9. Scaling-up efforts at pursuing the *blue economy potential* of Sierra Leone aimed at increasing human well-being through the sustainable development of ocean resources; as well as harnessing the *demographic dividend of the state*, taking advantage of having more economically active population and dependents in the country.
   10. Paying special attention to current infrastructure initiatives of GoSL; including giving attention to Western Area Peninsula Local Economic Development.
   11. Strengthening national data systems, monitoring of implementation and reporting, including establishing integrated web-based monitoring and reporting for the National Development Plan, SDGs and AU Agenda 2063.

***Presidential strategic policy areas for the next five years: The Big 5 Game changes***

1. Going into the second term of its administration for the next five years until 2028, the Government of President Maada Bio has articulated its Big 5 Game Changers as its overarching strategic framework. This will consolidate gains in the implementation of the MTNDP 2019-2023 while accelerating efforts towards the country’s vision of achieving a middle-income status by 2035 through next successive national development plan. The Big 5 will provide principal direction to the country’s new MTNDP 2024-2028, with the following broad acceleration commitments:
   1. *Feed Salone*: Essentially aimed at boosting agricultural productivity to ensure food security, and inclusive economic growth;
   2. *Human Capital Development:* Focusing on nurturing inclusive skills and healthy population for the 21st century demands through scaled-up investment in human capital development;
   3. *Youth Employment Scheme as a Catalyst for Democracy, Economic Productivity and National Security:* Aimed at creating 500,000 jobs for youths in the next five years;
   4. *Enhancing Public Service Architecture for Empowering Democracy and National Development:* Aimed at ensuring effective service delivery, efficiency and professionalism in the public service architecture; and
2. *Technology and Infrastructure:* Focused on increasing investment in infrastructure, technology and digitalisation.

# **G. Proposed direction and structure of the successor plan, MTNDP 2024-2028**

1. In light of the experience encountered during the implementation of the MTNDP 2019-2023, drawing from the fallouts of COVID-19 and the Ukraine-Russia war on the Sierra Leone economy, the following are critical arguments have been advanced towards shaping the direction and structure of the successor plan:
   1. Consider the need to broadly continue with the implementation of the priorities of the current national development plan owing to the enormous shocks it went through. The *four national goals* of the plan and most of its *targets* largely remain undelivered to expectation, and they continue to be strategic.
   2. It is accordingly expected that the next plan preparation process will essentially involve an updating of the current national development plan (the MTNDP 2019-2023), to derive MTNDP 2024-2028. It is crucial to ensure in the process that emerging topical/strategic issues that did not standout in the current plan are captured in the next plan.
   3. Basically, there is need to continue with the cluster/thematic structure of the current plan, with tweaks where necessary to ensure that fundamental emerging perspectives/orientations are captured in the next plan.
   4. Some of the emerging strategic issues could help define broad *parameters and principles* to guide the implementation of tangible projects and programmes in the next plan; ensuring regular monitoring and reporting on compliance with these critical parameters/principles.
   5. These principles/parameters may relate to mainstreaming the harnessing of blue economy potential, harnessing the demographic dividend, scaling-up climate action, harnessing AfCFTA opportunities, diversifying the economy, more deployment of digital solution/STI, operationalising gender equality legislation, generally enforcing the INFF, and operationalising an integrated M&E platform for national plan, SDGs and AU Agenda 2063.
   6. *A key* ***principle*** *that GoSL has given special prominence is that, the formulation of the next plan and its implementation will be heavily people-centred using the* ***Wan Fambul Framework (the People’s Planning Process****) as the leading vehicle in this direction.*
   7. Thus, the proposed structure/cluster system in the next plan is presented as follows:

**Super Cluster 1: The Big 5 Game Changes**

**Sub-Cluster 1.1: Feed Salone**

**Sub-Cluster 1.2: Accelerating Human Capital Development**

**Sub-Cluster 1.3: Investment in Youth Employment**

**Sub-Cluster 1.4: Public Sector Effectivenes****s and Efficiency**

**Sub-Cluster 1.5: Infrastructure, Technology and Innovation**

**Policy Cluster 2 – Diversifying the economy and promoting growth**

**Policy Cluster 3 –** **Governance and Accountability for Results**

**Policy Cluster 4 – Empowering Women, Children & Persons with Disabilities**

**Policy Cluster 5 – Addressing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience**

**Policy Cluster 6 – Means of Implementation**

1. Continuing clusters (2-6) will be reviewed and widely consulted upon, alongside the Super Cluster (1). Continuing clusters will be reviewed to determine which *strategic objectives* to retain, tweak/modify or change. *Targets and key policy actions* will be redefined in the process to inform the review of *projects and programmes*; dropping those not required anymore, capturing new ones where necessary.
2. *We expect to have broader district level engagements than before; involving the participation of all relevant chiefdom actors than a selected/representative few. This is in tune with the requirement of the government’s* ***Wan Fambul Framework*** *as a vehicle for deepening people-centred planning and plan implementation in the next five-year development cycle.*
3. Finally, the next plan is expected to have a highly rationalised Results Framework, containing only indicators with baseline and targets to enhance its usability.

# **H. Conclusion**

1. Once the general elections are over in June 2023, the preparation of the successor plan will start in earnest thereafter. This concept note will be adjusted to capture the full agenda of the new government administration for the next five years, covering 2024-2028.
2. A clear methodology for nationwide stakeholder consultations on the new plan will then be articulated, including governance of the process. Provision for consulting with Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora will be made in the post-election consultation instrument.

1. See Page 6 of the Statement of Economic and Financial Policies of the GoSL for 2023 Fiscal Year; obtainable from the Ministry of Finance, Freetown. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)