

## Key 2021 VNR Messages for Sierra Leone

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Sierra Leone remains steadfast in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It is presenting an evaluative third VNR report, following its second review in 2019. The country continues to give great focus to its accelerator Goals: SDG4 (*education*) and SDG16 (*justice*). The two Goals were informed by the national development context, as the most crucial to the socioeconomic transformation of the state.

Ensuring basic, inclusive, and free quality education is a top priority in the Government's Human Capital Development flagship programme within the country's Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023). Accordingly, national budget allocation to the education sector has remained around 21 percent since 2018 to ensure all public-school pupils have access to basic and senior school education; free access to textbooks for core subjects; and school feeding. With regard to the latter, the Government provided food for more than 300,000 pupils in 2020, besides efforts by Development Partners in the same area. This initiative has generally benefitted 2.5 million pupils and saved parents an estimated US\$500 per year per beneficiary pupil, coupled with free school bus service for all districts headquarter towns. This has seen significant increases in the Gross Enrolment Rate for the primary level which exceeded 135 percent in 2019 and 2020, compared to 109 percent in 2018.

Also, the country's efforts on SDG16 (*justice*) remains laudable. Internationally, it continues to provide leadership to the G7+, which secured a UN Observer Status in December 2019 to leverage more support to walk this group out of fragility into sustainable development. Sierra Leone is also Co-Chair of the International Dialogue on Peace-building and State-building. In December 2020, the country exited the formal agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission Configuration, as a show of remarkable achievement towards resilience and sustainable development. Nationally, the Government has scaled up efforts towards establishing the planned Commission of Peace and National Cohesion, with a Bill enacted in parliament to this effect. The justice sector has accelerated strides in promoting access to justice for the underprivileged. With the establishment of the Legal Aid Board in 2015, those benefiting from free legal representation, advice and related services reached a total of 413,169 people in 2020 (including persons in pre-trial detention and prisons); recording a 93 percent increase from 2018. Interventions covered child and women rights issues, land disputes, and criminal cases including domestic violence, rape, and juvenile offences; rural communities provided with special attention. To reinforce this, the number of Magistrates and Judges have increased from 63 in 2019 to 77 across the country.

Prioritising education (SDG4) and justice (SDG16) is central to pursuing other Goals, such as 1 (*ending poverty*), 2 (*zero hunger*) and 10 (*inequality*), as well as 3 (*healthcare*) and 5 (*gender*). For instance, increasing access to justice as an entitlement and basic need

is fundamental to stemming rural multidimensional poverty in the country, currently estimated as 86.3 percent, and income poverty 73.9 percent, compared to 37.6 and 34.8 percent for urban areas, respectively. Reducing school fee burden on poor households will increase their access to basic needs, including healthcare services and investment in small businesses consistent with SDG8 (*decent work*), and even 11 (*responsible production and consumption*) and 13 (*climate change*). Additionally, we have continued to maintain gender parity in primary education and achieved parity in junior secondary education.

With regard to localising the SDGs, the Government has revitalised district development coordination structures, alongside scaling up the “People’s Planning Process” model integrating chieftdom/village level planning into district/national planning processes.

On partnerships and financing for development (SDG17), a range of initiatives have been pursued, largely informed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Among them, we currently implement *a strengthening domestic resource mobilisation for SDGs financing project* aimed at driving innovation in domestic revenue collection and management at central and local levels and financial sector capitalisation through deploying digitalisation and financial literacy.

In terms of challenges, Government has experienced dwindling domestic revenues, especially with the COVID pandemic that has extremely constrained private sector operations. To this end, debt relief and cancellation would be critical to sustaining SDGs financing, in addition to ongoing efforts at strengthening general public financial management.