



## Effectiveness of AEP Study: Sierra Leone

### Research Title:

**“Increasing Access to Quality Education for Rural and Marginalised Children in West Africa— A Comparative Study of Accelerated Education and Girls Focussed Programmes in Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone”**

### Research Report

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## List of Acronyms

AEP	Accelerated Education Program
ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
CTA	Community Teacher Association
ELA	Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GFM	Girls Focused Model
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
JSS	Junior Secondary School
KII	Key informant interview
KIX	Knowledge, Innovation and Exchange
MBSSE	Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education
NFED	Non formal Education Directorate
NPSE	National Primary School Examination
ODK	Open Data Kit
SCI	Save the Children International
SEGRA	Secondary Grade Reading Assessment
SSS	Senior Secondary School

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# Executive Summary

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## Background

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is funding a research study under its Knowledge Information Exchange (KIX) initiative. KIX is a joint endeavour between IDRC and the Global Partnership Alliance for Education (GPE). The research study seeks to examine the efficiency, effectiveness, and scalability of Accelerated Education Programmes (AEP) and girls focused education models (GFM) in West Africa's rural, fragile, and hard-to-reach areas of Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The ultimate aim of the research is to increase access to learning for out of school children (OOSC) through strengthened use of knowledge on effective AEP and GFM. Associates for Change (AFC- Ghana), Centre for the Study of Economies (CSEA- Nigeria) and Dalan Development Consultants (DDC- Sierra Leone) are implementing the research.

An effectiveness study which forms part of the research package, seeks to investigate how beneficiaries who participated in the AEP implemented by BRAC, Save the Children (SCF) International as well as the Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) have transitioned to formal education or to the world of work.

As a prerequisite for undertaking the effectiveness study, the research consortium partners undertook an Out of School mapping exercise in three districts across two administrative regions of Sierra Leone. These were namely North West Region (Port Loko and Kambia districts), and Southern Region (Pujehun District); where BRAC Sierra Leone, the MBSSE and SCF respectively undertook AEP and GFM, to assess the magnitude of the out of school phenomenon, in the three districts. 22% of children aged between 4 to 17 years were estimated to be out of school. The mapping exercise was followed by a prelisting activity to trace AEP beneficiaries, using beneficiary data provided by the three service providers. The output from the prelisting exercise formed the sampling frame for the effectiveness study.

## Methodology

The effectiveness study employed an exploratory mixed-method approach –leaning more towards qualitative approaches to answer the research questions.

1. What is the effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability of the education innovations in relation to the OOSC population and girls?
2. How can AEP approaches be adapted and scaled up by government systems to contribute to universal primary and secondary education in West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone)

The approach used allowed for a deep-dive, in-depth assessment of key themes and variables of study. The qualitative data was gathered through in-depth Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and observations from all target groups (namely, AEP beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, teachers, facilitators, district education officers, community leaders and parents) across the study districts, communities, schools, and at the beneficiary level. Data was collected over November-December 2022. The overall coverage achieved was: 63 communities, 63 schools, 330 teachers, 407 AEP beneficiaries and 406 non AEP beneficiaries at school level and 167 beneficiaries at world of work. For the effectiveness study, Sierra Leone carried out in-depth analysis of **AEP beneficiaries who transitioned to Junior Secondary school (JSS) level and for AEP beneficiaries in the world of work.**

Qualitative data applicable to 245 AEP beneficiaries and 250 non-beneficiaries surveyed in the twenty two (22) JSS schools, as well as for 167 beneficiaries surveyed in the World of

Work were analysed using the Dedoose data analysis software package. MS-Excel software was used to analyse all quantitative data sets.

## **Key Findings**

### **Enablers favouring learning in Accelerated Education Programmes-**

#### **Conditions of Learning**

**AEPs cover essential costs:** Even though government policy stipulates that education should be free, there are other essential costs that are not covered, which parents have to bear. These include the cost of school bags, shoes and uniforms. In most cases, parents in deprived areas are unable to bear these costs, resulting in children dropping out of school. The AEPs implemented by SCF worked with the community to allocate physical structures to host AEP learners, and provided school bags, shoes and uniforms in addition to learning materials, which reduced the costs borne by parents. The MBSSE, through UNICEF, provided school bags, pens, books and other learning materials to beneficiaries. BRAC also provided beneficiaries with bags, shoes, books and other learning materials. The provision of such items encouraged children to enroll for the AEPs.

**AEPs offer a more conducive learning environment especially for marginalized girls.** In spite of the radical inclusion policy that has been adopted in Sierra Leonean schools, pregnant girls who enrolled in AEP programmes felt more comfortable in the AEP environment which they perceived as being more friendly, free of bullying and favourable for learning.

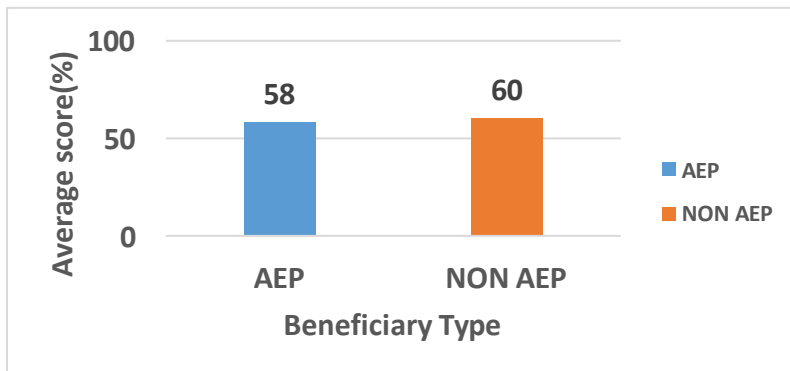
**The attitude of teachers regardless of the schooling system is key to stimulating learning.** Both AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries applaud their teachers for their friendliness. However, AEP facilitators/teachers are more likely to develop a personal relationship and interest in their pupils. In addition:

- Higher contact hours with the same teacher creates a bond between teacher and pupil.
- AEP teachers are more likely to make home visits to address absenteeism.
- The language of instruction used by AEP facilitators was predominantly the dialect common to the intervention area, compared to formal schools where the preference was for English. According to AEP beneficiaries, learning in the local dialect enhanced their understanding of the subject matter.
- AEP teachers rarely apply corporal punishment, but rather use more friendly behaviours (song and dance) to correct mistakes and stimulate learning.

#### **Impact One- Learning Outcomes**

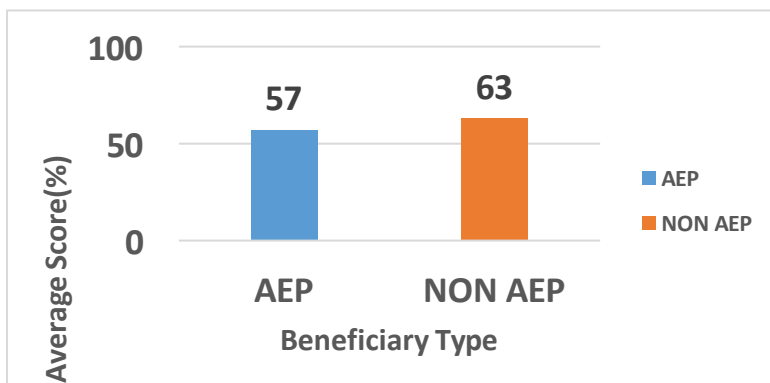
**Performance levels on word reading SEGRA tests is similar among junior secondary school (JSS) AEP and Non AEP beneficiaries.** The SEGRA assessment for word reading found no significant difference in performance between JSS pupils who transitioned from an AEP and those who have been continuously in the formal school system.

Figure 1: Word reading performance by beneficiary type



**Performance on SEGRA reading and comprehension is stronger among Non AEP Beneficiaries** - Pupils who were tutored in the formal school system throughout their schooling, consistently achieved significantly higher scores for reading and comprehension than their counterparts who had transitioned to a formal school from an AEP. The pattern was the same when the data was examined by gender, and by Innovator/ Implementer. However, the difference in AEP and Non AEP performance was not significant (i.e. 6 percentage points). Figure 2.

Figure 2: Reading and comprehension performance by beneficiary type



**Performance Analysis by gender yielded mixed results** - Boys outperformed girls for the lower level word reading test. However, for the higher level reading and comprehension test, performance levels were even for both sexes. The reasons for the trend are not clear.

Figure 3: Word reading performance by gender

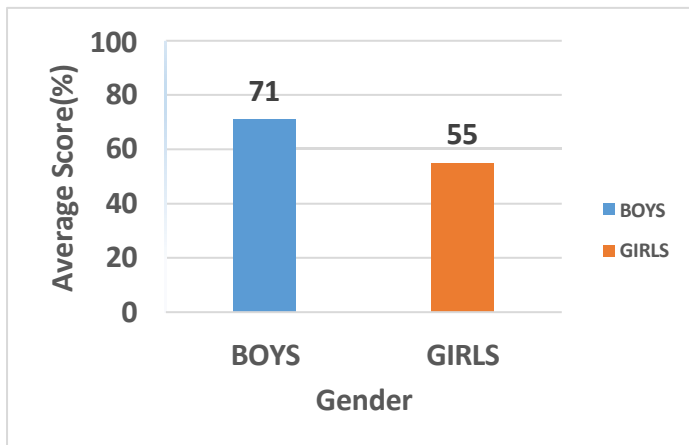
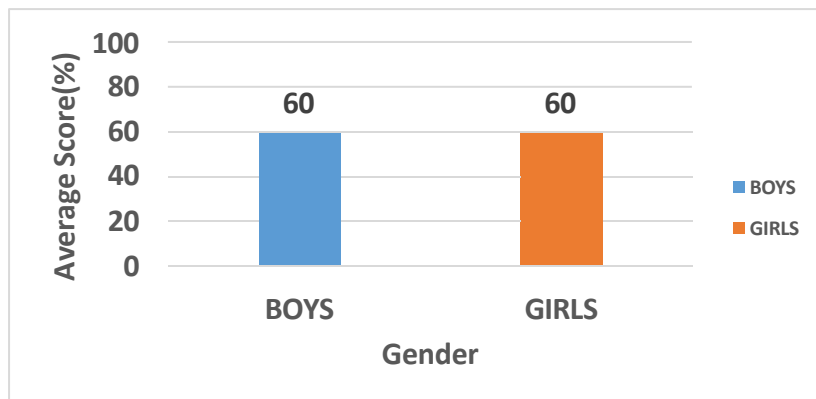


Figure 4: Reading and comprehension performance by gender



**Learning outcomes differ by implementing partner** Competency levels in Word Reading for pupils who had participated in an AEP matched the competency level of non-AEP counterparts especially for BRAC and SCF cohorts. In the case of the SCF sample, AEP graduates scored slightly higher (65%) compared to pupils continuously tutored in the formal school system (62%). However, for the MBSSE Cohorts, non-AEPs scored significantly higher (49%) than beneficiaries who started their education journey within an AEP system (45%). In the case of Reading and Comprehension, the mean score was even (66%) for both ex BRAC pupils and non BRAC pupils examined at the same school. In the case of MBSSE and SCF samples, the non AEP pupils scored higher although the difference was not significant. The findings for BRAC is surprising given that the AEP implemented by MBSSE and SCI were tailored to transition beneficiaries into the formal school system.

Figure 5: Word reading performance by implementing partner and beneficiary

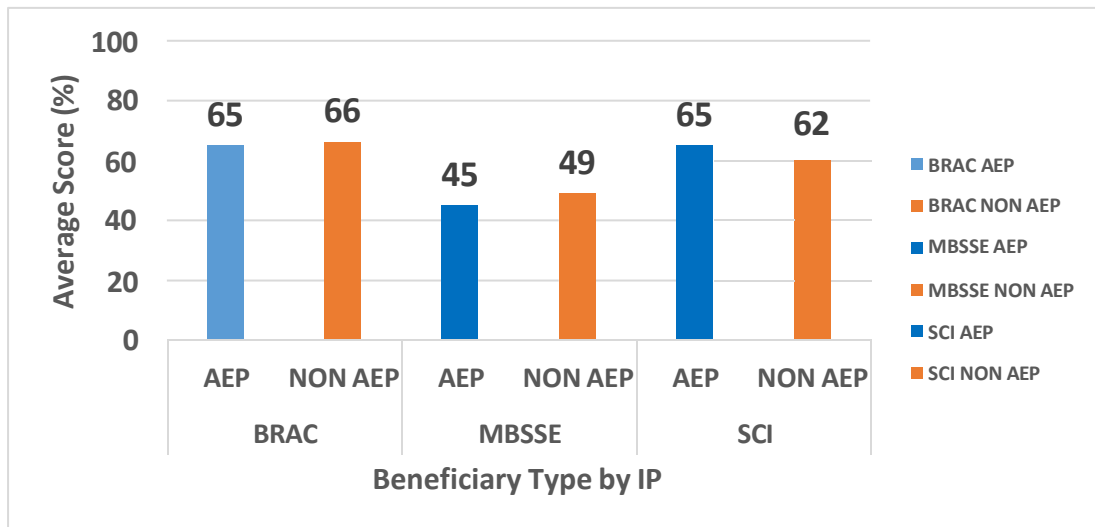
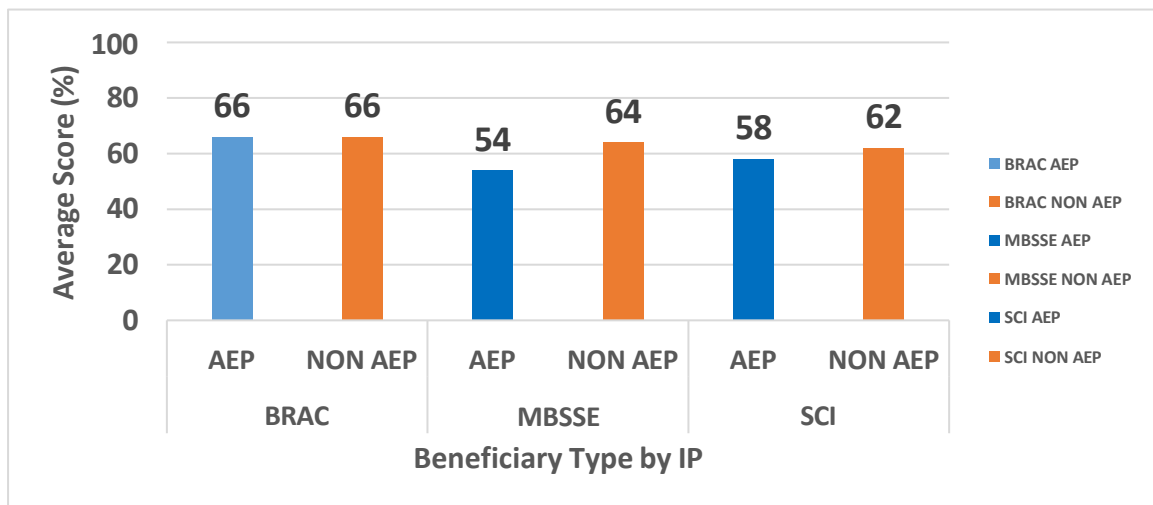


Figure 6: Reading and comprehension by implementing partner and by beneficiary type



## Impact 2 -Transition, retention and completion

**The transition pattern of BRAC beneficiaries is at odds with the AEP design:** Even though BRAC’s programme is designed to transition beneficiaries to the world of work, 66 out of 178 (37%) of AEP beneficiaries surveyed at JSS level were BRAC beneficiaries.

**Prospects for Transitioning from JSS to SSS among AEP Beneficiaries is promising:** One AEP beneficiary who has gone through JSS, has passed SSS, and is heading to university has become an instant celebrity and a role model in her community and every child wants to be like her. According to a head teacher participant:

*If you can take a look at one of the AEP pupil that has just got her requirement to the university, you can see her as one of the examples of what is motivating them ( others)..... KII HT. Massam, Pujehun*

**Reported higher completion rate at JSS level among AEP beneficiaries** – The completion rate at the JSS level is reported to be higher among AEP beneficiaries. This is attributed by the beneficiaries to their resolve to make good use of the opportunity of a second chance at schooling; and the fact that the AEP had instilled the importance of education in them.

**Multiple Factors contribute to retention of AEP beneficiaries who transition into the school system:** Removal of the burden of school fees, availability of school supplies, extra curricula activities, monitoring by AEP as well as family and community support were reported as key factors explaining the retention of AEP beneficiaries within the formal system..

### **Impact 3 – AEPs Transform the lives of beneficiaries especially girls -Gender Transformation**

**Exposure to AEPs stimulated students' interest in transitioning to further education-** According to some beneficiaries learning the basics and understanding the benefits of education has resulted in them enrolling in formal school and for those who had not yet done so, were inspired to do so in the future.

*“My participation in the program has helped me to have a positive mindset to go to college and finish my education and be a soldier.” (AEP BEN-RK-F-LUNSAR-PL-TM4-SMSS-JSS2-EMK).*

*“AEP helped me to learn and be in the school system.” (BEN-SJ-PUJ-01-GPSS-BUMPEH PERI-MG).*

**AEPs promote girls empowerment–** AEP graduates value their enhanced capacity to read, write and count. Empowered girls are key to breaking the cycle of poverty for families in Sierra Leone.

*“I learnt how to count from one to hundred. I used to sell in the market since I was a child with my mom so I do not have a problem with attending to my customers. But through the AEP program, I now know the value of money and how to make more profit in the business I am doing.” (BEN-WOW-YK-F-SHERILANKA -KAM-TM6).*

**AEPs promote the right to education-** The AEPs also made many beneficiaries, families and associated communities realise that everyone has a right to education and can be educated irrespective of their circumstances. One key informant interviewed commented that the AEP:

*“made the community aware that children can be educated with whatever condition or status they find themselves. They can attend the program, whether they are married, single, pregnant or a breastfeeding mother and they can be of any age as long they are ready to be educated.” (KII-FAC-AK-ZIMMI-PUJTH5-RSK)*

**AEPs strengthen business skills-** Beneficiaries who enrolled in the BRAC programme reported training in business skills as a positive impact. They mentioned that through the AEP, they had learnt how to start a business successfully. Many who did not choose the formal schooling route, were able to engage in businesses. AEP beneficiaries mentioned the following:

*“Well, the program taught me how to do business, and currently I am doing business and I am doing my business well.” (BEN FY\_Dare Salam\_WorlfoWork\_KamT6).*

*They again taught me how to do business [financial literacy]. For example, if you get le5, 000, how that said amount will become le10, 000.” (AEP-BEN-SOC-FS-F-PUJE-TM1-JM).*

*“The most important thing that I have learnt from the program is soap making because I am doing that and selling the soap now to take care of myself and support my family.” (BEN\_ZB\_Masineh\_WorlfoWork\_KamT6).*



**AEPs build self-esteem and confidence-** The AEP through its unique teaching methods has contributed to building the confidence of beneficiaries. A stakeholder in Pujehun district pointed to *the best school debating candidate*, who won an interschool debating competition and was an AEP beneficiary. One of the beneficiaries expressed with pride how participating in the program had helped her to be confident and bold in talking to people and responding to questions. She attributed this behavior change to the knowledge she had gained from the BRAC program. *“The knowledge gained has been very useful to me because during the implementation of the other education programs in my community, I was so confident and bold in answering whatever questions I was asked and I ensured to attempt every question asked even without knowing the answers. I got this boldness during the ELA (Brac) program.” (BEN-WOW-SFK-F-Koya2-KamT6).*

In the FGD with community leaders in Masama, Kambia, one community leader stated: *“Through the help of this program, our children are now very outspoken in the community and most of them are now doing well in their education. They are always taking part in competitions which they are doing well in. Because of the teaching method of the program most of these children are now doing well.” (FGD\_CL\_KamT6\_Masama\_AH).*

**AEPs help to prevent early marriage and teenage pregnancy -** According to AEP beneficiaries, the AEP helped them to understand and address issues that could adversely affect their well-being and prevent them from achieving their goals in life. One of these issues is teenage pregnancy as the following quotations confirm:



*“.....The teachers teach us how to prevent pregnancy.”(BEN-WOW-IC-F-DARESALAM-KAMTM6).*

*“I learnt that early sex is not good and that one should abstain from sex if you don’t want to get pregnant.” (BEN-WOW-IC-F-DARESALAM-KAMTM6).*

*“It (the AEP) has helped to shape my life by introducing us to various contraceptives.” (AEP BEN-F-KK-Port Loko).*

## **Barriers Hindering Learning in Accelerated Education Programmes-**

**AEP classroom spaces tend to be small and furniture is inadequate**—AEPs do not have adequate classrooms for lessons unlike some formal schools. The same goes for the lack of furniture. A common thread was:

*“Classroom space and sitting accommodation are the main challenges for us even though amenities for play are provided.” During the AEP classes, we did not use chairs and desks. We sat on mats on the floor, unlike my current school where we are using chairs and desks for classes. There are blackboards in my current school while we only used reader books in the AEP. We were only having one teacher in the AEP School whilst we have so many teachers in my current school with specialties in different subjects. AEP Ben. (JSS2), Magbesseneh, Port Loko.*

**AEP beneficiaries are at risk of dropping out of the AEP due to poverty** – Even though AEPs address other costs besides school fees with a view to influencing beneficiaries’ decision to stay with the programme, AEP beneficiaries are also at risk of dropping out. Some AEP beneficiaries were already mothers at the time of their enrolment, and may drop out in the absence of a reliable caretaker arrangement. Far distances to the AEP site, limited access to food whilst at the site also emerged as disincentives to stay on the AEP.

*At the time when I was going to the AEP sessions, I was having lunch as a challenge and also the distance was too far from my house to the AEP Centre it was also a challenge AEP Ben. (JSS 3) Pujehun.*

*The challenge I was experiencing when I was in the AEP programme is that, I had to walk long distance by foot in order for me to access the AEP learning centre and it was a serious challenge. AEP Ben. (JSS 3), Pujehun*

Another reason AEP beneficiaries drop out of the program is due to their family situation. Beneficiaries were expected to fulfil responsibilities such as farm work, or domestic chores, whilst also attending classes. Many choose to drop out, because of family labour pressure.

*Sometime when I want to go for the BRAC lessons my mum will tell me not to go because we have some chore to do on the farm. In addition, I had to cook and by the time I was done cooking, the lesson would be over. KII AEP Ben. (JSS2), Port Loko*

*P2: whilst I was attending the programme, my aunt was harassing/disturbing me to sell, and by the time I could come from selling and get prepared to go for the class, I would already be late. In fact, sometimes, by the time I could return from selling, my colleagues are already off for the day.*

*P3: whilst I was attending the programme, my mother some of the times instruct me to cook, and by the time could finish cooking, my colleagues are almost off.*

*P1: some of my challenges were, I had to wash dishes, bath my younger sister and by the time I was done with such work, I would meet my colleagues at the verge of completion.*

#### **Participants FGD Ben. (Girls) Rokupr, Kambia**

**Beneficiaries who transition to the ‘world of work’ face challenges:** driven by limited earning capacity. For some, the businesses they set up after graduating from the AEP programme failed, and they did not have a choice but to engage in unpaid tasks including cooking, cleaning, childcare, and laundry. In rural communities in Sierra Leone, where early marriage is culturally embedded, some of the AEP beneficiaries were pressurised to marry against their will. When this happened, they got trapped into the cycle of multiple pregnancies and raising large families within a poverty-stricken environment.

#### **Career aspirations of AEP beneficiaries**

The AEPs are a source of inspiration for beneficiaries, exposing them to opportunities that they did not know existed. They know that in order to gain a good career, they need to apply themselves diligently to their education. As one beneficiary in Pujehun observed in a KII, *“after completing my junior level (JSS), I would like to continue to Senior School (SSS) until I get to the university so I will be able to reap the benefit of education and also assist my grandmother”* **KII-Ben-WL-F-Jendema-PujT2-SLYMMSS-JSS3.**

The major career aspiration of AEP beneficiaries is in the medical field, particularly nursing with the intent to save people who are dying needlessly because of the lack of medical personnel in their vicinity. As a female AEP beneficiary pointed out in a KII, *“I want to become a nurse because I want to save lives, because being a nurse, when sick person comes, you can assist to get them healed in order that the person does not die an untimely death. For there are certain sicknesses that comes your way, it’s not capable of killing you, but due to lack of proper care one does lose their lives”.* **KII-BEN-(AS)-F\_K.KRIM\_PUJ.** Some are also attracted to the profession because of the way nurses dress and are respected by community members. For some beneficiaries, becoming a nurse is a way of breaking the gender bias favoring men which they thought was associated with nursing.

Another major career that AEPs aspire to is with the military because of its’ ability to bring order where there is chaos. Some AEP beneficiaries also aspire to engage in white-collar jobs such as accounting and banking. An AEP beneficiary had her aspirations shifted from becoming a victim of early marriage upon joining the program. As she reports, *“When I joined the programme, I realized that I can become a bank manager. In the past, my aspiration was limited and my thought was about early marriage and pregnancy”.* **KIIBEN\_SK\_GSS\_KAM03\_MADINA, Kambia.**

A few beneficiaries mentioned teaching as the career of choice because of their admiration for their teachers. Other AEP beneficiaries want to be journalists, lawyers, doctors and businesspersons.

#### **Prospects for Scalability**

A National Strategy for Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone (2022) has been developed by the government to improve *“access to education for the long-run development of young Sierra Leoneans”*. This compliments the radical inclusion policy in schools which aims to address the *“inclusion needs”* of OOSC. The strategy calls for expansion of AEP alongside existing school programmes, including updating the curricula.

SCF as an AEP provider has been asked to manage the Qatar fund for AEP development indicating the government's commitment to scaling up AEPs in order to bring education to children who are at risk of being excluded altogether from an education or of dropping out of school prematurely.

## **Recommendations**

### **Government/Policy makers**

- **Use recent findings on AEP effectiveness to guide investments:** the Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education( MBSSE) policy leads are advised to use findings from the the ongoing AEP/KIX effectiveness research studies, including cost effectiveness, to guide the planned scale up of AEP and to better understand what is currently working well and less well in existing AEPs in Sierra Leone.
- **Prioritise AEP expansion in the roll out of the existing Out of School Strategy:** In the process of scaling up AEP and enhancing AEP performance, it will be important to consider a twin track approach which combines the goals of increased transitioning of AEP beneficiaries into the formal school system, and equipping AEP beneficiaries for the world of work.

### **Education Innovators/Programmatic and strategic approaches**

- **Develop robust data management Systems:** AEP Education Innovators are encouraged to improve/ strengthen their data management systems in order to build the evidence base and make a convincing case of AEP effectiveness. It will be advantageous for them to upgrade and sustain reliable electronic data base systems, to routinely track indicators such as the following:
  - Number of beneficiaries enrolled (by gender)
  - Age at enrolment (by gender)
  - Enrolment profile (date enrolled etc)
  - Outcome (remained, dropped out, as well as stay- leave decisions)
  - Transitioning profile (age at transition, year transitioned, school transition to, grade)
  - For World of Work model (skills gained, plan to transition to formal school system, preferred school, anticipated grade, business interest etc).
- **Continue to apply a girl centred approach:** The findings presented above show that AEP stimulate strong drive among female graduates to pursue further education or establish successful businesses. To achieve the Sierra Leone's government goal of universal access to education, AEP programming needs to be increasingly women and girls centered, so as to achieve the broader agenda of improving the quality of life for beneficiaries and their families.
- **Address potential gender-based disparities in reading proficiency:** Innovators targeting both boys and girls should implement targeted interventions, to improve on reading skills at the word and paragraph levels for both females and males in order to equip all students to achieve their full potential in language proficiency and academic success.

- **Strengthen the recruitment drive for AEP beneficiaries and intensify mentor training:** AEP Innovators are encouraged to improve the recruitment drive and train more mentors. AEPs have a place in Sierra Leone's education system given the persistent risk of drop out especially among disadvantaged and over-aged children. AEPs will remain relevant to provide their unique learners who enrol into these programmes with equivalent certified competencies especially for basic education. Likewise, the AEP mentors/facilitators who deliver courses must be trained to ensure the use of effective teaching methods appropriate to stimulate learning within AEP settings.

## **Formal schools**

- **Foster collaboration between AEP implementers and formal schools** to facilitate smooth transition and support systems for AEP graduates.
- **Develop the school- parent interface for strategic dialogue to reduce drop out rates of pupils in formal schools:** Schools provide a unique platform for timely dialogue with parents about the benefits of the free quality school education (FQSE) scheme, the school/parent cost share opportunities to address aspects not covered by the scheme, and the advantages of retaining a child or ward in school. Strategic dialogue with the school system will assist parents plan better to keep their children in school.

## **Community**

- **Encourage communities to increase their contribution To the AEPs:** Although some community members have contributed to the establishment of AEPs within their communities, and have applauded the wider benefits of AEPs, AEP institutional structures are weak. Communities are urged to do more to provide additional classroom space and basic furniture and to assess what they might contribute to strengthening institutional structures.

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# Introduction

# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 *Background and context of the study*

The 1990 World Declaration of Education for All demonstrated universal efforts to advance education for every child, youth, and adult. The statement also emphasizes that no one should be excluded from education based on gender, race, location, or disability. In addition, the "Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments," (Dakar 2000), reasserted the vision through "a broad-based strategy for ensuring that the basic learning needs of every child, youth and adult are met within a generation and sustained thereafter". Following the declaration, countries have signed treaties and committed to enhancing education for all. However, governments are still challenged to provide education for some citizens and account for a high out-of-school population. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2019) over 258.4 million children, adolescents, and young people around the world are denied the right to education,. It reports the highest rate of education exclusion in sub-Saharan Africa, with more than one-third of the world's OOSC population (98 million) living in the sub-region; girls account for the majority (53%).

According to the UIS 2018 database, there were **624,292**, **608,717**, and **719,750** OOSC in Sierra Leone in **2015**, **2017**, and **2018** respectively. The Out of School Mapping study (2022) estimates the out of school rate at 22%. At the primary school level, more males than girls are out of school each year, while the opposite is true at the secondary school level. In terms of OOSC, there is a fine balance between boys and girls in junior secondary school, while the research suggests that it somewhat favors females.

In 2018 almost one-fifth (18 percent) of children aged 6 to 11 were out of school. Only 45 percent of JSS-age children were in elementary school, and nearly a fifth (19 percent) were not in school at all, with only 36 percent attending JSS in accordance with their age group. More boys than girls were out of school in both age groups, while (36 percent) of senior secondary school age were out of school; and there was a notable urban-rural divide: 8 percent of JSS-aged children in urban regions were out of school, compared to 29 percent in rural areas (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2018).

Several children in Sierra Leone do not complete primary school or make the transition from primary to junior secondary school (JSS). Primary school graduation rates are 64 percent, JSS (lower secondary) graduation rates are 44 percent, and SSS (upper secondary) graduation rates are 22 percent<sup>1</sup>. According to the 2022 out of school mapping report, the number of children who have dropped out of school is highest among children aged 15-17 (who are typically in SSS1-SSS3), with girls in SSS3 having the highest dropout rate of 23% .

In response to the high out of school situation and in an effort to give such children hope for a better future, Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs) have emerged as one of the key innovations for providing alternative education. They offer flexible, age-appropriate education and are run on accelerated timeframes. They also offer holistic forms of education that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/education>

contribute to higher confidence levels and cognitive well-being of beneficiaries, in addition to being inclusive, as they pay specific attention to girls and children with disabilities. AEPs offer access to education by enabling OOSC and youth (those who had dropped out of school and those who never enrolled in school), to enter or re-enter the formal school system.

## **The Knowledge and Innovation Exchange Research**

The KIX IDRC-funded research is a cross-country study of AEPs and girls' empowerment models that focus on vulnerable children and youth in rural, extreme poverty zones, and fragile environments across West Africa. The overarching objective of the study is to increase access to learning for children who are out of school through the strengthened use of knowledge in AEP. In Sierra Leone, organisations such as Save the Children (SCI) International, BRAC – Sierra Leone and Purposeful as well as the MBSSE, through their programmes have provided innovative education to children and youth who live in rural, deprived and underserved areas to return to formal school or to provide them with skills to live economically productive lives.

### **The KIX Sierra Leone Mapping**

To set the context for the Sierra Leone study, Dalan Development Consultants undertook an Out of School mapping exercise in three districts across two administrative regions, namely North West Region (Port Loko and Kambia districts), and Southern Region (Pujehun District). The mapping study has provided a baseline for subsequent research activities conducted over the project duration.

The mapping study gathered data on the profile of the different types of OOSC (disaggregated by gender, age, disability etc.), using UNICEF's framework to measure the five dimensions of exclusion and examine the demand and supply barriers to education. It also explored the diverse contexts in which the education innovations are being implemented (rural deprived and extremely deprived contexts, socio-cultural and poverty contexts). The general findings of the study indicate that:

- The out-of-school rate of 4-17 year old children in the study area is 22.21% (663 children out of 2992 are out of school).
- The highest out-of-school rate (6.6%) is among senior secondary school population aged 15 to 17 years, followed by primary school with 5.5% (aged 6-11 yrs), pre-primary pupils aged 4-5 years (5.6%) and 4.4% for JSS students aged 12-14 years.
- The main driver of the OOS situation is economic (51%) and has to do with parents' inability to provide their children's basic needs for school such as exercise books, uniforms and lunch.
- Other drivers are children's dislike of school (8.4%), teenage pregnancy (5.9%), and family members' refusal to allow children to go to school (4.4%).
- About 1431 children are at risk of dropping out of school in the study area based on the following at risk parameters of dropping out; about 890 of OOSC are overage for their current class, 385 of them do not attend school regularly and 156 of them have repeated a class more than once.

- AEPs contributed to addressing supply-side factors by using community-based facilities within walking distance that address financial costs and child protection, which also guaranteed and promoted community ownership and improved learning by combining local dialects and English with teaching support from volunteer retired teachers.
- AEPs contributed to reduced illiteracy and dropout rates, reformed children's attitudes, and reduced teenage pregnancy and early marriage.

### 1.1 The effectiveness study

This study builds on the OOSC mapping findings. The overarching objective of the study is to increase access to learning for children who are out of school through strengthened use of knowledge on effective accelerated education programmes and girls' focussed education models.

## 1.2 *Study objectives and research questions*

### 1.2.1 Purpose of the Effectiveness Study and research questions

The purpose of the effectiveness study is to find out the extent to which AEP beneficiaries (including those who benefited from the BRAC, SCI as well as MBSSE's AEP) have transitioned to formal education and the world of work.

### 1.2.2 Research Questions

Focusing on Sierra Leone in this case, the effectiveness studies seek to answer the following research questions and sub-questions:

3. What is the effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability of the education innovations in relation to the OOSC population and girls?
  - a. What is the effectiveness, efficiency, and adaptability of the education innovations (AEPs) in relation to the OOSC population and the following factors: social emotional learning, empowerment, inclusion, access, participation, retention, completion, transition and learning outcomes?
  - b. How effective are the programmes in lowering the number of out of school children and reaching particularly girls who are vulnerable and at risk in the communities?
  - c. How effective are the programmes in reaching children with special needs who are vulnerable and at risk in the communities?
  - d. How are the education innovations influencing girl's empowerment, behaviour, gender equality and social change: within the home, within the community, and from the girl's own perspective?
4. How can AEP approaches be adapted and scaled up by government systems to contribute to universal primary and secondary education in West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone)?
  - a. How adaptable are the AEPs to the context and environment they are operating in?



- b. What factors enable, incentivise, or impede the adaptability and scalability of the innovative education programming in the three country contexts?
- c. How can effective approaches be adapted and scaled up by government systems to contribute to universal primary and secondary education in al West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone)?

### ***1.3 Relevance of the study – value addition***

Very few studies have been undertaken on AEPs in Sierra Leone and there is little evidence about what happens to beneficiaries after they have completed AEPs in terms of their transition to formal education or to the world of work. The study provides evidence on the progression and experiences of transitioned AEP graduates from primary level to JSS, including the experiences of those who choose to work after AEP completion and how they fare in the world of work.

### ***1.4 Report structure***

Following this introductory chapter on background, purpose and relevance of the study, a brief description of the methodology and limitations of the study is presented. The remainder of the report presents the findings, which include the demographic context, the selection of AEP beneficiaries, conditions of learning in AEPs and formal schools, transition, retention and completion, performance in the ASER/SEGRA assessment and impact of AEPs/GFM, scalability and adaptability of AEP approaches. The final sections provide the research conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned.

# Methods

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Study design

The effectiveness study employed an exploratory mixed-method approach – with greater emphasis on qualitative approaches to answering the research questions. This approach allowed a deep-dive, in-depth assessment of key themes and variables of study. The qualitative data was gathered through in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and observations from all target groups (*i.e. AEP beneficiaries/non-beneficiaries, teachers, facilitators, district education officers, community leaders and parents*) across the study districts, communities, schools, and at the beneficiary level. The quantitative data was generated from structured community and school checklists, and from background demographic characteristics of the AEP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries as well as learning assessments conducted with student participants of the study. These approaches provided robust, and reliable data through triangulation of methods and key stakeholder groups regarding the effectiveness of the different models across the different contexts. Below further details are provided of the adopted approaches – including the domains of investigation, sampling processes, data gathering and reporting processes at all levels - district, community, and school levels.

#### 2.1.1 Targets and domains of investigation

Three key groups of AEP graduates were targeted in the study. These are highlighted in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Study targets

<b>Group 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AEP beneficiaries who transitioned &amp; are currently in school (JSS)</li></ul>
<b>Group 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AEP beneficiaries that transitioned but dropped out after a year or more in formal school</li></ul>
<b>Group 3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AEP beneficiaries who transitioned straight into the world of work (<i>youth: 13-20 years - never attended formal school</i>)</li></ul>

##### 2.1.1.1 School level (AEP beneficiaries who transitioned – currently in school):

- **Measure 1:** Conditions of learning at school (JSS) and in class
- **Measure 2:** Learning differentials to their peers and learning outcomes:
  - SEGRA test
- **Measure 3:** life outlook, beliefs, and values
  - Especially in relation to learning, service and work; intergenerational change between parents' beliefs and their own beliefs.

- **Measure 4:** Barriers of retention and completion to JSS (*Supply and Demand*)
- **Measure 5:** Enablers to retention and completion of JSS.

### 2.1.1.2 Community/household level – Youth in the world of work (13-20)

- KIs with AEP beneficiaries who transitioned to the world of work in the community:
  - Self employed
  - Farming
  - Apprentices
  - Working for other enterprises and companies
- **Domains of enquiry:**
  - Programme effectiveness: how the AEP prepared learners for work and the difference the programme made/ the skills they acquired and what they have gained from the AEP experience
  - Outcomes: in terms of personal development, economic gain, and social stability as well as life outcomes; Literacy and numeracy test performance— retention of learning.
- **Drop-outs**
  - Factors accounting for drop-out rates
  - What could be done to keep children, especially girls, in school?

### 2.1.2 Sampling procedure for the Effectiveness Survey

As a prerequisite for undertaking the effectiveness study, a prelisting exercise was undertaken to identify beneficiaries of the AEPs, using beneficiary data provided by service providers. The output from the prelisting exercise formed the sampling frame for the effectiveness study.

#### 2.1.2.1 Pre-listing exercise

Both BRAC and SCI as well as the MBSSE provided data on their beneficiaries for the prelisting exercise. Where the list of beneficiaries was inadequate, the team used the snowballing approach whereby beneficiaries who could be found identified other beneficiaries whose names were missing from the list.

The training for the pre-listing lasted for two days and covered both paper versions of selected tools as well as electronic versions which were programmed for electronic data collection using the Open data Kit (ODK) software. Data collectors were introduced to the three main tools to use during the pre-listing and how to identify AEP beneficiaries. There was a tool for school level beneficiaries that is, beneficiaries who transitioned into the formal school system) which was used to identify SCI and MBSSE beneficiaries. The community tool was used for BRAC beneficiaries that transitioned into the world of work. There was also the dropout tool which was used to track beneficiaries who had either dropped out of formal school or from the AEP program.

Ten female and eight male data collectors were selected from Dalan’s pool of data collectors and were trained to undertake the prelisting exercise.

Data collectors were also trained on how to use the snowballing approach to identify beneficiaries who were not included in the initial list provided by the service providers. They were taught how to distinguish between beneficiaries who had benefitted from an AEP project from those who had benefitted from project with similar characteristics but were fundamentally different from the AEP projects under consideration in the research.

### 2.1.2.2 Criteria for selection of communities

**Sampling was based on exposure to an AEP program (BRAC, SCI or the MBSSE) focusing on intervention regions and districts. All three districts sampled are largely rural with high levels of deprivation and poverty and relatively low female participation in education.** Education Innovators had an active presence implementing AEP in these districts over the last five to 10 years. BRAC Sierra Leone implemented an Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) program between 2012-2014 targeting a total of 4800 girls in Port Loko and Kambia districts. SCI implemented an AEP with 700 children (350 boys and 350 girls) between 2016 and 2020 in Pujehun district. The MBSSE’s Non-formal Education Directorate (NFED) in collaboration with UNICEF, DFID and UNFPA from 2014-2016 conducted classes in core subjects (Language Arts, mathematics, Integrated Science, and Social Studies) for 14,500 out of school girls with the objective of returning them to formal education and over 10,000 the girls transitioned into the formal education system.

**The Tracer and Effectiveness study was carried out across three focus districts in two regions, namely: Kambia and Port Loko in the North Western region and Pujehun in the Southern region.** Table 2 shows the districts and the number of communities covered by the research.

Table 2: Districts for the effectiveness study (Intervention Communities Only)

District Name	No. of Communities (Only AEP/ GFP intervention communities)	Education Innovator (EI)
Pujehun	13	Save the Children
Kambia	23	BRAC
	9	MBSSE
Port Loko	18	
	<b>63 communities</b>	

## 2.2 Data collection tools

### 2.2.1 Instrumentation/data collection tools

Overall, three data collection methods were employed: structured interview with beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).

The key instruments used for gathering the data for the effectiveness study are summarized in Table 3:

*Table 3: Summary of Data Collection Tools*

SN	Instrument Number	Description
<b>School-level instruments</b>		
1.	Instrument 1:	School Checklist
2.	Instrument 2:	Head teacher and Longest serving Teacher
3.	Instrument 3:	Survey with AEP Graduates in School (Upper Prim. & JHS)
4.	Instrument 4:	Survey with Non-AEP Students in School (Upper Prim. & JHS)
5.	Instrument 5:	FGD Guide for AEP Graduates in School (Upper Prim. & JHS)
6.	Instrument 5b:	ASER test with Upper Primary
7.	Instrument 5c:	SEGRA test with JHS students
<b>Community-level instruments</b>		
8.	Instrument 6:	Community Checklist
9.	Instrument 7:	Interview with AEP Beneficiaries who could not transition and are in the 'world of work'
10.	Instrument 8:	Interview with AEP beneficiaries who transitioned but dropped and are currently not doing anything
11.	Instrument 9:	FGD with Community Leaders
12.	Instrument 10:	KII with AEP Facilitators
13.	Instrument 11:	Stories of Change Protocol (Case Study)
14.	Instrument 12:	KII with AEP Staff (Director, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer)
<b>District-level instrument</b>		
15.	Instrument 13:	FGD with District Education Officers

## **2.3 Data collection processes**

### **2.3.1 Enumerator training**

Experienced enumerators from Dalan's database were recruited to undertake the fieldwork. Data collectors were selected according to their experience in education research, particularly qualitative research and their proficiency in the languages of the research communities dy. There were 35 data collectors- 15 female and 20 male.

**Training-** Data collectors were trained from 14<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2022. Trainees were divided into two groups (those for schools and those for communities) and were trained by different facilitators – one from AFC and the other from Dalan. Training for both groups took place concurrently at Dalan Office premises.

Data collectors were trained on how to use the data collection tools, data collection protocols, including safeguarding issues on conducting research with children and objectivity

during data collection. The training included a step by step discussion of the questions after the purpose of the study had been explained.

### **2.3.2 Quality assurance processes**

The Dalan teams ensured high quality assurance standards at all levels. The in-depth training of field enumerators and their data collection rehearsals (including interview skills) in the presence of key members of the research team ensured that they understood all aspects of the study. Significant efforts were made to avoid missing data by reframing the questions and probing the respondents further to ensure their full understanding of the question and to elicit the information required. A WhatsApp group was created for fieldworkers and the central Dalan team where all fieldwork challenges were reported and real time solutions were found . Debrief meetings provided another layer in the quality assurance process. Each field team organised these daily to identify gaps and correct them during the subsequent days' fieldwork.

## **2.4 Data analysis procedure**

### **▪ Qualitative data analysis**

Data was analysed using the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software to analyse the general themes emerging from the data. Emphasis was given to ensuring that responses from female participants in the FGDs and KIIs were adequately represented across the analysis and reporting stages to reduce any potential gender bias.

### **▪ Quantitative analysis**

The quantitative analysis was done using MS-Excel. Basic descriptive, frequency and crosstab analyses were computed for the background section of the study report. The ASER and SEGRA learner assessments were analysed using guidelines provided by the AFC (Lead Research Agency). Further analysis was done of disaggregated data across regions, district, locality, levels of deprivation (rural deprived and extremely deprived), gender, and disability.

## **2.5 Ethical considerations**

The Research and Curriculum Department of the MBSSE gave permission to the Dalan team to conduct the research after providing information about the research objectives, safeguarding issues and research participants. Similarly, in order to access schools and the district education offices, permission was sought from the Directorate of School Quality Assurance, Management and Resource.

Researchers completed a consent form with each research participant, briefing them on the research in a language that they understood, assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality. Research data collected was anonymised and was only accessible to the core research team. Participation in the study was voluntary and there were no financial or other incentives provided.

### **2.5.1 Gender, equity and inclusion considerations**

Research for the Tracer and Effectiveness study factored into its planning and implementation important gender, equity and inclusion considerations. Each research team contained female

data collectors who led FGDs and KIIs with female participants, including AEP beneficiaries, in order for them to feel more comfortable and at ease to express themselves. During data collection, information on both parents of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries was collected in order to gain the perspectives of both genders.



# Findings

### **3.0 Study Findings**

This section presents the results of the effectiveness study across selected districts, communities, and schools. Findings are presented under the main thematic areas to ensure the consistent and coherent presentation of results. It starts with an overview of the demographic characteristics across the study area and discusses the context of the districts, communities and schools relating to infrastructure, economic activities, teacher types and academic qualification of teachers.

### **3.1 Demographic /background characteristics of respondents**

#### **3.1.1 Community context**

AEPs operate in rural, deprived communities. Table 4 shows these and their location. The standard of measurement for rural deprived was based on the distance of the community from the district capital. The further the community is from the district capital, the more rural it is considered to be. The majority of the communities under study (67%) were within one hour radius of the district capital, whereas 14% were located 3 hours away from the capital and were considered very remote. None of the communities was considered as *extremely deprived and hard to reach*.

Table 4: Location of communities

<b>Location of community</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Beyond one-hour radius of the district capital and considered rural	7	19
Considered extremely deprived and hard to reach	0	0
Very remote area of the district (over 3 hours' drive from capital)	5	14
Within a one-hour radius of the district capital	24	67
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>

Farming is the major economic activity engaged in across the different age groups and genders and is the main source of livelihood for 34% of people in the study area. Apart from females (both youth and women) whose economic activities hover around mainly farming and trading, men and the youth males engage in more versatile economic activities including sand mining, stone mining, building construction and motor bike riding for the youth in particular.

Table 5: Economic activities of community members

Water Source	Women		Female Youth		Men		Male Youth		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Farming	10	30	7	18	21	58	12	31	50	34
Trading	9	27	9	23	0	0	0	0	18	12
Farming and trading	12	37	14	36	5	14	3	8	34	23
Bike riding and other activities	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	61	24	16
Farming and other activities	2	6	9	23	10	28	0	0	21	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: School checklist, fieldwork data, Effectiveness study: Dec. 2022

### 3.1.2 Access to basic social facilities:

#### ▪ Sources of drinking water

Table 6 shows that the major source of drinking water for the study communities is borehole, (36%), followed closely by well (33%). A lot more inhabitants of extremely deprived communities (40%) have access to a borehole which is a safe source of drinking water than those in rural deprived areas (36%). On the other hand, 4% of respondents who live in rural deprived areas have access to other safer sources of water such as pipe borne water, which is not available to those in extremely deprived areas. The use of surface and dam water which are deemed as unsafe sources is quite high-28% of respondents use these sources as their main source of drinking water.

Table 6: Sources of drinking water

Water Source	Extremely Deprived		Rural Deprived		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Bore hole	4	40	16	36	20	36
Well	3	30	15	33	18	33
Dug out/ Dam	1	10	1	2	2	4
River/ Stream	2	20	11	24	13	24
Other water source	0	0	2	4	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Community checklist. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

## Access to basic health facilities

Table 7 shows that just about 30% of communities in the intervention areas have access to basic health facilities, with communities in extremely deprived areas having slightly more access (33%) than those in rural deprived communities (32%). This implies that access to basic health facilities is minimal and inhabitants may be using unorthodox means in order to meet their health needs.

Table 7: Access to health facilities

Health facility	Extremely Deprived		Rural Deprived		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
No	4	67	19	68	23	68
Yes	2	33	9	32	11	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Community checklist. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

### ▪ Access to toilet facilities

In terms of sanitation facilities such as toilets, very few are available in the communities under study. Only 3 out of 5 respondents (60%) in extremely deprived communities and 8 out of 30 (27%) of respondents in rural deprived communities reported that they have access to toilet facilities. Overall, about 30% of respondents reported that they have access to toilet facilities.

Table 8: Access to health facilities

Toilet facility	Extremely Deprived		Rural Deprived		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
No	2	40	22	73	24	69
Yes	3	60	8	27	11	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Community checklist. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

## 3.1.3 School-level contexts

### 3.1.3.1 Number of schools visited

Service providers provided a list of 33 schools in the formal system to which their AEP beneficiaries had transitioned. However, data collectors found that some beneficiaries on their tracking sheets had transitioned to other schools to which they were traced. For JSS alone, beneficiaries were traced to 45 schools as indicated in Table 8. Kambia district had the highest number of schools – 23- (51%), followed by Port Loko with -13- 29% and Pujehun with -9- 20%.

Table 9: Number of JSS schools visited

Districts	No. of schools covered	%
Kambia	23	51
Port Loko	13	29
Pujehun	9	20
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Teachers data base. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

Much as AEPs operate their own system of education, they depend on the formal education system for continuity. Therefore, the availability of schools in the vicinity of the AEP will help students who want to further their education transition smoothly. Table 10 shows that 50% and 55% respectively of primary schools in extremely deprived and rural deprived communities are within 10 minutes reach of the communities. Only 6% of primary schools are beyond one hour from the communities.

Table 10: Distance to nearest primary school

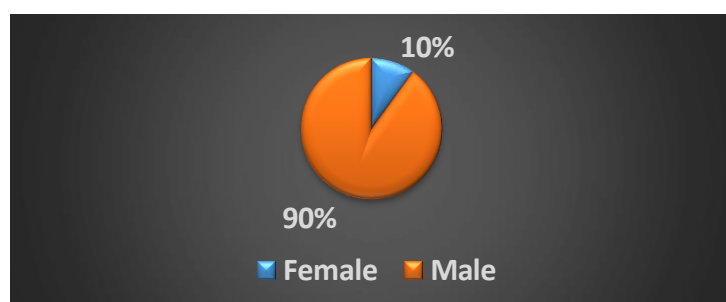
Distance from nearest primary school	Extremely Deprived		Rural Deprived		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
10 minutes	3	50	17	57	20	55
20 minutes	0	0	5	17	5	14
30minutes	1	17	5	17	6	17
One hour	2	33	1	3	3	8
Beyond one hour from the community	0	0	2	6	2	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Community checklist. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

### 3.1.2.2 Profile of head teachers

Figure 7 shows that 10% of head teachers in the study area are female, and 90% are male, an indication of male dominance in positions of authority in schools, especially at the higher level.

Figure 7: sex of Head teachers



Source: Teachers data base. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

Table 11 shows that 12 out of the 20 teachers (60%) have a bachelor's degree and both of the female teachers fall within this category. The least qualified head teachers have the Higher Teacher Certificate (HTC) and form 5% of the total.

Table 11: Educational qualification of head teachers

Teacher Qualification	Female		Male		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Degree	2	100	10	56	12	60
Diploma in Education	0	0	7	39	7	35
HTC	0	0	1	5	1	5
Others	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Teachers data base. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

### 3.1. 3 Conditions of JSS schools visited

Table 12 shows that 31% of the schools that were visited were in good condition and well kept, whereas 49% needed some repair work. The remaining 20% were not in good condition. Below are some reasons given for the ratings.

*The school has many classrooms. The entire school is well kept, and sanitation is well placed. Toilet and water facility is available throughout the school hours.*

*The school building is in good condition but the ceiling and windows are not in good condition.*

*The structure is not a school building, it was a community warehouse owned by the community. The hall is separated by local materials for each class. There are no enclosed classrooms, water facilities, and toilets.*

Table 12: Conditions of JSS schools

Condition of school	Frequency	%
Average: with some repair work needed	22	49
Good condition well kept	14	31
Not in good condition	9	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: School checklist. Effectiveness Study Dec. 2022

#### 3.1.2.4 Qualification of Teachers in JSS

There were 341 teachers, 38 (11%) of whom were female. More than 40% of the teachers have a Diploma in Education, with 63% of females and 40% of males falling in this category. A quarter of the teachers have Bachelor's degree; 19% of female teachers and 26% of male

teachers have a degree. A significant percentage of JSS teachers (25%) are community volunteers/pupil teachers; more than a quarter of male teachers in JSS schools in the communities under study are male.

Table 13: Qualification of teachers by gender

Teacher Qualification	Female		Male		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Degree	7	19	78	26	85	25
Diploma in Education	24	63	122	40	146	43
NYSC	0	0	7	2	7	2
HTC	2	5	11	4	13	4
WASSCE	0	0	3	1	3	1
Community teacher/Pupil teacher	5	13	82	27	87	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Teachers database. Effectiveness Study Dec. 2022

### 3.1.3 Background characteristics of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries

Table 14 shows the average age of beneficiaries of AEPs and non-beneficiaries- referred to as AEPs and non-AEPs respectively. The majority of both categories of students are aged between 12 and 15 (AEP-60% and Non-AEP, 65%). This is followed by 37% aged 16 and above (AEP- 38% and Non-AEP, 34%).

Table 14: Average age of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in JSS

Average age	AEPs		Non-AEPs		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
10-11	3	1.2	2	1	6	1
12-15	154	60.4	160	65	314	63
16+	98	38.4	84	34	182	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in school. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

In terms of the difference in age between AEPs and non-AEPs by sex, Table 15 shows that 58% of AEP and 64% of non-AEP beneficiaries are females aged between 12 and 15, and for the same age category, 67% each of AEPs and non-AEPs are male. Only 1% of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries are within the age bracket of 12 to 11; most of those in this age category are female.

Table 15: Average age of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in JSS by gender

Average age	AEPs		Non-AEPs		Total	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male

	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
10-11	3	1.5	0	0	1	0.5	1	2	4	1	1	1
12-15	117	58.5	37	67	124	64.5	36	67	241	62	73	67
16+	80	40	18	33	67	35.0	17	31	147	37	35	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>12</b>

Source: AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in school. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

More than 50% of fathers of both AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries have no formal education; 59% of AEP beneficiaries fathers compared with 56% for non-AEP beneficiaries' fathers have no education. The majority of AEP and non-AEP fathers who have formal education (12%) have JSS/Middle school level education (12% non-AEP and 11% AEP). 6% of AEP fathers compared with 5% on non-AEP fathers have university education. The data in Table 16 shows that overall, 38% each of fathers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries have some form of education.

Table 16: Educational level of fathers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries

Father's Education	AEP		Non-AEP		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
None	146	59	138	56	284	57
Non-formal	5	2	3	1	8	2
Pre-school	1	0	2	1	3	1
Arabic	0	0	0	0	0	0
Primary	24	10	21	8	45	8
JSS/Middle school	27	11	29	12	56	12
SSS/'O'-level/'A' level	22	9	26	10	48	10
Technical training	1	0	3	1	4	1
University	16	6	12	5	28	5
Don't know	8	3	14	6	22	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>250</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in school. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

On average, 68% of mothers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries have no formal education. Table 17 shows that 3% of AEP beneficiaries' mothers compared with 1% of non-AEP beneficiaries mothers have university education. The educational level of the majority of the mothers is JSS/Middle school- (14%); AEP beneficiaries 14% and non-AEP, 14%.



Table 17: Educational level of mothers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries

Mother's Education	AEP		Non-AEP		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
None	175	68	169	68	344	68
Pre-school	1	0	2	1	3	1
Non-formal	1	0	1	0	2	0
Primary	18	7	22	9	40	8
JSS/Middle school	36	14	34	14	70	14
SSS/'O'-level/'A' level	12	5	9	3	21	4
Technical training	4	1	2	1	6	1
University	7	3	2	1	9	2
Don't know	5	2	8	3	13	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>508</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in school. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

Most fathers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries (54%) are farmers as shown in Table 18; 55% of non-AEP fathers and 53% of non-AEP fathers are farmers. This is followed by selling/trading (15%) for both AEP and non-AEP fathers. Service provision both in the formal and informal sector is another source of employment for both groups of fathers, undertaken on average by 11% of AEP fathers and 16% of non-AEP fathers. Other activities undertaken by the fathers of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries include mining, motorbike riding and stone quarrying, was reported by 4% and 5% respectively of fathers.

Table 18: Occupation of fathers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries

Occupation of Father	AEP		Non-AEP		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agriculture	129	55	130	53	259	54
Formal services	19	8	18	7	37	8
Agric. & Trading	19	8	10	4	29	6
Agric. & fishing	7	3	8	3	15	3
Fishing	4	2	8	3	12	2
Providing informal Services	6	3	21	9	27	6
Selling/Trading	33	14	40	16	73	15
Construction	8	3	0		8	2
Others	9	4	13	5	22	5

<b>Total</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>
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Source: AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in school. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

Farming and trading are the major occupations for mothers of both AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries, as shown in Table 19. Both occupations are almost equally split; with 42% engaging in farming and 43% engaging in trading. A combination of trading and farming form the main occupation of 9% of both groups of mothers. Other occupations include housewife, tailoring and stone quarrying, reported by 2% and 6% respectively of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries mothers.

Table 19: Occupation of mothers of AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries

Occupation of Mother	AEP		Non-AEP		Total	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Agriculture	100	41	102	42	202	42
Formal services	8	3	4	2	12	2
Agric. & Trading	29	12	15	6	44	9
Providing Services	0	0	0	0	0	0
Selling/Trading	101	42	105	44	206	43
Others	4	2	14	6	18	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>482</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries in school. Fieldwork data, effectiveness study, Dec. 2022

### 3.1.4 Background characteristics of AEP beneficiaries in the world of work

Due to the girl-focused nature of the BRAC AEP all surveyed beneficiaries in the world of work were female, with the majority of them (51%) in the 14-20 age range. As indicated in Table 20, 21-27 year olds form 34% of the AEP beneficiaries in the world of work. Only 6% and 2% are in the age range of 35+ and 7-13.

Table 20: Age and gender of beneficiaries in the world of work

Age Group	Female		Male	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<b>Beneficiaries in the world of work</b>				
<b>7-13</b>	3	2	0	-
14-20	75	51	0	-
21-27	50	34	0	-
28-35	11	7	0	-
35+	9	6	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>100</b>

### 3.1.5 Background characteristics of AEPs who dropped out of formal schools

The study found out that 11 of the AEP beneficiaries who had transitioned to school had dropped out- 10 females and one male. Most students who had dropped out (5 female and 1 male), were in the 14 – 20 year group, followed by 4 beneficiaries in the 21-27 year category. This bears out the fact that students who are older than the average age of their class are more likely to drop out of school.

Table 21: Age of beneficiaries who dropped out of formal school

Age Group	Female		Male	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
7-13	1	9	0	-
14-20	5	46	1	9
21-27	4	36	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>

## 3.2 Effectiveness, Efficiency and Adaptability of AEPs and GFMs in Sierra Leone

### 3.2.1 Selection/Targeting processes

#### 3.2.1.1 Equity and transparency in selection of beneficiaries

AEP usually provide age-appropriate programmes run in an accelerated timeframe for children and young people who have dropped out of school or have never attended school. As is the norm with introducing activities in new places, there were community engagements as well as involvement of the local education authorities encouraging transparency from the start.

*... the organisation that brought it here first was Save the Children and with the Ministry of Education, they assembled the stakeholders in this community and undertook a survey. They found out that there are drop out kids that had the desire to return to school, from there they engaged with the teachers to find ways to establish the program and where they should put up structures in order to host these kids. We were able to provide an unfinished structure, which the program helped to refurbish. We also provided community teachers that the program gave a stipend every month.*

**KII teacher (LST), Pujehun**

*When BRAC brought the program, they first contacted the chief and they called a stakeholders meeting in relation to the program. My husband was part of the meeting; he came home and told me about the program, and asked me if I am interested then I said yes, I am. He took me to the centre to get me registered. **Beneficiary world of work (Ben. WOW), Kambia***

In order to ensure that young people who really required that kind of support were reached, the AEPs used diverse methods as reported by a former SCI AEP facilitator.

*I am a Senior teacher in this school and was also one of the community mobilizers/ facilitators for the AEP program. We did our selection process in different ways. **KII, LST and former AEP facilitator, Pujehun***

*When they started initially, they organized football gala activities for the vulnerable children living in the community. It was through this gala that they started the selection process by asking them one after the other, if they are already enrolled in school. This way, they were able to differentiate children that are not going to school from those that are in school. After the selection process, they visited the parents/caregivers of the dropout children who are not in school. We thank God, this was how the selection process was done and it was a very transparent process. Every child whether able or disabled, once you have attained the school age and you are not enrolled in school because of one reason or the other, Brac will definitely give you the opportunity to be registered and enrolled in the program. **Community leaders (CL) FGD, Kambia***

Traditional leaders and town criers were also included in order to enhance outreach for the selection of marginalized children who could benefit from AEP educational services.

*The chiefs and town criers sent message to all household and neighboring settlements informing parents to come with their out-of-school children to register...this was how I became enrolled into the programme.” **KII, Ben WOW, Kambia***

*There was a man that came to our village and he went directly to the chief and told him about the AEP programme. The chief asked us to come and write our name for the AEP programme and so we were selected through the chief. **AEP beneficiary (JSS 3), Pujehun***

The involvement of traditional leaders/chiefs (who are the customary custodians and carry authority in their various localities) speak not only to the effectiveness of the selection process but also to efficiency in outreach/advocacy and enrolment activities.

Other sources of information dissemination included radio broadcasts and the use of megaphones in order to have a wider reach. The message of the AEPs was well disseminated and so some children decided by themselves to join after seeking permission from their parents or guardians.

*When they started the AEP programme they announced it on the radio so one of my teachers Mr. ... told my mother about the programme, that the programme is to support out of school children and my mother agreed so I join the programme. **FGD beneficiary (male), Pujehun***

*They announced to the community people using mega-phone, that anyone who is willing to join should come onboard. The children they enrolled volunteered by themselves to be part of the program. **KII Head teacher (HT), Pujehun***

*I was engaged in this cassava farming, I later realised education is relevant to me because I was getting older, so I discussed it with my mother. She later told me about this program and guided me to be part of this program, so that was how I joined this program. **FGD beneficiary Boys, Pujehun***

There was also house-to-house method of targeting children for AEP enrollment, which was an effective strategy having in mind the trend for some parents/guardians to keep their children at home.

*“I was encouraged to join the program by ..., who happened to be the mentor. She visited our home during her house to house visit explaining the benefits of the program. So my mother thought it fit to register me in the program and I got interviewed by her.”* **AEP beneficiary (JSS 2), Port Loko**

*During that time they were looking for children who are not going school, they met me home and asked me why am I not in school and I told them that am not going to school and they wrote my name and told me to start attending at AEP.* **AEP beneficiary, Pujehun**

Additionally, children who were attending Quranic schools as well as those who were engaged in other household activities were encouraged to enrol in AEP. In order to discourage parental resistance they were promised that the timing of AEP classes would not interfere with domestic and other economic activities that children were expected to undertake:

*They told the parents/caregivers that they have got a facility in the community and the children should be enrolled, so that they will benefits from it. The AEP classes starts at 2pm, so the children will serve their parents/caregivers until 2pm, and then they will leave for classes. They pick the children on the streets, and others at the farm doing farm work during school hours.* **KII headteacher, Pujehun**

There was also no discrimination evident in the selection of AEP participants. Every child who was out of school was eligible as mentioned by FGD beneficiaries:

*When the AEP programmed came, they were looking for children that are not going to school. Since I have never been in school, they met my parents and explained to them about the program my parents agreed for me to join. They took my name to be part of the program.* **AEP beneficiary (JSS 2), Pujehun**

*The selection process was transparent, because Mr. ... made visits to villages asking for children that had dropped out of school and those who had never been to school. I was among those that he came in contact with and encouraged to get registered for the program.* **KII Beneficiary (JSS 3), Kambia**

There was deliberate effort to include children who were particularly disadvantaged such as orphans, teenage mothers and children from poorer homes. There was no indication of bias in the selection or targeting of participants in the research domain. There was neither discrimination relating to disability or socioeconomic status, which speaks to the consideration of both local and international education instruments that guarantee equity in education services (SDGs, EFA, CRPD, etc.). All of the participants who were queried about the transparency of the selection process responded in the affirmative:

*they looked for the orphan child, children that dropped out of school because of poverty, teenage pregnancy or early marriage. Also, children who had never been to school but had the eagerness to learn. All these beneficiaries were selected by interviewing the chief, community members and also by spotting some of the children themselves (save the children) according to their appearances.*

**KII head teacher, Kambia.**

*they went in search of children that had dropped out of school, those who were married, disabled, those that had been marginalized, and teenagers who were pregnant. They looked out for all those kinds of children to see how they could support them. KII with longest serving teacher, Kambia*

Outreach was also effective; AEP facilitators made commendable efforts to reach children who had dropped out of formal school, vulnerable and deprived children who are unable to enroll in school. It included children who had resorted to petty trading in order to help their families make ends meet:

*I joined the AEP at age 9. Someone went to our cookery shop [eatery] to buy food, and he met me there. He enquired if I was in school, I said no. The following day, he came back and told my mother that I should start attending the AEP learning sessions. This was how I joined the AEP programme.*

**AEP beneficiary (JSS 2), Pujehun**

*... I was engaged in street trading. All of my friends who have left school for quite a long time started attending this program. Since they started attending the program, their ways of life started changing. I started to question myself, 'what type of life am I living? Why can't I join my friends in this program to change my story like theirs?' One day I was on my way to visit a friend of mine, I heard melodious voices coming from a building, which attracted my attention, and I could not withstand it. I went straight to the place, I saw my peers singing and learning new things, I grew interested and I told one of the facilitators to register my name, because I was interested in the program. That was how I was registered. AEP beneficiary, JSS, Port Loko*

In all cases, consent was sought from parents/guardians prior to AEP enrolment of their children. Wherever a child was registered, the focal person would accompany the child in order to seek the consent of their guardian/parent.

*When I heard about the programme, I tried to talk to one of the Facilitators and explain my situation to him. On that very day, he went with me home and talked to my father about the AEP, my father accepted for me to join and the man wrote my name for the programme. FGD Ben. Boys, Pujehun*

*She met me at home and told me to join the program because it is helpful to girls. I agreed but told her I will have to ask my mom for permission. When I spoke with my mom, she was happy to let me join because it would be beneficial to me. AEP Ben. Port Loko*

The selection process was followed by interviews to ensure correct placement of beneficiaries in the right class. All the answers from respondents indicate that every child that was registered went through some form of interview, ensuring their effective placement.

*we session them by their level of understanding and also the field of study, so based on our interview questions we asked, we would be able to session them in the right field of study and in the right class, that was how we got them enrolled. KII longest serving teacher, Kambia*

*they requested for special children like orphans, less privileged, etc. then conducted interviews with the children to know whether they meet the criteria before registering them into the program. KII with AEP Ben (JSS), Kambia*

*they choose them through conducting interviews with the stakeholders and community members. I was made to understand that they enrolled more girls than boys.*

**KII LST, Kambia**

*We got interviewed to test our academic ability whether some of us have the basic foundation like the alphabets, counting, writing and reading etc. So that's how I got selected for the program.*

**Ben. Wow. Kambia**

Whereas the focus of the BRAC and MBSSE AEPs was mainly on girls, SCIs AEP was slightly more gender-neutral. Selection for both types of AEPs was thus informed by their objective for establishment.

*When the program came, they asked us if we lived in this town. They told us that the program only for females who were dropouts or females who were not opportune to go to school. They took our name and registered us in the programme; the chief was part of the selection and other stakeholders in the community. This program was there to help them to continue their Education.*

**AEP Ben, World of Work, Kambia**

*I was at home when one of my area friends came and told me that a program had come that was looking for girls below the age of 15. I met my grandmother and explained to her and we both went there for a meeting and based on what they told us about the things we hope to learn there, my grandmother asked the group leader to include me on the program. **AEP beneficiary, Port Loko***

*The selection process was done equally the number of boys equal to the number of girls to participate in AEP programme, for example if they selected 10 boys, they would also select 10 girls and so the selection was done equally. **AEP beneficiary (JSS 3), Pujehun***

### **3.2.1.2 Challenges/gaps in selection processes**

In spite of the fact that selection processes were conducted transparently they were not without challenges. A major challenge was AEP inability to attract enough children initially, in spite of the fact that many children had dropped out of school in the communities:

*At first, they did not get the number of children they want to enrolled, because most of the children were dropout, and trying to get them into school was a challenge for the program.*

**FGD Participant, Community Leaders, Port Loko**

This explains why AEP used different methods to attract children including house to house, village to village outreach and in some cases even enrolling children who were already in school.

*We were in class when Mr..... brought folded papers. In the papers, there were two words- win and loss. If you chose win, you will join the AEP and if you chose loss, you will not join the AEP. **AEP Beneficiary (JSS 3), Pujehun.***

*it was my teacher that led to me being registered for the programme. At First, we were in class (in class – 4), and then they requested for all that are interested in attending the AEP programme, to raise their hands, and I together with others did. Thereafter we were registered without offering anything. Except that, after attending the programme for a week, we were then given a test. **KII beneficiary (JSS 2), Pujehun***

*My mother was the motivator for me to join the AEP school program because she asked me to be part of the program and I accepted it and I myself wanted to be part of the program because I need extra classes after school as a Class 6 pupil. **AEP Beneficiary (JSS 3), Pujehun***

Enrolling students in AEP meant for children who are out of school creates a serious gap and undermines the reason they were set up, namely to support children who had dropped out of school and thereby facilitate universal access to education.

Another challenge to AEP enrollment concerned the reliance or dependence of households on children to do chores at home or work on farms. For other parents/guardians releasing their children for AEP was considered a waste of time.

*The first challenge the program faced when they came into the community is to bring the beneficiaries together to go to the learning center. Some said 'I have work to do let me go and do my work' and some parents did not release their children they thought it was a waste of time. It was a great challenge to the facilitators by then but as time went by they realized that it was something important.* **FGD Participant, Community leaders, Port Loko**

Gender representation was also a serious challenge in relation to the selection process. In some communities the programme targeted only girls, while boys were in need of the same opportunity.

*...the program was only meant for the female children and not for the male. We have male children who need similar opportunities.* **KII longest serving teacher, Kambia.**

*I have heard about their good works in other schools, most especially BRAC I know they give aid to less privileged kids and help drop out kids to return to school, I really want the boys to achieve this opportunity as well.* **KII headteacher, Kambia.**

These statements show that gender equity was not properly factored into the selection process in some communities because as mentioned previously, some programmes (eg MBSSE) targeted only girls to the exclusion of boys.

In some cases the selection process was not seen to be well coordinated and random youth were just enrolled:

*...the woman met me on the street and asked me if I am going to school; I said no. she said there is a programme. They need out of school children both boys and girls to join the programme. She asked me if I want to join, and I said yes, and she included me"* **AEP beneficiary (JSS3), Pujehun.**

Lack of coordination resulted in oversubscription where over time community members became aware of the importance of AEPs through sensitization:

*As I told you earlier, before the AEP, the parent were reluctant to send their children to school but when they started seeing the outcome of some of the children like the boldness to stand in the barray (traditional court) in front of so many people and speak, that is when they decided to accept education wholeheartedly.* **KII, Facilitator, Pujehun.**

However, AEP places were limited and not every OOSC could be enrolled.

*When the program came, every parent wanted his or her child to be part of the program but the program required to take a specific number of children not to take everyone. Therefore, the challenge was with the individual who took the names because the program was dealing with number but we were able to come as one and overcome that challenge.* **FGD, community leaders, Port Loko**

Many children had also been registered without adequate consideration having been given to the availability of classroom accommodation or how participants would commute from home



to class. According to a key informant in Pujehun, the programme had stipulated a distance beyond which beneficiaries should not be recruited, but apparently this was not always adhered to.

*When the program was about to start they selected a particular range which the program should cover. The children selected should be within the range of 3miles. They don't enroll children after 3miles, because they don't want the children to face much constrains. **KII LST, Pujehun***

A community leaders FGD participant note that: *“One of the most challenging issues during that time is transportation for those that are staying far from the community”*. **FGD Community Leader, Kambia**. In order to solve the transport problem, they established, “community attachment” so that children in communities that were far from the centre could also take part in the programme.

*When Brac was visiting some of the communities, they were able to identify some of these beneficiaries and after which they started sending these children into different schools. Like Kolenten school, Kiss school and Islamic Federation. These are the way the children were incorporated in different schools. Because they were not in the community, they decided to do what we call ‘community attachment’. For instance, Massama has one zone, which forms the meeting point for all the children that are unfortunate to attend at Kiss and Kolenten. **KII LST Kambia***

A head teacher observed that even though there were challenges in the selection process, the ultimate goal was to provide education for school dropouts and underprivileged children and this was largely successful:

*There were challenges but they were able to adapt because they came with a focus. Which was to bring back the vulnerable children in school and they succeeded. They also gave the community people support by paying the staff well; they conducted in-service courses. They also conducted community sensitisation so that they would be able to encourage the parents to enroll their children in the program. **KII Head teacher, Pujehun***

### **3.2.2 Education-related challenges that have been addressed by the AEPs/GFMs**

Education related challenges in the study localities include lack of the following: schools within reasonable walking distance, furniture in schools, trained and qualified teachers (supply side); and on the demand side socio-cultural and socio-economic factors such as traditional norms and customs, finance. AEPs have emerged as key entities that provide alternative education in communities in which access to quality education is a challenge.

The programme contributed significantly to reducing the dropout rate as well as increasing school enrollment.

*All the children were enrolled in the program because ‘we called them one after the other and talked to them’ therefore the number of school enrollment increased while the dropout number decreased. Another member of the FGD reechoed this view: ... the number of school dropouts was very high here but when the program came, the number reduced and everyone was able to see that our children are learning better. **FGD Community Leaders, Port Loko***

*At the time I was promoted to Class 6, my Aunty said that she could not afford to pay my school bills and that I should drop from school. When the AEP came to the community, she said that I should join the program, and that is when I joined the AEP, we were given, books, pen, pencils, undervest... that is where I wrote my NPSE exams. AEP. Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun*

*The AEP ensured that school drop outs who were pregnant and assuming early motherhood returned to school. The boys who were involved in commercial bike riding were also encouraged to return to school. AEP non-Ben. (JSS1) Pujehun*

**Even though government policy stipulates that education should be free, there are costs that are not covered in the budget for formal schools, which parents have to bear. These include school bags, shoes and uniforms. In most cases, parents in deprived areas are unable to meet these costs, resulting in children dropping out of school. The AEPs built schools, provided school bags, shoes and uniforms in addition to learning materials, which reduced the cost implications of education for parents and guardians. The provision of such items encouraged children to also attend.**

*... when the teacher told me about the programme, I told him that I did not have books, pens, and bag. he gave me some books, pens, and bag and because I knew it would be beneficial to me so that is why I too joined the AEP programme. Yes, I was happy to join the programme.*

**FGD AEP Ben. Pujehun**

*I was not part of the program, but I normally saw them on my way to town/school. They had an entire structure built in the nearby community. The very first day I went there, I thought, it was owned by the old pupils Association to conduct tutorials for their juniors. I was later told that, it is owned by the AEP, an organization that wants to enroll drop outs and vulnerable children in the community. At one time I also witnessed when AEP gave supplies like bags, shoes, books, pens, pencils etc. to the beneficiaries. On their graduation ceremony, the beneficiaries were also given a sum of three hundred Leones (Le300 or NLe30) each from the AEP. KII Non-Ben. JSS, Kambia*

*The programme [AEP] helped a lot of girls to be in school for in the programme , no school fees is paid and all school items are given to you which makes it good for girls that cannot afford school fees and school materials. Ben. WOW, Kambia.*

*A lot of boys in this community were out of school, some were farming, some were selling on the street, and some were not even doing anything. But AEP encouraged them to go back to school by supporting them with school materials like books, pens, shoes and uniforms. KII non-AEP Ben. (JSS2), Pujehun*

One of the major causes of children dropping out of school is related to their age; children who are older than the average age of their class mates are more likely to drop out of school. The OOSC mapping (2022) found out that 890 pupils were at risk of dropping out because of their older age. AEPs on the other hand accept overaged children and make them feel comfortable (through counselling and encouragement) enough to stay in education and learn.

*Some parents are even crying for the AEP to be revived. Because there are still matured girls and boys in the community who are not in school because they are afraid of their age, they may think that they might be mocked. Therefore, the parents are crying for the AEP to return so that these set of children will be encouraged to be in school and given the required education. KII HT, Pujehun*

**In spite of the radical inclusion policy that has been adopted in Sierra Leonean schools, pregnant girls do not feel comfortable in schools because students and teachers alike**

**mock them. However, AEPs are more accommodating and pregnant girls are able to attend school without any hassle.**

*Yes, they should adapt this system in formal schools. Because looking at the educational system, if children get pregnant and go to school his colleagues will start laughing at her, but through the help of this program nobody will provoke or laugh at a pregnant girl in school. She will continue her schooling process with great encouragement. **KII LST, Kambia***

Before AEPs were established, some parents were reluctant to send their children to formal schools. For example, some assumed that Quranic education was all that their wards needed. With AEP sensitization and flexibility such perceptions changed and children were able to benefit from both types of education:

*...the AEP was a very good venture to complement the work of the government. Before the implementation of AEP, parents were not allowing their children to enroll into formal schools; they only gave them the Arabic education, because they thought that is the only beneficial education. With the implementation of the AEPs, there was thorough sensitization, which has changed the perception of these parents that their children should acquire both forms of education instead of just one. I think the AEP was a very good project created for Pujehun district. **KII LST, Pujehun***

*The AEP's also visit the Quranic learning centers and suggest to the teachers that after the quranic learning in the morning, the children should also attend the AEP classes in the afternoon. **KII head teacher, Pujehun***

*Some of these children were identified from the Arabic learning centers. Like in my own case, I registered twenty to forty-five students from my father's Arabic learning center and some from my brothers that have the same learning centers. Other children (beneficiaries) were also identified by the implementing partner which is Save the Children within the community.*

**KII, Longest Serving Teacher and former AEP facilitator, Pujehun**

Other problems concerning distance and meals were, however, not entirely addressed by the AEPs according to some beneficiaries:

*The time when I was going to the AEP session, I was having lunch as a challenge and also the distance is too far from my house to the AEP Centre it was also a challenge **AEP Ben. (JSS 3) Pujehun.***

*The challenge I was experiencing when I was in the AEP programme is that, I have to walk long distance by foot in order for me to access the AEP learning centre and it was a serious a challenge.*

**AEP Ben. (JSS 3), Pujehun**

Views on AEP classroom space and furniture are mixed just as they are in formal schools. In some cases, AEP participants complain of inadequate classroom space and furniture and are of the opinion that formal schools are better endowed with classroom furniture than AEPs. There were others, who complained that because classes were held in rented premises, they did not have free space to in which to play. Others did not have school furniture at all.

*During the AEP classes, we did not use chairs and desks. We sat on mats on the floor, unlike my current school where we are using chairs and desks for classes. There are blackboards in my current school while we only used reader books in the AEP. We were only having one teacher in the AEP*

*school whilst we have so many teachers in my current school with specialties in different subjects.*

**AEP Ben. (JSS2), Magbesseneh, Port Loko.**

*I disliked the land lady of the house that was rented for classes to take place. Because she was too aggressive and arrogant. Whenever we wanted to play, she would stop us and start complaining that we are too noisy. In addition, there were no desks nor chairs to sit on in a comfortable and relaxed*

*manner. AEP Ben. (JSS3). Lunsar, Port Loko*

### **3.3 Conditions of learning: AEP and formal school**

Conditions of learning should ideally help to ensure that students feel safe, engaged, connected and supported<sup>2</sup> in their classrooms and schools<sup>3</sup>. Positive school climates of which conditions of learning are a part, contribute to good learning outcomes and support students to improve their learning outcomes. Study findings suggest some differences in the conditions of learning between AEPs and formal schools.

#### **3.3.1 Classroom situation (AEP and current school)**

Generally, AEP beneficiaries have a positive outlook on conditions of learning in their AEPs compared to those in formal schools. AEP teachers are more accommodating and encourage them to learn, which is often not seen to be the case in the formal system.

*The thing that I like most about the AEP session is the encouragement for us to learn book until you get it right but in my current school the teacher doesn't have that time to encourage us. AEP Ben.*

**(JSS 2), Pujehun**

*The differences between the AEP class and my current school is that, in the AEP class when I did not attend class the AEP teacher will go to my house to find out why I did not attend class.*

*However, in my current school if I do not come to school the teacher will not want to know why I did not come to school. AEP Male Ben. FGD, Pujehun*

*The difference is that when the teacher in my school sees that you are shy to ask question, thinking that if you speak wrongly your colleagues will laugh at you, they don't encourage you to speak but in the In the BRAC programme there was nothing like that. The mentor will encourage you and repeat whatever you do not know over and again. Some of the words that we do not know, will be put in the form of a song and we will sing it until we know how to properly pronounce and spell it.*

*At the formal school level, they will not wait until everyone has understood before progressing because we are many. KII AEP Ben (JSS 3), Port Loko*

Some AEP and non-AEP beneficiaries though, said they are happy with the formal school system and applaud their teachers for their friendliness. AEP teachers are generally seen to

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<sup>2</sup> feel safe (mentally and physically), engaged (by tailoring instructions to pupils' unique strength) , connected (to teachers, staff and fellow students) and supported (by all those connected to their learning experience)

<sup>3</sup>[Four Elements for Creating a Positive Learning Environment | All4Edt](#)

be accommodating and try to provide a positive learning experience for their students. Similarly, there are some teachers in the formal schools who are said to go out of their way to provide a conducive learning environment.

*By my observation, the behaviour of the teachers is very good. They are friendly and approachable. If a pupil has difficulty in a subject, he/she can meet the assigned teacher, and they are always ready to help. The only thing is that they will beat us if we go against the rules of the school.* **Non AEP Ben. (JSS 2), Pujehun**

*I am very happy about the condition of learning in this school, because we have conducive learning environment, the teachers are always punctual in class and the teachers always treat us like their sons and daughters.* **KII with AEP Ben. Kambia**

*There are many teachers in my current school and the teachers teach students many subjects. At ... Secondary School, teachers ensure to cover the class syllabus before any public examinations. But during the AEP programme, there weren't enough trained teachers. Sometimes, myself and other brilliant students taught our colleagues.* **KII AEP Ben, Kambia**

### **3.3.2 Differences in facilitation between AEP and formal schools**

According to an FGD participant in Pujehun, teachers encourage them to try again even when they give wrong answers to questions whereas in formal schools there is little or no feedback given to students by teachers; and sometimes pupils are punished for getting answers wrong.

*When I was in AEP class, I observed that the teacher would give assignment and class work. If I got it wrong, the teacher would encourage me to do it again. He would say, 'keep trying because you were not going to school so you are now trying to pick up'. But in my current school when the teacher gives us assignment or class work and I get wrong, the teacher will not tell me if I got it wrong or not and sometime they flog me, but in the AEP class the teacher will encourage me*

**FGD (Male) Ben., Pujehun**

When comparing AEPs to formal schools, beneficiaries mentioned that in the former, one or two facilitators taught all the subjects. On the other hand, in formal schools where the subjects are many, each teacher teaches a different subject and the methods of teaching differ. Whereas a narrower range of subjects may be taught under AEP than in formal schools, beneficiaries point to the imaginative teaching methods AEP facilitators adopt to encourage learning.

*At BRAC, the Facilitator taught us only two subjects, numeracy and literacy. She combined singing and dancing to teach. She did not flog us if we did not understand the topics. She would go over it several times until we understood the topics. In my current school, the teachers teach us eight subjects, and a separate teacher handles each subject.* **AEP beneficiary (JSS3), Kambia**

The language of instruction in AEPs is predominantly the dialect of the area, compared with formal schools where the preference is to use English, followed by Krio and then the local dialect. Whereas non-AEP beneficiaries report that formal schools use both English and the

local language, AEP beneficiaries observe that the language of instruction in the formal system is predominantly English. According to non-AEP beneficiaries, as quoted below, teachers in formal schools use different languages to teach as long as it helps pupils understand what is being taught

*They teach us in English, Limba and Susu so that all in the class will understand the teachings from them. KII Non-Ben (JSS 1), Kambia*

*Sometimes they teach us in our local language or Krio for us to understand, like in the case of Mathematics. KII Non-Ben (JSS 3), Pujehun.*

*the teaching process is good and I love the way the teachers are teaching us. They teach us in English, Krio and Mende and some time they teach us in Limba. Non-AEP Ben. (JSS2), Port Loko*

A head teacher in one of the schools visited for the study reported that facilitators for the AEP programmes are people who can speak the local dialect in order to communicate effectively with their students.

*They [mentors] also spoke the language of the people ..., because if they employed a mentor who does not speak the language of the people, it will be difficult to achieve the organisation's goal of eradicating illiteracy in the community. KII head teacher, Kambia*

According to the AEP beneficiaries, the language of instruction was purely the language of the area in which the AEP was situated.

*In the AEP class, the teacher would teach us in our local language so that we could understand, and he would use games and songs for us to understand but in my current school they are not doing that. AEP Ben. FGD, Pujehun*

*We communicate in Krio or Themne in the AEP programme while in school it is strictly English. In the AEP programme we had access to text books to ensure our assignment is done. AEP Ben. FGD, Port Loko*

Teachers in both AEP and formal school contexts have ways of making their classes interesting. AEP facilitators, for example, regularly use icebreakers in the form of songs—something that is rarely used in the formal system.

*Yes, there are differences in teaching methods. When a teacher finishes a session in BRAC, they will teach us a song, and then we will sing it to keep from getting bored or fatigued. This is not the case at this school, and the punishment for misbehavior at BRAC is less severe than it is at this school. KII, AEP Ben. Port Loko*

*What I liked most about the AEP programme was the manner in which the facilitators were conducting the sessions. They were able to capture the attention of everyone in the class. They would make fun, and told stories if they found out that the concentration level of the class was low. AEP Ben. FGD. Pujehun*

However, as reported by some non-AEP beneficiaries, teachers in formal schools also use different approaches and methods:

*For some teachers when they enter to teach us, they will ask us to turn over to the previous notes we had and they begin to discuss it with us. Moreover, we would joke and laugh together and later they will read the new notes to us and we will read after them. All of our teachers use this method. **Non-AEP Ben. Pujehun***

*...the teaching approach is good and our teachers come to school every day. They teach us in groups and they make sure we understand the teaching before the teachers will stop teaching us.*

**KII Non-Ben. Kambia**

*Some teachers when they come when they teach if they notice that the class is dull, we exercise our body, and they make us laugh, and they will tell us a story. **AEP non-Ben (JSS3), Kambia.***

In addition to the subjects taught in both AEP centres and formal schools, AEPs included counselling sessions which help to boost the confidence of beneficiaries and encourage them to take their studies seriously; something which beneficiaries say is absent from formal schools:

*There were counselling sessions at BRAC. Sex education and the implications of traditional practices such as early marriage, secret societies were daily discussions at the learning sessions.*

**KII AEP Ben. (JSS 3), Kambia**

*The teachers in BRAC have time to advise us and tell us the truth about life, while the formal school, the teachers have no time to advise and encourage us. **FGD AEP Ben. Kambia***

*During the AEP, there was emphasis on sanitation and personal hygiene but here the only emphasis is to take our education seriously. I did not have many teachers in the AEP; my current school has specific teachers allocated for specific subjects. **AEP Ben. JSS 3, Port Loko***

### **3.3.3 Differences in access to teaching and learning materials**

In their bid to educate children from deprived backgrounds, AEPs factor into their programmes basic necessities. . For instance, they provide essential school materials such as uniforms, shoes and bags, as well as learning materials such as exercise books, pens and textbooks and teaching materials to support teaching and learning.

*AEP was supplying us with books, shoes and everything, but my new school does not supply. My aunty provides me with materials. In the new school, there are not much textbooks. Only the teachers that hold textbooks to teach. **AEP Ben (JSS3), Pujehun***

*In school, teachers do not have pictures to make examples they only use books to make examples but in the AEP class, teachers reference the pictures on the wall to make an example and they have books as well. **KII AEP Ben. (JSS2), Port Loko***

*The children have a special package that the district education office will give them like learning materials and at times, they even give them start up kits which contain school uniform and also award them scholarships. **KII LST, Kambia***

According to both AEP beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, the MBSSE provides very little support for students in terms of teaching and learning materials:

*This is indeed a very serious challenge in the school. The school has never provided learning materials to us. Every pupil is expected to come along with his/her textbooks to school. It is*

*compulsory to come with our literature books on the days that we have English literature. No one is allowed to share textbooks. Sometimes, the teacher will ask us out of the classroom if we cannot afford the literature books in particular* **KII non-AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun**

*The only support we receive from the ministry of education is the supplies of teaching and learning materials like core subject books (Mathematics and English Language etc.)*

**KII, Head teacher (JSS), Kambia**

*We have a serious challenge with teaching materials even to have chalk, is a problem. We also have learning material challenges in this school because our people are poor.*

**KII non-AEP Ben (JSS3), Pujehun**

### **3.4 Transition, Retention and Completion**

AEP goals differ. Whereas SCI and MBSSE focus on returning beneficiaries to school after upgrading their education, BRAC trains beneficiaries primarily for success in the world of work. Therefore, SCI supplies beneficiaries with basic items for schooling which set the tone for transitioning into JSS after they have written the National Primary School Exam (NPSE), as reported by study participants:

*P1= What has help us more to stay in school up to this time is because AEP supplied us school materials and I am still using these school materials.*

*P2= Why I stay in school is because after my NPSE they supplied me books, pens, bag, pencil, shoe and socks. I am praying to have more from them.*

*P3= AEP has helped me to be bold. They supplied me bag, shoes, uniform, and books that I am still using. That is what has help me to stay in school.* **AEP Ben. FGD male, Pujehun**

The MBSSE also provides some basic materials to support children who are transitioning from the AEP to formal schools. According to an FGD participant, children who were transitioning were provided with “two pairs of uniforms, school bags, books, pens and shoes. Most of these children are currently attending school in different schools”. **FGD Community leaders, Kambia.** In the case of BRAC, no materials were given to those who were transitioning to formal school except advice:;

*BRAC never gave us anything to transition to the formal school. When it was time for us to transition to the formal school, BRAC gave us our results, they advised us to be focused in school to become better persons in the society, and that we should be different from those who were not part of the BRAC team.* **KII AEP Ben. (JSS2), Port Loko**

As is the practice, every child in Sierra Leone must pass the NPSE in order to gain admission into the JSS. Therefore, any child who wishes to transition must pass the NPSE. According to respondents, the AEPs supported them to go through the NPSE:

*P2: AEP promoted me to secondary school because I was in class one (1) when they came and promoted me to level six (6) where I sat to my NPSE, got good grades and enrolled to secondary school level.*



*P4: When we were about to take the NPSE (National Primary School Examination), our parents/caregivers didn't pay anything because AEP were responsible for our transport fare (to and fro), fees and also our feeding till we finished our exams. AEP Ben. FGD (JSS2), Pujehun*

Teachers also confirmed the fact that AEP beneficiaries sat for the NPSE

*they [Save the Children] started transitioning children in 2017 ... the children didn't transition right away from the AEP, they sat their national primary school examination (NPSE) from a particular school and later got transitioned in my school. KII Head teacher, Pujehun*

*I know of one [AEP] that was established in Massam community. It was supported by save the children. They catered for out of school children. They brought them on-board, trained and allowed them to take the NPSE exams. Later, they transitioned them in secondary schools KII Head teacher, Pujehun*

### **3.4.1 Transition and retention levels from primary to JSS level**

Anecdotal evidence from the data collected indicates that AEP graduates indeed transition to formal schools. Whilst the information provided by beneficiaries is scanty, it goes to buttress that received from AEP service providers themselves, whose data was used to undertake the prelisting exercise preceding the study.

According to study participants from the Ahmadiyya School in Pujehun district, in 2016, 6 learners in total transitioned from the primary level into JSS 1, consisting of 3 boys and 3 girls. In the following year, 5 learners transitioned to JSS 1, including 4 boys and 1 girl. In the last phase of the programme, 5 learners transitioned into JSS 1 including 1 boy and 4 girls. In another school in Pujehun, it was reported that 15 students enrolled into the JSS level in the 2017/2018 school year.

In a school in Sami Town, Kambia, it was reported that 2 male learners and 3 female learners from the AEP transitioned from the primary level to JSS 1.

One school in Kambia is reported to have enrolled about 50 girls into their school, in 2022 enrolling about 13 girls.

### 3.4.2 Transition and retention levels from JSS to SSS level

Within the JSS level, the school in Kambia reported that 5 boys and 9 girls from the AEP transitioned to JSS 2 and 6 boys and 8 girls from the AEP transitioned to JSS3. Another school in Sami Town in the same district, reported that 1 boy and 3 girls from the AEP transitioned to JSS3. In another community in Kambia, the school reported that they have 4 AEP beneficiaries who transitioned to JSS2 and another 4 to JSS3.

Non-AEP beneficiaries also made progress in transition within the junior secondary school, with one school reporting that 30 non-AEP boys and 35 non-AEP girls transitioning from JSS2 to JSS3 (Sami Town, Kambia). However, schools indicated that retention at the JSS level is higher among AEP beneficiaries as compared to non-AEP beneficiaries.

It was reported that overall, 85% of AEP learners transitioned into formal school and only 15% did not transition (AEP-LST). AEP successes in getting children back into school was reported by many communities. This is evidenced in the quotes below:

*...the most important thing that the AEP programme has done for the beneficiaries is that, before this time they had not been going to school but now they are going to school and learning and they can read and write for themselves. AEP non-Ben, MAGBAFT, Port Loko*

*We can boast that 90% of the children that are in the community are going to school now.*  
**KII-LST, Rokuper, Kambia**

*Currently, the percentage of children in school are more than those who are not in school.*  
**KII-LST, Masine, Kambia.**

Whilst this was the case for many of the communities where the study was conducted, the programme seems to have been challenging for other communities, where they report that there are still a high number of children at home rather than in school. They stated that only 10% of the children in their community benefitted from the AEP.

*The percentage rate at home is higher than those that have achieved this program; only 10 percent of kids in our community have achieved this opportunity; the 90 percent are still out there.*  
**KII-PLS, Bayada, Kambia**

### 3.4.3 Completion levels at JSS level

Completion rates at the JSS level are reported to be higher among AEP beneficiaries. Respondents attribute this to their resolve to make full use of a second chance at schooling and the fact that the AEP programme instills the importance of education in them.

*The AEP learner completion rate is higher than for the non-AEP learners, because they are determined as they do not want to become dropouts again. AEP-LST, Madina, Kambia*

*The program has changed the way I am thinking now because when my mother stopped me from going to school, I was not having any hope of returning to school but now I am very much determined to complete my school. AEP Ben. JSS 3, Pujehun*

*Actually, the Brac children now know the importance of education due to what they had been told/advised by Brac. Because when they were in the program, they were having visitors who used to visit and inspire them to take their education seriously. In fact, they have the willingness to learn than the non-AEP students in the school, because they are hardly absent from school.*

**KII HT. Kambia**

### **3.4.4 Success factors enabling retention and completion of AEP graduates in mainstream school**

The AEPs instill discipline in their learners most of whom develop the habit of regular and punctual school attendance. As such, most of them do not miss classes and this helps them to gain confidence to be in school. Through the AEP, parents are aware of the importance of education, they now support their children in their schooling and allow them time to study and do their school work. This has been particularly helpful for girls and has contributed to their retention and completion within the formal school system. Additionally, school authorities report that parents, particularly mothers Community Teacher Association (CTA) meetings.

*The program helped the parents to know the relevance of education and know how to treat their kids well at home, not to beat them and not to engage them too much in domestic chores at home but to help them achieve their educational goals. KII Mentor, Robanka, Kambia*

*My mother has intensified her support for me since I transitioned into the formal school. BRAC is no longer providing the learning materials that they used to provide for us. She has been the sole person providing books, pens, pencils, school bag, shoes, and lunch money for me. AEP Ben. (JSS 3), Kambia*

*The mothers of these children are more active as compared to the head of the household, which is the fathers. Even in terms of meeting (CTA) attendance, the women are the ones who attend in numbers and they ensure to partake in anything related to the school KII HT, Pujehun*

#### **3.4.4.1 School-based factors enabling transition and retention**

Some school authorities are aware of the AEPs and the fact that students from those institutions will be enrolled in their schools. Therefore, they prepare well to receive them; included sensitising regular students to the AEP students circumstances and encouraging other pupils, not to discriminate against new AEP learners. The AEP students are also given an orientation to prepare them in advance so that they feel comfortable in their new environment and to support their retention in school. According to some school authorities:

*What we did as teachers and administration was to take these children to the assembly and call all other children in the school. We did a formal introduction to them and explained the benefit of education to children. We told them 'the children you see here were once on the street roaming about with no mission or vision. Save the Children gave them opportunity to learn and they respect*

*and value it, now they are here with you as colleagues. You are now brothers and sisters nobody should discriminate against them or humiliate them'. KII LST, Pujehun.*

*No, we do not have a special procedure for welcoming AEP graduates. We know that they did not attend formal school. In this case, we gave them orientation of on how a formal school operates from the non-formal school. We gave these children our dos and don'ts of the school and we told the girls to watch how they relate with the boys in the school. KII HT, Pujehun*

Some schools have a counselling unit whose staff provide advice and counselling to learners. This support base serves as a way of ensuring transition and retention of pupils. Schools also indicate that they have special sessions with teachers to train them about how to work with AEP students.

*Once we knew that they were coming, we instructed a particular teacher that would be engaging them in guidance and counselling on a regular basis to see how their behaviour would align to that of the formal school system. This is what we put in place as a preparation for transitioned AEP learners*

**KII HT, Kambia**

*The administration prepared in consultation with the guidance counselling unit to see how best the guidance counselor will engage the teachers to know how to embrace those kids so that the retention would be one of the main outcomes, they encourage the kids to feel free and feel at home.*

**AEP-LST, Dares Salam, Kambia**

School authorities also indicate that they have in place different trainings to equip teachers on to deliver their lessons more effectively, which they believe helpsd in the transitioning of students from one level to the next.

Government provides support in terms of school supplies and fees, which are channeled through schools. School authorities confirmed that they do sometimes receive school supplies from government or other education partners which they make available to students.

According to AEP students who have transitioned into formal school, mentors and teachers in their schools are very helpful and supportive, providing valuable advice and guidance to them.

*Mr. Bangura teaches us integrated science and each time he has completed a particular topic he will he asks questions to make sure that we understand, he always encourages us and all the teachers in the school are like that. They give us assignments, tests just to test our ability and our understanding.*

*The relationship between the teachers and us the students is very cordial.*

**KII AEP Ben. Magbath, Port Loko**

*At the school level, the teachers are encouraging us, they are monitoring us to make sure we pay attention to our school work but apart from that we are not getting any other support from the school. AEP. Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun*

Another factor mentioned by learners and other stakeholders is that encouraging participation in extra curricula school activities and having a friendly and conducive learning environment encourages students to stay in school. Some schools organise debates and other

competitions, such as games and sports, which get the students involved and interested in school, contributing positively to their retention in school. Some AEP beneficiaries are in school clubs, others serve in the school prefect body, giving them a sense of belonging.

*We are also doing games and sports in the school to keep the children in the school, despite the AEP program having ended. KII-HT-GBANDOPI-PUJ-01-RCPS*

*Yes there is a great interest in the learners, as a result they play active part towards the development of the school. Some of them are part of the schools clubs, some of them are on the prefectural board of the schools. KII LST, Kambia*

*We organize debating and other competitive play among them in the school. Sports activities are some of the things that will keep children in the school. KII-HT-Gbondapi-Pujehun*

#### **3.4.4.2 Community-based factors enabling transition and retention**

Through sensitization and the AEP, communities including parents and OOSC are becoming more aware of the value and relevance of education in society. This has inspired more students to enroll and stay on in school. AEP participants mentioned that with the support of the community, there has been a reduction in teenage pregnancy and early marriage.

*The dropout rate among boys and girls in the community has considerably reduced because many of them have returned to school. Those who have never been to school have transitioned into the formal schools, and they are doing well in those schools. Parents who did not see the use to send their daughters to school have now seen the need to do so.*

**Non-AEP-Ben. Gbondapi, Pujehun**

Parents are supporting their children more, encouraging them to stay in school and discussing lessons with them after school. This stimulates children's motivation. School children indicated that their parents provide support in terms of school materials and fees:

*My mother gave me school uniform, socks, books, shoes, bag, hat, badge and tie. These were the things she bought for me to start going to school. BEN-FMB-F-ROKUPR-KAM03-HCSS*

*My mother is still providing me with support like books, pens, bags, shoes etc. and also school fees because the school only pay half and my mother pay the other half of the fees.*

**AEP Ben. (JSS 2), Port Loko**

Other members of the family such as grandparents have also been instrumental in keeping AEP beneficiaries in school through their support, as reported by some students.

*My grandmother provides food, lunch, clothes, and school fees for me. AEP Ben. (JSS 2), Port Loko*

*My grandmother gives me food and lunch to school and I also manage to make something for my survival. AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun*

*My grandfather is supporting me well. He gives us books and further encourages us, telling us not to leave school. KII AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun*

The communities have demonstrated unity in their support for AEP graduates to encourage and motivate them to stay in school and complete their education. Parents and other family members have been a particularly strong support. Some parents continue to support their children through their farming activities. Other beneficiaries indicated that they get moral support and encouragement from their mothers and some from their husbands.

In the discussion with community leaders, one of them stated:

*... before now; yes we used give our children into marriage. After we have seen the benefits of education that has changed. Now we send our children to school instead of going to secret societies and early marriage. FGD Community Leaders, Port Loko*

Parents indicated that they are now participating more in meetings as community elders and taking measures to stop early marriage and curtail the operation of secret societies, which they believe hinder transition and retention in schools. According to the head teacher of a school in the Gbandopi community:

*the dropout rate has reduced greatly in the community. As I am talking now, if you tell any female student about getting married, they will tell you that they are interested in education, not marriage issues. They are only interested in their education, which means they now know the importance of education; they have seen light in education. KII-HT-Gbandopi, Pujehun*

Laws in place but not being adhered to, are now being enforced thanks to community people coming together and ensuring this. As a result the use of child labour has been reduced in some communities, allowing more children to stay on in school and learn.

*Child labour has also reduced because the community leaders developed bi-laws that is why. KII Facilitator, Port Loko*

*Now it is rare to see a child roaming on the streets during school hours, because all of them are in school acquiring education. There was also a law in place that if a child within the school age bracket is seen selling during school hours, their parents/caregivers should be apprehended and must be taken into police custody. Therefore, because of these laws, the parents are afraid to give their children goods to sell, and have now enrolled them in school. FGD Community leaders, Kambia*

Teacher availability is an important factor encouraging the retention of children in school and some communities help by supporting teachers who are not on the payroll.

*Mostly the mothers clubs help the teachers that are not on pay role by contributing in terms of salary incentives and by that its helps the teachers to be motivated in order to thoroughly teach these kids and help them stay in school for that required time KII LST, Kambia*

### **3.4.4.3 Motivation to complete education**

Notwithstanding the challenges faced, especially in terms of support for their schooling, most AEP beneficiaries stated the desire to complete their education and were able to give reasons that has inspired or motivated them to do so. Overall, the increased awareness of the

importance of schooling and the determination not to become dropouts again is a major motivation to complete their schooling. As beneficiaries reported:

*The program has changed my way of thinking now because when my mother stopped me from going to school, I was not having any hope of returning to school but now I am very much determined to complete my school.* **AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun**

*The AEP has broadened my understanding on education. It has helped me seek knowledge. It has also helped me to stay in school because of the pieces of advices that I received during the program.*  
**KII AEP Ben. (JSS3)**

*Before the AEP programme, I was not able to read and write, there was nothing to motivate me. However, with the intervention of AEP I can now read and write, because of the support given to me. I am motivated to learn and my desire is to go as far as university level. My eyes are now open to education and I have plans for the future.* **AEP Ben. Pujehun**

Attending school without having the necessary support is a challenge for students and is a major causes of their dropping out of school. For most students, the provision of school materials such as bags, shoes, pens and books as well as food during lunch hour is enough to keep them in school. Student participants in this study attested to this fact:

*The things that kept me in school is the school materials the AEP supplied us, like books and bags etc, and from since they supplied these materials I am still using them, I have not changed them.*  
**FGD. (Boys) AEP. Ben., Pujehun**

*There is no chance that I will not continue with my education. I am ready to complete my school and my parents are trying their best to support me with my school work.* **KII AEP Ben. Pujehun**

The quality of the school workforce is also mentioned as a source of motivation for learners encouraging them to work hard and stay in school. Teachers can provide a strong support structure, for example by offering free evening classes to AEP graduates; or by teaching well; and being available and willing to help them.

*“Like I said our class room is neat and the teachers are teaching us well and we also understand what they are teaching us in school.”* **Non-AEP Ben, Pujehun**

*I like the discipline in this school. Students respect time; they make sure they come to school on time. If students come late, the gate is closed. Moreover, I like the teaching in this school*  
**KII, AEP Ben. Kambia**

Knowing that a good education will help provide them with careers that raise their standards of living in the future motivates students to stay in school irrespective of the challenges they might face.

*I am aspiring to become an accountant. When I joined this program I said thanks to them because I have seen great changes in my life. I was sitting at home. I was selling cooking items but now it does not happen. I am going to school now.* **KII AEP Ben. Kambia**

### 3.4.5. Barriers/risks limiting retention and completion of AEP graduates in mainstream school

Not all children in Sierra Leone complete primary school or make the transition from primary to junior secondary school (JSS) or from JSS to SSS. Primary school graduation rates are 64%, JSS (lower secondary) graduation rates are 44%, and SSS (upper secondary) graduation rates are 22%<sup>4</sup>. The Sierra Leone Out of School Mapping report 2022 found out that 22% of sampled children had dropped out of school and a further 26% were at risk of dropping out due to truancy, old age and frequent repetition. Here we consider factors that increase the risks of AEP students who have transitioned dropping out of school.

#### 3.4.5.1 School factors

Often AEP graduates are not used to formal schooling and require some orientation in order to cope with the different conditions of a formal school. Similarly, children in mainstream school need some sensitisation about AEP graduates in order to understand their unique circumstances and to encourage easy coexistence. It is important that the school creates a conducive environment for AEP graduates to ensure their retention in the formal system. However, some school authorities, are not aware of the presence of AEP beneficiaries in their schools having enrolled them as regular students.

*They should have informed us about the transition of these children, so that we prepare to receive them but nothing like that. We should have prepared sitting accommodation for them. We were taken unawares* **KII LST, Pujehun**

The special circumstances under which AEP beneficiaries enter the formal system of schooling requires some form of orientation in order to fit them into the regular stream. Some head teachers mention isolation as one of the challenges they face,

*some of the challenges are isolation, because when a child has dropped from school for a long time, it will take them some time to cope with the formal school environment.* **KII HT Rokupr, Kambia**

*I also observed that, they are much older than the other children in the school and so they are more mature when doing things in school. For example, during lunch hours they are most times on their own, they do not play with the other children. When they do play, their own types of playing are different from the other children* **KII HT. Bumpe Perry, Pujehun**

*The AEP girls are not so active compared to the non-AEP girls, probably because the AEP girls had passed the age of primary school before enrolling into primary level. When they were enrolled into junior school, they met 9 year old children in JSS1, whilst they were between the ages of 14 to 17 The AEP girls are normally mocked by their colleagues, they even called them 'mothers' and 'fathers' because they are matured* **KII HT. Zimmi, Pujehun**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.unicef.org/sierraleone/education>



Schools researched are not appropriately set up to cater for the needs of children with disabilities (CWD) . An FGD held with community leaders in a community in Port Loko revealed that children in the schools live with different affecting their sight, mobility, speech and hearing.

*P4: Yes we have disabled pupils in school; a boy that has a problem with both his hand and feet. My sister's child whose legs were amputated is also attending the school presently.*

*P4: I cannot tell you the exact number of children with disabilities in the school, but the number I know is two.*

*P5: In addition to what P4 said some students cannot hear clearly and some do not see clearly, they have eye problems. I am the chairman of the primary school so that is what I want to add in support of what p4 said.*

*P1: We have three disabled pupils in school one is not walking properly, and their names are ...*

**FGD, CL, Port Loko**

There are barriers that prevent children in Sierra Leone from attending school and for CWD, such barriers are compounded. According to the MBSSE's Radical Inclusion Baseline Study Report<sup>5</sup>, problems such as long distances to school, conventional classroom furniture, WASH facilities and playgrounds are risk factors that deter such children from completing school. In addition to these barriers, family and community perceptions of the possible difficulties that CWD will face if they attend school is a reality that they must grapple with in their quest for education. An FGD participant articulated this perception when he said:

*The reason why they (CWDs) should not go to school is this firstly, someone who is deaf may want to go to school but it will be difficult for teachers to pass on the information to him or to catch up with others. Secondly, for a stammering child if teachers ask questions he or she may know the answer but because he is a stammers he will struggle to answer the question and if the teacher shouts at him, he will not be able to complete the sentence. In addition, the way they behave and their ways of dressing will cause them to be driven out of the school*

**FGD participant, Community Leaders, Port Loko.**

An AEP beneficiary living with disability gives a vivid description of what he went through, in terms of physical and psychological discomfort because he wanted to go to school:

*My key challenge was walking long distance to the venue for classes. Because of my disability, I got weak walking long distance. Because of this, I missed classes. Moreover, people mocked and laughed at me and told me that I am wasting my time. KII, AEP Ben. Kambia*

*I have challenges with my eyesight. Whenever I concentrate on the board persistently, I experience a rapid flow of water from my eyes for which I have to take excuse from the teacher and go home.*

**AEP non-Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun**

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<sup>5</sup> National Policy for Radical Inclusion – Baseline Report for Implementation (2021-26), March 2022

An FGD participant in Kambia confirms that many CWDs are unable to complete their education because of the challenges they face:

*Because of the distance of the school, some disabled children find it difficult to access the school compound. Due to this reason, some of them have decided not to continue their schooling again.* **FGD Participant, Community Leaders, Kambia**

Poor water sanitation and health (WASH) facilities challenge school retention rates. Poor toilet facilities as well as lack of water are major challenges for girls, especially during their menstrual cycle and causes many to miss classes and sometimes to drop out of school altogether. A girl who was interviewed simply said “ *I don’t like the toilet facility here in this school*” **KII AEP Ben, Port Loko** in response to a question about on the condition of school facilities. Poor facilities can mean girls skipping classes and not attending school regularly and result in poor learning outcomes and eventually dropping out of school. A UNICEF report in February 2023 observes that thousands of Sierra Leonean girls stay out of school when they are menstruating and reports that this can have a direct impact on school attendance, learning outcomes and completion rates<sup>6</sup>. A chairman of one schools studied in Port Loko observes that the lack of toilet facilities and water is a serious challenge in his school.

*We have many challenges in the school. One of the challenges is lack of a toilet facility. We used to have a toilet facility unfortunately, due to heavy winds, the roof of the toilet was blown away. In addition, we lack water facilities in the school, we need water well in the school because as a school they should have water on their own.* **FGD participant, Community Leaders, Port Loko**

Girls also complained of the lack of sanitary pads to use especially whilst in school.

*We need support with school materials and sanitary pads for menstruation. Because when I am at school and see my menstrual cycle, I have to clean myself.* **KII AEP Ben. Kambia**

*We the girls ... need also sanitary pads because we are using them every month and ..., they are very important to us ....* **KII Ben. (JSS 3), Kambia**

Some students must travel long distances to attend school, and most do so on an empty stomach or without money for lunch as their parents or guardians cannot afford these necessities. For example during one AEP, some children quit the programme because there was a limited supply of food. Distance between home and school is a major challenge reported by many learners. and means that some children will not complete their education.

*What will stop us from completing our education is lunch and transportation. Some of us come from far villages to come to Kukuna so it is not easy. ... walking far distance to come to school is not easy and that will make some of us drop out of school.* **AEP Ben. (JSS3), Kambia**

*I cannot be hungry and then walk to school at the same time. By the time I will arrive at school, I would have become exhausted. I would rather stay at home and find food to eat.*

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<sup>6</sup> [Supporting girls in Sierra Leone to ensure safe and dignified menstrual hygiene management | UNICEF Sierra Leone](#)

### **AEP Ben. (JSS1) Rokupr, Kambia**

Learners do not benefit from the Free Education policy and must pay fees if they do not attend a government approved school of which there are still many, especially in rural communities. Despite the Free Education policy, learners must meet some charges themselves even in government approved schools. Many parents cannot meet these extra financial burdens. In addition, some study participants attending non-approved schools say they are at risk of dropping out because teachers ask them for money to cover their salaries as they not on government payroll:

*...this our school is not yet approved by government. Because of this, teachers are always harassing us to pay our fees. The teachers told us that they are not getting salaries from the central government. Every day they asked us for money. This sometimes makes me not to go to school the day I do not have money. FGD AEP Ben. Girls, Kambia*

Non-payment of salaries is a major problem, as one JSS 3 non-AEP beneficiary student in Pujehun said: “Some teachers have even left because they are not receiving salaries”. Many schools (government approved or not) face the challenge of lack of teachers, especially resident teachers who can, for example, support AEP graduates who have transitioned into formal schools by organizing evening classes.

*We have many challenges in providing education for our children. First is, we do not have a resident teacher, like other communities where the teacher will take extra classes with the children. Additionally, sometimes because we do not have resident teachers, pupils go to school and there will be no teacher to teach them and we have children that are coming from afar. These are some of the challenges. FGD Community Leaders, Port Loko*

*We have eight community teachers who are not on payroll and three other teachers who are on payroll that is the head teacher, the assistant head teacher, and one other female teachers.*

**FGD community leaders, Port Loko**

The system of punishment and discipline in some schools discourage some students from staying in school.

*I hate the style of suspension in this school. If you cause minor thing or issue in the school, instead of the principal to settle the matter, he will ask you to go home for three weeks and come along with your parents when coming back, while at AEP nothing like that was happening. AEP Ben. Port Loko*

*The teachers beat us and when we are late to school, they close the gate. They will not allow us to enter so that is affecting us in school. Sometimes they will evening ask us to call our parents*

**Participant AEP Ben. FGD (Girls). Kunkuna, Kambia**

*Teachers should be advised not to get annoyed with such students in school. Most of these children if you flog them, they will not come to school. Teachers should abide by the policy that prevents them from flogging students, and children will definitely come to school. KII LST, Kambia*

### 3.4.5.2 Household factors

The study considered the extent to which household factors, such as the provision of food or cash for lunch, could put students at risk of dropping out of school.

*Children need the encouragement of parents through provision of lunch and school material. The kids need their motivation from home. If they stop supporting these kids, this might be the greatest risk to their education* **KII LST, Kambia**

*All of the AEP pupils that transitioned into the formal school should be supported with learning materials. Most of them are from very poor background. The parents do not have the means to provide all the learning materials they may require in school. I have observed that some of them do not take money to school for lunch. Whenever it is lunch time, I don't see them buying snacks. They cannot even afford to buy a sachet of cold water. They usually share a sachet of water with close friends.* **KII non-AEP Ben. Gbondapi, Pujehun.**

Parents/ caregivers' attitude to education increases the risks of children not completing school. An AEP beneficiary points out that whereas parents provide for her needs at home, they do nothing to provide for her school needs. In the end, she has to fend for herself:

*When it comes to the provision of food at home, the parents shoulder that responsibility, but when it comes to addressing my school needs, they do not take responsibility. This is where some of us go the extra mile to get ourselves involved in some form of economic activities.*

**FGD AEP Ben. (Girls), Pujehun**

In trying to meet their school needs themselves, children face a myriad of challenges, which challenge retention. For instance, some children are enticed by the money they could earn in the world of work and drop out of school. Out of school work can also negatively affect children's learning outcomes, and eventually mean they drop out of school. Some girls become pregnant in their quest to generate income to support themselves in school.

Household poverty can also truncate a child's education. In spite of the fact that basic education is free in Sierra Leone, several additional costs must be borne by parents and for poor rural households, this a challenge encouraging children to drop out of school. As an AEP beneficiary from Pujehun points out, "I am afraid I might eventually drop out of school, because my only sponsor right now is my old grandmother who finds it very difficult to make ends meet". Another AEP beneficiary who is in JSS 3 reports how she goes to school without food "My name is ..., I am staying with my sister, she is poor, I do not come to school with lunch, my mother is dead, my dad is poor and he is doing farming" **AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun.** Even though she has been able to reach that class in spite of poverty, the chances of moving to the next level in her education are slim. In FGDs with community leaders, participants reported that poverty is the major risk factor mitigating against maintaining children in school.

*P4: The most challenging thing is poverty. We don't have money to provide the basic need of education for our children.*

*P2: The reason why some of us are tired of paying school fees for our children is because we are very poor. For us that have two to three children and we are finding it difficult to support them.*

*P5: Because of poverty, our children are dropping out of school. FGD Community leaders, Kambia*

*R4- Poverty and food are a major factor. We have children in this community who find it difficult to be able to get food. It is very difficult and if they are not able to get food at home, then they will not go to school and even if they go to school, they will not be able to learn at school because their attention will not be in class. Participants, FGD Community leaders, Pujehun*

Many households rely on children to work in and around the house, or provide support to their farming activities as well as trading. Girls in particular, are usually burdened with household chores. If not managed properly, these activities prevent the child from learning through home study:

*Most times after school, ... I have to chase my parents to the farm and help with farming activities. I spend less time to study because by the time I reach home, I am exhausted, and prefer to go to bed and sleep. AEP Ben (JSS2) -Feredugu-P-T4-RASS*

*I cannot study after school. After school I go to the farm with my parents, and when we return from the farm, I help to cook in the house. AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun*

*For me I am still going through the same pressure because just after school, I will work until night so most times I do not have enough time to study. FGD, AEP Ben. Mabessenneh, Port Loko*

The recently introduced Radical Inclusion Policy allows young mothers to return to school. However, they face challenges in terms of their lack of finance and child care when they are attending classes. This makes it difficult for them to stay in school and poses a risk for their retention. A KII respondent speaks of her ordeal as a young mother who attends school:

*For me one of the factors that may cause me to drop out of school is the fact that I have the sole responsibility of taking care of my child. I do not have support from anyone including my mother who is also struggling. Most times, I walk to school with my child because I do not have anyone to take care of him. It is even difficult to get food to eat. KII AEP Ben Kambia*

In spite of a favourable policy environment to encourage young mothers and pregnant girls to go to school, society continues to frown on the idea. According to one teacher, having pregnant girls and young mothers in school is not good since they negatively influence other children:

*... being that some of these female students are wives and mothers, it is likely that they will influence the younger female pupils in the school to get married or become pregnant which might lead them to drop out of school. There are risks in keeping such children in school. KII LST, Kambia*

Pregnancy is a major risk against retention of girls in school since in some cases it results in the immediate withdrawal of educational support by a birth parent or foster parent. An AEP beneficiary speaks of the threat to retention which pregnancy presents: *“Let me just speak for all of us. When parents send their children to school, sometimes the children do not focus or pay attention on schooling. All they pay attention to is men and some may get pregnant and that will stop that child from continuing her education” KII AEP Ben. (JSS 1), Port Loko.*

A KII respondent speaks of how her father withdrew support for a fellow beneficiary when she became pregnant:

*I have a friend her name is ..., we were attending the formal school and later dropped out. We went to the AEP programme together and transitioned to formal school again but now she has dropped*

*out because she is pregnant. My father was the one responsible for her education but when she got pregnant, he decided to stop paying her fees. That caused her to drop out of school.*

**KII AEP Ben. Port Loko**

Schools themselves are not pregnancy-friendly. A girl speaks of how several friends of hers have dropped out of school because of pregnancy “... I have many friends who have dropped out. They got pregnant and the school asked them to stop going to school. Some of them got married and now they have more than two to three children” **KII AEP Ben. Port Loko**

Responses from some boys suggest that those who impregnate girls must drop out of school just as the girls as this AEP beneficiary reveals: “When you impregnate a girl I believe it is the greatest risk because it will stop you from going to school for the boys. And for the girls, if they got pregnant, it will stop them to go further”. **KII AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun.** Another boy confirms this when he reports that he and a number of boys had to adhere to this punishment when they impregnated girls:

*The boys and I followed the community’s instructions. They implored us to do so, saying that since we are the ones who have made them pregnant, we should join them in staying at home until the baby is born before continuing together.* **KII Ben. (JSS 1) Pujehun**

It is clear that the Radical Inclusion Policy is not yet operating in all Sierra Leone communities, perhaps in part because communities and schools do not understand it properly.

### **3.4.5.3 Socioeconomic and cultural factors hindering transition and retention of AEP graduates**

#### **Socio-economic factors**

The study was undertaken in rural communities. The socio-economic status of families in such communities is weak; therefore, the livelihood of the family depends on the entire family- both young and old. According to a former AEP mentor, one of the biggest challenges she had during her time as mentor concerned parents who relied on their children’s labour rather than attend classes:

*During the time I was working there as a facilitator, that was my greatest challenge that I encountered, it is still happening there. Some parents will say ‘farming is what we do to sustain us as a family at home, and you do not expect me to work there alone without my kids’. That was the challenge I had with some of the parents.* **KII Mentor, Kambia**

Due to the weak financial status of families of AEP beneficiaries, they still use the books and other materials that were supplied to them during their AEP days as FGD participants observed:

*(P2) The reason that I’m still in school is the school materials the AEP supplied us, materials like shoes, books uniforms bag shoes etc so I’m still using those materials to sustain me in school*

*(P5) The things that has helped me to stay in school is the uniforms and the books the AEP program supplied us, those books have served me from the time we have started the AEP class and up till now they are of service to me* FGD. (Boys) AEP. Ben., Pujehun

There is the risk of dropping out of school when these materials run out before the students complete formal schooling, as was observed by a head teacher, "...we also noticed that the uniforms provided by the AEPs last much longer. However, they are worn out but they still wear them to come to school because they do not have another. The challenge here is that they might stop going to school when they are no longer able to use them. **KII HT, Pujehun**

When the household economy is weak, it takes the concerted effort of both parents to support the family. The death of any parent threatens the household's livelihood and by extension, the children's education. Some AEP beneficiaries have lost one parent and others are orphans. As a girl participating in an AEP Beneficiary FGD lamented: "*if I am promoted to the new class, and I realise that my mother cannot afford to support me further since my father is dead, I will drop out of school, and do business instead*" **FGD participant (girl), Pujehun**. Another AEP beneficiary retention in school is influenced by the lack of supplies and the death of a parent; "*if we do not have someone support us we can't complete our schooling. Also if someone loses their parents that will pose the greatest risk for staying in the school and completing it*". **AEP Ben. (JSS3), Pujehun**

Whereas economic hardships impinge negatively on children's education, girls in particular are disadvantaged more than their male counterparts. In most cases, parents must choose between sending their male or female child to school where finances are limited; ultimately it is the girl that suffers. A head teacher from Pujehun makes this observation: "*Some parent are still battling with the idea of who to send to school, between the boy and the girls, especially when they have them both at home and they do not have enough money*". **KII HT, Pujehun**. In most cases, girls stay at home whilst their male siblings go to school as reported by an FDG participant:

*P 3: I stayed at home to help my mother with domestic work because my father had appealed to me to allow my male siblings to go to school, and that I will join them later. He does not have all the financial means to support all of us at the same time in school.*

**AEP Ben. FGD (girls) participant, Pujehun**

### **Cultural factors hindering transition and retention of AEP graduates**

Dominant culture and practice in most of the communities researched is for parents to allow or actively encourage their girls to marry early. Early marriage is an important contributory factor negatively affecting transition and retention.

*"It still exists. Just as I said, some parents do not take proper care of their kids. I do not know if it is because they are poor, so some kids do not chose to continue school. For the girls, some are forced into early marriage.* **KII-LST. Madina, Kambia**

*I was going to school but my parents removed me from school and asked me to get married. Now I am married and I have three kids the first child is going to school. I am now old enough to make the decision to return to school but I am not able to return to school because I have three children to take care of and I have my husband and I do not have money to support myself.*

**Ben. WOW. Makatic, Kambia**

Cultural/traditional practices hinder students' regular school attendance. Some say they are not able to go to school due to the activities of some 'traditional societies'.

*The 'orjeh' society in particular comes out to display without any consideration for school hours, nor for internal and external examinations periods; they are not bothered. If I continue to miss promotional examinations all the time, it will cause me not to complete my education.*

**KII AEP Ben. Masimera, Kambia.**

Society sometimes puts pressure on parents to send their female children for initiation into the 'Bondo' society. Boys are also forced to join the Poro society by the practitioners. This disrupts their schooling and can cause them to lag behind in lessons.

*The key challenge that I faced during the program was I got initiated into the secret society so during that period, I was not able to attend classes. I was in the society bush until when all the ceremonies were completed before we were allowed to go out. AEP. Ben. (JSS3) Lunsar, Port Loko*

*P6: Sometimes we are forced to join the poro society. In fact, they even collect children from school to join these societies.*

*P1: They persuade us to put our schooling on hold in order to join the poro society. The initiation lasts for a month. Participants FGD. AEP Ben. (Boys). Gbondapi, Pujehun*

Mainly due to community expectations or influences, learners sometimes prefer and/ or are expected to attend community functions rather than go to school.

*"Most times, whenever there is an event/function within the community/village, they will not be in full attendance in school. They will prefer to attend the functions instead of going to school. KII. LST. Senthia, Kambia*

### **3.5.1 Performance in SEGRA tests**

#### **3.5.1.1 Method**

All eligible AEP beneficiaries known to be in junior secondary school (JSS) were tracked down to the school level. A matched sample was identified at each school. Matching involved identifying another child in the same class, and of the same gender. In all, five hundred and thirty- three JSS pupils (533) were enrolled for the learning assessment (Table 22). The number of pupils who had graduated from an AEP programme before transitioning to the formal school system (50.6%) and the matching group (49.4%) who have had continuous exposure to the formal schooling system were almost equal in the sample.

Two standard SEGRA tests were administered to the beneficiary group (case) and the matched sample (comparison group); a word reading test and a reading comprehension test. Both tests consisted of six test items. Of the 533 enrolled for the tests, 521 (94.2%) took the reading test, whilst 495 (89.5%) took the reading comprehension test.



Table 22: Classification by beneficiary type and by test uptake

Characteristics	N Value	%
<b>Classification By Beneficiary Type</b>		
AEP	280	50.6%
Non AEP	273	49.4%
<b>Test Uptake</b>		
Total JSS students surveyed	533	
Took the Word Reading Test	521	94.2%
Took the Reading and Comprehension Test	495	89.5%

### 3.5.1.2 Analysis of tests

The mean percentage scores achieved were analyzed, by type of beneficiary (AEP vs NON AEP), by gender and by Implementing Partner (BRAC, MBSSE, STC).

Findings – The results by test score are summarized in Tables 23 and 24

### 3.5.2 SEGRA test performance

Table 23: Mean % scores word reading

Characteristics	N Value	Mean % Score	Level of Significance
<b>Performance By Beneficiary Type</b>			
AEP	262	58%	P > 0.05 (not Significant) z = -0.2805, p = 0.77948 (not significant)
NON AEP	259	60%	
<b>Performance By Gender</b>			
Boys	141	71%	P < 0.05 (significant) Z = 8.4977, p = 0.0001 (significant)
Girls	380	55%	
<b>Performance By Gender and By Type of Beneficiary</b>			
Boys			
AEP	70	70%	P > 0.05 (Not Significant) t-value = -2. P-value = 0.183503 (not significant)
NON AEP	71	73%	
<b>Performance By Gender and By Type of Beneficiary</b>			
Girls			
AEP	192	54%	P > 0.05 (Not Significant) Z = -0.2436, p = 0.81034 (not significant)
NON AEP	188	55%	

<b>Performance By implementing Partner and By Beneficiary Type</b>			P > 0.05 (Not Significant) t-value = -0.21108. p-value = 0.85238 (not significant)
<b>BRAC</b>			
AEP	43	65%	
NON AEP	48	66%	
<b>MBSSE</b>			P < 0.05 (significant) Z = -5.3072, p = 0.00001 (significant)
AEP	89	45%	
Non AEP	52	49%	
<b>Save The Children</b>			P > 0.05 (Not significant) Z = 1.8754, p = 0.0601 (not significant)
AEP	130	65%	
Non AEP	159	62%	

Overall, for the **word reading test**, the assessment found no significant difference in performance between JSS pupils who transitioned from an AEP programme and those who have been continuously in formal schools. However, when the word reading dataset was examined with a gender lens, boys were found to out-perform girls and the difference is significant. Boys achieved a mean score of 71% compared to 55% for girls. Among girls, AEP girls (54%) matched the performance level of Non AEP girls (55%). When the Word Reading scores were examined by the implementing partner, a mixed pattern was obtained. Competency levels of pupils who had been exposed to an AEP programme matched the competency level of their Non AEP counterparts for BRAC and SCI cohorts. In the case of the SCI sample, AEP graduates scored slightly higher (65%) compared to pupils continuously tutored in the formal school system (62%). However, for the MBSSE cohorts Non AEPs scored significantly higher (49%) than beneficiaries who started their education journey within an AEP system (45%) .

Table 24: Mean % scores reading and comprehension

Characteristics	N Value	Mean % Score	Level of Significance
<b>Performance By Beneficiary Type</b>			P > 0.05 (not significant) Z = -0.5022, p = 0.61708 (not significant)
AEP	245	57%	
NON AEP	250	63%	
<b>Performance By Gender</b>			P > 0.05 (not Significant) t-value is -0.70341. p-value is 0.554661 (not significant)
Boys	140	60%	
Girls	355	60%	
<b>Performance By Gender and By Type of Beneficiary</b>			P > 0.05 (not Significant) Z = -0.5521, p = 0.58232 (not significant)
<b>Boys</b>			
AEP	69	58%	
NON AEP	71	62%	

<b>Performance By Gender and By Type of Beneficiary</b>			P > 0.05 (not significant) Z = - 0.6693, p = 0.50286 (not significant)
<b>Girls</b>			
AEP	176	57%	
NON AEP	179	64%	
<b>Performance By implementing Partner and By Beneficiary Type</b>			P > 0.05 (Not Significant) t-value = -0.24325. p-value = 0.830488 (not significant)
<b>BRAC</b>			
AEP	29	66%	
NON AEP	40	66%	
<b>MBSSE</b>			P > 0.05 (not significant) t-value = 0.72973. p-value = 0.54145 (not significant)
AEP	89	54%	
Non AEP	52	64%	
<b>Save The Children</b>			P > 0.05 (not significant) Z = 1.0926, p = 0.27572 (not significant)
AEP	127	58%	
Non AEP	158	62%	

As expected, the SEGRA **reading and comprehension test** was more complex compared to the word reading tests. Pupils were expected to read a story script (Fruits of Freedom), and then answer six multiple-choice questions based on their understanding of the story line. The performance levels, expressed as mean percentage score are shown in Table 25. Even though pupils whose history is only within the formal school system consistently achieved higher scores than their counterparts who had transitioned to the formal school from an AEP, the difference in scores is not significant. The findings by gender showed an encouraging trend. The mean percentage score for both boys and girls was even- 60%. However, within each gender group, Non AEP pupils performed better than AEP pupils. The difference in the GIRLS ONLY group was 7 percentage points (64% Non AEP Vs 57% AEP). When examined by the implementing partner, there was a perfect score match (66%) for both ex BRAC pupils and Non BRAC pupils examined by the same school. In the case of MBSSE and SCI samples, the difference in mean percent score was 10% and 4% points respectively in favour of Non AEP pupils.

#### Performance on Comprehensive test by Class Level

We examined the average scores achieved by class level among intervention (AEP) and comparison (Non- AEP) group. The pupils in the Non -AEP group consistently scored higher than the intervention group (AEP) and the difference was significant for JSS2 cohort. Although there was some difference in test scores between intervention and comparison group for pupils in JSS1 and JSS 3, the scores were similar.

Table 25: Performance on comprehensive test by class level

Characteristics	N Value	Mean % Score	Level of Significance
Performance of JSS 1 Pupils			P > 0.05 (not significant)

AEP NON AEP	22 31	42% 58%	t-value = -0.74403. p-value = 0.534395 (not significant)
Performance of JSS 2 Pupils AEP NON AEP	96 72	54% 63%	P < 0.05 (Significant) Z = -4.3594, p = 0.00001 (significant)
Performance of JSS 3 Pupils AEP NON AEP	162 170	60% 64%	P > 0.05 (Not Significant) Z = -0.1149, p = 0.9124 (not significant)

### 3.5.3 Head teachers/Teachers' perception on performance of AEP graduates in school

This section looks at AEP beneficiaries' performance in terms of their preparedness to be in school, willingness to learn and their actual performance in class.

In most cases teachers and head teachers (respondents) report that AEP beneficiaries are happy to be in school especially because they have been given another chance to have an education.

*... they were well prepared to transition in to formal schools. We had some children that dropped out of school because of a one-time mistake. For example some got themselves into early marriage, others teenage pregnancy. Due to their experiences, they are determined enough to acquire education because they are now aware that education alone will make them successful. In 2020, the best BECE (Basic Education Certificate Examination) female candidates was a beneficiary of the AEP*

#### **KII HT. Port Loko**

*They are more determined because they have dropped out of school before and they do not want to lose this opportunity given to them. Therefore, they make good use of this second chance at learning*

#### **KII LST Kambia**

Teachers observe that the AEP beneficiary students attend school regularly and are punctual, positively impacting on the attendance of the regular students.

*I see the enthusiasm and happiness in the AEP beneficiaries. According to the class register, you will see the attendance is perfectly high. They come to school almost every day. ... they are very punctual which has inspired the other learners to follow their footsteps to always come to school and take their academic work seriously* **KII LST, Port Loko**

*From my own observation concerning them (AEP beneficiaries), they were prepared and able to cope because you can see the readiness in them based on how they are attending school. They are punctual and regular. Which has shown that they are very much ready to learn and they are ready to be in school.* **KII LST Kambia**

However, not all the AEP beneficiaries are punctual and attend school regularly. The school authorities in Kambia, for example, solved this problem with a combination of methods including home visits, counselling and sometimes punishment.

*Most of them come to school early every day. Some however come to school late and in that case, we give them punishment in the school. KII HT, Kambia*

*We experienced frequent absenteeism from some AEP graduates, so we had to talk to them, citing examples about the relevance of being educated. KII LST, Kambia*

*When they started attending, we noticed that there was a huge gap in terms of their punctuality in school. We had to follow-up with the parents/caregivers to know their reasons for being absent from school. KII HT, Kambia*

In terms of their academic performance, teachers unanimously report that most AEP beneficiaries perform well in class. One teacher describes their performance as “overwhelming”. Another observes that by their second term of enrollment, some AEP beneficiaries were outperforming regular students.

*in the first term when we transitioned them in class, the non AEPs performed better than the AEP learners but during the second term we found out that AEP learners performed better than the Non AEPs, the AEP girls have a lot of training exposure more the non AEP girls, and some are matured in their dealings. AEP LST*

A head teacher rates AEP beneficiaries general performance at three competency levels, benchmarking his categorisation against the performance of the regular students.

*My general assessment on them is that there are those that are doing better than the ones they met there. Others are at the same level with the ones they met and the others need to improve upon their performance because schooling is something you have to be prepared for and something you have to be committed to. KII HT, Kambia*

Teachers report some challenges with new entrant performance including their inability to read:

*There were challenges but not much. Few of the AEP beneficiaries were not able to read well, this was because most of the children enrolled in the AEP class had dropped out of school for a very long period and the time for the AEP classes was too short. I believe this is the reason why some of them find it difficult to cope with regular schoolwork. KII HT, Pujehun*

### **3.6 Impact of AEPs/GFM – Most significant Change Stories**

The AEPs provide complementary education to students who for some reason or another have never had formal education or have dropped out of school. In most cases, beneficiaries comprise of those who are above the basic school age. Therefore, the education they provide needs to be multifaceted in order to be useful for both those who will transition to formal school and those who will enter the world of work. Outlined below is AEP impact as reported by beneficiary communities and students.

### 3.6.1 Most Significant Change stories

#### 3.6.1.1 Impact/ Most Significant Change stories/

One AEP beneficiary who has gone through JSS, has passed SSS, and is heading to university has become an instant celebrity and a role model in her community. Every child wants to be like her, according to a head teacher study participant:

*One of the former AEP pupils has just got her requirement to go to the university; she is one of the examples of what is motivating the children to stay in school. Before the AEP even the appearance of the young woman (Mattu), was not good but today with the intervention of AEP, she looks decent and attractive and is about to go to the university. She is admired by schoolchildren so much so that they even follow her steps. They copy her dress code, the way she talks and even in their various classes, they will say “this is the way Mattu used to talk, and this is the way am going to talk, this is the way Mattu does her presentation and this is the way am also doing mine”. Mattu has become their role model whom they always try to imitate. KII HT. Massam, Pujehun*

#### 3.6.1.2 Acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills

The AEP provide basic literacy and numeracy skills to help beneficiaries become literate. Participants mentioned that through the AEP, they can acquire the ability to read and write. Many indicated that before joining the AEP, they could neither read nor write and some could not count. The programme was able to accommodate diverse skill levels and to open up many opportunities for beneficiaries, including achieving higher education.

*The programme encouraged me to continue my education and improve my skills in reading and writing. As I keep on saying, I can read and write now. I can spell and sign my name. I am confident to talk to a large crowd. I have the desire to further my education until I get to college provided I have a sponsor. I have the belief that if I complete my education through college, I would surely get a job and support my parents* **Story of Change, Kambia**

For those who wish to go into the world of work, the programme has been beneficial and supported them to manage their businesses better.

*R – it helps me a lot. I used to give extra money to customers mistakenly who buy from me because I was finding it difficult to calculate the money they used in buying from me. Now with what I have learned the programme, I know how to calculate my money and how to give the correct change. Ben WOW, Kambia*

*Now when I buy fish for sale, I am able to calculate my expenses, cost and profit at the end of the day. Which has helped me greatly. The AEPs have also helped me in the area of my farm work. Whenever I am doing my farm work, I take record of all the cost of labour from start to end. This way, I am able to know the cost of labour and the productivity outcome of the farm at the end of the year. Ben. WOW, Kambia*

#### 3.6.1.3 Provision of alternative options to formal education

The AEP programme opens up vast opportunities for participants and gives them hope for a better future. Some expressed establishing businesses, accessing multiple sources of income,

and acquiring assets in their communities. Participants were also able to gain basic knowledge in skills such as soap making, gara tie and dye and tailoring to enroll in other technical or vocational skill centers or to start work on their own since BRAC, for instance, provided startup capital.

*It has helped me to embark on business because when the program was about to end, Brac gave us six hundred Leones (Le600) each to set up a business which is what I'm doing presently and it's helping me to take care and assist my family because that's where we feed from. **Ben WOW, Kambia***

Participants were able to diversify their skills to combine two or more sources of income to support themselves. Multiple sources of livelihood are needed by farmers who face financial challenges during the dry season.

*I am selling the produce I made from the farm. I sell cassava leaves, potato leaves and corn, but the corn produce is seasonal so I do not sell corn regularly. Cassava and potato leaves are what I sell regularly. **World of work beneficiary, Kambia***

*I am doing business. I buy banana and sell, I am also working in the farm, and when I harvest, I will Now I can make soap; they supplied us with the materials for soap making. I also got to know about pregnancy preventive measures from the program. **WOW. Ben. Kambia***

*Currently, I am doing tailoring, soap making, I plait hair and I am also doing gara tie dyeing and I am getting money from all these things. **WOW Ben. Kambia***

#### **3.6.1.4 Hygiene**

AEP programmes also focus on improved hygiene – both personal and environmental. Beneficiaries were taught various methods and techniques, which many of them indicated has been helpful and beneficial for them.

The teaching on menstrual hygiene is very relevant and useful for female beneficiaries. Most of them stated that they did not know how to take care of themselves during their menstrual cycle, but that through the AEP, they have learnt a lot and are now putting what they learned into practice.

*it has help me to take good care of my child. I have a child now and taking care of him is not difficult for me. I always want to see my community and my house very clean. When I am in my period, I take good care of myself and no one is aware that I am on my period **Ben WOW, Kambia***

*The AEP has helped me to take care of myself. It is benefiting my community in the area of cleaning the community, cleaning the house, and always treating drinking water safely. It changed my life and taught me how to take good care of my environment.*

**Ben WOW, Mile 14 Kambia**

The community leaders during their FGD indicated the programme has taught their children how to take care of themselves and to practice good personal hygiene.

*The AEP programme has taught the children on how to take care of themselves. Some children during the start of the program looked unkempt; their armpits were full of hair, but they shaved it off*

*when they were taught how to take care of themselves. Now, they plait their hair well, they wash their hair and we have seen how they practice hygiene very well.* **FGD Participant, CL. Port Loko.**

Some beneficiaries mentioned that they learn about the cause of many common diseases in Sierra Leone and their prevention through practicing environmental hygiene. Most beneficiaries try to put into practice what they have learnt. One participant stated:

*I learnt some of the things that cause diseases in the community; diseases like malaria, cholera and typhoid. They told us that the little water on the ground that is left for days are the reasons we have mosquitoes, which are the carriers of malaria. They instructed us that we should always cover the food we eat to prevent flies from entering the food.* **BEN-WOW-IC-F-DARESALAM-KAMTM6.**

Food preservation was among the lessons taught and in rural communities food preservation in the absence of refrigerators is a very useful topic. One participant stated:

*I learnt how to preserve food when there is no refrigerator, they taught us how to use the dry method, frying and cooking method to preserve food from spoiling.*

**BEN-WOW-IC-F-DARESALAM-KAMTM6.**

### **3.6.1.5 Sexual and reproductive health education**

Teenage pregnancy is a major challenge to retaining girls in school. Therefore, AEPs which seek to enhance the future prospects of teenagers must educate students on the consequences of early sex and the importance of using contraceptives offering protection against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). According to beneficiaries, the AEP also helps them understand and address issues that will affect their well-being and prevent them from achieving their goals in life. They raise awareness on both early sex and the use of contraceptives, to enable the children to complete their schooling and capacitate themselves in different skills, so that they can be self-reliant in the future. The programme also taught the children about their rights and responsibilities related to sex, as described by some beneficiaries:

*I learnt that early sex is not good and that one should abstain from sex if you do not want to get pregnant.* **KII Ben WOW Dare Salam, Kambia.**

*The AEP program helped me to gain awareness about teenage pregnancy, early marriage and pregnancy prevention.* **KII Ben (JSS2), Madina Kambia**

*We were also taught on how to prevent ourselves from getting pregnant. For instance, they supplied condom (Jadelle), PPA and tablets which are used in preventing pregnancy.*

**KII Ben. Zimmi, Pujehun**

AEP sex education and counselling elements has had visible impact to the extent that AEP non-beneficiary students observed behavioural changes in their colleagues:

*One of the things I have observed from most of them is that, they are not into intimacies like the other girls so they have low chances of becoming pregnant at an early age.*

**KII non-AEP Ben. Masam, Pujehun**

*Among the changes that I see, rushing into early marriage is now outdated, teenage pregnancy is now drastically decreasing among them. They take their studies seriously; even when the teacher is not around, you hardly see them going around the school doing nothing. Most of the times you see*



them calling one another to go over areas in their notes that they think they still do not understand.

**KII, non-AEP Ben. Wuyawo, Pujehun**

*Without the AEP program, many children would not have had the chance to go to school. Many youngsters have benefited from this program, especially girls; this has helped to prevent many adolescent pregnancies and early marriage. Additionally, the information that AEP staff members give me regarding underage pregnancies and early marriage has been quite helpful. The program has created eagerness in children in the community to learn. KII Ben. Gbondapi, Pujehun.*

### **3.6.1.6 Building confidence**

Through its unique teaching methods AEPs have contributed to building beneficiaries confidence . Community members have observed this, as evidenced in a community leaders FDG in Masama. An FGD participant observes that:

*Through the help of this program, our children are now very outspoken in the community and most of them are now doing well in their education. They always take part in competitions, and they excel.*

**FGD\_CL\_KamT6\_Masama\_AH.**

One beneficiary also explained how attending the programme has helped her to be confident and bold in talking to people and responding to questions. This, she attributed, to the knowledge gained during this programme:

*The knowledge gained has been very useful to me because during the implementation of the other education programs in my community, I was so confident and bold in answering whatever questions I was asked and I ensured to attempt every question asked even without knowing the answers. I got this boldness during the ELA (Brac) program. (BEN-WOW-SFK-F-Koya2-KamT6).*

A stakeholder in Pujehun reiterated how the AEP has empowered children in the community. He stated:

*I could still recall one of the best school debating candidates is a product of the AEP program. That young man went on to win the inter-school debate competition at Fayiro and was even taken to Pujehun for an interview on radio. We are still proud of him.*

(KII-LST-AD-Puj02-SLYMM-MK-SM).

The AEP programme has benefited girls as they are not only taught basic numeracy and literacy skills, but also received training in life skills. According to the community leaders in Kerefay:

*The program helped the girls to become bold and taught them things they should do and things they should not do. The girls were bold enough to engage and motivate their colleagues who were not part of the program to join the program. The children are willing to go there to learn and the materials and knowledge they got there have contributed to helping them progress in their education. (FDG Community Leaders, PI7, Kerefay, FB).*

### 3.6.1.7 Social Conduct

AEP beneficiaries indicated that they learn how to relate with and communicate with different people in their communities, claiming that these skills were very relevant and timely and help them cope better in society. One beneficiary specifically mentioned that she had learnt how to relate to her parents and community elders:

*The AEP has imparted manners in me. Before the program, I did not greet my parents or elders in general but after the knowledge imparted in me during the AEP, I now greet and respect my elders.*  
(AEP-Ben-FHG-F-Rogbalan-Port Loko-T4-A.D.W.S.S-JSS2).

Community leaders also mentioned that the AEP objective to inculcate good manners in young people has been successful. They assert that the AEP graduates are now more respectful and helpful both at home and in the wider community:

*When this program came, they told us the program will teach the children how to respect elders, and indeed, they have done that, the children are now very respectful. They take care of the home, they now do housework like sweeping the house.*  
**(FGD Community Leaders, PL7, Technical Community, FB).**

Beneficiaries also commented on how they learn about authority channels within the community and at home and how and to whom they should report offences. One of them indicated that they have adopted this:

*My experiences were to respect people and they taught us many life skills, like reporting matters of offence to your parents or to the authorities within the community.*  
AEP-WOW-EJ-FMafokie-PL-TM7.

### 3.6.1.8 Traditional norms and practices

Traditional norms and cultural practices help to mold the behavior and conduct of communities and their members. Over the years, these norms have remained static in spite of changes to the extent that they sometimes undermine the importance of schooling. The AEP implementers realised that in order to support the children sensitisation of entire communities was needed. Through sensitisation awareness has been raised of some of the negative implications traditional practices such as child marriage have. As a result, the incidence of early marriage has reduced and parents are aware of the long-term benefit of educating their children.

*Before now when the program was not here, early marriage and secret society (Bondoe) was rampant in our community. As soon as the program came they sensitized us about these things, and the community accepted, and by extension, we also advise our neighboring villages based on the advice they gave us and they agreed with us to stop or limit early marriage and secret society activities in our communities.* **FGD Community Leaders, PI7, Kerefay, FB.**

*Before this program, girls were going for early marriage or become pregnant at an early age but since this program was brought here, that has reduced in the community.*

**KII non-Ben. Jendema, Pujehun**

Initiation ceremonies such as Bondo, Orje and Poro which are mainly celebrated to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood are held irrespective of interruptions to the school calendar. Through sensitisation and discussions with community leaders, these activities are now organised to align with school holidays.

*Now, most of the girls do not join 'Bondo' society because they want to go to school. In addition to that, people have gotten the awareness again from FGM campaigners. They only now do initiation during holidays* **FGD Community Leaders, Royeama, Port Loko**

### **3.6.2 Challenges AEP/GFM participants encounter**

The distance from home to the AEP venues is far and required children to walk long distances in order to access the learning centres. There is usually no money for public transport, in instances where there is motor bikes are frequently not available:

*I had a financial challenge for transportation to attend classes from my village to the venue. Sometimes we had the money but motorbike is not available to convey us to the venue.* **KII Ben. Madina, Kambia**

*If a school had been constructed for us, our children could not have been walking three miles just to access the learning centre. They should have continued going to school here.* **Participant, CL. FGD. Mabetor, Port Loko**

There is no support system for young mothers, which makes it difficult for them to attend classes especially if they do not have a carer for their child/ren.

*I was having problem with the time duration of the classes. I have three children and I have to take care of them. When going for the class I have no one to leave my children with, I had to leave them with my neighbor always complained that I do not come home early. She used to say this all the time and I almost wanted to leave the programme before I heard that the programme would be ending in this community.* **Ben. WOW. Sherilanka, Kambia**

AEP class timetables often mean students must walk home in the evening which is risky especially for girls. One beneficiary reported that she and her friends were attacked:

*R- I don't like the time we came from the programme. We were coming home late from the programme every day. We would go to school at 4:00pm and returned late in the evening. On our way coming from the school one time, we were attacked by boys who wanted to rape us.* **Ben. WOW, Kambaia**

AEP classes also coincide with food preparation times for the evening meal and other household chores so girls are sometimes late for classes.

*Sometime when I wanted to go for the BRAC lessons my mum would tell me not to go because we have some chores to do on the farm. Also, I had to cook and by the time I was done cooking the lesson would be over.* **KII AEP Ben. (JSS2), Port Loko**

*P2: whilst I was attending the programme, my aunt was harassing/disturbing me to sell, and by the time I could come from selling and get prepared to go for the class, I would already be late. In fact, sometimes, by the time I could return from selling, my colleagues are already off for the day.*

*P3: whilst I was attending the programme, my mother some of the times instruct me to cook, and by the time could finish cooking, my colleagues are almost off.*

*P1: some of my challenges were, I had to wash dishes, bath my younger sister and by the time I was done with such work, I would meet my colleagues at the verge of completion.*

**Participants FGD Ben. (Girls) Rokupr, Kambia**

Traditional ceremonies for young girls means that they must abandon classes for several weeks. At an FGD for community leaders a participant explained that most girls abandoned the AEP during that period.

*P3: They were facing some challenges in the area of Bondo in the community, at a time most of these children were taken to bush and that really disturb the program. At some times they also experienced theft of learning materials in the school. However, they were able cope with the situation.*

**Participant, FGD CL. Masam, Pujehun**

### **3.6.3 Career aspirations of AEP beneficiaries**

The AEPs are a source of inspiration, exposing beneficiaries to opportunities that they did not know existed. They know that in order to gain a good career, they need to apply themselves diligently to their education. As one beneficiary in Pujehun observed :*“after completing my junior level (JSS), I would like to continue to Senior School (SSS) until I get to the university so I will be able to reap the benefit of education and also assist my grandmother”* **KII-Ben-WL-F-Jendema-PujT2-SLYMMSS-JSS3.**

The major career aspiration of AEP beneficiaries is in the health sector, particularly nursing, since people die needlessly due to the lack of medical personnel in their vicinity. As a female AEP beneficiary pointed out:, *“I want to become a nurse because I want to save lives, because being a nurse, when sick person comes, you can assist to get them healed in order that the person does not die an untimely death. For there are certain sicknesses that comes your way, it’s not capable of killing you, but due to lack of proper care one does lose their lives”.* **KII-BEN-(AS)-F\_K.KRIM\_PUJ.**

Some graduates are also attracted to the nursing profession because of the way they are respected by community members: *“ It has always been my goal to become nurse after completing my studies. We have nurse around our area, I love the uniform it looks good on them and respect they receive from the community people and they themselves are always concerns about saving lives”* **Ben (F) Massam Kpaka Government Secondary School.**

For some beneficiaries, becoming a nurse is a way of breaking the gender bias they thought was associated with nursing:

*“Before I joined BRAC, I had no knowledge about the various career opportunities for both men and women. I had the feeling that certain careers were exclusively for men such as the Nursing career.*

*My perception has completely changed, and as a result I am determined to become a Nurses when complete my education” AEP Ben. Masimera, Kambia.*

Another major career that AEPs aspire to is with the military as one JSS 3 pupil said: *“I would like to become a soldier because, if it happens that there is a problem and there is chaos, we can help to calm the people down even if it means fighting to secure my people”.* **KII, AEP Ben.**

**Pujehun\_PUJ01\_JSS3**

Another AEP beneficiary said he wants to join the military because he admires soldiers: *“I have a secret desire to join the military because I find it so admirable, especially the way they train and even more so when I see them advising politicians.”* **KII BEN (M.K)(M) Gbondapi, JSS 1.**

Some AEP beneficiaries aspire white collar jobs, such as accountants and bank managers: *“I am aspiring to become an accountant. When I joined this program I said thanks to them because I have seen great changes in my life. I was sitting at home. I was selling cooking items but now I am going to school”.* **KII AEP Ben. Kambia.** Another beneficiary is hoping to complete her education in order to become an accountant: *“If I gets continuous supports, I would want to complete my education up till university level and later become an accountant”.* **Participant, FGD-AEP Madina, Kambia.** The aspirations yet another AEP beneficiary shifted from early marriage to a professional career: *“When I joined the programme, I realized that I can become a bank manager. In the past, my aspiration was limited and my thought was about early marriage and pregnancy”.*

**KIIBEN\_SK\_GSS\_KAM03\_MADINA, Kambia.**

A few beneficiaries mentioned teaching as their career of choice because they admire teachers. As a JSS3 beneficiary pointed out: *“I did not have any future plans before, but the sooner I joined BRAC, and I saw how the Facilitator was teaching, I immediately became interested in teaching as a career”* **BEN-KII-M-ZIMMI-PUJ2-ASS-JSS3.** Another has chosen the path of teaching because he believes that becoming a teacher has personal benefits such as being objective and accurate in outlook. *“I want to become a teacher because when you become a teacher you will always be accurate. When you are teaching the pupils, you will also learn from them; it will make your brain open”.* **AEP BEN FGD MALE-ZEMIE PUJE-ZEMIE**

An AEP beneficiary in JSS 2 in Zimmi, Pujehun district wants to be a journalist because of the perception that: *“Journalists ...change the history of a country”.* Another beneficiary believes the literacy and numeracy skills they have acquired have set them on the path of becoming a journalist: *“I have developed new skills like writing and reading, and also took my NPSE exam I think I have developed strong foundation through the program which will help me in my future career as a journalist”* **KII..BEN(M)\_PUJ01\_Gbondapi.**

Other career aspirations of AEP beneficiaries include law, medicine, business and tailoring as listed below in Box 1.

*Box 1: Other career aspirations of AEP beneficiaries*

*I want to continue my education. I want to proceed to university and become a doctor.*

**AEP BEN-JSS 2 F-Port Loko**

*R4- I want to become a medical doctor because I want to treat my people and the community* **AEP BEN-FGD-Mabessenneh-Port Loko**

*R3- I want to become a lawyer because I will be arguing for people in court* **AEP BEN-FGD-Mabessenneh-Port Loko**

*I will want to become a nurse and take care of my family and the community. I will like to work in the hospital.* **BEN-MHS- JSS1 F-KAMBIA**

*I want to become a medical doctor.* **AEP BEN-JSS 2-M-BUMPEH-PUJ**

*I have the desire to go to higher level if only I have the support so I will become a businesswoman.* **BEN-TM-PUJ-01-SLYMM-GBONDAPI.**

*I prefer football because, plying football to certain level (at professional level) they pay you.* **JSS 3 Ben. Puj.**

*I want to become a scientist (a mathematician specifically).* **KII BEN(M JSS3) Massam Kpaka\_PUJ.**

*After my WASSCE I want to be a professional seamstress.* **AEP BEN FGD GIRLS-KUKUNA-KAM**

*I want to become nurse because I want to protect the lives of people* **AEP BEN FGD GIRLS-KUKUNA-KAM**

*I want to become a scientist (a mathematician specifically).* **KII BEN(M) (B.R)\_Massam Kpaka\_PUJ.**

### **3.7 Experiences of AEP/GFM graduates in the world of work**

#### **3.7.1 Reasons for not transitioning into formal schools**

The major reason graduates do not transition from the AEPs to formal school is poverty. Most come from poor homes as a non-AEP participant observes: *“Most of those who benefited from the AEP program came from poor families. Their houses are made of wattle and thatch and it leaks during the raining season.* **KII non-Ben. (male), Pujehun.** Therefore, they do not have the support needed to transition and hence could not attend.

*I did not transition into formal school because when my father died, I did not have someone to take up my expenses and my mother is poor. You know how expensive education is today; if you do not have money, you will not be educated, so I had to get myself into early marriage.*

**Ben. WOW. Massineh, Kambia**

*I did not transition into formal school because I did not have the support needed to be in school. My father who was to take up my expenses died years back. My mother is poor and can only afford to provide us with food to eat.* **BEN-WOW-JK-F-Massineh-KamT6**

*My mother makes decisions for me; I should have been in school but she is a poor woman. Even when she sells, she does not make enough money. She just takes items on credit from other business people and after selling, she gives them their monies. We were in the struggle, when I became pregnant. The man who impregnated me was not able to send me back to school because he was also from a poor background.* **Ben. WOW. Makatic, Kambia**

Some female participants became pregnant and decided to end their education at the AEP level. Others decided to get married after becoming pregnant and did not pursue formal education.

*I dropped out of school due to pregnancy and lack of school fees. My parents could not afford my school fees the time I was going to school. After sitting at home for quite a long time, I had to get married because I was pregnant. I got married and focused on my business*

**Ben. WOW. Magbolontony, Kambia**

*Some of us (girls) are in our matrimonial homes having our kids and husbands to care for, so that was what prevented some of us from transitioning. We also embarked on farm work that is done by only us (girls) without the help of our counterparts.* **Ben. WOW. Massineh, Kambia**

There are no support systems for young mothers especially in terms of caring for their children whilst they attend school and this hinders transitioning to formal education. There are others who are married and do not see the need to go to school.

*The reason why I did not transfer to formal school was that I have children who are now attending formal school. If I follow them to school, who can provide for them food when they are off school? Although they are talking about free quality Education, this free Education does not seem to be free. Lack of financial support was another reason for which I could not transit.*

**Ben-Female-WOW. Robanka, Kambia.**

*I got pregnant and that was what prevented me from transitioning into formal school. Now I have my children, but do not have someone to nurse them while I am away.*

**Ben. WOW. Massineh, Kambia**

The decision not to transition is also sometimes due to factors such as demands on their labour, personal reasons such as the belief that they are either too old to go to school or that they are incapable of undertaking higher education.

*The reason why I did not transfer to normal school was that I have a lot of work at the farm and I did not have anyone to help me do the work. It was from this farm I used to feed my family. I also have to take care of my children; I am a mother of three children.*

**Ben. WOW. Robanka, Kambia**

*When the AEP program came I decided to attend the programme. No one told me not to transition to formal school, I decided not to transition because I have money constraints and I will not be able to settle school fees and school materials. Besides, I think I am too old to be going to the formal school, the children in the school will laugh at me.* **Ben. WOW. Mafaray, Kambia**

*I did not transition to normal school because I am an adult so decide to learn how to read and write. I want to do business so that is why I did not continue school and I am married with children.* **AEP Ben.**

**WOW. Robanka, Kambia**

*I did not transition to normal school because I had the feeling that my brain is not good for schooling, so that is why I am focusing on doing business but if I had completed secondary education, it would have helped me in my business.* **AEP Ben. WOW. Kargboto, Kambia**

### **3.7.2 Type of paid/unpaid work engaged in**

AEP graduates who did not transition into formal school are engaged in diverse activities. Some enrolled in vocational schools provided by SCI for example. Most are engaged in productive work in their communities.

*Save the Children brought another program, which was vocational training. Some of the slow learners from AEP went over to join that program. Now they are offering good services to the community. KII LST, Pujehun*

Study participants are involved in **business, small business, and farming** and some continue to focus on household-related duties. With these livelihoods they take care of themselves but and their family.

*Since I got married, I am engaged in petty trading and my husband bought me a freezer, so I buy soft drinks, water and put them inside the freezer to get cold and I later sell them in the big market.*

**Ben. WOW. Massineh, Kambia**

*I buy a bag of rice and sell by cup; I also sell palm oil by 300ml/litre so that I will be able to take care of my children and myself. Ben. WOW. Koya, Kambia*

*Currently sell cookery (food) at the school and I use the money I get to support my family and myself.*

**Ben WOW. Dare Salam, Kambia**

*I trade; I buy goods from the market and sell them to maximize profit which I use to sustain my family and myself. Am also learning tailoring to add up to my business*

**Ben WOW. Royema, Port Loko**

Most graduates who do not transition to formal schools stay at home and the greater burden of household chores falls to them. This mainly unpaid work is mostly related household chores and childcare including taking care of their babies, parents, in-laws, keeping the house clean and doing farm work.

*all the work I do are unpaid work. My aunty does not give me money for the business we do. I fetch water, I cook and I do laundry. Girls cook, fetch water, tidy up the compound, do laundry and wash the dishes. Whilst the boys engaged in farm work only. Ben. WOW. Massineh, Kambia*

*the boys are the ones who go to the farm to fetch fire wood, ride motor bikes and go fishing, while the girls cook, clean the compound, takes care of the children or their youngers ones and do the laundry at home for the whole family. Ben WOW. Sherilanka, Kambia*

*I sweep, fetched water, launder our cloths, clean the toilet, wash the household utensils, pack my thing, wash the drinking bucket and placed water in there, that is what I do at home.*

**Ben. WOW. Royema, Port Loko**

### **3.7.3 Lessons learned through the AEPs/GFMs**

#### **Value attached to education**

A major AEP outcome is an overall appreciation of the importance of education and increased willingness to enroll children in educational institutions. Children themselves understand the need to acquire an education; even those who feel too old to proceed to higher education recognize the need to acquire some basic knowledge in order to succeed in life.



*My interest in education developed no sooner I started attending the sessions. The programme has made most of the drop out in the community to return to school. They have also made those who have never been to school to start school for the first time. All of us have transitioned into secondary schools. Some of us are in junior school and others are in the senior school level. Girls who were given into early marriage are now in school, teenage pregnancy is not too common in the community. We are in competition with one another in the community to attain education*

**KII AEP Ben. Bumpeh Peri, Pujehun**

Previously, it was believed widely that education was a male preserve but with AEP sensitization, this has changed. Additionally communities are beginning to understand that children can attend school even if they are disabled, abled, pregnant or a mother.

*the AEP program has helped to sensitize our parents/caregivers that education is not only meant for boys but for girls also. It has also helped us to be enrolled in school, some of us are now able to read and write well. KII Ben. (JSS3), Jendema, Pujehun*

*It made the community aware that children can be educated with whatever condition or status they find themselves. They can attend the program, whether they are married, single, pregnant or a breastfeeding mother and they can be of any age as long they are ready to be educated. (KII-FAC-AK-ZIMMI-PUJTH5-RSK)*

*Since the implementation of AEP, the awareness has been raised. Save the children conducted series of workshops on how to integrate these disabled children in schools and how they should be encouraged. They also told us that children with disability have the same rights as the abled children.*

**KII LST. Gbondapi, Pujehun**

### **Traditional norms and practices need not harm school attendance**

Traditional norms, beliefs and practices are not always detrimental to the future of the children nor are they static and unchanging.

*Families have changed their behavior in terms of early marriage, they now know that it is wrong to let your child marry at an early age. Families have changed their concepts regarding pregnant girls and teenage mothers going back to school. They now believe that even if a child gives birth, that should not stop them from going to school. They also know that they should not discriminate against children because of their disabilities. Participant, FGD. CL. Kerefay, Port Loko*

### **Continuous support of AEP beneficiaries is important**

AEP are developed to provide basic skills for continuous learning - formal, informal, and non-formal and establish livelihood skills training programmes to address the diverse needs of young people. When support ends abruptly without hope of future support the hopes of young people can be crushed. For instance, many AEP graduates who transitioned into formal schools are not able to complete JSS because families are unable to support their wards with basic learning materials and food when they are in school. A JSS 1 pupil makes a passionate appeal;

*Let them supply us once more since it would give us zeal. They should also assist our parents with paying for our feeding in school and other school expenses because that will encourage us to study*

*harder. This is because that if a student arrives at school without lunch or nourishment, he or she may not be able to concentrate fully on what the teacher is saying. KII Ben. Gbondapi, Pujehun*

BRAC had a loan scheme for parents to support their children in school but this came to an abrupt end, according to community leaders in Kambia;

*One of the things that Brac helped us with, which enabled the parents to send their children to school is with the loan scheme. When Brac was giving loans to the parents/caregivers in the community, the parents were able to take responsibility for their children's schooling. Now those things are not happening anymore. Now when you want to transfer your child to another school, you have to buy all the required school materials and we do not have the money because there is no loan scheme in the community anymore since Brac's exit. Participant, CL FGD. Rokupr, Kambia.*

SCI and MBSSE focus on transitioning children into formal school. There is a one off gift of basic learning materials for students and then support ends. Parents struggle to see their children through school. Students whose parents are unable to continue supporting them drop out.

### **3.8 Scalability and adaptability of AEP approaches**

This section of the report looks at the conditions in the communities that favour scalability, the readiness of government to support AEPs and their willingness and ability to scale up to the extent that the drop out situation is minimised.

Sierra Leone's Effectiveness study is based on 3 AEP/GFM using 3 different models to support the OOSC situation. The SCI AEP uses a compressed version of the MBSSE primary school curriculum to train OOSC and transition them to the formal system. The MBSSE model is an Accelerated Education (catch up) model, developed for girls who became pregnant/ gave birth during the Ebola crisis. BRAC's model combines AEP components (literacy, numeracy and life skills) with vocational, life skills and income-generation activities. These 3 models have been used in different parts of the country and have been successful, according to beneficiaries.

#### **3.8.1 Adaptability of the AEPs to the context and environment in which they are operating**

##### **Conditions to Scale the AEP Model**

Information from the 2022 OOSC mapping in Sierra Leone shows that 22 percent of children in the study area were out of school; this is in spite of the fact that AEPs had operated in the vicinity. The current effectiveness study suggests that not only do communities want the return of AEPs, but that these programmes should expand to other communities:

*I am advocating for AEP program to come back to our community. I am also recommending that they should bring the same program to other communities because the first program succeeded so there is every possibility for the second program to be successful. KII LST, Pujehun.*

*...well if at all AEP wants to return, they should use the same method as before to enroll these OOSC and the program should be extended to the surrounding villages. KII. HT. Zimmi, Pujehun*

These and similar statements made by study participants speak to the need for AEPs which have folded to restart and to scale up and expand their reach to other communities.

AEP are necessary due to poverty and the inability of parents to provide for the basic school needs of their wards. Poverty is a major issue that poses a threat to schooling in the communities under study and in Sierra Leone, the issue of child poverty<sup>7</sup> is real. According to the Sierra Leone Child Poverty Report, 77% of children in Sierra Leone are poor and Pujehun district has the highest child poverty (93%) in the country. The extensive levels of poverty in the country and the fact that several rural communities lack school infrastructure makes it imperative for AEPs to scale up in order to support the Sierra Leonean government's education goals.

Orphanhood is a threat to children's education and is a condition for scaling up AEPs. In this study, several children reported that the death of a parent caused them to drop out of school. As one said: *"I was in class five when my father died. When he died none of his relatives supported me. Even when I reached class 6 to take my NPSE exams was out of hard struggle. My mother had a lot of us at that time so you find out that my own schooling I had to sit for more than six years without going to school because mother had to support the older ones to complete first". KII AEP Ben. Masine, Kambia.*

### **3.8.2 Government adaptation and scalability of AEP models to contribute to universal primary and secondary education**

The Sierra Leone government through its non-formal education directorate has implemented an AEP since 2014. However, this is heavily donor-dependent; and in January 2018, the programme came to a temporary halt because government could not commit to pay for girls tuition in the learning centres, according to the Non-formal Education Directorate. In October 2018 activities were revived in collaboration with UNFPA and support for pregnant girls and young mothers continues

The National Strategy for Out-of-School Children in Sierra Leone (2022) has been developed with the aim of improving *"access to education for the long-run development of young Sierra Leoneans"* and is meant to compliment the Radical Inclusion Policy in schools to address the *"inclusion needs"* of OOSC . The theory of change on which the policy is built includes a

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<sup>7</sup> A child is considered poor if he or she is deprived of at least one of the following rights which constitute poverty: housing, education, information, water, sanitation, health and nutrition. Sierra Leone Child Poverty Report 2016

sufficient supply of accessible safe school; sufficiently sensitised households who have resources and attitudes required to prioritise the education of their children; and systems that are already in place resourced at all levels, including supportive structures required to support OOSC.

Among the policy's immediate recommended actions are to:

- Expand accelerated learning programmes alongside existing school programmes
- Develop a Non-Formal Education policy on alternative and accelerated education
- Update curricula for accelerated and alternative education programmes

Clearly, the national strategy for OOSC indicates that government of Sierra Leone intends to bring on board “*accelerated and alternative education programmes*” in its quest to increase educational opportunities for young children in Sierra Leone. Additionally, the fact that SCI has been asked to manage the Qatar fund on AEPs is an indication of government's interest to scale up AEPs to support in bringing education to all children who are at risk of never having an education or dropping out of school.

### **3.8.3 Contributions of stakeholders/community leaders and parents to sustainable AEPs/GFM**

Among the barriers to education that have been identified both in the OOSC mapping 2022 and this current study are traditional norms, beliefs and practices as well as the lack of value assigned to education. Through the AEPs, communities are beginning to understand the importance of their children going to school and have started modifying the practice of traditional beliefs so as not to detrimentally affect the school calendar. Now, initiations are conducted during school holidays. In the same vein, the incidence of early marriage is being reduced in part through enhanced understanding about the importance of educating both boys and girls. This psychological breakthrough provides a strong background upon which successful AEPs can be designed and implemented.

Responses from the field research indicate that community leaders support AEPs by sometimes providing classroom structures and helping to enrol children on the programmes. However, once an AEP is withdrawn from communities, little attempt is made to sustain the gains. Parents who can afford it continue to support their children in school but there is no effort to continue AEP classes even where community structures are in place to ensure sustainability as in the case of the SCI AEP in Pujehun.

*...we were expecting the communities to sustain the AEP centers, so that when our time is done, they will be able to take charge. We established a committee to be identifying children who are over age to continue their school. KII Save the Children Mentor, Pujehun*

Some teachers appreciate the role AEP play and are willing to continue facilitating classes.

*I am still appealing to Save the Children, to bring back the AEP program, because we the teachers of the AEP have also grown love for the program. When we were teaching at the AEP centre, we attended workshops on a monthly basis; they trained us on how to deal with the children.*

**KII. LST. Gbondapi, Pujehun**

However, it takes more than buildings, community structures and teachers to run an AEP. In the case of SCI stipends and motivation for teachers were provided directly by the organization, for example.

*Save the Children was responsible for their teachers remuneration. We were only giving them stipend and because of that at times they became disgruntled. What we did for some of them was that we sent them to institutions to further their Education; it really motivated them to be teaching.*

**KII Save the Children Mentor, Pujehun**

As communities were not contributing directly to the AEP in terms of paying the stipend for facilitators once SCI left the scene, in spite of the structures that had been put in place and the availability of teachers, the AEP could not continue.

BRAC operated in Kambia; a recommendation from a teacher in Kambia alludes to the fact that community structures were not put in place to sustain its programme.

*My future recommendation towards these programmes if they took the oath to help these children to go to school, they need to take people from the community so that they supervise the activities of these children when they leave. So that they can succeed. They need to trace these children after sending them to school and give support, give morale so that they continue with happiness.*

**KII LST Bayade, Kambia**

A head teacher in Romaka community, Kambia admonishes BRAC to put up more permanent classroom buildings next time to ensure programme sustainability.

*BRAC has done well but they need to embark on building structures that are more permanent, because most of the structures I have been seeing are huts, thatch house etc. which are just built to be used tentatively; in other communities, they used rented premises. KII HT. Romaka, Kambia.*

Whereas AEPs use cost effective ways to provide accelerated education to children from poorer families, implementers could have constructed classrooms with more durable materials than thatch. In this way, those structures would be available for use after their departure.

Communities do not bear sole responsibility for not sustaining the AEPs after BRAC and SCI left the scene. Responses from research participants indicate that sustainability was not built into AEP planning. Once plans include community members and in particular, leaders, in AEP implementation, they will own the programs and are likely to sustain them for the benefit of children in their communities.

## 4.0 Conclusions, Recommendations and Lessons Learned

### 4.1 *Conclusions in relation to:*

- Learning outcomes
- Conditions of learning
- Enablers: Transition, retention and completion
- Barriers: Drop out – demand and supply issues
- World of work

In Sierra Leone, building the human capital base continues to be a Government priority. In the past five years (2018-2023) it has made tremendous gains with introduction of the Free Quality School Education (*FQSE initiative*). Whilst school enrolment at various levels has increased, however, a significant number of children are still not in school. Foundational learning is one of the Government's priorities for the next five years. The global argument about embracing AEPs into the category of foundational learning is currently active. AEPs are known to be flexible, age-appropriate programmes that promote access to education in an accelerated time frame for disadvantaged groups, over-age out-of-school children and youth who missed out or had their education interrupted due to poverty, marginalization and exclusion, conflict and crisis.

The findings from this primarily qualitative study on AEP effectiveness, provides evidence for the government of Sierra Leone's to consider as part of its foundational learning agenda.

The effectiveness study applied simple comparative analysis to study academic performance by comparing the performance on standard SEGRA tests of AEP beneficiaries who had transitioned to Junior Secondary School level with performance of cohort of regular JSS students (Non AEPs), in the same class. The study found no significant difference in performance between the two groups for word reading (mean scores 58% AEPs vs 60% Non AEPs) and for reading and comprehension although regular JSS students scored consistently higher in the reading and comprehension tests than students who transitioned from an AEP programme (mean scores AEPs 57% vs 63% non AEPs). The findings suggest that investment in AEPs will likely yield similar education outcomes as regular, mainstream school programmes.

**Enablers: Conditions of learning:** SCI worked with communities in implementing AEP to allocate suitable structures, for use as schools, whereas in the formal school system, government or other sponsors invest in the construction of dedicated structures. The FQSE in the formal system and AEP programmes provide tuition for beneficiaries free of charge. However, the AEP programme managed by SCI also provided school bags, shoes and uniforms as well as learning materials, which reduced the financial burden for parents. On the other hand, parents of pupils attending regular schools must bear the added costs. Comparative analysis of the behavior of facilitators/ teachers also comes out in favour of the AEPs. AEP facilitators/teachers are more likely to develop a personal relationship and interest in their pupils and will more likely use culturally appropriate teaching methods (local language, song and dance) to stimulate learning. Even though AEP resources are weak in terms of classroom size, space and furniture, AEPs offer a more conducive learning environment

especially for marginalized girls. Pregnant girls who enrolled in AEP feel more comfortable within the AEP learning environment, which is described as more friendly, free of bullying and more favourable for learning.

**Barriers: For AEP Beneficiaries** - Not surprisingly, drop out among AEP beneficiaries who transitioned to the formal school system, is triggered by absence of enablers. School fee levies, limited school materials, harsh school policies as well as lack of parental support, which results in children having to walk long distances to school and going without food whilst at school, are all triggers for dropout. AEP beneficiaries in the world of work also encountered many challenges, due to limited earning capacity: The challenges include failed businesses, forced into polygamous marital unions, exposing girls to early and multiple pregnancies, and raising large families within a poverty stricken environment,

## 4.2 **Recommendations / Implications**

### 4.2.1 **Government/Policy makers**

- **Use recent findings on AEP effectiveness to guide investments:** the Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education( MBSSE) policy leads are advised to use findings from the the ongoing AEP/KIX effectiveness research studies, including cost effectiveness, to guide the planned scale up of AEP and to better understand what is currently working well and less well in existing AEPs in Sierra Leone.
- **Prioritize AEP expansion in the roll out of the existing Out of School Strategy.** In the process of scaling up AEP and enhancing AEP performance, it will be important to consider a twin track approach which combines the goals of increased transitioning of AEP beneficiaries into the formal school system, and equipping AEP beneficiaries for the world of work.

### 4.2.2 **Education Innovators/Programmatic and strategic approaches**

- **Develop robust data management Systems:** AEP Education Innovators are encouraged to improve/ strengthen their data management systems in order to build the evidence base and make a convincing case about AEP effectiveness. It will be advantageous for them to upgrade and sustain reliable electronic data base systems, to routinely track indicators such as the following:
  - Number of beneficiaries enrolled (by gender)
  - Age at enrolment (by gender)
  - Enrolment profile ( date enrolled etc)
  - Outcome ( remained, dropped out, as well as stay- leave decisions)
  - Transitioning profile (age at transition, year transitioned, school transitioned to, grade)
  - For World of Work model (skills gained, plan to transition to formal school system, preferred school, anticipated grade, business interest etc).

- **Continue to Apply a Girl Centred Approach** The findings presented above show that AEPs stimulate strong drive among female graduates to pursue further education or establish successful businesses. To achieve the Sierra Leone government's goal of universal access to education, AEP programming needs to be increasingly women and girls centered, so as to achieve the broader agenda of improving the quality of life for beneficiaries and for their families.
- **Address potential gender-based disparities in reading proficiency** Innovators targeting both boys and girls should implement targeted interventions, to improve on reading skills at the word and paragraph levels in order to equip all students to achieve their full potential in language proficiency and academic success.
- **Strengthen the recruitment drive for AEP beneficiaries and intensify mentor training:** AEP Innovators are encouraged to improve the recruitment drive and train more mentors. AEPs have a place in our education system given persistent risks and rates of drop out especially among disadvantaged and over-aged children. AEPs will remain relevant to provide learners who enrol on these programmes with equivalent certified competencies especially for basic education. Likewise, the AEP mentors/facilitators who deliver courses must be trained to ensure the use of effective teaching methods appropriate to stimulating learning within AEP settings.

#### 4.2.3 Formal schools

- **Foster collaboration between AEP implementers and formal school authorities** to facilitate the smooth transition of AEP graduates and support systems for them.
- **Develop the school- parent interface for strategic dialogue to reduce drop out rates of pupils in formal schools-** Schools provide a unique platform for timely dialogue with parents about the benefits of the free quality school education (FQSE) scheme, the school/parent cost share opportunities to address aspects not covered by the scheme, and the advantages of retaining a child or ward in school. Strategic dialogue with the school system will assist parents plan better to keep their children in school.

#### 4.2.4 Community

- **Encourage communities to Increase their contribution to the AEPs-** Although some community members have contributed to the establishment of AEPs within their communities, and have applauded the wider benefits of AEPs, AEP institutional structures are weak. Communities are urged to do more to provide additional classroom space and basic furniture and consider how best they might contribute to strengthening institutional structures.



### 4.3 Key Lessons Learned

**AEPs promote girls empowerment–** AEP graduates value the enhanced capacity, to read, write and count. Empowered girls are key to breaking the cycle of poverty for families in Sierra Leone.

*I learnt how to count from one to hundred. I used to sell in the market since I was a child with my mom so I do not have a problem with attending to my customers. However, the AEP program has taught me how to make more profit in the business I am doing.* (BEN-WOW-YK-F-SHERILANKA -KAM-TM6).

**Exposure to AEPs stimulates interest in further education-** AEP beneficiaries expressed increased value for education. According to some beneficiaries learning the basics and understanding the benefits of education has resulted in them enrolling in formal school and for those who had not yet done so, some were inspired to do so in the future.

*“AEP helped me to learn and be in the school system.”* (BEN-SJ-PUJ-01-GPSS-BUMPEH PERI-MG).

*“My participation in the program has helped me to have a positive mindset to go to college, finish my education and be a soldier.”* (AEP BEN-RK-F-LUNSAR-PL-TM4-SMSS-JSS2-EMK).

**AEPs address a critical human rights issue: The right to education-** The AEP has helped many beneficiaries, families and associated communities realise that everyone has a right to education and can be educated irrespective of their circumstances as one described:

*“It made the community aware that children can be educated in whatever condition or status they find themselves. They can attend the program, whether they are married, single, pregnant or a breastfeeding mother and they can be of any age as long they are ready to be educated.”* (KII-FAC-AK-ZIMMI-PUJTH5-RSK)

**AEPs strengthen economies-** Beneficiaries who enrolled in the BRAC programme reported the positive impact of business skills training. They mentioned that through the AEP, they learnt how to start and conduct a business successfully. Many who did not choose the formal schooling route were able to engage in businesses. One of the beneficiaries mentioned:

*“Well, the program taught me how to do business, and currently I am doing business and I am doing my business well.”* (BEN FY\_Dare Salam\_WorlfoWork\_KamT6).

*They again taught me how to do business [financial literacy]. For example, if you get le5, 000, how that said amount will become le10, 000.”* (AEP-BEN-SOC-FS-F-PUJE-TM1-JM).

*“The most important thing that I have learnt from the program is soap making because I am doing that and selling the soap now to take care of myself and support my family.”*  
(BEN\_ZB\_Masineh\_WorlfoWork\_KamT6).

**AEPs build self-esteem and confidence-** The AEP through its unique teaching methods has contributed in building the confidence of its beneficiaries. This is currently being reflected in their communities. A stakeholder engaged in Pujehun district describes *the best school debating candidate*, who won an interschool debating competition as a product of the AEP program. One of the beneficiaries expressed with pride how attending the program helped her to be confident and bold in talking to people and responding to questions. She attributed the behavior change to the knowledge gained during the BRAC program.

**AEP participation helps to reduce early marriage and teenage pregnancy** - According to beneficiaries, the AEP are helpful to understand and address issues that will negatively affect well-being and prevent them from achieving their goals in life. One of these is teenage pregnancy. Beneficiaries learn various ways to prevent pregnancy such as abstinence and the use of contraception.

## References

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