



GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE

MINISTRY OF BASIC & SENIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION (MBSSE)

Request for Proposals to Develop A National Curriculum Framework, Subject Syllabuses, and Implementation Strategy for Senior Secondary Education

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Rationale:

The Sierra Leone Government which took office in 2018 has been pursuing a “*New Direction*” of progressive reforms across key sectors. Education has been designated as a flagship priority and is backed by the *Free Quality School Education (FQSE)* policy, under which innovative reforms are being executed. After decades without an official school curriculum this government has introduced a new *National Curriculum Framework & Guidelines for Basic Education*, as well as the related subject syllabuses; available at <https://mbsse.gov.sl/basic-education-curriculum/>. To continue this reform process, the Minister of Basic & Senior Secondary Education (who is vested with authority to determine education content), has recently triggered the process for designing a senior secondary curriculum. This is the basis for the present request for proposals.

The Request for Proposals:

The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) requests proposals from qualified consulting firms to develop a curriculum package for the 3-year senior secondary cycle in Sierra Leone. The package must include: an updated national curriculum framework; detailed syllabuses for prescribed subjects; and feasible implementation strategies. The MBSSE envisages that this new curriculum package will enhance choices for learners through a range of subjects that caters for diverse interests and talents. It should enable learners to realize their potential for tertiary studies and/or quality employment. It must also help to harness national human capital, diffuse the frustrations of youths, and provide all learners with “*multiple pathways to success*”.

Submission of Proposals:

Qualified consulting firms are requested to submit their technical and financial proposals by email to: Caroline Jordan caroline.jordan@camb-ed.com before 9:00 a.m. on Friday 12th February 2021. Any points of clarification or questions can be sent to the same email address before Friday 5th February 2021. Proposals must be submitted separately. For Technical proposals, please indicate Technical Proposal for Senior Secondary Curriculum on the e-mail

subject line. For financial proposals, please indicate the e-mail subject line as Financial Proposal for Senior Secondary Curriculum.

Technical Proposals:

The technical proposal must be based on a full understanding and clear interpretation of these terms of reference, and must not contain any reference to costs. It should outline the broad approach, key strategies, main methodologies, specific measures, and key personnel with which the consultants propose to execute the assignment and deliver a satisfactory SSS curriculum package. It should clearly outline the consultant team with details of expertise and experience of the team leader and key team members, including national experts/specialists. The technical proposal must delineate the curriculum package exercise into the following key components:

- (a) *A new/revised national curriculum framework* that builds on the current national curriculum framework for basic education, but focuses more on issues pertinent to the SSS cycle in Sierra Leone. Important concerns to be considered will include: the contemporary environment (social/economic/political/cultural) within which the school system operates; broad goals and objectives set for education; the national human capital needs; entrepreneurship and the evolving job market; the unique age-band profiles (needs/potentials) of adolescents; the pivotal role of the SSS cycle as the apex of the school system; links to the high-stakes final school examination (WASSCE); criteria and standards for 21st century knowledge; imperatives of knowledge and pedagogy for quality education; etc. The proposal should clearly indicate how various resources will be harnessed and used to successfully accomplish each stage of the assignment. In general, the proposal must make the case for successful results, starting with an *Inception Report* that will be reviewed by MBSSE as a basis for moving forward.
- (b) *The subject curriculum and detailed syllabus* for each of the subjects prescribed/agreed for the 3-year SSS cycle. A list of the subjects currently offered in senior secondary schools in Sierra Leone is provided as an annex to this document. The latest Subject Groups for WASSCE offerings can be obtained by enquiry from the WAEC website at: <https://waecsl.org> Some of the concerns to be addressed in the proposal include: rationale and justification for the subject at SSS level in Sierra Leone; broad goals & specific objectives; prescribed learning outcomes; learning assessment; general structure; scope and sequence; content (topics and/or themes); general and specialist staffing requirements; teaching & learning materials; suggestions on pedagogy; validation strategies; roll-out and implementation strategies; etc.
- (c) *A feasible implementation strategy* that details viable processes, standard procedures, and practical requirements for establishing the new SSS curriculum and getting it to take hold in the education system. The best-designed curriculum is only useful if it has a chance of being properly implemented in the education system. The proposal must therefore demonstrate awareness of the realities of the school system in terms of “enablers” and “barriers” that may affect successful implementation of the new SSS curriculum. Based on such awareness the proposal must outline feasible strategies, measures, and activities that are aligned with existing or proposed governance and administrative structures, resources, rules, regulations, and staffing for curriculum implementation in the school system. The proposal must outline

strategies for trialling and validating draft versions of the new curriculum and syllabuses before final versions are developed for roll out and implementation in the school system.

Financial Proposals:

The financial proposal should reflect detailed and comprehensive estimates of all personnel and non-personnel costs that are envisaged as necessary for executing the assignment. MBSSE will provide official documents required and facilitate access to education institutions and personnel for the consultants. However, the consultants will be responsible for all other requirements such as office accommodation, international/local transport, computers, office equipment & supplies, meeting venues, logistics & administration, fees, per diems, etc. These and other such costs must therefore be fully reflected in the financial proposal that is submitted. Financial proposals should be submitted only in Great British Pound Sterling (£), United States Dollars (\$) or Sierra Leone Leones (SLL), and the estimated budget must be valid for a period of at least 6 months from date of submission.

Required Competencies:

Qualified consulting firms are required to have proven expertise in curriculum development and practical experience with innovative curriculum design in developing countries. Demonstrated capacity to identify, marshal, deploy, and coordinate a complex range of national/international expertise to work on key subjects at the senior secondary level will be essential. Familiarity with education systems in African countries like Sierra Leone is desirable, and successful curriculum development work in Sierra Leone or similar countries will be an advantage. Firms must have the capacity to identify and select a competent and balanced team, set up office accommodation, secure appropriate equipment, organize transportation and logistics, acquire support staff, plan meetings and workshops, etc.; for successful execution of the assignment.

Team Leader: is expected to have a Masters' or Doctorate degree in education with specialization in curriculum development and a focus on developing countries. S/he must have at least 10 years of experience working on education and development challenges, preferably in African countries. Proven ability to lead and manage complex teams for successful and timely delivery of results is highly desirable for the team leader.

Subject Specialists: are expected to have at least a Bachelors' degree or preferably a Masters' or Doctorate degree; as well as a professional teaching qualification in some cases. These specialists will typically be operating at the university, teacher college or senior secondary school levels. It is expected that some specialists will be at the cutting edge of their discipline, whilst others will be more concerned with the practicalities of successfully teaching the subject at senior secondary school level. MBSSE therefore expects a team of national and international specialists capable of providing the range of expertise required for successful execution of the assignment.

Other Experts: The team may include other experts such as managers/supervisors with special competencies in making new/revised syllabuses operational in the realities of the school system. These experts will have many years of management and supervision experience at the senior

secondary level, in addition to degree qualifications. Another category of experts that may be in the team could be specialists in assessment and examinations at SSS level (WASCE). In general, consultant firms are expected to field a competent team for successful execution of the tasks.

Background:

Sierra Leone operates a 6-3-3-4 education system. A 6-year primary cycle is followed by a 3-year junior secondary school (JSS) cycle, which leads to a 3-year senior secondary school (SSS) cycle (or to Technical/Vocational options), followed by 4-year tertiary courses. Progression from one cycle to the next is determined by high-stakes examinations. The National Primary School Exam (NPSE) regulates flow from primary to JSS, and the Basic Education Certificate Exam (BECE) determines progress from JSS to SSS. At the end of senior secondary, learners take the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) which determines entry to university and other tertiary institutions. Over the years, this system has benefited from reforms, policy changes, and investments that have expanded enrolment and enhanced quality. Nine years of quality basic education is now a constitutional right for all learners. Also, the Free Quality School Education (FQSE) policy supports zero-cost primary and JSS for learners and facilitates low-cost senior secondary education. Enrolment growth rates continue to be impressive at all levels, and quality of schooling is also improving although still unsatisfactory.

Despite such gains, schooling in Sierra Leone remains academic, elitist, and susceptible to social, economic, and cultural disparities. Too many learners fail to complete school and achieve their true potential or make optimal contributions to society. Exclusive use of narrow academic criteria for success leaves otherwise talented learners in limbo, with negative consequences for society. Most of those who do complete school are not successful in the WASSCE. In 2020 for instance, only 6,325 (4.5%) of 139,567 candidates gained minimum pass of 5 credits for university entry.

MBSSE seeks to transform this “academic and elitist” system into a high-quality rights-based system that facilitates learning for all through equity and inclusion. The new basic education curriculum was designed to give all learners a 9-year foundation of primary and JSS education based on appropriate prescribed learning outcomes. It establishes reforms that shift learning from memorizing and reproducing knowledge to understanding and applying knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in all subjects. MBSSE expects that the SSS curriculum package will enhance these reforms with quality content and pedagogy that reflect the varied interests of learners and facilitate worthwhile learning for all at this level. MBSSE contends that after navigating a 9-year basic education cycle, learners deserve an SSS curriculum package that offers them much more than a narrow academic path to tertiary education for only a small minority.

The Senior Secondary Cycle in Sierra Leone:

The multiple status of the SSS cycle in Sierra Leone should inform the design of the curriculum package. It should be noted that after basic education there are other options (tech/voc.) besides senior secondary schools. Whilst the mandate of MBSSE is confined to senior secondary *schools*, the curriculum package must be sensitive to the dynamics and programming links between these schools and other institutions (tech/voc.) available to adolescents after basic education.

The SSS cycle sits at the apex of the school system, and leads to the high-stakes WASSCE that determines learners' future in terms of tertiary education or quality employment. MBSSE expects design of the curriculum package to take account of this pivotal role of the SSS cycle.

Similarly, the SSS cycle caters for adolescents who are at a critical developmental phase in the human life cycle. These adolescent learners are experiencing profound physical, psychological, and emotional changes in their lives, as they try to cope with various forces in the society. The SSS curriculum package should therefore empower them to deal with the associated challenges.

In policy terms, the SSS level marks a transition from homogenous schooling as a right for all, to diversified schooling that empowers all learners to make informed choices and achieve success in line with their interests and talents. The SSS level also serves as a resource pool with potential for transforming human capital development in Sierra Leone. In addition, it can be an incubator for developing entrepreneurial skills in adolescent learners. MBSSE expects that the new senior secondary curriculum package will embrace and reflect these dimensions of the SSS cycle.

Broad Guidelines & Expectations:

MBSSE expects the senior secondary curriculum package to continue and enhance the reform process initiated by the 2020 *Basic Education Curriculum Framework & Syllabuses*. For senior secondary curriculum, the package must address the unique needs of adolescents and youths, encompass the best of 21st century competencies, embody the standards of high-stakes exams, reflect national socio-economic and cultural characteristics, and deliver on the expectations of government and employers, as well as the hopes and aspirations of parents and communities.

Development of the SSS curriculum and subject syllabuses must be guided by a revised national curriculum framework that (re)assesses interests and aspirations of adolescents as learners, as well as the vision, priorities, and expectations of government as provider. The framework should also ensure that syllabuses are designed to embody appropriate "state-of-the-art" content and pedagogy for the Sierra Leone context.

Subject syllabuses must be in harmony with the WASSCE exams which determine university entry and/or quality employment. The standards set by WAEC must be respected in designing detailed syllabuses for prescribed subjects that will be examined at WASSCE level. The expected learning outcomes must be clearly specified for the different topics/themes/units, as must the suggested method(s) for assessing learning achievement. The consultants may suggest (with justification) appropriate changes to the subjects offered at SSS level, and recommend pedagogical styles to facilitate learning for all, as well as required teaching and learning materials.

Consultants are expected to address implementation issues through an evidence-based approach that reflects the realities of how the education system in Sierra Leone works in practice. Reforms often flounder due to lack of effective implementation strategies, so MBSSE expects consultants to propose feasible and pragmatic strategies to implement the new curriculum package.

Some Key Factors to Consider:

Design of the curriculum package must take account of key factors, challenges, and opportunities that influence innovative education for the 21st Century at senior secondary level in Sierra Leone. These factors will determine the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum package as well as the efficiency with which it can be implemented. MBSSE expects that a credible sweep of the development scenario in Sierra Leone will be done to identify challenges and opportunities that are relevant to the new curriculum package. The following are some factors that MBSSE suggests should be considered in designing the new curriculum package:

- Senior secondary schools are beleaguered by lack of a national curriculum, poor exam results, and mismatch between school courses, entrepreneurship, and employability. These factors tend to be blamed for persistent youth unemployment in Sierra Leone.
- The job market is in flux and changing rapidly, leaving school leavers prone to uncertainty and undermining their self-esteem, positive identity, and sense of worth.
- In the absence of a national curriculum senior secondary schools use the WASSCE syllabuses for teaching and learning. This creates a backwash effect, with teaching and learning in JSS based on the BECE syllabuses, and primary schools focused on the NPSE exams.
- Senior secondary education entails memorizing and reproducing knowledge in public exams, rather than understanding/applying knowledge in the real world to enhance quality of life.
- Disparities of poverty and gender are exacerbated by corruption, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and a related rise in adolescent pregnancies. At an estimated 21%, Sierra Leone has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancies in the world.
- In the absence of the protection and empowerment that senior secondary schooling offers, adolescent girls are increasingly being exposed to sexual abuse and harassment.
- Corruption and SGBV are not adequately addressed in the curriculum to raises awareness, empower adolescent girls, protects learners, reduce corruption and ameliorate sexual abuse.
- The SSS cycle does not help to reduce adolescent frustrations, or maintain peace and stability in Sierra Leone, as most adolescents are deprived of schooling beyond basic education level.

General Considerations for Curriculum Design:

As much as possible, design of the curriculum package should adopt a “do-no-harm” minimalist approach to avoid disrupting current structure and content beyond what would be acceptable to the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) which conducts the WASSCE examination. This high-stake exam is conducted for several countries in West Africa and has strong credibility and integrity in certifying the achievements of learners across West Africa. There are limits to changes that can be made by one country to this tight-knit system without incurring considerable negative backlash from stakeholders who have invested so much trust in this system of certification.

Curriculum design should also (re)calibrate the standards governing senior secondary education in Sierra Leone to accommodate the imperatives of the new curriculum package. Reforms can be criticized as diluting standards or weakening the system. (Re)calibration should be part of the strategy for implementation. It entails specification of staffing, facilities, equipment, supplies, and other key requirements for successful uptake of the new curriculum package.

There is also a need to revisit and better define the purpose and expected outcomes of a new senior secondary curriculum. This may entail a focus on empowering learners to make informed life choices; shifting toward employability; strengthening an ethical stance for desirable attitudes, values, and behaviours; cultivating enthusiasm for learning; and enhancing quality of life through a rich variety of prescribed learning achievements.

Scope & Sequence of Envisaged Activities:

The curriculum package for senior secondary needs to be validated and the subject syllabuses must be submitted to WAEC for approval by end of July 2021 so that the next WASSCE exams can be based on the new curriculum. This timeline indicates a tight schedule for design, testing, validation and submission of the curriculum package. It may therefore be necessary to truncate the sequence of completing the framework and developing syllabuses. So, subject experts may start work on the syllabuses once the curriculum framework is sufficiently defined to provide guidelines. Also, there are approved WAEC subjects that may not require much change, given that scope for any major change in subject content within WASSCE standards may be limited.

Notwithstanding the tight schedule, MBSSE insists that to be credible, the national curriculum package for senior secondary must provide evidence for all decisions, strategies, guidelines, and recommendations. The package should involve review of documents, reflect available data sets, and include the views of adolescents, youths, subject experts, and practicing teachers. MBSSE assumes that most of the evidence required to design the curriculum package will be available already as secondary data, so the exercise would not require extensive collection and analysis of primary data. Also, although MBSSE insists that the design should be evidence based, this is not about rigorous data analysis to prove causality. The main expectation is that the consultants will have expertise and experience with handling complex curriculum issues, and proven capacity to identify, deploy, manage, and coordinate subject expertise to design the curriculum package.

Annex:

Alphabetic List of Subjects Offered at Senior Secondary Schools in Sierra Leone

Agricultural Science Arabic Language Biology Business Management Chemistry Christian Religious Studies Clothing and Textile Commerce Cost Accounting Critical Office Duties Economics Engineering Science	English Language Financial Accounting Food and Nutrition French Further Mathematics Geography Government Health Science History Home Economics Home Management Information	Computer Technology (ICT) Islamic Religious Studies Library Work (Library Studies) Literature in English Management in Living Mathematics Music Physical Health Education Physics Science Core Statistics Technical Drawing Technology Visual Arts
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