

ICT in Education in Sierra Leone

by Kofi Mangesi
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Source: *World Fact Book*¹

Please note:

This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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It is expected that individual *Country Reports* from the *Survey of ICT and Education in Africa* will be updated in an iterative process over time based on additional research and feedback received through the *infoDev* web site. For more information, and to suggest modifications to individual *Country Reports*, please see www.infodev.org/ict4edu-Africa.

Overview

As a country recovering from a devastating civil war that destroyed its infrastructure, Sierra Leone has huge gaps in both ICT policy-making and implementation both at the national and educational levels. An ICT policy has still not been finalised, and the education sector has no systematic policy of integrating ICTs at all levels. There seems, however, to be a strong governmental will to make ICT a core component of its education reforms.

Country Profile

Sierra Leone shares a border with Liberia and Guinea and is located on the west coast of Africa, facing the Atlantic Ocean. It became a republic in 1971 with Siaka Stevens as president for a five-year term. In 1978 it became a one-party state under Stevens's APC party.

Sierra Leone experienced a long period of civil war; however since the war in the 1990s, the country's economic performance has been robust, especially during 2002-04, due to a recovery in agriculture and mining outputs. The country has sustained a strong economic recovery: 4.3% GDP growth in 2002, 9.3% in 2003, and 7.4% in 2004. Recovery has been propelled by large-scale resettlement and reconstruction, increases in land under cultivation, a resumption of mining, a bounce-back in the private sector, and the growth of donor-financed imports.²

Table 1 provides some selected socio-economic indicators for the country.^{3,4}

Table 1: Selected Country Data

Indicator	
Population	5.5 million
Languages	English
Adult literacy rate (2005)	35.1 (% people aged 15 and above)
Economic activity 2005 (% of GDP)	46.1: Agriculture 24.4: Industry 29.5: Services
Human Development Index	176 out of 177 countries
Human Poverty Index	95 out of 102 countries
Per capita gross national income (US dollars)	\$140 (2000); \$210 (2004); \$220 (2005)

The Education System⁵

In Sierra Leone's 6-3-3-4 education system, primary education lasts for six years, followed by secondary education which is divided into two 3-year cycles. The first cycle leads to the Basic Education Certificate Examination and the second to the Senior School Certificate Examination, which gives access to higher education, which is offered by one university (comprising institutes) and its constituent colleges, teacher-training colleges, and a technical institute. All of these fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. The university is governed by the court, composed of non-university and university members, and the senate, which is composed of academic members and is responsible for academic matters.

Sierra Leone has recently made education free for all children by removing school fees. As a result, the number of children going to school has tripled.

Table 2 provides a quantitative perspective of some selected system indicators.⁶

Table 2: Selected Education Data

Primary enrolment (% gross)*	145.1 (2003)
Secondary enrolment (% gross)*	13.8 (2003)
Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary (%**)	74.3 (2004)

*Percent of gross is the number enrolled as a percentage of the number in the eligible age group.

**Ratio of girls to boys is the percentage of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

ICT Policies

National

A national policy on ICT is almost non-existent at the present time. However the policy-making process began in 2006 and it is expected to be finalised in 2007.

A Telecommunications Act of 2006 has, however, been passed and has set the pace for the establishment of a regulator the National Telecommunications Commission (NaTCom), with responsibility for licensing and spectrum management among other things.

Education

The absence of a national ICT policy has equally affected the ICT in education policy. However, provisions for ICT utilisation are embedded in the National Science and Technology Policy⁶, with assertions such as making science and technology education compulsory in the basic education system by integrating it into the curricula of all schools and at all levels. The policy also states that "the rapid development and exploitation of ICTs shall be targeted."

At the same time, the National Education Master Plan 1997–2006 outlines plans for upgrading teachers through the use of distance education. In support of distance education and learning aided by ICTs, the government's reform initiatives include

restructuring and upgrading of the School Broadcasting Unit in support of the 6-3-3-4 system. An upgraded Educational Broadcasting Division has been proposed to replace the School Broadcasting Unit. One of the objectives of the new proposed division is to produce and deliver quality educational radio and television programmes to complement and enrich lessons in formal and non-formal education classes.

Infrastructure

National

In Sierra Leone, despite all the difficulties the country faces (e.g., limited stability, lack of a national ICT strategy), private-sector activities have led to some efforts at developing a robust ICT infrastructure.

Table 3 provides some of the statistics of ICT infrastructure in Sierra Leone.⁷

Table 3: ICT in Sierra Leone

ICT	
Fixed-line operators	1
Total fixed-line telephone subscribers	23,327
Cellular mobile operators	5
Total cellular mobile subscribers (2005)	297,000
Mobile subscribers (per 1,000 people) (2004)	22
Internet users per 100 inhabitants (2004)	2
Personal computers per 1,000 inhabitants (2004)	12

Education

All the major tertiary institutions, such as the university and polytechnics, have computer centres for training students and giving concessionary Internet access to staff and students. The University of Sierra Leone has a computer centre that provides teaching in basic computer skills to all staff and students. The centre also offers Internet and electronic library services.

At the school level, there is very little infrastructure in terms of computers and the Internet. The competing education needs means that very little has yet been done in the area of equipping schools with computers and efforts in this area are mainly through the support of NGOs.

Current ICT Initiatives and Projects

Table 4 summarises the current and recent ICT initiatives in Sierra Leone.

Table 4: Summary of Current and Recent Initiatives and Projects

<p>Project: FM 95.1 Radio Education Unit: Distance education programme for basic schools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): Ministry of Education, Science and Technology • Funding sources: UNESCO • Contact: www.col.org/colweb/webdav/site/myjahiasite
<p>Project: International Education And Resource Network (iEARN) – helping young people, mainly of school-going age, collaborate with other young people from different parts of the world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): iEARN • Funding sources: War Child Canada • Contact: www.digitalopportunity.org/external/?url=http://www.learnsierraleone.org
<p>Project: ODL Resource Centres – alternative methods of widening access to education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): Plan Sierra Leone • Funding sources: COL, UNESCO, UNICEF, Plan Sierra Leone • Contact: www.col.org/colweb/site/pid/3897
<p>Project: Knowledge Aid Project – develops the ability of schools to tap the Internet as an educational resource</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): British Council • Funding sources: UK/Sierra Leone governments • Contact: www.britishcouncil.org/sierraleone-learning-education-project-knowledge-aid.htm
<p>Project: Taking IT Global (TIG) Sierra Leone Network – resource of opportunities and a network of inspirational young people and their projects.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): Youth-based member organisations • Funding sources: Various local and international donors • Contact: http://sierraleone.takingitglobal.org/
<p>Project: Computer Training in Sierra Leone and the Gambia – train-the-trainer programme that includes office applications and Web design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): Develop Africa Inc. • Funding sources: Individual donations • Contact: hwww.universalgiving.org/donate/computer_training_in_sierra_le/id3102.do
<p>Project: Learning for Livelihood Initiatives – non-formal education directorate of MEST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): Government of Sierra Leone • Funding sources: UNFPA • Contact: http://pcf4.dec.uwi.edu/viewpaper.php?id=414&print=1
<p>Project: Sierra Leone and Science and Technology Information Network (SALSTINET) – fosters collaboration between information providers, researchers, “informaticians,” and end users of science and technology information (STI) in the country</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation(s): University of Sierra Leone • Funding sources: Carnegie Corporation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contact: www.firstmonday.dk/issues/issue5_2/kargbo/index.html
<p>Project: Access to ICT4SD in Colleges – aimed at introducing computers to university students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation(s): Society for Democratic Initiatives Funding sources: Stockholm Challenge Contact: http://old.stockholmchallenge.se/projectdata.asp?id=1&projectid=487

Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

Table 5 provides a framework for understanding the core factors that help and hinder the development of ICTs in education in Sierra Leone.

Table 5: Factors Influencing ICT

Factors	Enabling Features	Constraints
<i>Policy framework and implementation plans</i>	A commitment in the Education Master Plan	Lack of a national and educational ICT policy
<i>Advocacy leadership</i>	A strong NGO community promoting ICTs in schools	
<i>Gender equity</i>		Inequality in access to education between boys and girls
<i>Infrastructure and access</i>		Erratic supply of electricity/ High costs of telephone connection and the long-distance charges
<i>Collaborating mechanisms</i>	A strong donor support for ICTs and government commitment to rebuilding education infrastructure	
<i>Human resource capacity</i>	Increase in private initiatives providing ICT training	Inadequate supply of skilled ICT labour in Sierra Leone
<i>Fiscal resources</i>		Lack of adequate government resource for education
<i>Learning content</i>		Lack of any standardised ICT curricula
<i>Attitudes</i>	Strong commitment on the part of teachers and administrators	
<i>Sustainability</i>		Heavy reliance on donor projects

Notes

1. The World Factbook 2007. <https://cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sl.html>
2. Country Brief: Sierra Leone. 2007. World Bank.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/SIERRALEONEEXTN>

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3. Sierra Leone Data Profile. 2006. World Bank.
<http://devdata.worldbank.org/external/CPProfile.asp?CCODE=SLE&PTYPE=CP>
4. “Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty, and the Global Water Crisis.” *Human Development Report 2006*. 2006. UNDP. <http://hdr.undp.org/hdr2006/>
5. The Development of Education. National report from Sierra Leone.
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/countries/countryDossier/natrep96/sierraleone96.pdf>
6. Alghali, A.M., E. Turay, E. Thompson, and J. Kandeh. “Environmental Scan on Education in Sierra Leone.” Presentation: Freetown, Sierra Leone, February 16-18, 2005.
www.col.org/colweb/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/docs/05SierraLeone_EnviroScan.pdf
7. ICT at a Glance. 2004. World Bank. http://devdata.worldbank.org/ict/sle_ict.pdf

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